



Israel Has "Not Received" What It Needs

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Last week, Israel's Defense Minister Yoav Gallant [was](#) in Washington to discuss expediting delivery of U.S. weapons. The same week, despite [reports](#) that the Biden administration authorized some weapons transfers, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff General Charles Q. Brown acknowledged that Israel has "not received everything they've asked for," in part because U.S. leaders are "[not willing to provide](#)" some weapons to Israel "right now, in particular."

Continued and timely U.S. arms supply to Israel, particularly the advanced capabilities Gallant reportedly requested such as precision-guided munitions, F-15s, and F-35s, and other needs including Apache helicopters and KC-46A aerial refueling tankers, are vital to defeating Hamas as well as deterring or, if need be, responding to, attacks by Hezbollah, other Iranian proxies, and Iran itself. Ensuring Israel's qualitative military edge (QME) over its enemies is a key U.S. strategic interest, both to deal a blow to Iran's "ring of fire" web of proxies and to demonstrate, to friends and adversaries alike, that the United States stands by its partners.

What Happened?

- On March 28, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff General Charles Q. Brown [stated](#) that though the United States has "been supporting [Israel] with capability, they've not received everything they've asked for," because Israel has requested weapons that "we either don't have the capacity [for] or [are] not willing to provide, not right now, in particular."
- Brown's comments come amid recent reports indicating that the United States is either considering [slowing down](#) weapons shipments to Israel or has already begun doing so.
 - » An anonymous senior Israeli official told *ABC News* earlier this month that the United States has already started slow-walking military aid to Israel, remarking that the flow of military aid was "coming very fast" at the start of the war, but "we are now finding that it's [very slow](#)."
- The State Department, on March 25, [confirmed](#) that it certified Israel's compliance with international humanitarian law, both regarding its conduct in the war and the extent of humanitarian aid entering Gaza. The same day, Israel's Defense Minister Yoav Gallant [arrived](#) in Washington to meet with his American counterpart and other U.S. officials.
 - » According to a March 25 *CNN* report, Gallant [made clear](#) in a call with Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin shortly before the visit that he planned to discuss "U.S. weapons and equipment that Israel wants to buy and have delivered in an expedited manner ... including more precision-guided munitions (PGMs) and F-35 and F-15 fighter jets."
 - » The *Washington Post* subsequently reported on March 29 that the Biden administration had recently "[authorized](#) the transfer" of around 1,800 MK84 bombs, 500 MK82 bombs,

and 25 F-35 fighter jets. According to [reports](#), the bombs will take at least a month to arrive and the fighter aircraft will likely take several years.

Why Is It Important?

- Ensuring that Israel is sufficiently armed to prevail over Hamas in Gaza, destroy Hezbollah's rocket arsenal, and prevent a nuclear Iran is squarely in the United States' interests, namely deterring further Iranian-backed aggression and promoting a stable Middle East with strong regional partners and weakened regional adversaries.
 - » Failure to provide the necessary weapons to Israel will only increase the likelihood of further regional instability, and harm perceptions of U.S. resolve globally. However, the inverse is also true. As JINSA Distinguished Fellow IDF MG (ret.) Amikam Norkin recently [said](#), "strong Israeli capabilities mean [a] stable Middle East."
- The reported U.S. approval of the transfer of around 2,300 bombs and 25 F-35 fighter jets to Israel is a positive step towards enhancing Israel's readiness. However, the items are [unlikely](#) to arrive in Israel in the near-term, and a number of key defense items Israel needs remain outstanding.
 - » The reported U.S. approval of roughly 2,300 munitions is an important measure, but this quantity is likely insufficient to ensure Israel's full readiness in the event of a major conflict with Hezbollah. The terror group possesses an [arsenal](#) of approximately 130,000 rockets and missiles in sites across Lebanon.
 - » Defense Minister Gallant's reported request for F-15 fighter jets also remains unaddressed, and Israel also needs Joint Direct Attack Munition (JDAM) tailkits to equip the MK82 and MK84 bombs with.
- Despite the State Department confirming Israel's compliance with international law—in the face of political pressure to do otherwise—a number of U.S. lawmakers have called for a slowing, conditioning, or outright termination of U.S. arms exports to Israel.
 - » Had the State Department failed to do so, Israel's ability to receive U.S. weapons shipments would have been [jeopardized](#) under a recent national security memorandum, NSM-20. The memorandum required U.S. military aid recipients to [provide](#) "credible and reliable assurances" that they will abide by international law when using the weapons or risk losing access to U.S. arms.
 - » On March 23, six members of Congress [penned](#) a letter to President Biden arguing that the "Israeli government has made itself ineligible to receive continued U.S. weapons" due to its alleged failure to abide by international law, aside from certain "defensive weapons systems."
 - » On March 22, 17 senators [urged](#) the State Department not to certify that Israel's conduct is in keeping with international law in a statement provided to *The Washington Post*.
- Reportedly, in recent weeks, for the "first time since the beginning of the war" the White House has [requested](#) a list from the State Department and the Pentagon of "imminent arms shipments to Israel in order to examine the security export permits to Israel before approving them."
- The Biden administration may be slow-walking weapons as a *de facto* restriction of military aid to Israel without explicitly contravening decades-long U.S. policy to [not withhold](#) weapons shipments from Israel, even in times of [disagreement](#).
 - » *CNN* reported on March 26, citing a U.S. official, that the Biden administration is [concerned](#) "that approving too many big weapons sales too quickly could allow Israel

- to accumulate equipment for an eventual major confrontation with Hezbollah in Lebanon.”
- » In fact, the opposite is true. Facilitating Israel’s power projection and ensuring that Israel’s QME is unambiguously preserved are the best ways the United States can help deter Hezbollah from further escalatory attacks on Israel and prevent a full-scale war.
 - Preserving Israel’s QME over regional adversaries is a longstanding official U.S. policy, [codified](#) in U.S. law.
 - » QME is a term referring to Israel’s ability to maintain a qualitative military edge over its neighbors for both deterrent and readiness purposes.
 - » Under U.S. law, QME is [defined](#) as Israel’s ability “to counter and defeat any credible conventional military threat from any individual state or possible coalition of states or from non-state actors, while sustaining minimal damages and casualties, through the use of superior military means, possessed in sufficient quantity.”
 - Additionally, though administration officials [profess concern](#) about the humanitarian impact of Israel’s use of U.S. weapons in Gaza, rapid U.S. weapons provision to Israel would enable a speedier defeat of Hamas and an end to fighting, helping limit civilian suffering.
 - » As a former U.S. ambassador to Israel correctly [observed](#), “the quicker Israel wins this war, the quicker people’s lives can start to get rebuilt,” both in Gaza and in Israel.
 - » Conversely, Israel lacking the munitions to beat Hamas conclusively would only prolong the conflict and risk the resurgence of Hamas.
 - Israel’s tactical successes thus far, including dismantling the vast majority of Hamas’s battalions and eliminating thousands of terror operatives, have been aided significantly by PGMs.
 - » PGMs and JDAM tailkits enable Israel to precisely strike targets. JDAMs add GPS [guidance](#) to unguided gravity bombs, [converting](#) unguided air-to-ground bombs into PGMs and better enabling precision targeting to limit civilian harm.
 - As JINSA’s President and CEO Michael Makovsky and two sitting U.S. congressmen pointed out in a recent [op-ed](#), Israel’s use of precision munitions allow it to “strike intended target with as little collateral damage as possible ... without PGMs, Israel would have to ... drop more bombs than it currently does. The result would be far greater devastation of Gaza.”
 - The authors also [note](#) that “these precautions are only possible because of U.S. assistance to Israel. Many of the precision-guided munitions, or PGMs, that Israel uses to enable its surgical strikes come from the United States.”
 - » Israel has [specifically requested](#) bunker-buster precision munitions, according to reports. These munitions are pivotal to Israel’s efforts to eliminate Hamas leadership in the terror group’s subterranean bunkers.
 - » The Israel Defense Forces used munitions [launched](#) from the air to eliminate Hamas’s number two military wing leader, Marwan Issa, and another senior Hamas [decisionmaker](#), Ghazi Abu Tamaa, on March 11 while the two were [reportedly](#) in a tunnel more than 60 feet underground.
 - There were no reports of civilian casualties in the strike. One former Israeli general referred to the operation as a tactical feat likely [unprecedented](#) in warfare.
 - Israel currently relies heavily on air-launched munitions to neutralize Hezbollah operatives in Lebanon preparing projectile attacks against Israeli soil. Accordingly, Israel needs additional

precision munitions to deter Hezbollah and prevent a major front from opening in Lebanon, and for use should a northern war front in fact open up.

- » JINSA Distinguished Fellow IDF MG (ret.) Amikam Norkin, former head of the Israeli Air Force, recently [said](#) in a JINSA webinar that Israel “need[s] to have enough JDAMs” for the “northern front.”
 - JDAMs are crucial to ensure that Israel has freedom of action over Lebanon’s skies in a full-on conflict.
 - Hezbollah and Iran’s Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) have deployed increasingly [sophisticated](#) Iranian, and, [reportedly](#), Russian, air defense systems across Lebanon to try to stymie Israel’s air operations and increase Israel’s costs.
 - In any war scenario, Israel’s ability to [prevail](#) at acceptable cost will hinge on its ability to employ JDAMs and other precision munitions to target Hezbollah’s air defenses and arsenal of an estimated 130,000 rockets and missiles across Lebanon.
- Israel also needs fighter aircraft, namely F-15s and F-35s, to launch these munitions and eliminate Hezbollah personnel and weapons arsenals in Lebanon. Fighter aircraft also provide support to IDF ground forces in Gaza and enable Israel to conduct operations against hostile actors in Syria and elsewhere across the region.
 - » F-15 and F-35 squadrons, reportedly among Gallant’s primary requests, are critical for Israel’s QME. Israel is not slated to receive these fighter jets from the United States in the immediate future, something the United States should work to quickly remediate.
 - IDF MG (ret.) Norkin observed in a recent JINSA webinar that although “the F-35 squadrons and the F-15 squadrons are already in the plan for 10 years, we need them [earlier](#).”
 - Noting quantitative depreciations in Israel’s fighter jet arsenal, Norkin further [stated](#), “from 1970-1980 Israel bought 250 airplanes; between 1990 to 2000 we bought 102; in the last 10 years, we bought 19.”
 - » To supplement combat readiness and power projection, Israel would also benefit from the U.S. provision of KC-46A aerial tanker refuelers, which would [ensure](#) that its fighter jet squadrons can fly long-distance missions.
- Israel’s combat helicopter fleet is also in need of U.S. enhancements, both qualitatively and quantitatively. Since the 1980s, helicopters have represented Israel’s [first response](#) to operational problems, and represent Israel’s [best platform](#) to defend against border threats.
 - » IDF helicopters also support ground operations in Gaza, providing valuable air cover to ensure troop maneuverability and striking Hamas’s strategic [strongholds](#).
 - » Despite Israel’s reliance on Apache helicopters, one of Israel’s two Boeing AH-64 Apache squadrons is comprised of Apache AH-64 model A variants, the [sole military](#) in the world still using this outmoded version.
 - » The United States may be unable to ensure that Boeing can produce new models in a timely-enough fashion. In order to ensure full IDF combat readiness, the United States could [provide](#) a loan of between 10-12 newer-model Apache helicopters.
- Israel has reportedly [sought additional](#) Iron Dome interceptors, ground-to-air missiles that target incoming rockets, an invaluable tool to shield Israeli citizens from attack and an indispensable element of Israel’s homeland defense should a war with Hezbollah arise.
- Perceptions of divergence between the United States and Israel, particularly over Israel’s defense needs and the U.S. role in ensuring they are met, only [embolden](#) Tehran as well as Hamas’s political leadership operating abroad in Qatar.

- » Conversely, Iran and its proxies were unpleasantly surprised by the U.S. decision to deploy two carrier strike groups to the Middle East in the first week of the war. According to U.S. officials, U.S. intelligence agencies assessed that the deployment [deterred](#) Hezbollah from conducting a largescale attack on Israel.
- Israel dealing a blow to Iran’s “ring of fire” web of proxies would serve primary U.S. interests of ensuring stability and freedom of navigation in the Middle East. The proxy network, which Iran [calls](#) its ‘axis of resistance’, has, since the war began:
 - » Directly [killed](#) three American troops and injured dozens of American personnel;
 - » [Fired](#) over a dozen missiles and combat drones at U.S. Navy vessels, and;
 - » Singlehandedly raised the cost of global shipping and forced numerous ships to avoid the Suez Canal, a crucial thoroughfare for trade between Europe and Asia, causing traffic to [plummet](#) there by over 40 percent and raising the cost of commercial goods globally.
- The United States also has a strategic interest in countering Iranian activity in Syria and Lebanon that aids Russia’s war effort against Ukraine. Ukraine alleges that the IRGC has [trained](#) Russian troops in Syria to use drones in the war against Ukraine.
- Washington holding back or slow-walking arms to Israel, a steadfast U.S. partner for decades, would generate skepticism in other global capitals, namely Beijing and Pyongyang, about the reliability of other U.S. security assurances to allies and partners.
 - » As JINSA’s President and CEO Michael Makovsky recently [observed](#) in a JINSA webinar, “how [U.S. officials] treat Israel registers with other[s] ... a lot of foreign governments look at the bilateral U.S.-Israel relationship as an important barometer for how America stands by its friends.”

What Should the United States Do Next?

- The United States should quickly provide Israel with the weapons that Defense Minister Gallant requested on his visit to Washington, as well as any other munitions Israel has requested in recent months, in order to successfully prosecute its war against Hamas and project images of readiness to Iran and Hezbollah, both in the near and long terms.
- If infeasible for the United States to provide certain platforms due to manufacturing shortfalls, the United States should provide loans of urgently needed defense articles, such as Apache attack helicopters. The United States should also consider forward-positioning defense articles that cannot be manufactured in an immediate timeframe, such as KC-46A aerial refueling tankers.