

Human rights organizations say halting U.S. weapons shipment to Israel too little, too late



An Israeli soldier moves a 155mm artillery shell on October 18, 2023 near a self-propelled

howitzer close to Lebanon. (Photo by AFP)

Geneva, May 9 (RHC)-- Rights advocates say the recent decision by US President Joe Biden to halt a shipment of thousand-pound bombs to Israel is too little too late to undo the damage to Palestinian life spurred by Israel's savage military campaign in Gaza.

The government watchdog groups and rights advocates said the shipment pause also falls short of what the Biden administration's policy and US law require in terms of weapons transfers.

"This is a good start, but it also falls far short of what U.S. law and the Biden administration's own policy require. This sort of suspension was necessary many months ago," Middle East Eye quoted John Chappell, an advocacy and legal fellow at the Center for Civilians in Conflict (Civic), as saying on Thursday.

"The decision should be extended to transfers of all weapons that pose a risk of being used to harm civilians or violate international law. And the harms resulting from US policy already can't be undone."

Josh Paul, a former State Department official, said that rather than "a one-off pause of a shipment as a means of exerting momentary and overdue leverage, this needs to be the start of a sea-change in American policy towards the provision of security assistance to Israel."

"A real change in American policy would come, of course, too late for so many souls in Gaza," said Paul who resigned in October citing Biden's policy on Gaza.

The U.S. president admits civilians have been killed in Gaza by American bombs supplied to Israel, but insists Washington is not walking away from the regime's security.

The United States, the great benefactor of Israel, has reportedly paused a shipment of bombs after the regime failed to address US concerns over its Rafah plans. News outlets noted the transfer consisted of 1,800 2,000-pound bombs and 1,700 500-pound bombs.

Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin during a congressional hearing on Wednesday linked the paused shipment to Washington's concerns about an Israeli invasion of southern Gaza city of Rafah.

U.S. State Department spokesperson Matthew Miller has also said they are reviewing further arms packages to Israel over concerns with the Rafah offensive.

Senator Bernie Sanders defended the decision to halt the arms shipment. Last month, as many as 37 congressional Democrats, signed a letter, urging the U.S. president to stop transfer of American weapons to the Israeli regime in light of the latter's crimes in the Gaza Strip.

In February, the administration agreed, after pressure from U.S. lawmakers, to invoke National Security Memorandum 20, which required the administration to make a determination as to whether Israel has used US weapons in violation of international law in Gaza.

Even if the U.S. were to put a halt to its military assistance to Israel, after seven months of Israel's war in Gaza, the pause would have come too late, according to human rights advocates.

A UN assessment last week stated that the estimated cost for Gaza's reconstruction would be between \$30-40 billion.

More than seven months into Israel's war on Gaza, the regime's relentless air and artillery strikes continue to claim civilian lives in the besieged Palestinian strip. More than 34,900 Palestinians have been killed since Israel launched its war on Gaza. More than 78,500 others have been injured while thousands

more remain unaccounted for.

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