

# [***U.S. Aid to Israel Hurts Israel. Biden Just Proved It. | Opinion***](https://advance.lexis.com/api/document?collection=news&id=urn:contentItem:6C0J-W8R1-DY68-1009-00000-00&context=1516831)

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**Highlight:** Israel has become a de facto vassal of a finicky empire that routinely lashes at its friends and lavishly rewards its enemies.

**Body**

Last July, my colleague Jacob Siegel and I wrote a [*piece*](https://www.tabletmag.com/sections/news/articles/end-american-aid-israel) for *Tablet Magazine* entitled "End U.S. Aid to Israel." It made three simple arguments.

First, American aid is anything but. The roughly $3.8 billion that flows from Washington to Jerusalem each year isn't a gimme—it's a backdoor subsidy to defense contractors that may be nominally based in the U.S. but are global corporations invested in global conflict. And whereas Israelis were previously allowed to spend up to 26 percent of the aid package on domestic products, the Obama administration changed the terms to make sure not a single dollar ever left the United States. To call this arrangement aid, then, is misleading; if you want to see what real American aid looks like, follow the dollars, [*$75 billion*](https://www.cfr.org/article/how-much-us-aid-going-ukraine) of which were awarded to Ukraine in 2022 alone.

Second, American aid is actually curbing Israel's ability to develop its own home-grown industries. In 2020, for example, the Institute for National Security Studies, a leading Israeli think tank, [*estimated*](https://www.inss.org.il/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/Memo202_e.pdf) that reliance on American aid is costing Israel between 20,000 and 80,000 defense industry jobs. Israel's Ministry of Defense backed this assessment, and put the nation's subsequent lost revenue at $1.3 billion. Put bluntly, American aid is losing Israel money, and forcing it to invest not in its own essential innovation, but in [*failing American projects*](https://www.f35.com/f35/global-enterprise/israel.html) like the [*troubled*](https://nationalinterest.org/blog/buzz/f-35-fighter-has-problem-proving-be-total-pain-210303) F-35 fighter jet.

Finally, and most troubling, the aid puts Israel center stage in the age-old kabuki theater of American domestic ***politics*** masquerading as foreign policy. It enables agitators like Rep. [*Ilhan Omar*](https://www.newsweek.com/topic/ilhan-omar?utm_source=Synacor&utm_medium=Attnet&utm_campaign=Partnerships), for example, to engage in ripe antisemitic conspiracy theories, as she did in 2019 when she [*tweeted*](https://www.cbsnews.com/minnesota/news/ilhan-omar-twitter-anti-semitism-aipac-its-all-about-the-benjamins/) "It's all about the Benjamins," suggesting that America's own interests were subverted by a powerful lobby of rich Jews forcing lawmakers to send taxpayer dollars to Israel instead of to, say, Minnesota. And it allows the White House to intervene in Israel's diplomatic, military, and even [*domestic*](https://www.axios.com/2023/07/17/biden-netanyahu-call-judicial-overhaul-herzog) decisions, threatening to hold off on those billions unless are American conditions are met.

When the piece first ran, a host of high-profile critics, including prominent lawmakers from both parties, [*responded*](https://www.tabletmag.com/collections/end-us-aid-israel) by defending the existing arrangement, offering more talk of the so-called "special friendship" between Israel and the United States.

But this week, President [*Joe Biden*](https://www.newsweek.com/topic/joe-biden?utm_source=Synacor&utm_medium=Attnet&utm_campaign=Partnerships) showed the true nature of America's current relationship with Israel. Talking to [*CNN's Erin Burnett*](https://www.cnn.com/2024/05/09/politics/video/joe-biden-erin-burnett-full-interview-ebof-digvid), the president summoned his famed eloquence when answering a question about his decision to halt military aid to Israel should the Jewish state proceed to stage an operation in Rafah. "I've made it clear to Bibi and the war cabinet that they're not going to get our support if in fact they go into these population centers," Biden said. "We're not walking away from Israel's security, we're walking away from Israel's ability to wage war in those areas."

It wasn't mere talk: The administration has now reportedly [*withheld*](https://abcnews.go.com/Politics/biden-administration-pauses-ammunition-shipments-israel-us-officials/story?id=109993270) a shipment of 3,500 bombs and other weapon systems to Israel. Appearing at a [*Senate*](https://www.newsweek.com/topic/senate?utm_source=Synacor&utm_medium=Attnet&utm_campaign=Partnerships) hearing shortly after the announcement was made public, Defense Secretary [*Lloyd Austin*](https://www.newsweek.com/topic/lloyd-austin?utm_source=Synacor&utm_medium=Attnet&utm_campaign=Partnerships) [*called*](https://www.politico.com/news/2024/05/08/austin-israel-bomb-shipments-00156819) America's commitment to Israel "ironclad," but added that the Biden administration will not supply the munitions until it assesses and approves of Israel's military response.

Many, in Washington, in Jerusalem, and elsewhere, were shocked by the administration's move. They shouldn't have been.

What we're seeing right now—the baffling spectacle of an American president abandoning a key ally as it fights against a terror organization that still holds more than a 100 civilians, including American citizens, hostage—isn't an aberration. It's merely American aid to Israel doing just what it was designed to do: check Israel's ability to pursue its own interests while allowing the White House to continue uninterrupted with its own policy of regional realignment, empowering Iran, its allies, and its proxies.

This is why side-by-side with punishing Israel, the Biden administration also issued a sanctions waiver that bypasses a congressional prohibition on selling arms to Arab countries that do not recognize the Jewish state. As Adam Kredo [*reported*](https://freebeacon.com/national-security/day-before-biden-admin-announced-it-would-withhold-weapons-from-israel-it-issued-sanctions-waiver-to-allow-arms-sales-to-qatar-and-lebanon/) in the *Washington Free Beacon*, the administration will now send weapons to Qatar, which is closely associated with [*Hamas*](https://www.newsweek.com/topic/hamas?utm_source=Synacor&utm_medium=Attnet&utm_campaign=Partnerships) and hosts the group's leadership, and to Lebanon, the Iranian satrapy currently engaged in a simmering conflict with Israel that may boil over any day.

Let's imagine, for a moment, an Israel untethered to American aid. Such a nation would've been at liberty to inform the United States that championing Teheran, sending its proxies arms and money, and rewarding Palestinian barbarism with talk of diplomatic appeasement are all in direct contradiction to Israel's basic, existential needs. An unburdened Jerusalem would then be free to apply its own considerable ingenuity to accelerating its already impressive homegrown defense industry, using its newfound liberty to trade without American-imposed limitations to make new powerful friends. Like India, for example, which has [*purchased*](https://www.reuters.com/business/aerospace-defense/israels-military-exports-top-buyer-india-unaffected-by-gaza-war-2024-02-23/) nearly $3 billion in Israeli weapons this past decade, or like neighboring Arab states, which purchased a mind-boggling [*24 percent of all Israeli arms*](https://www.reuters.com/business/aerospace-defense/israel-reports-record-125-bln-defence-exports-24-them-arab-partners-2023-06-13/) in 2022.

The reality on the ground, meanwhile, is very different. Earlier this month, four IDF soldiers were [*killed*](https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-68960585) after Hamas fired rockets on the Kerem Shalom border crossing, which was only open because the Biden administration insisted Israel deliver so-called humanitarian aid to Hamas-controlled Gaza. It's the sort of insane and unprecedented demand—supplying your enemies mid-war as they continue to hold men, women, and children hostage—that is only made possible because Israel continues to accept American aid.

It's time for this arrangement to end.

The last few months have made it very clear what America gets for its $3.8 billion—it gets an Israel forced to do pretty much whatever it is told, a significant asset if your main goal is to accelerate its main foe, Iran. It's also very clear what Israel gets—it has now traded its ability to maneuver, becoming a de facto vassal of a finicky empire that routinely lashes out at its friends and lavishly rewards its enemies.

If Israelis want to celebrate their independence day next week feeling like an actual sovereign nation, they've no choice but to call the Oval Office and inform the president that he should no longer bother with his bucks. Any other decision is frankly just too pricey.

*Liel Leibovitz is editor at large at* Tablet Magazine *and the editor of the recently published* [*Zionism: The Tablet Guide*](https://tabletmagstore.com/merch/p/zionism-the-tablet-guide)*.*

*The views expressed in this article are the writer's own.*

[*Link to Image*](https://d.newsweek.com/en/full/2390565/president-joe-biden-speaks-guests.jpg)

**Graphic**

President Joe Biden speaks to guests

Scott Olson/Getty Images

President Joe Biden speaks to guests during an event at Gateway Technical College’s iMet Center on May 08, 2024 in Sturtevant, Wisconsin. Biden said that he would not supply offensive weapons that Israel could use to launch an all-out assault on Rafah in southern Gaza.

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