

Should the U.S. End Aid to Israel? Funding Our Decline

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April 1st I participated in a debate in San Francisco that raised the question of US aid to Israel.

It was highly appropriate that this debate was held two weeks before tax day, since in Israel's sixty years of existence, it has received more US tax money than any other nation on earth.

During periods of recession, when Americans are thrown out of work, homes are repossessed, school budgets cut and businesses fail, Congress continues to give Israel massive amounts of our tax money; currently, about 7 million dollars per day.

On top of this, Egypt and Jordan receive large sums of money (per capita about 1/20th of what Israel receives) to buy their cooperation with Israel; and Palestinians also receive our tax money (about 1/23rd of that to Israel), to repair infrastructure that Israeli forces have destroyed, to fund humanitarian projects required due to the destruction wrought by Israel's military, and to convince Palestinian officials to take actions beneficial to Israel. These sums should also be included in expenditures on behalf of Israel.

When all are added together, it turns out that for many years over half of all US tax money abroad has been expended to benefit a country the size of New Jersey.

It is certainly time to begin debating this disbursement of our hard-earned money. It is quite possible that we have better uses for it.

To decide whether the US should continue military aid to any nation, it is essential to examine the nature and history of the recipient nation, how it has used our military aid in the past, whether these uses are in accord with our values, and whether they benefit the American taxpayers who are putting up the money.

1. What is the history and nature of Israel?

Describing Israel is always difficult. One can either stay within the mainstream paradigm, or tell the truth. I will opt for the truth.

Drawing on scores of books by diverse authors, the facts are quite clear: Israel was created through one of the most massive, ruthless, and persistent ethnic cleansing operations of modern history. In 1947-49 about three-quarters of a million Muslims and Christians, who had originally made up 95 percent of the population living in the area that Zionists wanted for a Jewish state, were brutally forced off their ancestral land. There were 33 massacres,

over 500 villages were completely destroyed, and an effort was made to erase all vestiges of Palestinian history and culture.

The fact is that Israel's core identity is based on ethnic and religious discrimination by a colonial, immigrant group; and maintaining this exclusionist identity has required continued violence against those it has dispossessed, and others who have given them refuge.

2. How has Israel used our military aid in the past?

In all of its wars except one, Israel has attacked first.

In violation of the Arms Export Control Act, which requires that US weapons only be used in "legitimate self defense," Israel used American equipment during its two invasions of Lebanon, killing 17,000 the first time and 1,000 more recently, the vast majority civilians. It used American-made cluster bombs in both invasions, again in defiance of US laws, causing the "most hideous injuries" one American physician said she had ever seen, and which, in one day in 1982 alone, resulted in the amputation of over 1,000 mangled limbs.

It has used US military aid to continue and expand its illegal confiscation of land in the West Bank and Golan Heights, and has used American F-16s and Apache Helicopters against largely unarmed civilian populations.

According to Defence for Children International, Israel has "engaged in gross violations of international human rights and humanitarian law." Between 1967 and 2003, Israel destroyed more than 10,000 homes, and such destruction continues today. A coalition of UK human rights groups recently issued a report stating that Israel's blockade of Gaza is collective punishment of 1.5 million people, warning: "Unless the blockade ends now, it will be impossible to pull Gaza back from the brink of this disaster and any hopes for peace in the region will be dashed."

In addition, Israel uses US military aid to fund an Israeli arms industry that competes with US companies. According to a report commissioned by the US Army War College, "Israel uses roughly 40 percent of its military aid, ostensibly earmarked for purchase of US weapons, to buy Israeli-made hardware. It also has won the right to require the Defense Department or US defense contractors to buy Israeli-made equipment or subsystems, paying 50 to 60 cents on every defense dollar the US gives to Israel."

Israel has used US aid to kill and injure nonviolent Palestinian, American and international activists, as well as American servicemen. Israeli soldiers in an American-made Caterpillar bulldozer crushed to death 23-year-old Rachel Corrie; an Israeli sniper shot 21-year-old Tom Hurndall in the head; Israeli soldiers shot 26-year-old Brian Avery in the face. In 1967 Israel used US-financed French aircraft to attack a US Navy ship, killing 34 American servicemen and injuring 174.

Israel has used US aid to imprison without trial thousands of Palestinians and others, and according to reports by the London Times and Amnesty International, Israel consistently tortures prisoners; including, according to Foreign Service Journal, American citizens.

3. Are these uses in accord with our national and personal values?

Not in my view.

4. Do these uses of US aid benefit American taxpayers?

While some Israeli actions have served US interests, the balance sheet is clear: Israel's use of American aid consistently damages the United States, harms our economy, and endangers Americans.

In fact, this extremely negative outcome was so predictable that even before Israel's creation virtually all State Department and Pentagon experts advocated forcefully against supporting the creation of a Zionist state in the Middle East. President Harry Truman's reply: "I am sorry gentlemen, but I have to answer to hundreds of thousands who are anxious for the success of Zionism. I do not have hundreds of thousands of Arabs among my constituents."

Through the years, as noted above, our aid to Israel has not resulted in a reliable ally.

In 1954 Israel tried to bomb US government offices in Egypt, intending to pin this on Muslims.

In 1963 Senator William Fulbright discovered that Israel was using a series of covert operations to funnel our money to pro-Israel groups in the US, which then used these funds in media campaigns and lobbying to procure even more money from American taxpayers.

In 1967 Israeli forces unleashed a two-hour air and sea attack against the USS Liberty, causing 200 casualties. While Israel partisans claim that this was done in error, this claim is belied by extensive eyewitness evidence and by an independent commission reporting on Capitol Hill in 2003 chaired by former Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Admiral Thomas Moorer.

In 1973 Israel used the largest airlift of US materiel in history to defeat Arab forces attempting to regain their own land, triggering the Arab oil embargo that sent the US into a recession that cost thousands of Americans their jobs.

During its 1980s Lebanon invasion, Israeli troops engaged in a systematic pattern of harassment of US forces brought in as peacekeepers that created, according to Commandant of Marines Gen. R. H Barrow, "life-threatening situations, replete with verbal degradation of the officers, their uniform and country."

Through the years, Israel has regularly spied on the US. According to the Government Accounting Office, Israel "conducts the most aggressive espionage operations against the United States of any ally." Secretary of Defense Caspar Weinberger said of Israeli spy Jonathan Pollard: "It is difficult for me to conceive of greater harm done to national security," And the Pollard case was just the tip of a very large iceberg; the most recent operation coming to light involves two senior officials of the American Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC), Israel's powerful American lobbying organization.

Bad as the above may appear, it pales next to the indirect damage to Americans caused by our aid to Israel. American funding of Israel's egregious violations of Palestinian human rights is consistently listed as the number one cause of hostility to Americans.

While American media regularly cover up Israeli actions, those of us who have visited the region first-hand witness a level of US-funded Israeli cruelty that makes us weep for our victims and fear for our country. While most Americans are uninformed on how Israel uses

our money, people throughout the world are deeply aware that it is Americans who are funding Israeli crimes.

The 9/11 Commission notes that Khalid Sheikh Mohammed's "animus towards the United States stemmed from his violent disagreement with U.S. foreign policy favoring Israel." The Economist reports that "the notion of payback for injustices suffered by the Palestinians is perhaps the most powerfully recurrent theme in bin Laden's speeches."

The Bottom Line

In sum, US aid to Israel has destabilized the Middle East; propped up a national system based on ethnic and religious discrimination; enabled unchecked aggression that has, on occasion, been turned against Americans themselves; funded arms industries that compete with American companies; supported a pattern of brutal dispossession that has created hatred of the US; and resulted in continuing conflict that last year took the lives of 384 Palestinians and 13 Israelis, and that in the past seven and a half years has cost the lives of more than 982 Palestinian children and 119 Israeli children.

By providing massive funding to Israel, no matter what it does, American aid is empowering Israeli supremacists who believe in a never-ending campaign of ethnic cleansing; while disempowering Israelis who recognize that policies of morality, justice, and rationality are the only road to peace.

It is time to end our aid?

Alison Weir is Executive Director of If Americans Knew. For more information on the US-Israel relationship she especially recommends the books by Donald Neff, Paul Findley, Kathleen Christison, Stephen Walt, John Mearsheimer, Grant Smith, Stephen Green, George Ball, and John Mulhall.

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