

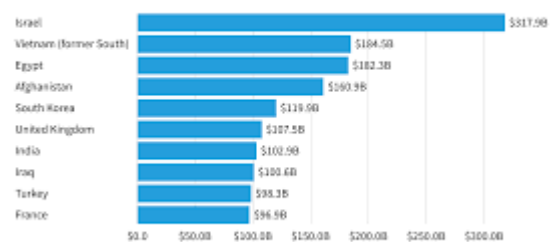
The First US-Israeli Joint War

THE ISRAELI MILITARY forces' war on Gaza, following Hamas's 7 October attack, is the first Israeli war in which Washington is a co-belligerent. The US openly supports the war's proclaimed goal and is blocking calls for a ceasefire at the United Nations – all while providing arms and ammunition to Israel and acting to dissuade other regional actors from intervening in the conflict to help Hamas.

The US did not give Israel military support at its creation: it presented itself at first as an impartial arbiter between Israel and its Arab neighbors, ordering an embargo on arms packages to both that remained in force until the end of Dwight Eisenhower's presidency (1953–61). In the early years, Israel had to rely on West Germany and France for its funding and arming. The situation changed when John F. Kennedy, faced with radicalized Arab nationalism led by Nasser's Egypt and setbacks to US influence in the Middle East, decided to rely on Israel and began to send it arms.

Since WWII, the US has provided more foreign aid to Israel than to any other country.

Total US foreign assistance by country, adjusted for inflation, 1946–2022



Adjusted for inflation in 2022 dollars. Data range for aid to Israel is 1951–2022. Data for 2020–2022 is partially completed. Source: US Agency for International Development

This was the beginning of a 'special relationship' that would prove very special indeed: between its creation in 1948 and the start of 2023, Israel received more than \$158bn in US aid, including more than \$124bn in military aid, which makes it the largest cumulative recipient of US funding since the second world war. [\(1\)](#) Every year the US provides Israel with military

aid to the tune of almost \$4bn.

Yet Washington did not openly support Israel's war against its Arab neighbors in 1967 (it could not endorse the invasion of the West Bank at the expense of Jordan, another ally). During the October 1973 war, the "special relationship" did translate to an airlift of weaponry to Israel – the goal, however, was to help it to contain the offensive launched by Egypt and Syria. Once Israel managed to redress the situation to its advantage, Washington exercised strong pressure on it to end hostilities. The US did not openly support the Israeli invasion of Lebanon in 1982 and intervened as mediator for the evacuation of Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO) combatants in Beirut. Nor did it support the war launched by Israel against Lebanon in 2006, or its subsequent successive offensives against Gaza.

This time, though, US support for Israel has been explicit and massive. In the aftermath of 7 October, Washington decided to send two US carrier battle groups into the eastern Mediterranean, led by the aircraft carriers USS Eisenhower and USS Ford, a marine intervention unit, as well as an amphibian assault group led by the USS Bataan in the Black Sea and the USS Florida nuclear submarine, which carries cruise missiles. At the same time, Washington alerted its air bases in the region and urgently delivered military equipment to Israel, including missiles for the Iron Dome aerial defense system.

Washington thus provided a regional cover to Israel, so that it could devote the bulk of its forces to a war against Gaza whose stated objective, from the outset, has been the eradication of Hamas. The US and other western states have openly supported this goal. The fact is, however, that the eradication of a mass organization that has governed a small, very densely populated territory since 2007 cannot go ahead without a massacre of genocidal proportions. This is especially true since the Israeli army had the clear intention of minimizing losses in its own ranks during the invasion,

which called for the intensive use of remote strikes, the flattening of urban areas in order to avoid urban guerrilla warfare and, therefore, the maximization of civilian deaths.

The US's responsibility in this massacre includes providing Israel with a large portion of the means to commit it. As of late November, Washington had sent its ally 57,000 artillery shells and 15,000 bombs, including more than 5,400 BLU-117s and 100 BLU-109 ('bunker buster') bombs, which weigh 2000 pounds (almost a ton) each.[\(2\)](#) The New York Times reported military experts' astonishment at Israel's 'liberal' use of these 2,000-pound bombs, each of which can flatten a tower several stories high, and which contributed to making Israel's war against Gaza a massacre of civilians 'at a historic pace'.[\(3\)](#) By 25 December, the US had provided Israel with 244 arms deliveries by cargo plane, as well as 20 shipments by boat.[\(4\)](#) In addition, the Guardian revealed that Israel had been able to draw on the vast stockpile of US weapons already 'pre-positioned' in the country.[\(5\)](#)

To finance all of this, on 20 October, the Biden administration made an extra-budgetary request of \$105bn to Congress, including 61.4bn for Ukraine (\$46.3bn in military aid), \$14.1bn for Israel (\$13.9bn in military aid) and \$13.6bn for the fight against illegal immigration at the border. The US president believed he could wrangle a green light from the Republican right for Ukraine by tying that aid (a bone of contention) with causes dear to them – yet by the end of 2023, Biden had still not succeeded in having his request approved. The Republican right has used Biden's strategy against him by demanding even more drastic measures at the border, putting him in an uncomfortable position with his own party.

In order to provide Israeli Merkava tanks with 45,000 artillery shells for \$500m, the Biden administration has bypassed Congress by passing an emergency measure on 9 December, a package of 14,000 shells for \$106.5m. It repeated this man oeuvre on 30 December for \$147.50m, provoking the

anger of Democrats calling for more controls on arms packages to Israel. For all this, Biden bears a direct share of responsibility for the massacre perpetrated by Israeli forces in Gaza. His exhortations for Israel to be more 'humanitarian' ring hollow and are easily dismissed by critics as hypocrisy. His disagreement with Israeli prime minister Binyamin Netanyahu on the plan for the day after the war does not change the two governments' joint responsibility for the war itself.[\(6\)](#)

Ultimately, Biden – who, during his 2020 presidential campaign, promised to reverse course on his predecessor's markedly pro-Israel politics, notably by reopening the US consulate in East Jerusalem and the PLO office in Washington – did none of this. Instead, he followed in Donald Trump's footsteps, first by focusing on encouraging Saudi Arabia to join the Arab states that had established diplomatic relations with Israel under Trump's aegis, then by giving unconditional support to Israel in its invasion of Gaza. In so doing, he has managed to anger his own Democratic Party – which is today more sympathetic to the Palestinians than to the Israelis (by 34% to 31%), according to a poll published on 19 December – without satisfying the Republicans either. In the end, 57% of Americans disapprove of Biden's handling of the conflict, according to the same poll.[\(7\)](#)

Translated by Lucie Elven

Notes

1. Congressional Research Service, U.S. Foreign Aid to Israel, CRS Report, Washington, 1 March 2023.
[back to text](#)
2. Jared Malsin and Nancy A Youssef, ["U.S. Sends Israel 2,000-Pound Bunker Buster Bombs for Gaza War,"](#) *Wall Street Journal*, 1 December 2023.
[back to text](#)
3. Lauren Leatherby, ["Gaza Civilians, Under Israeli](#)

[Barrage, Are Being Killed at Historic Pace,"](#) *New York Times*, 25 November 2023.

[back to text](#)

4. Harry Davies and Manisha Ganguly, ["244 US cargo planes, 20 ships deliver over 10,000 tons of military equipment to Israel – report,"](#) *Times of Israel*, 25 December 2023.

[back to text](#)

5. ["Gaza war puts US's extensive weapons stockpile in Israel under scrutiny,"](#) *The Guardian*, 27 December 2023.

[back to text](#)

6. Read Gilbert Achcar, ["Israeli far right's plans for expulsion and expansion,"](#) *Le Monde diplomatique* in English, December 2023.

[back to text](#)

7. Jonathan Weisman, Ruth Igielnik and Alyce McFadden, ["Poll Finds Wide Disapproval of Biden on Gaza, and Little Room to Shift Gears,"](#) *New York Times*, 19 December 2023.

[back to text](#)

[Le Monde diplomatique](#), January 22, 2024

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<https://anticapitalistresistance.org/what-internationalism-do-we-need-today/>

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