

## COSTS OF ARMING ISRAEL CAN NO LONGER BE IGNORED

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<sup>[3]</sup>

US weaponry was used in the flattening of Gaza during the three weeks of attacks in winter 2008-09. (Wissam Nassar/MaanImages)

Israel may be forgiven for failing to realize the current fiscal woes of the United States. After all, US military aid to Israel not only sailed unscathed through this month's passage of the 2011 budget, but reached the record level of \$3 billion.

The US additionally provided Israel \$415 million for procurement, research and development of joint US-Israeli missile defense projects, including \$205 million to fund Israel's newly-deployed Iron Dome system.

This anti-missile battery already has altered significantly the strategic balance in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict when Israel successfully shot down incoming rockets fired from the Gaza Strip earlier this month. With the assured diplomatic backing of the US to prevent Israel from being held accountable by the international community for its illegal blockade, Iron Dome will embolden Israel to tighten its siege and escalate its attacks on the occupied Gaza Strip by providing its citizens with additional protection against retaliatory fire.

US funding of Iron Dome is but one example of many of how US weapons transfers to Israel privilege Israeli military dominance over Palestinian freedom and create perverse economic disincentives for Israel to defy US policy goals such as halting Israel's colonization of Palestinian land, ending its collective punishment of Palestinians in the Gaza Strip and negotiating in good faith a lasting peace agreement.

As long as US weapons continue to flow, Israel will feel free to disregard the Obama administration's mild blandishments and half-hearted attempts to bring Israel to the negotiating table. Unfortunately this disincentive structure is set to be reinforced over the coming years.

Under a Bush-era agreement, US weapons transfers to Israel are scheduled to total \$30 billion from 2009-2018, an annual average increase of 25 percent above previous levels. With this 2007 Memorandum of Understanding, the US solidified Israel's position as the largest recipient of US military aid this decade. In line with increases proposed under this arrangement, President Obama asked for a record-breaking \$3.075 billion of weapons for Israel in his 2012 budget request.

A new online database — "How Many Weapons to Israel?" (<http://www.weaponstoisrael.org/> <sup>[4]</sup>) — casts doubt on whether the US can afford, either morally, financially or politically, to continue transferring weapons to Israel at taxpayer expense without examining the ramifications of this policy.

From 2000-2009, the US licensed, paid for and delivered to Israel more than 670 million weapons and related equipment, valued at nearly \$19 billion, through three main weapons transfer programs (Foreign Military Sales, Direct Commercial Sales and Excess Defense Articles). These weapons transfer programs accounted for nearly 80 percent of the more than \$24 billion in military aid appropriated to Israel during these years. The bulk of the remaining money was spent by Israel on its own domestic arms industry, a unique exemption written into law for Israel. All other countries receiving US military aid are required to spend the whole sum within the US.

Military aid to Israel ran the gamut from the patently absurd — one used food steamer valued at \$2,100 — to the lethal — 93 F-16D fighter jets valued at a total of nearly \$2.5 billion. With nearly 500 categories of weapons transferred to Israel, the US is pervasively, intricately and comprehensively involved in arming its military.

These weapons transfers also make the US deeply complicit in almost every action the Israeli military takes to entrench its illegal 43-year military occupation of the Palestinian West Bank, including East Jerusalem, and Gaza Strip and the apartheid policies that undergird its government's stance toward Palestinians.

From September 2000-December 2009, roughly the same period during which the US transferred these 670 million weapons to Israel, the Israeli military killed at least 2,969 Palestinians, of whom 1,128 were children, who took no part in hostilities, according to the Israeli human rights organization B'Tselem.

For example, Israel killed 446 unarmed Palestinians, including 149 children, with missiles fired from helicopters. The Pentagon classifies the number, types and value of missiles transferred to Israel; however, the US gave Israel nearly 200 AH-64D Apache, Sikorsky CH-53 and Cobra helicopters from which at least some of these lethal missiles were fired. It was likely one such US-supplied missile from a US-supplied helicopter that Israel fired in the Jabalya refugee camp in the Gaza Strip on 29 December 2008, which killed five sisters, Jawaher (age 4), Dina (age 7), Samar (age 12), Ikram (age 14) and Tahrir Baulusha (age 17) during an attack on a nearby mosque.

Israel's misuse of US weapons to commit human rights abuses like these against Palestinian civilians should trigger sanctions against, rather than increasing amounts of military aid to, Israel. The Arms Export Control Act limits the use of US weapons to "internal security" and "legitimate self-defense." Israel's occupation of the Palestinian West Bank, including East Jerusalem, and Gaza Strip is defined by the US government as a foreign military occupation, and the killing of thousands of unarmed civilians in support of a military occupation cannot be justified as legitimate without distorting the meaning of self-defense.

In addition, the Foreign Assistance Act strictly prohibits US foreign assistance to any country that "engages in a consistent pattern of gross violations of internationally-recognized human rights." The State Department's recently released 2010 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices documents amply, if not comprehensively, Israel's human rights abuses of Palestinians.

As Washington now considers raising the debt ceiling and making even more substantial cuts to the 2012 budget, the moral, financial and political costs of arming Israel can no longer be ignored.

If the Obama administration is serious in its efforts to resolve the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and genuine in its stated commitment to the universality of human rights, then it must utilize the significant leverage the US wields over Israel through its military aid program. By terminating weapons transfers to Israel at least until Israel upholds its obligations under US and international law, ends its illegal military occupation of Palestinian land and negotiates in good faith a just and lasting peace with Palestinians, the US can create an incentive structure to achieve its frustrated policy goals.



*[5] Josh Ruebner is the National Advocacy Director of the US Campaign to End the Israeli Occupation, a national coalition of more than 350 organizations working to change US policy toward Israel and the Palestinians to support human rights, international law and equality. He is a former Analyst in Middle East Affairs at Congressional Research Service.*



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