

Bernie Sanders's Vote on Gaza Genocide Forces Senators to Go on the Record

Schuyler Mitchell : 9-12 minutes : 11/20/2024

Today, US senators will be forced to record for posterity whether they condone US enabling of the genocide in Gaza.

Sen. Bernie Sanders, joined by fellow Senators Chris Van Hollen, Peter Welch and Jeff Merkley, speaks at a news conference on restricting arms sales to Israel at the U.S. Capitol on November 19, 2024, in Washington, D.C.
Kevin Dietsch / Getty Images

Since last October, Israel has been able to wage a genocidal war on Gaza while receiving little more than a light slap on the wrist. President Joe Biden and his administration have claimed to be working tirelessly toward a ceasefire, all while continuing to supply Israel with the billions of dollars in weapons it needs to prolong its assault.

So, when Biden said last month that the United States would limit arms transfers to Israel if it did not stop blocking the flow of humanitarian aid into Gaza, his threat understandably rang hollow. The administration's 30-day deadline for Israel to "surge" food and other aid into Gaza has now passed. And, just as predicted, the Biden administration said it will continue sending Israel weapons — even though aid groups like the [World Food Programme](#) say conditions in Gaza have only worsened since Biden first floated the possibility of consequences.

This is not only a moral failing, but also a violation of the law. The Foreign Assistance Act and the Leahy Law dictate that the U.S. cannot send weapons to governments committing human rights violations. But time and time again, the U.S. has failed to abide by its own legal code. In 2019, for instance, Donald Trump vetoed a congressional vote to end military support for Saudi Arabia's war in Yemen, which at that time had killed more than 70,000 people. Shortly after taking office, Biden announced he would halt sales of "offensive weapons" to Saudi Arabia, citing their use in human rights abuses. The arms suspension was a major break from the status quo — but one that was quickly [rolled back](#) earlier this year.

The U.S. has also continued to shirk accountability in the case of Israel. The [United Nations](#) and [Human Rights Watch](#) are among those who have resoundingly documented the rampant violations of human rights that Israel has committed in the last year alone. This includes the systematic destruction of Gaza's healthcare system through "relentless and deliberate attacks on medical personnel and facilities," the torture and rape of Palestinians detained in Israeli military camps, deliberate home demolitions, the bombing of safe zones and evacuation corridors, and the forced displacement of 90 percent of Gaza's population.

The [latest evidence](#) that the country is [systematically and deliberately](#) blocking humanitarian aid in Gaza arrives months after the International Court of Justice already found it "[plausible](#)"

that Israel is committing acts of genocide. Citing the humanitarian crisis, hundreds of human rights organizations around the world have called for the U.S. to [stop the weapons transfers](#). But the State Department still claims it doesn't see a problem.

Today, for the first and probably last time, U.S. Senators will have an opportunity to tell Biden to chart a new course — and honor his own word. Sen. Bernie Sanders (I-Vermont) is bringing six measures, known as the Joint Resolutions of Disapproval, to the Senate floor for a vote. The bills, also backed by Sens. Peter Welch (D-Vermont), Jeff Merkley (D-Oregon) and Brian Schatz (D-Hawaii), would block the sales of six different kinds of weapons to Israel, worth a total of \$20 billion.

It's the [first time](#) Congress has voted on legislation blocking arms sales to Israel. Hassan El-Tayyab, an organizer with the Friends Committee on National Legislation, a Quaker peace group, [described the vote](#) as "historic."

"I have met with doctors who have served in Gaza, treating hundreds of patients a day without electricity, anesthesia or clean water, including dozens of children arriving with gunshot wounds to the head," Sanders wrote in a *Washington Post* op-ed this week, urging his fellow senators to pass the Joint Resolutions of Disapproval. "As Americans, we are complicit in these horrific and illegal atrocities. Our complicity must end."

[More than 100](#) civil society organizations have publicly backed the resolutions. Even J Street, which describes itself as a "pro-Israel, pro-peace" group, acknowledged that Israel's mass killing and starvation of civilians in Gaza is "unacceptable" and expressed support for passing the resolutions in order to send a strong message to Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu.

Still, the Joint Resolutions of Disapproval are unlikely to pass. They would need to be approved by both the House and the Senate to be enacted, with at least a two-thirds majority to prevent the guaranteed presidential veto. But even if the resolutions won't stop the bloodshed in Gaza, the vote still has a meaningful symbolic importance that will set a congressional precedent.

"Just the fact that this is happening is already sending that political signal," El-Tayyab [told Al Jazeera](#). "It's not business as usual."

All Senate members will now be forced to go on the official legislative record about whether or not they condone the United States' continued facilitation of a genocide in Gaza. Polls have consistently shown that [most Americans want](#) the U.S. to halt weapons sales to Israel, yet our politicians have consistently ignored their constituents' voices.

On the campaign trail this election cycle, Democrats have tried to fashion themselves as the political party that cares about the democratic process and the rule of law. Today's vote is an opportunity for Democratic lawmakers to, in a sense, prove it.

In fact, the Biden administration released its own [Conventional Arms Transfer policy](#) in February 2023, which expanded the framework for evaluating the legality of arms transfers. The updated policy prohibits the sale of weapons that are "more likely than not" to be used to violate international law and bans arms transfers that "facilitate" or "aggravate risk" or human rights violations. This language is actually stronger than what was previously on the books — "actual knowledge" of violations is not required. The risk of human rights abuses is supposed

to be sufficient.

Nine months later, the U.S. authorized more than \$14 billion in new Israeli military funding. [War crimes were documented](#) within weeks.

Truthout Is Preparing to Meet Trump's Agenda With Resistance at Every Turn

Dear *Truthout* Community,

If you feel rage, despondency, confusion and deep fear today, you are not alone. We're feeling it too. We are heartsick. Facing down Trump's fascist agenda, we are desperately worried about the most vulnerable people among us, including our loved ones and everyone in the *Truthout* community, and our minds are racing a million miles a minute to try to map out all that needs to be done.

We must give ourselves space to grieve and feel our fear, feel our rage, and keep in the forefront of our mind the stark truth that millions of real human lives are on the line. And simultaneously, we've got to get to work, take stock of our resources, and prepare to throw ourselves full force into the movement.

Journalism is a linchpin of that movement. **Even as we are reeling, we're summoning up all the energy we can to face down what's coming, because we know that one of the sharpest weapons against fascism is publishing the truth.**

There are many terrifying planks to the Trump agenda, and we plan to devote ourselves to reporting thoroughly on each one and, crucially, covering the movements resisting them. We also recognize that Trump is a dire threat to journalism itself, and that we must take this seriously from the outset.

Last week, the four of us sat down to have some hard but necessary conversations about *Truthout* under a Trump presidency. How would we defend our publication from an avalanche of far right lawsuits that seek to bankrupt us? How would we keep our reporters safe if they need to cover outbreaks of political violence, or if they are targeted by authorities? How will we urgently produce the practical analysis, tools and movement coverage that you need right now — breaking through our normal routines to meet a terrifying moment in ways that best serve you?

It will be a tough, scary four years to produce social justice-driven journalism. **We need to deliver news, strategy, liberatory ideas, tools and movement-sparking solutions with a force that we never have had to before.** And at the same time, we desperately need to protect our ability to do so.

We know this is such a painful moment and donations may understandably be the last thing on your mind. But we must ask for your support, which is needed in a new and urgent way.

We promise we will kick into an even higher gear to give you truthful news that cuts against the disinformation and vitriol and hate and violence. We promise to publish analyses that will serve the needs of the movements we all rely on to survive the next four years, and even build for the future. We promise to be responsive, to recognize you as members of our community with a vital stake and voice in this work.

Please dig deep if you can, but a donation of any amount will be a truly meaningful and tangible action in this cataclysmic historical moment. We are presently looking for 182 new monthly donors in the next 24 hours.

We're with you. Let's do all we can to move forward together.

With love, rage, and solidarity,

Maya, Negin, Saima, and Ziggy