

There Is Still Time to Stop the \$735 Million Arms Sale to Israel

The breadth of support for blocking the bomb sale shows that opposition to uncritical military support for Israel is growing.

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The Biden administration sparked vocal protests at home and abroad with last month’s decision to go full speed ahead on a sale of \$735 million of precision-guided bombs to Israel. The sale moved forward even as Israel was in the midst of a devastating bombing campaign in Gaza that killed over [250](#) Palestinians, including at least [67 children](#), and drove [52,000 people](#) from their homes. As with all Israeli military actions, the attacks relied heavily on U.S.-supplied weaponry, including precision-guided bombs and Lockheed Martin F-16 combat aircraft.

The new bomb sale is just the latest installment in a U.S. policy of supporting Israel’s military that goes back decades — over [\\$236 billion](#) (adjusted for inflation in 2018 dollars) in assistance since the founding of the Israeli state, more than three-quarters of it in the form of military aid. And Israel is three years into a ten-year U.S. commitment of [\\$38 billion](#) in military assistance — the only such long-term arrangement with any U.S. ally. Israel has largely escaped accountability for its indiscriminate uses of U.S. military equipment, such as 2008’s [Operation Cast Lead](#), which resulted in the killing of 1,383 Palestinians in Gaza, including 333 children. The United States does not even [keep track](#) of which military units get which U.S. weapons, making it extremely difficult to apply human rights strictures like the Leahy Law, which prohibits U.S. assistance to military units that commit gross violations of human rights.

Key members of Congress like Rep. Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez and Sen. Bernie Sanders attempted to block the bomb sale last month, but those efforts were unsuccessful, in significant part due to the short notice provided regarding the sale and the Biden administration’s determination to push it through quickly. But this is not the end of the story. The Biden administration can still stop the sale should it choose to do so. This week a group of 100 peace, human rights, and political groups released a [letter](#) urging the Biden administration to do just that. The letter had a broad range of signatories, including faith-based groups such as Churches for Middle East Peace, American Muslims for Palestine, the

Friends Committee on National Legislation (FCNL) and Jewish Voice for Peace Action along with more secular groups like Defense of Children International - Palestine, Justice Democrats, Indivisible, the Sunrise Movement, MoveOn, the Working Families Party, and Democracy in the Arab World Now (DAWN). Foreign policy think tanks like the Quincy Institute and the Center for International Policy also signed onto the letter. The breadth of support for the demands to block the bomb sale underscores the fact that opponents of uncritical military support for Israel are growing in strength, and are not going away.

Hassan El-Tayyab, the legislative manager for Middle East Policy at FCNL, summarized the thrust of the letter as follows:

“The Biden administration must use its existing authority to block delivery of this \$735 million in new offensive arms sales to Israel. Moving ahead with these transfers will be seen as an endorsement of Israel’s indiscriminate attacks on Gaza and encourage more acts of violence against Palestinian civilians. The administration’s efforts should instead be focused on delivering humanitarian assistance to Palestinians, helping with reconstruction efforts in Gaza, using U.S. leverage with Israel to end its occupation and blockade, and supporting the diplomacy needed to achieve a lasting peace between Israelis and Palestinians.”

Beth Miller, Senior Government Affairs Manager at Jewish Voice for Peace Action, further noted that “It is outrageous that the Biden administration would even consider an arms sale to Israel, especially in the wake of the Israeli military’s most recent assault on Gaza. The world just saw exactly how Israel uses these weapons — to destroy infrastructure and wipe out families. By rubber stamping the sale, Biden is giving a green light to the Israeli government to continue killing Palestinians with our weapons. Under no circumstances can this sale go through.”

So far the Biden administration has made only the mildest of criticisms of Israel’s attacks on Gaza, as well as its wider suppression of Palestinian rights and routine repression of Palestinians in both the occupied territories and within Israel. The administration’s approach was underscored in a recent statement by Secretary of State Anthony Blinken. Asked in an interview with Axios whether Israel would be held accountable for attacks on a building in Gaza that housed the headquarters of Al Jazeera and the Associated Press, he reiterated the administration’s main talking point: “Israel has the right to defend itself, and it was on the receiving end of indiscriminate rocket attacks.” Blinken went on to say that “Israel, as a democracy... has an added burden to make sure it is doing everything possible to avoid civilian casualties.” Given the death toll in Gaza, it is clear that Israel was not taking adequate precautions, but there’s no sign yet that the Biden administration is serious about imposing consequences for Israel’s misuse of U.S. weapons.

The attacks on Gaza are just one part of an Israeli approach that Human Rights Watch has [described](#) as imposing “deprivations [that] are so severe that they amount to crimes against humanity of apartheid and persecution.”

Now is the time to change course on U.S. military assistance to Israel in response to its ongoing repression of Palestinians. Stopping the bomb sale would be a good place to start.

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Featured image: Smoke rises after Israeli airstrikes on Gaza City, the Gaza Strip, Palestine, Wednesday, May 12, 2021. (Nick_Raille_07 / Shutterstock.com).

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