



[Israeli Officials Vow to Escalate in Gaza After the Passage of More U.S. Military Aid](#)

Israeli officials have recently vowed to escalate their military operations in Gaza following the passage of a foreign aid bill that provides \$26.4 billion in military support to Israel. Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu applauded its approval, and rather than heed repeated pleas from the United States and others to scale back the increasingly criticized Israeli military offensive and provide essential humanitarian aid to civilians in Gaza, Netanyahu instead pledged to further escalate. This is at a time when regional tensions are already high. Additionally, the remarks come amid the backdrop of both the universally denounced planned Israeli assault on the southern Gaza border city of Rafah, where more than 1.5 million Palestinian civilians are sheltering, and the extremely troubling recent discovery of mass graves at the two main hospitals in Gaza. A potential Israeli attack on Rafah would be devastating and exacerbate the already dire humanitarian crisis in Gaza, according to multiple human rights organizations, U.S. officials, and other world leaders. President Biden and members of his administration have repeatedly warned Israel against invading the city, but Netanyahu has been defiant and stated that the military seeks to escalate its tactics in targeting and destroying Hamas – a task that many experts contend is folly and not feasible.

Regarding the foreign aid bill that provides more military funds to Israel, there were 21 Republicans and 37 Democrats that voted against it. Around 20 of these Democrats signed a statement, saying that “Netanyahu appears willing to sacrifice the hostages while inflicting extraordinary suffering on the people of Gaza...most Americans do not want our government to write a blank check to further Prime Minister Netanyahu’s war in Gaza.” One of the main reasons that this group voted in opposition to the bill is that they were very concerned that the supplying of offensive weapons to Israel “could result in the killing of more civilians,” an underlying issue for many voters, particularly amongst the Democratic Party. There is a belief among human rights and peace activists that the United States is providing arms to Israel that will be used against the best interests of the U.S., as Israel has already used these offensive weapons to indiscriminately kill a heinous number of civilians in Gaza while also striking Iranian targets, risking inflaming tensions with Iran. Israel’s reckless and abusive actions risk increased U.S. involvement in the Middle East as well, a role that the Biden administration has consistently stated it wants no part in due to the costly and destructive nature of a military campaign there.

The recent discovery of mass graves at the hospitals in Gaza only adds to the growing outrage regarding Israel’s military offensive and how it is using its arsenal of weapons. The White House even expressed recently that it “wants answers” from Israel on the disturbing uncovering. The discovery also prompted the United Nations to demand an independent probe into it. Hospital sites, like other types of non-combatant infrastructure, are supposed to be protected from attack under international law but Israel has repeatedly been found to engage in the indiscriminate bombardment of these facilities. UN Human Rights Chief Volker Turk outlined that “Hospitals are entitled to very special protection under international humanitarian law...and the intentional killing of civilians, detainees, and others who are non-combatants is a war crime.” Officials from Amnesty International commented that the discovery of the mass graves highlights the urgent need to grant access to independent human rights investigators.

Ultimately, there is an array of evidence which sheds light on Israel's track record of committing human rights violations, making the passage of the Israeli military aid bill all the more troublesome. In fact, ironically, despite its passage, the United States is expected to sanction the Netzah Yehuda battalion of the Israel Defense Forces (IDF). The unit has been frequently accused of egregious human rights violations in the illegally-occupied West Bank, even well before the onset of Israel's destructive War on Gaza. The impending sanction move would be significant, as it would mark the first time that the United States imposes them on an Israeli military unit. It would add further weight to those pushing for the U.S. to abide by the Leahy Law, which prohibits U.S. foreign aid and training programs from going to military, security, and police units that are credibly alleged to have committed human rights abuses. The potential decision to sanction the IDF battalion may also open the door for other IDF units to be punished as well. Israeli officials have claimed that their military operations "are carried out according to international law," however, if that was indeed the case, then they certainly would not be under any threat of being sanctioned or facing surging global condemnation for their pattern of war crimes and human rights abuses.