



# U.S. Foreign Assistance to Israel

A Nexus Issue Brief for Policymakers

This campaign season has many wrestling with how to talk about several tough issues without evoking antisemitic tropes. This series of issue briefs from the Nexus Project is designed to help ensure that complex issues can be debated thoroughly and clearly, while maintaining important sensitivity.

U.S. military aid to Israel — direct assistance, supplemental funding, and arms sales — has long been politically fraught, and Hamas' October 7 attack and the ensuing Israeli campaigns in Gaza, Lebanon, and now Iran have turned support for Israel aid into a political litmus test in Congress and in races across the country. This issue brief explains why Israel aid is a particularly sensitive issue for many Americans, identifies policy considerations within the scope of legitimate discussion, flags warning signs for arguments reflecting antisemitic dynamics, and offers strategies for discussing this contentious issue responsibly. **The Nexus Project does not take a position on U.S. aid to Israel.**

## ISRAEL-AID IS A PARTICULARLY SENSITIVE ISSUE

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For many Americans, debates over aid to Israel carry emotional and symbolic weight beyond many other foreign policy questions. This could be explained through personal, communal, or ideological perspectives – with a combination of all three often feeding into the exceptional sensitivity of this topic.

**A decades-long bipartisan status quo is being challenged.** For decades, U.S. support for Israel was treated as a mainstream bipartisan position, reinforced by many legacy Jewish organizations and political leaders. With this consensus weakening in recent years, some view the shift as a normal political realignment, while others view it as an abandonment of long-held norms and of a close ally.

**Feelings of shared destiny and communal responsibility.** Many Jewish Americans grew up in communities that view Israel not simply as another allied state, but as a refuge tied to Jewish history, safety, and self-determination after centuries of persecution. That emotional framework can make debates over Israel especially charged.

**Personal ties to those affected by war.** Many Americans have family, friends, or loved ones in Israel, Gaza, the West Bank, Lebanon, Iran, or elsewhere in the region. Political arguments supporting or opposing military aid can therefore feel immediate and personal rather than abstract.

**Religious and cultural attachment across communities.** Israel, Jerusalem, and the broader region hold religious significance for Jews, Christians, Muslims, and others. Views on aid may be shaped by identity, faith, religious travel, and community ties.

**The rise in antisemitism.** Antisemitism has increased in the United States and globally, and antisemitic rhetoric and harassment can sometimes be found in anti-Israel spaces. Although opposition to aid doesn't directly correlate to anti-Israel positioning—and not all anti-Israel views are antisemitic—many Jews approach Israel-related policy debates with heightened concern.

## **DEBATING ISRAEL-AID IS NOT INHERENTLY ANTISEMITIC**

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Opposition to or questioning of aid for Israel does not intrinsically point to antisemitism. Many arguments arise from broader policy principles that would apply to multiple countries or conflicts.

**Prioritizing domestic needs over foreign spending.** Some Americans oppose foreign assistance generally and believe resources should be directed toward domestic priorities such as healthcare, infrastructure, education, or deficit reduction.

**Reducing U.S. involvement in the Middle East.** Others favor a more restrained foreign policy and believe the United States should shift focus away from Middle East entanglements toward Asia, Europe, or the Western Hemisphere.

**Opposition to specific Israeli military campaigns or policies.** Some object to Israeli military actions and policies in Gaza, the West Bank, Lebanon, and/or Iran, and view withholding aid as a legitimate means of signaling disapproval or seeking policy change.

**Concerns about continued U.S. escalation with Iran.** Some oppose aid decisions they believe could draw the United States deeper into a regional war or seek to signal disapproval of the ongoing U.S.-Israeli joint military campaign with Iran.

**Support for enforcing existing U.S. law and treating Israel like other allies.** Some advocate for closer enforcement of aid conditions and restrictions under existing U.S. statutes governing arms transfers, civilian harm, or human rights compliance. They argue that Israel is not upholding existing conditions in one or more theaters, and that it should not be uniquely exempt from scrutiny, conditions, and standards applied to other U.S. partners - including application of legal ramifications until Israel is compliant.

## WHEN OPPOSITION TO AID RAISES CONCERNS

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Antisemitic rhetoric is recognizable when it expresses hatred of Jews *explicitly* based on their Jewish identity or utilizes widely known antisemitic terminology and imagery. It can be more challenging to identify antisemitism when it emerges through coded narratives, double standards, or dehumanizing language. While conclusive determinations must be made on a case-by-case basis, certain rhetoric themes should be treated as serious warning signs and be closely scrutinized. [The Nexus Document's antisemitism definition](#) may also be utilized when examining if views on Israel relate to antisemitic hate.

**Disproportionate demonization of Israel.** Disproportionate negative attention on Israel is not *prima facie* proof of antisemitism - there are reasons a U.S. citizen may pay more attention to Israel than other foreign countries, such as family or religious ties, the charged history of American involvement in the Middle East, and others. However, narratives of Israel as demonic, uniquely evil, or the root of global suffering cross into dehumanizing rhetoric and should raise serious concern.

**Denying protection or humanity to Israeli civilians or Zionists.** Justifying attacks on civilians, dismissing Israeli suffering, or calling for violence against Israelis or "Zionists" crosses moral, and potentially legal, lines. Encouragement of political violence or hate crimes against *any* group is not acceptable and should never be tolerated.

**Singling out Jewish self-determination as illegitimate.** Broad questioning of religious or ethno-nationalist state models, including in countries like Israel, Armenia, Pakistan, and others is valid. Arguing that only Israel is uniquely illegitimate, while accepting similar arrangements elsewhere, can reflect a discriminatory and potentially antisemitic double standard.

**Invoking conspiracy narratives about Jewish control.** Claims that U.S. policy is controlled by "the Jews," "Zionists," Jewish money, or shadowy influence networks echo longstanding antisemitic tropes.

## SUPPORT FOR ISRAEL IS NOT IMMUNE TO HARMFUL RHETORIC

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Contrary to popular belief, antisemitic dynamics and questionable attitudes toward Jews can also appear in rhetoric that is nominally supportive of Israel or aid to Israel.

**Instrumentalized or fetishized support for Jews or Israel.** Some support for Israel stems not from personal connection or concern for Israelis' wellbeing, but from theological end-times beliefs, ethnic stereotyping, or romanticized notions of Jews. Many Jews experience this kind of Philosemitism/Judeophilia as objectifying and uncomfortable rather than supportive.

**Dual loyalty assumptions.** Demanding that all American Jews support aid to Israel, or assuming Jewish Americans are politically obligated to prioritize Israel, mirrors the antisemitic trope that Jews are less loyal to their own country than other citizens. While many Jews feel a close

connection to the Jewish state, Israel is routinely ranked low amongst the top political priorities of American Jewish voters.

**Weaponizing Jewish pain and fear as political cover.** Invoking Jewish identity or antisemitism selectively to defend unrelated agendas, while ignoring antisemitism elsewhere, can undermine trust and credibility and discredit genuine efforts to combat antisemitism. Using legitimate fears of antisemitism as a weapon to take away others' rights serves only to make Jews the scapegoats for such infringement.

## **ASSUAGE ANTISEMITISM CONCERNS WHEN DISCUSSING AID**

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Policymakers can debate Israel aid vigorously and even oppose all U.S. aid to Israel while also demonstrating seriousness about combating antisemitism and empathy to the pro-Israel community.

**Use language carefully.** Prioritize precise language over slogans or phrases widely understood by many Jews as endorsing violence or eliminationism, even if speakers intend something else. Resources such as the Nexus Project's "[Guide to Identifying Antisemitism in Debates about Israel](#)" and "[Talking About Antisemitism: A Messaging Guide for Policymakers](#)" offer additional guidance on language to avoid.

**Ground arguments in U.S. interests and policy goals.** Frame support for or opposition to aid in terms of national security, regional stability, humanitarian concerns, alliance management, fiscal priorities, or legal obligations rather than purely in terms of position on Israel.

**Acknowledge and condemn antisemitism clearly and consistently.** Recognize the real rise in antisemitism and condemn harassment, threats, vandalism, or bigotry - including when it appears in pro-Israel or anti-Israel spaces.

**Avoid imputing motives to Jewish communities.** Do not assume all Jews hold the same views on Israel or aid, or expect Jews to declare a position on Israel to enter conversations. The Jewish community is politically diverse - not all Jews prioritize the U.S.-Israel relationship as part of their identity, and not all support the current nature of the bilateral relationship.

**Separate people from governments.** Criticism of Israeli policies should not become hostility toward Israelis or Jews broadly, just as support for Israel should not erase Palestinian humanity or concerns.