



RESTRICTING US MILITARY AID TO ISRAEL IN THE AGE OF NORMALIZATION

By [Nadya Tannous](#)

[Click here](#) to read online or [download](#) the full paper

The United States has never wavered from aiding Israel militarily, and has consistently maintained Israel's [Qualitative Military Edge \(QME\)](#) in relation to its neighbors. Examining this long-standing practice within the context of the recent Arab normalization agreements, as well as within the context of the rise in global support for Palestinians, sheds light on new dynamics unfolding in the halls of Capitol Hill and in the streets of every major US city.

In addition to military aid, the US has strategically brokered “peace” deals between Arab states and Israel, deals that require Arab governments to support Israel politically and economically, or, in the least, to abstain from publicly condemning its actions. Since 2001, Israel has received over [\\$63 billion in security assistance](#) from the US, with over 90% of it funded by the State Department's Foreign Military Financing (FMF) program. And since 2020, the US has brokered normalization agreements – known as the Abraham Accords – between Israel and the United Arab Emirates (UAE), Bahrain, Sudan, and Morocco.

Yet these agreements must be understood within the longer history of US military aid to Israel and its allies. The agreements signed with Bahrain and the UAE were recognized as a [first-rate arms deal](#) between two Gulf governments for American weapons. As a result of the Abraham Accords, the UAE publicly noted that it was [expecting 50 F-35 fighter jets](#) and 18 armed Reaper drone systems as part of the [\\$23.37 billion arms deal](#) approved by the Trump administration in exchange for normalization.

Israel is the only country in the world for which [the US does not track](#) which weapons go to which military unit, making it virtually impossible to condition military aid to Israel based on its violations of international human rights. Indeed, [US aid powers the Israeli Air Force](#), providing billions of dollars' [worth of fuel](#) under the government-to-government Foreign Military Sales (FMS) program. Since 2015, the US has [spent over \\$5.4 billion](#) on aviation fuel, diesel fuel, unleaded gasoline, and aerial refueling aircraft. The US is scheduled to send the \$3.3 billion in FMF funds to Israel throughout 2021, which Congress approved on a bipartisan basis.

But progressive policymakers on Capitol Hill immediately took action to condition and halt US aid to Israel following its ethnic cleansing of [Palestinians in Sheikh Jarrah](#) and its [vicious assault on Gaza](#) in May 2021. On May 5, Congress was notified of the \$735 million commercial sale of precision-guided weapons to Israel, initiating a 15-day period when members of Congress may object. Following the assault on Gaza, and at the end of the 15-day period, several representatives [proposed a senate joint resolution](#) and [a house joint resolution](#) to halt the sale. On May 13, they publicly [expressed support for the Palestinian people](#) in Congress, calling for an end to funding Israeli military aggression. On June 8, over 100 prominent national organizations submitted a letter to President Biden [urging him to block the sale](#), with 73 centrist democrats calling on him to categorize Israeli settlements as illegal.

The tide is clearly shifting in the US. Beyond Capitol Hill, [grassroots movements of Palestinians](#) and tens of thousands of [Palestine supporters have taken to the streets](#) across major US cities, protesting the Israeli regime's disproportionate use of power and calling for freedom for the Palestinian people. An [August 2021 Chicago Council Survey](#) showed that 50% of Americans favor restricting military aid to Israel in operations that target Palestinians, as opposed to 45% who oppose it. Democrats overwhelmingly support it at 62%.

In order to seize on this historic moment in the defense of Palestinians' rights:

- Activists and lobbyists must pressure policymakers and the international community to restrict US military aid to Israel, including through sanctions. They should support legislation conditioning aid to Israel, and should push for legislation that tracks Israel's military spending. They should promote grassroots groups and NGOs already dedicated to this work.
- Activists, lobbyists, and policymakers must support the [Boycott, Divest, Sanctions \(BDS\)](#) movement, which is part of a larger strategy to hold accountable [corporations and companies](#) implicated in arms deals with Israel.
- International policymakers must promote the growing movement to hold Israel accountable for its ongoing violations through legislation and partnerships that protect, praise, and fund them.
- US policymakers must uplift and support the voices of US citizens who are calling on their representatives demanding an [end to US military support for Israel](#).
- International policymakers must oppose and demand the [revocation of anti-BDS laws](#) which quash and delegitimize criticism of Israel, especially in the US.