

# [***US postpones decision on aid to Israeli army battalion accused of abuses against Palestinians***](https://advance.lexis.com/api/document?collection=news&id=urn:contentItem:6BWK-N3C1-DYMD-62WJ-00000-00&context=1516831)

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**Byline:** ELLEN KNICKMEYER, FARNOUSH AMIRI and MATTHEW LEE, Associated Press

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**Body**

WASHINGTON — Secretary of State Antony Blinken has determined that an Israeli army battalion committed grave human-rights abuses against Palestinians in the West Bank before the war in Gaza. But he said in a letter to House Speaker Mike Johnson that he is postponing a decision on blocking aid to the unit to give Israel more time to right the wrongdoing.

The undated letter, obtained by The Associated Press on Friday, defers a decision on whether to withhold U.S. assistance to an Israeli military unit for the first time over its treatment of Palestinians and its compliance with international and human rights law. Israeli leaders, anticipating the U.S. decision this week, have [*angrily protested any such aid restrictions*](https://apnews.com/article/israel-us-army-palestinians-west-bank-gaza-dd18e8ebf07b937bdad09ce9b56bd0cf).

News of the delay comes with Blinken once again headed to Israel. An Israeli foreign ministry official told The Associated Press that Blinken was visiting on Tuesday, the latest of multiple trips he and other top U.S. officials have made since the war in Gaza began.

Blinken stressed in his letter that overall U.S. military support for Israel’s defense against Hamas and other threats would not be affected by the State Department's eventual decision on the one unit. Johnson was instrumental this week in muscling through White House-backed legislation providing [*$26 billion in additional funds*](https://apnews.com/article/ukraine-aid-israel-tiktok-congress-a8910452e623413bf1da1e491d1d94ba) for Israel's defense and for relief of the growing humanitarian catastrophe in Gaza.

The Biden administration is facing a decision on the aid as protests and counterprotests over American military support for Israel’s war against Hamas are [*roiling U.S. college campuses*](https://apnews.com/article/israel-palestine-war-campus-protests-e8a2e657e2614f94373beae602e9ba9d) as well as election-year ***politics*** at home and relations abroad.

The U.S. declaration concerns a single Israeli unit and its actions against Palestinian civilians in the West Bank before Israel's war with Hamas in Gaza began in October. While the unit is not identified in Blinken's letter, it is believed to be the Netzah Yehuda, which has historically been based in the Israeli-occupied West Bank.

The unit and some of its members have been linked to abuses of civilians in the Palestinian territory, including [*the death of a 78-year-old Palestinian American man*](https://apnews.com/article/middle-east-israel-2569b996a0d596a5981d09ef811783f4) after his detention by the battalion's forces in 2022.

The Israeli army announced in 2022 that the unit was being redeployed to the Golan Heights near the Syrian and Lebanese borders. More recently, its soldiers were moved to Gaza to fight in the war against Hamas.

Blinken said the Israeli government has so far not adequately addressed the abuses by the military unit. But "the Israeli government has presented new information regarding the status of the unit and we will engage on identifying a path to effective remediation for this unit,” he wrote.

A 1997 act known as [*the Leahy law*](https://apnews.com/article/lsrael-us-military-aid-leahy-law-e11fafa09029262a89aa8f8c5b6deae7) obligates the U.S. to cut off military aid to a foreign army unit that it deems has committed grave violations of international law or human rights. But the law allows a waiver if the military has held the offenders responsible and acted to reform the unit.

The Leahy law has never been invoked against close ally Israel.

After State Department reviews, Blinken wrote Johnson, he had determined that two Israeli Defense Force units and several civilian authority units were involved in significant rights abuses. But he also found that one of those two Israeli military units and all the civilian units had taken proper and effective remediation measures.

Although the amount of money at stake is relatively small, singling out the unit would be embarrassing for Israel, whose leaders often refer to the military as “the world’s most moral army.”

The U.S. and Israeli militaries have close ties, routinely training together and sharing intelligence. It also would amount to another stinging U.S. rebuke of Israel’s policies in the West Bank. The Biden administration has grown increasingly vocal in its criticism of Israel’s treatment of the Palestinians and recently imposed sanctions on a number of radical settlers for violence against Palestinians.

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Lee reported from Beijing. Josef Federman contributed from Jerusalem.

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