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Impact of U.S. Military Support to Israel on the Escalation of Violations of International Humanitarian Law in the Arab Region



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Overview

Israeli occupation forces have carried out numerous indiscriminate and disproportionate military attacks against civilians and civilian infrastructure in several Arab countries, including in the Gaza Strip, Lebanon, Qatar, Iraq, Syria, and Yemen.

According to estimates by Maat, Israeli occupation forces have killed thousands of civilians and caused permanent disabilities and injuries to many others; they have also destroyed homes and residential buildings and inflicted severe damage on infrastructure in several Arab states. Under the rules of international humanitarian law, direct attacks on civilians and civilian objects, as well as indiscriminate and disproportionate attacks, constitute war crimes.

Despite documentation and reporting of war crimes and crimes against humanity committed by Israeli occupation forces, the supply of arms and military support to those forces by the United States continues, an explicit breach of the principles, treaties, and rules of international humanitarian law and international disarmament law.

Accordingly, this paper examines the consequences of U.S. military support for human rights in the Arab region during the occupation. The attacks carried out by Israeli forces against unarmed civilians clearly demonstrate that U.S. military exports enable occupation forces to commit war crimes and crimes against humanity.



First: International Legal Obligations Related to Arms Transfers to Conflict Zones

Numerous principles of international humanitarian law impose legal obligations on states regarding arms transfers to armed conflict zones. Those obligations expressly prohibit states from exporting arms when they know that the arms will be used to perpetrate violations of human rights and international humanitarian law, a prohibition the U.S. administration has disregarded in exporting arms to Israel. Among these legal obligations are the following:

Common Article 1 of the four 1949 Geneva Conventions, which implies refraining from transferring arms where there is a clear risk that those arms will be used to commit violations of international humanitarian law, and requires states to use their influence to prevent other parties to the conflict from committing violations.

The Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide (1948), which prohibits assisting or being complicit in genocide. If it is established that arms transfers contribute to acts that amount to genocide or crimes against humanity, the transfer may constitute a violation of that Convention.

Under domestic U.S. law, arms transfers are regulated by the Arms Export Control Act and the Foreign Assistance Act, together with the Conventional Arms Transfer policy, which bars transfers if it is more likely than not that the arms would be used to commit serious violations of international humanitarian law.

The Leahy Laws impose restrictions on assisting military units that have committed gross human rights violations.

Although the United States withdrew from the Arms Trade Treaty, signature and prior engagement do not mean a state is free from relevant obligations; Articles 6 and 7 of the Treaty set out obligations that prohibit states from transferring or selling arms when they know those arms will be used to commit violations of international humanitarian law.

Despite numerous UN assessments documenting crimes and breaches by Israeli occupation forces of international human rights law and international humanitarian law across the Arab region since the accession of Trump to the presidency in January 2025, including killing civilians and targeting civilian objects such as residential and service buildings in multiple Arab countries, as well as imposing a tight blockade and cutting off all means of life to the Gaza Strip (water, foodstuffs, fuel, and medicines), conduct that may amount to war crimes

and genocide under Article 55 of the Fourth Geneva Convention and Articles 6, 7 and 8 of the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court, the United States continues to supply Israel with weapons and ammunition. These arms transfers do not conform to the principles of international humanitarian law because they have enabled and facilitated Israeli forces to target civilians and civilian objects.



Second: U.S. Arms Transfers to Israeli Occupation Forces under Trump

Since President Donald Trump took office in January 2025, his administration has approved numerous arms sales to Israel through the Foreign Military Sales (FMS) program and used emergency authorities to bypass congressional review periods.

In some cases, these sales focused primarily on aerial munitions such as bombs and guidance kits, armored vehicles, attack helicopters, and supporting equipment.



helicopters.

In 2026, the administration notified Congress of a package worth \$6.67 billion, including **30** AH-64 Apache attack helicopters valued at \$3.8 billion; **3,250** Joint Light Tactical Vehicles (JLTVs) valued at \$1.98 billion; engines for Namer armored personnel carriers valued at \$740 million; and \$150 million for AW-119Kx light

On 6 March, it also announced an emergency sale of \$151.8 million for **12,000** BLU-110A/B general-purpose bomb bodies (**1,000** lb), bypassing congressional review.

The year 2025 saw several major notifications, including:

- On 7 February, total notifications of about \$7.41 billion, which included more than **20,000** bombs and guidance kits valued at \$6.75 billion, and **3,000** AGM-114 Hellfire missiles valued at \$660 million.
- On 28 February 2025, the Trump administration used emergency authorities to notify a \$3.0107 billion package that included **35,529** **2,000**-lb bombs (MK 84 or BLU-117) with **4,000** penetrator warheads, approximately **5,000** **1,000**-lb bombs with guidance kits, and Caterpillar D9 bulldozers valued at \$295 million.



- On 30 June 2025, the administration approved a \$510 million sale of more than **7,000** JDAM (Joint Direct Attack Munition) guidance kits.

- On 14 April, it approved a \$180 million sale of Powerpack engines for Eitan armored vehicles. Media reports also indicated that Israel had received **940** U.S. arms shipments since October 2023, and that some prior restrictions on **2,000**-lb bombs were lifted in January 2025.



The total value of major FMS notifications to the occupation forces from the start of the Trump administration through March 2026 is estimated at roughly \$17.9 billion, with a focus on strengthening Israel's air and ground capabilities amid regional tensions.

Some of these packages faced attempts in Congress to block them through joint disapproval resolutions by members such as Senator Bernie Sanders and Representative Pramila Jayapal, but most failed to advance. Secretary of State Marco Rubio indicated in March 2025 that the administration had approved roughly \$12 billion in major sales.

These figures reflect officially announced notifications and may not capture additional direct commercial sales that are not always included in public notifications.

Third: Violations Committed by Israel and War Crimes in Arab States

Since the beginning of President Donald Trump's second term in January 2025, Israeli occupation forces have been recorded committing a series of military violations and breaches of international humanitarian law in several Arab states, including the Gaza Strip, Lebanon, Qatar, Iraq, Syria, and Yemen. These violations have included repeated aerial bombardment, ground operations, destruction of civilian infrastructure, and issuance of forced evacuation orders, according to multiple human-rights estimates.

In the Gaza Strip, violations continued despite a ceasefire that entered into force in October 2025. The Gaza Government Media Office recorded more than 2,073 Israeli violations up to March 2026, including 973 bombardments and explosions, 750 incidents of direct fire on civilians, and 263 property demolitions.



A prominent example was the surprise attack of 18 March 2025, which killed more than 400 Palestinians in nighttime airstrikes on homes and residential neighborhoods. The cutting off of humanitarian assistance in March 2025 further exacerbated the hunger and famine crisis. The violations also included strikes on hospitals, schools, and civilian areas, resulting, according to UN estimates, in thousands of deaths and injuries.



As for Lebanon, Israeli violations continued despite the ceasefire in November 2024. In 2025, the occupying forces carried out nearly 1,653 airstrikes, with a notable escalation in January 2026, reaching 50 strikes in a single month. These operations included the destruction of bridges over the Litani

River and civilian homes in southern Lebanon, as well as issuing extensive orders for forced evacuation affecting villages such as al-Jubour, al-Qatrani, ar-Reihan, Budai, and Hirmal in the Beqaa Valley. This led to the displacement of thousands of civilians. In January 2025, Israeli forces fired on civilians returning to their homes in southern Lebanon, resulting in the killing of 26 people, 25 civilians and one Lebanese soldier, and injuring 147 others. In addition, there was widespread destruction of more than 10,000 civilian buildings and agricultural lands in villages such as Yarin, Dhira, and Bustanah.

As for Qatar, one prominent direct violation was recorded on 9 September 2025, when the occupying forces launched missiles at the capital, Doha, targeting Hamas leaders. This caused damage in civilian areas and sparked a diplomatic crisis, before the Israeli prime minister issued an official apology under pressure from the Trump administration.

As for Iraq, Israeli violations included airstrikes on bases and arms depots belonging to Iran-backed factions in areas such as Anbar, Babylon, Diyala, Nineveh, and al-Muthanna during February and March



2026. This was part of the escalation linked to the U.S.-Israel war with Iran, resulting in damage to civilian infrastructure.

As for Syria, the occupying forces

carried out more than 207 airstrikes during 2025, mainly targeting southern governorates such as Quneitra, Daraa, and Damascus. There were also raids and arrests in areas such as Beit Jinn in the Damascus countryside, which led to clashes and

the killing of 15 civilians in a single day in November 2025. The violations also included ongoing shelling of targets associated with Iran-backed factions.



As for Yemen, in 2025, Israel carried out roughly 48 airstrikes on Houthi sites, focused on military targets in remote areas reaching up to 1,200 kilometers. This is considered a violation of Yemen's sovereignty according to reports by the Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project (ACLED).

These repeated violations in the Arab countries mentioned are described by

some as potential war crimes or crimes against humanity, including forced displacement, unjustified destruction of civilian property, and indiscriminate targeting. These operations continued through March 2026 amid regional escalation linked to the war involving Iran, which increased tensions across the Arab region. Without the American support

provided to the Israeli occupying forces, the scale of these appalling violations would not have been possible.



Fourth: American Weapons Kill Civilians in Many Arab Countries

Israeli occupying forces used specific American weapons in random military strikes that resulted in the killing of civilians in the Gaza Strip and Lebanon from January 2025 onward, while continuing to use earlier stockpiles and newly shipped ordnance. Prominent among these weapons are MK-84 bombs weighing 2,000 pounds; BLU-109 and BLU-110A/B bombs; JDAM guidance kits that convert unguided bombs into precision weapons; as well as Hellfire missiles (AGM-114) launched from American-made Apache helicopters.



In the Gaza Strip, heavy MK-84 bombs equipped with JDAM contributed to several incidents that destroyed residential buildings, schools, and densely populated civilian areas. For example, in January 2026, remnants of American-made small-diameter bombs (GBU-39) were identified in an attack on a

residential building in Gaza City and another in Deir al-Balah, both resulting in civilian deaths. Reports also documented the use of 2,000-pound bombs in strikes on schools and residential neighborhoods, leading to the “evaporation” of thousands of victims due to the enormous destructive force and the intense heat generated by the explosion. These



bombs were part of ongoing U.S. shipments, including the lifting of restrictions in January 2025.

Hellfire missiles were also used in Apache helicopter attacks against civilian areas in Gaza, including operations in refugee camps, where dozens of civilian deaths occurred in strikes described as indiscriminate.



In addition, other incidents, such as strikes on schools in Gaza during 2025, estimated rights-focused organizations identified the use of American-made GBU-39 small-diameter bombs, resulting in the killing of dozens of displaced civilians. These weapons, which also include

500-pound and 1,000-pound bombs such as BLU-111 and BLU-110, were part of accelerated U.S. arms-sales deals under the Trump administration, including multi-billion-dollar agreements in February and June and January 2025-2026. Reports confirm that these weapons contributed to increasing the scale of destruction and civilian casualties due to their destructive power in crowded residential areas.

In Lebanon, human rights organizations documented the use of U.S.-made weapons in airstrikes on southern Lebanon during 2025. These included bombs and rockets that destroyed homes, agricultural land, and civilian buildings, with civilian



deaths occurring in areas such as Yaarin and Dura. Some of these strikes involved the use of heavy bombs similar to those used in Gaza, raising concerns regarding proportionality and the distinction between military and civilian targets.

In Syria, Israeli occupying forces carried out repeated airstrikes throughout 2025, particularly in southern areas such as Quneitra, Daraa, and Damascus. In one notable incident in November 2025, shelling of the area of Beit Jinn in the countryside of Damascus resulted in the deaths of 15 civilians in a single day. This was attributed in part to U.S.-made fighter jets such as F-16s and F-15s carrying precision-guided bombs with JDAM guidance kits and 2,000-lb MK-84 bombs. The strikes also included the use of Hellfire missiles to target sites linked to armed factions, which caused collateral damage in nearby civilian areas.

As for Yemen, Israel conducted approximately 48 airstrikes during 2025 on sites affiliated with the Houthis, some in remote areas reaching up to 1,200 kilometers. Reports documented the use of U.S.-made aircraft and missiles in these operations, including Apache helicopters that fire Hellfire missiles, as well as precision bombs such as the GBU-39 Small Diameter Bomb. Some of these strikes resulted in civilian casualties in targeted areas, particularly when bombardment hit targets located near populated settlements or civilian infrastructure, an outcome that was considered a violation of the principle of distinction between military objectives and civilians



Finally: Recommendations

- The U.S. administration should reactivate National Security Memorandum NSM-20 or issue a similar directive requiring Israel to provide written assurances and an independent verification mechanism that such weapons will not be used in grave violations of international humanitarian law. Any shipments involving MK-84 bombs (2,000-lb), BLU-109, BLU-110A/B, JDAM guidance kits, Hellfire missiles, and GBU-39 bombs should be suspended immediately, especially after the ban was lifted in January 2025.
- The U.S. Departments of State and Defense must conduct regular, independent (with participation from external experts) risk assessments prior to any notification of foreign military sales (FMS). Particular focus should be placed on the use of these weapons in Gaza, Lebanon, Syria, and Yemen, where remnants of these munitions have been documented in strikes that killed civilians.
- The U.S. “Leahy” law should be applied to the Israeli military units involved in operations that have produced documented violations (such as strikes on schools and hospitals in Gaza, or air raids on southern Lebanon), with assistance to those units suspended immediately.
- The use of emergency procedures to accelerate multi-billion-dollar arms deals (as occurred in February and March 2025-2026, totaling more than USD 17.9 billion) should be halted. All sales must be subject

to full review by the U.S. Congress, with due consideration of human rights reports.

- Arab states, in cooperation with the European Union and states committed to the Geneva Conventions, should submit draft resolutions to the UN Security Council and the UN General Assembly calling for a ban on arms exports to Israel as long as documented violations continue in Gaza (over 2,073 violations as of March 2026), Lebanon (1,653 strikes in 2025), as well as in Syria and Yemen.**
- Encourage States Parties to the Rome System to submit additional referrals and evidence to the International Criminal Court regarding the criminal responsibility of U.S. and Israeli officials under Article 25 (aiding and abetting, and complicity in war crimes and crimes against humanity). Emphasis should be placed on the role of U.S.-supplied weapons in specific incidents, such as the bombing of residential buildings in Gaza and Deir al-Balah, and the Beit Jinn airstrikes in Syria.**
- Establish a joint international investigative commission (under the auspices of the United Nations or the Arab League) to document remnants of U.S.-supplied weapons at strike sites and publish periodic reports on civilian losses resulting from MK-84 bombs, JDAM guidance kits, and Hellfire missiles.**