

Joe Biden Moves to Lift Nearly Every Restriction on Israel's Access to U.S. Weapons Stockpile

By easing virtually all limits on Israel's use of the stockpile, Biden could undercut U.S. military preparedness and congressional oversight.

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The White House has requested the removal of restrictions on all categories of weapons and ammunition Israel is allowed to access from U.S. weapons stockpiles stored in Israel itself.

The move to lift restrictions was included in the White House's supplemental [budget request](#), sent to the Senate on October 20.

"This request would," the proposed budget says, "allow for the transfer of all categories of defense articles."

The request pertains to [little-known](#) weapons stockpiles in Israel that the Pentagon established for use in regional conflicts, but which Israel has been permitted to access in limited circumstances — the very limits President Joe Biden is seeking to remove.

"If enacted, the amendments would create a two-step around restrictions on U.S. weapons transfers to Israel," said John Ramming Chappell, a legal fellow with the Center for Civilians in Conflict.

Created in the 1980s to supply the U.S. in case of a regional war, the War Reserve Stockpile Allies-Israel, or WRSA-I, is the largest node in a network of what are effectively foreign U.S. weapons caches. Highly regulated for security, the stockpiles are governed by a set of strict requirements. Under circumstances laid out in these requirements, Israel has been able to draw on the stockpile, purchasing the weapons at little cost if it uses the [effective subsidy of U.S. military aid](#).

With the WRSA-I, Biden is looking to lift virtually all the meaningful restrictions on the

stockpile and the transfer of its arms to Israel, with plans to remove limitations to obsolete or surplus weapons, waive an annual spending cap on replenishing the stockpile, remove weapon-specific restrictions, and curtail congressional oversight. All of the changes in the Biden budget plan would be permanent, except for lifting the spending cap, which is limited to the 2024 fiscal year.

The changes would come in an arms-trade relationship that is already shrouded in secrecy, as *The Intercept* [recently reported](#). Whereas the administration has provided pages of detailed lists of weapons provided to Ukraine, for instance, its disclosure about arms provided to Israel could fit in a single, short sentence. Last week, Bloomberg obtained a [leaked list](#) of weapons provided to Israel, revealing that they include thousands of Hellfire missiles — the same kind being used extensively by Israel in Gaza.

The effect of lifting the restrictions on transfers to Israel — such as eliminating the requirement that the weapons be part of a surplus — could harm U.S. interests by diminishing American preparedness for its own conflicts in the region, said Josh Paul, a former official who served in the State Department’s Bureau of Political-Military Affairs.

Paul, who [resigned](#) over [U.S. arms assistance to Israel](#), told *The Intercept*,

“By dropping the requirement that such articles be declared excess, it would also increase the existing strain on U.S. military readiness in order to provide more arms to Israel.”

“Undermine Oversight and Accountability”

The U.S. government is only supposed to spend \$200 million per fiscal year restocking the WRSA-I — about half the total cap for all U.S. stockpiles round the globe. The White House request, however, would waive the limit on U.S. contributions to the stockpile in Israel. That would allow the stockpile to be continuously replenished.

“The President’s emergency supplemental funding request,” Paul said, “would essentially create a free-flowing pipeline to provide any defense articles to Israel by the simple act of placing them in the WRSA-I stockpile, or other stockpiles intended for Israel.”

The U.S. currently requires that Israel grant certain concessions in exchange for certain types of arms assistance from the Pentagon, but the White House request would remove this condition as well.

Finally, the White House request would also reduce congressional oversight of U.S. arms transfers by reducing the length of advance notice made to Congress before a weapons transfers. Under current law, there must be 30 days prior notice, but the Biden budget request would allow this to be shortened in “extraordinary” circumstances.

“The Biden administration’s supplemental budget request would further undermine oversight and accountability even as U.S. support enables an Israeli campaign that has killed thousands of children,” said Chappell, of Center for Civilians in Conflict.

The House has already passed legislation reflecting the White House’s request last month, and it now stands before the Senate.

“Taken as a package,” said William Hartung, an arms expert at the Quincy Institute for Responsible Statecraft, “it is extraordinary, and it will make it much harder for Congress or the public to monitor U.S. arms transfers to Israel, even as the Israeli government has engaged in massive attacks on civilians, some of which constitute war crimes.”

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