

Heavy Words or Heavy Actions: Stop U.S. Weapons Sales to Israel

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The Bush administration has sharply criticized Israel's latest attack on a densely populated neighborhood in the Gaza Strip, calling it a "heavy handed action that will not contribute to the peace."

In a mission termed by one Israeli general as a "precision attack," an Israeli F-16 fighter plane dropped a 1,000-lb bomb in an attempt to assassinate a single man, Hamas leader Sheik Salah Shehadeh, who was responsible for a series of suicide attacks in Israel. The Israeli attack, initially hailed as "one of our major successes" by President Ariel Sharon, killed the Hamas leader. But fourteen other people, including nine children, the youngest of whom, Dina Mattar, was two months old, were also killed. Shifa Hospital in Gaza reported that 140 people were injured, 7 seriously. The bomb destroyed five buildings, reducing an area the size of half a city block to rubble.

It is time to cut off the flow of weapons to Israel, which is the top recipient of U.S. military aid at \$3 billion a year. According to a November 2001 Congressional Research Service report, "Israel: U.S. Foreign Assistance," American aid to Israel in the past half century has totaled a whopping \$81.3 billion. The F-16 fighter plane used in the attack was manufactured in the United States by Lockheed Martin and is one of more than 200 F-16s in the Israeli arsenal. They have another 106 on order from the Maryland-based manufacturer. Given that Israel is one of the United States' largest arms importers, it should be investigated whether the 1,000-lb bomb is from the U.S. as well.

The U.S. Arms Export Control Act prohibits U.S. weapons from being used for non-defen-

sive purposes. And there is nothing defensive about dropping a 1,000-lb bomb on a densely populated neighborhood in order to kill one man. Given Israel's violation of U.S. law and the subsequent killing of innocent civilians, it is time for President Bush to take some "heavy handed action" of his own, action that will "contribute to the peace," in the administration's words.

For 2003, the Bush administration is proposing that Israel receive \$2.76 billion in foreign aid, mostly in the form of military hardware. An additional \$28 million will go to Israel for the purchase U.S.-manufactured counter-terrorism equipment. In the past decade alone, the United States has sold Israel \$7.2 billion in weaponry and military equipment—everything from fighter planes and attack helicopters to machine guns and grenade launchers.

Freezing this military aid would send a strong message to the Israeli government that bombing heavily populated neighborhoods and killing civilians is as unacceptable from one of its closest allies as it is from Palestinian suicide bombers. This might not stop the killing between Israelis and Palestinians tomorrow, but at the very least the United States will no longer be complicit in the death of innocent children.

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