



## U.S. Security Assistance to Israel

By Joseph Yackley and Stephen Zunes

The violence of the past year and a half between Israelis and Palestinians has left more than 2,000 people dead, torpedoed the peace process, and turned the streets of the West Bank and Gaza Strip into battlefields. As the U.S. reconsiders its role in promoting Israeli-Palestinian peace, the prospects for a final settlement that recognizes the security needs of Israel and the legitimate political

rights of Palestinians seem worse than ever. The Bush administration has abandoned the ambitious approach of its predecessor by emphasizing "assistance" over "insistence." Unfortunately, rather than focusing on the issues that have derailed the peace process, American assistance is emerging as a disjointed policy that urges a peaceful resolution to the conflict while boosting military aid to Israel. This military aid has been used in the widespread killings of civilians, destroyed large sections of the infrastructure in Palestinian society, and hardened Arab attitudes toward Israel.

The increases in military aid grow out of a central pillar of U.S. policy in the Middle East:

strengthening America's "strategic cooperation" with Israel. This cooperation currently centers on two categories of U.S. military-related assistance to Israel, Economic Support Funds (ESF) and Foreign Military Financing (FMF). The larger of these two, FMF, is intended to help Israel finance its acquisition of U.S. military equipment, services, and training. FMF is scheduled to increase by \$60 million each year, for a total of \$2.04 billion in FY2002, as part of an ongoing plan to phase out ESF support by 2008. Previous discussions about Israel's security needs following peace agreements with Syria and the Palestinians and a withdrawal from the Golan Heights, the West Bank, and the Gaza Strip foresee an additional \$35 billion of U.S. military assistance, raising the potential total to more than \$7 billion per year over the next seven years. This is roughly the same amount currently spent by all of the former Soviet republics combined. Such an enormous increase is based on the confusing assumption that peace agreements with once-hostile neighbors somehow make Israel less secure and require a greatly expanded Israeli military.

Already the strongest military power in the region and the largest recipient of U.S. foreign aid, Israel does not need additional military assistance. It has one of the most sophisticated, well-equipped, and best-trained armies in the world, and its armed forces are growing faster than those of its neighbors, whose military expenditures decreased during the 1990s. Israel's annual military expenditures are consistently two to three times as high as those of other countries involved in previous Arab-Israeli wars combined, and Israel leads the region in the number of heavy weapons holdings, armored infantry vehicles, airplanes, and heavy tanks. Israel outpaces Syria, Iraq, Iran, and Lebanon in every major category of arms spending.

A careful review of FMF assistance reveals that this program has actually hindered the resolution of the Arab-Israeli conflict, made the Middle East more volatile, and undermined U.S. regional interests. If the purpose of the FMF program is to improve Israel's security, the U.S. should reverse its increasing emphasis on military assistance and replace outdated, one-dimensional ideas about Israel's security with a more extensive definition. Taking into account important nonmilitary aspects of Israel's security would enable the U.S. to complement its current policy with a variety of alternative strategies designed to identify and address the causes of conflict and create conditions for a sustainable peace.

The primary short-term threat to Israeli security stems from suicide bombers based in Israeli-occupied territories in the West Bank and Gaza Strip. This can best be addressed by improved surveillance and interdiction and, more fundamentally, by ending Israel's occupation, which has brought enormous human suffering while creating extremists willing to wreak carnage on Israeli civilians. Little of the U.S. security assistance helps protect Israelis from such attacks and, by providing the military hardware for an increasingly repressive occupation, results in the backlash that has manifested itself in the rise of extremist groups committed to terrorism.

The longer-term threat to Israel comes from sophisticated weaponry procured by Arab monarchies in the Persian Gulf region, which are the only military systems that come close to challenging Israeli military superiority. Most of these weapons also come from the United States, however, so this threat can best be neutralized not by providing more arms to this overly militarized region, but through arms control. Indeed, Israel announced its support for a moratorium on arms exports to the Middle East in 1991, but the U.S. rejected it, raising serious questions as to whether the U.S. really has Israel's best interests in mind.

### Key Points

- United States security assistance to Israel has not supported Israel's legitimate security needs against terrorism and related threats but has instead enabled Israel to pursue aggressive policies that threaten its long-term security interests.
- The widespread use of U.S. weapons by Israeli occupation forces against civilian targets is a violation of international human rights standards and U.S. law.
- U.S. military aid to Israel has increased as conventional military threats from its Arab neighbors have declined and has failed to address Israel's broader security interests.

# Problems with Current U.S. Policy

---

The violence that erupted in September 2000 highlighted some important points about Israel's security. First, the most serious challenge for Israel has not been protecting its existence from hostile neighbors but rather pursuing an increasingly repressive military occupation that has created international diplomatic isolation as well as terrorist attacks. Second, while armed attacks against Israeli occupation forces and settlers in the occupied territories, suicide bombing attacks against civilians inside Israel, and widespread condemnation by Arab governments have heightened Israeli citizens' sense of vulnerability, Israel's neighbors have not seriously threatened Israeli territory. Finally, Israel's clear military advantage has not made Israelis feel secure on a personal, individual level.

This paradox of personal insecurity in the face of overpowering military strength stems from an important distinction within Israeli security that Washington's FMF assistance program to Israel does not address. Israeli security has two levels—the macro, or national, level and the micro, or personal, level. The state of Israel is extremely secure in this first sense. Since its declaration of statehood and overwhelming military victory in 1948, Israel has not been attacked militarily within its internationally recognized borders. Peace agreements with Egypt—by far its most powerful adversary—in 1978 and with Jordan—with which it shares its longest border—in 1994 have inordinately improved its security. Military spending by Syria has declined dramatically, Lebanese armed forces have never been much of a threat and Iraq's military has been decimated as a result of the Gulf War and the subsequent sanctions regime. In addition, cooperation with regional powers, such as Turkey, and decades of U.S. military assistance have combined to create a secure Israel.

At the same time, Israeli citizens continue to be the target of terrorist attacks and violent uprisings. Billions of dollars in U.S. military assistance to Israel are spent each year addressing the wrong type of security. What's worse, FMF assistance has undermined personal security in Israel by diluting the incentives for seeking peace and by emboldening Israel to avoid making the concessions necessary for peace. This personal security will elude Israelis until the underlying causes of the conflict and the current uprising are addressed.

The current violence grows out of Palestinian frustrations with the peace process. During years of waiting for promised benefits, Palestinians have seen their standard of living steadily decline. In the seven years between the signing of the Oslo Accords and the start of the uprising in September 2000, Israeli policies—including border controls, retention of Palestinian funds, and restrictions on trade, investment, and access to water resources—resulted in growing trade and budget deficits for the Palestinians. Unemployment was hovering at 50%, poverty rates increased, health standards deteriorated, and any sense of opportunity among Palestinian youth began to fade. The anger and despair that ignited the 2000 uprising and the current wave of suicide bombings stems from these policies and their effect on daily Palestinian life. The Spring 2002 re-occupation of Palestinian cities and widespread killings by Israeli forces using American armaments, detention and mal-

treatment of unarmed civilians, and the wanton destruction of economic and social infrastructure have only increased the Palestinian desire for revenge. This has also strengthened popular support for extremist groups like Hamas and Al-Aqsa Martyr's Brigade, resulting in less security for Israelis.

For years, most Palestinians have viewed a negotiated peace as the clearest route to achieving their aspirations for an independent state. While they waited for the peace process to produce this result, the Israeli government dramatically expanded its illegal settlements, Jewish-only highways, and related infrastructure in order to establish permanent control over large areas of Palestinian territory. These policies were pursued in large part to make a contiguous viable Palestinian state on the West Bank impossible and were in direct violation of the Fourth Geneva Convention and a series of United Nations Security Council resolutions. This was possible because of the large-scale financial, military, and diplomatic support for Israel by the United States. As a result, many Palestinians now question the wisdom of pursuing a peace framed and sponsored by the United States. Many Palestinians see negotiation as empty

promises and have begun seeking other means—some violent—of obtaining a homeland. As a result, a sense of insecurity grows within the Israeli population, fostered by the very policies that the U.S. and Israel pursue in the name of promoting Israeli security.

In addition to weakening U.S. credibility as a neutral mediator, massive increases in military assistance to Israel undermine U.S. attempts to limit the spread of weapons of mass destruction in the region. When Jordan downsized its military and proposed linking further military cutbacks in the region to debt reduction in the early 90s, for example, the U.S. resisted the suggestion and continued shipping arms to Israel at record levels. Following the 1994 peace deal between Jordan and Israel, other Arab states cited Jordan's relative military weakness as the major reason for its inability to extract more concessions from Israel. The lesson was clear: The American-Israeli military relationship makes unilateral disarmament in the Middle East fruitless, even counterproductive.

Even as Washington cites Iraq's potential possession of weapons of mass destruction and its failure to adhere to UN resolutions to justify its severe economic sanctions on the Iraqi population and its threats to invade the country, it continues to increase military aid to Israel, a nuclear power that remains in violation of scores of UN resolutions. In fact, states like Iran, Iraq, and Syria view their own efforts to develop and acquire chemical and biological weapons as a counterbalance to Israeli weapons acquisitions.

---

## Key Problems

- By ignoring the security ramifications of its Foreign Military Financing program, Washington is undermining both regional security and the overall personal security of most Israelis.
  - U.S. military assistance to Israel fails to address the causes of conflict and subverts the peace process by both enabling and rewarding Israeli defiance of international law.
  - With the FMF program, the United States is spending an enormous amount of diplomatic, political, and strategic capital on a policy that is bearing the opposite of its intended effects.
-

# Toward a New Foreign Policy

The U.S. must recognize that Israeli security and Palestinian rights are not mutually exclusive, but mutually dependent. Just as the Palestinians will not be granted their rights until Israel's legitimate security needs are recognized, Israel will not be secure until the Palestinians are granted their legitimate rights. The U.S. should maintain its moral and strategic commitment to Israel to ensure its survival and its legitimate strategic

interests in defending its internationally recognized borders. At the same time, however, the U.S. must also be willing to apply pressure whenever the Israeli government refuses to make the necessary compromises for peace, which requires withdrawal from the occupied territories, removing colonists from the illegal settlements, sharing Jerusalem, and pursuing a just resolution for Palestinian refugees. This would require an immediate suspension of all military assistance to Israel as long as the Israeli government continues to engage in violations of interna-

run for about 500 miles, whereas the demarcation lines between Israeli and Palestinian controlled areas prior to the most recent fighting were closer to 2,000 miles.

It is not surprising, then, that far more Israelis have died in the occupied territories than within Israel itself. Similarly, Israel utilizes far more of its soldiers outside the country maintaining its occupation against the Palestinians than it does defending the country's borders or maintaining internal security. As reiterated in the recent Arab summit in Beirut, an Israeli withdrawal to within its internationally recognized borders would result in the security guarantees and fully normalized relations with Arab states Israel has long sought. This would put both Israel and its neighbors into compliance with UN Security Council resolutions 242 and 338, long considered to be the basis for Arab-Israeli peace. While this would not satisfy some Islamic extremists, an end to the occupation would dramatically reduce their following and simultaneously increase the ability and willingness of the Palestinian leadership to crack down on potential terrorists.

A more comprehensive definition of Israel's security would create greater flexibility in the FMF assistance program, allowing the U.S. to address the personal insecurity of Israelis. Earmarking the ongoing \$60 million annual increase for desalination and waste water recycling projects would reduce Israel's reliance on Palestinian water resources, remove an incentive for maintaining the illegal occupation, and improve Palestinian economic prospects. Other options for applying the assistance include financing joint projects on a regional energy grid or natural gas pipelines, coordinating ecological management strategies, promoting international trade and tourism, and advancing efforts to develop cooperative economic zones along national borders. Tying the region together economically creates collective incentives to promote peace while highlighting the rewards of international cooperation to Arabs and Israelis alike. In this way, U.S. security assistance could bolster Israeli security without increasing military transfers or threatening Israel's neighbors. Such a broader vision of security is necessary if the U.S. is truly interested in promoting peace and stability for Israel and the Middle East.

*Joseph Yackley <joeyackley@hotmail.com> is a recent graduate from the University of Chicago, with master's degrees in Middle Eastern Studies and Public Policy Studies and currently serves as a Robert Bosch Foundation Fellow with a focus on economic development issues in the Middle East.*

*Stephen Zunes <zunes@usfca.edu> is Middle East editor for the Foreign Policy in Focus Project and serves as an associate professor of Politics and chair of the Peace & Justice Studies Program at the University of San Francisco.*

## Key Recommendations

- Rather than spending billions of dollars preparing Israel for conflict, the U.S. should focus on addressing the causes of conflict.
- To restore confidence in negotiated peace, Washington must suspend military assistance to Israel as long as the Israeli government continues to engage in violations of international human rights standards and international law.
- The U.S. must emphasize regional security and work for regional arms control.

tional human rights standards and international law.

Such a position not only would be morally right and would be in Israel's own security interest, but it would also end the Bush administration's ongoing violation of the Foreign Assistance Act, which forbids security assistance to any government that "engages in a consistent pattern of gross violations of internationally recognized human rights" without a waiver [22 U.S.C. Secs. 2034, 2151n].

Suspension of military aid to Israel must be part of a comprehensive effort at regional arms control, including a suspension of U.S. military aid to other Middle Eastern governments, virtually all of which engage in a pattern of gross and systematic human rights violations.

Despite the threat and reality of suicide bombings, Israelis are relatively secure within their country's internationally recognized borders compared to the soldiers and settlers in occupied Palestinian territories seized by Israel in the 1967 War. Settlements and roads in these areas—reserved for Jews only—not only create an apartheid-like situation, but also make it extremely difficult for Israeli forces to defend against a hostile population angry that foreign occupiers have confiscated what is often its best land. Israel would be far more secure defending a clearly defined and internationally recognized border than this network of illegal outposts within Palestinian territory. Israel's official borders

*Foreign Policy in Focus* is a joint project of the Interhemispheric Resource Center (IRC) and the Institute for Policy Studies (IPS). The project depends on sales and subscription income, individual donors, and grants from foundations and churches. *In Focus* internships are available, and we invite article queries and comments. ISSN 1524-1939

### Editors

Tom Barry (IRC)  
Martha Honey (IPS)  
**Media Officer**  
Kathy Spillman (IPS)

### Communications

Siri Khalsa (IRC)  
Erik Leaver (IPS)  
**Project Administrator**  
Nancy Stockdale (IRC)

### Orders and subscription information:

**Mail:** PO Box 4506  
Albuquerque, New Mexico 87196-4506  
**Voice &**  
**Fax:** (505) 842-8288  
**Email:** infocus@irc-online.org

### Editorial inquiries and information:

**IRC Editor**  
**Voice:** (505) 388-0208  
**Fax:** (505) 388-0619  
**Email:** tom@irc-online.org

**IPS Editor**  
**Voice:** (202) 234-9382/3 ext. 232  
**Fax:** (202) 387-7915  
**Email:** ipsps@igc.org

**Website:** <http://www.fpif.org/>

# Sources for More Information

## Organizations

### Carnegie Endowment for International Peace

1779 Massachusetts Ave. NW  
Washington, DC 20036-2103  
Voice: (202) 483-7600  
Fax: (202) 483-1840  
Email: [info@ceip.org](mailto:info@ceip.org)  
Website: <http://www.ceip.org/>

### Center for Palestine Research and Studies

(CPRS)  
Box 132  
Nablus, Palestine  
Voice: (9729) 238-0383/7925/7926  
Fax: (9729) 238-0384  
Email: [cprs@cprs-palestine.org](mailto:cprs@cprs-palestine.org)  
Website: <http://cprs-palestine.org/>

### Center for Policy Analysis on Palestine (CPAP)

2425-35 Virginia Ave. NW  
Washington, DC 20037  
Voice: (202) 338-1958  
Fax: (202) 333-7742  
Email: [info@palestinecenter.org](mailto:info@palestinecenter.org)  
Website: <http://www.palestinecenter.org/>

Stephen Zunes, "The Strategic Functions of U.S. Aid to Israel," *Middle East Policy*, Vol. 4, No. 4 (October 1996).

## World Wide Web

### Library of Congress

<http://thomas.loc.gov/>

### Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics

<http://www.pcbs.org/>

## Publications

International Institute for Strategic Studies, *The Military Balance 2000-2001* (London: Oxford University Press, 2000).

Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, *SIPRI Yearbook 2000: Armaments, Disarmament and International Security* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000).

## Subscribe to the *Self-Determination Crisis Watch* listserv!

Send an email to [majordomo@fpif.org](mailto:majordomo@fpif.org) with the message "subscribe selfdeterminationlist" in the body.

### Subscribe:

Subscribe for \$15 (10 issues) or \$30 (20 issues). Individual copies of *In Focus* are \$2.50, postpaid; bulk orders of *In Focus* are \$12.00 for 10 copies of the same issue, postpaid; orders for delivery outside the U.S. are double the listed prices. (Subscriptions do not include back issues. Contact the IRC for a list of available back issues.) Make checks payable to the Interhemispheric Resource Center. We also accept VISA and MasterCard.

To subscribe to *Foreign Policy In Focus*, or to order back issues, contact the IRC:

PO Box 4506 ♦ Albuquerque, NM 87196-4506 ♦ Phone / Fax: (505) 842-8288

Email: [irc@irc-online.org](mailto:irc@irc-online.org) ♦ Website: <http://www.fpif.org/>

Secure, online order form: <https://secure.webburner.net/fpif/briefs/subscribe.html>

Name

Email Address

Street Address

City, State, Zip Code

VISA/MasterCard Number

Expiration Date

Signature



Self-Determination In Focus, a Foreign Policy In Focus (FPIF) project, aims to provide comprehensive analysis of self-determination issues around the world. As a "think tank without walls," FPIF brings together an international network of analysts and activists dedicated to "making the U.S. a more responsible global leader and partner." We encourage your involvement in the self-determination project. Send suggestions for policy briefs, updates of self-determination struggles, bibliographic additions, new web links, and commentary and criticism to [infocus@irc-online.org](mailto:infocus@irc-online.org).

Visit our site at <http://www.foreignpolicy-infocus.org/selfdetermination/index.html>