

*Long-awaited U.S. report finds no
wrong doing by Israel, paving the
way for further weapons
shipments*



Washington, May 11 (RHC)-- A report from the administration of U.S. President Joe Biden has found that Israeli forces likely used U.S.-supplied weapons in a manner "inconsistent" with international law, but it stopped short of identifying violations that would put an end to Washington's ongoing military aid.

In the report, released on Friday after a delay, the U.S. State Department indicated Israel did not provide adequate information to verify whether U.S. weapons were used in possible violations of international law during its war in Gaza.

The Biden White House had issued a national security memorandum, NSM-20, in February requiring Israel and other countries receiving military aid to provide written assurances that all US-supplied

weapons were used in a manner consistent with international law.

The U.S. would then make a decision about future military aid based on those written assurances. Friday's report is a byproduct of that memorandum.

"It is reasonable to assess that defense articles covered under NSM-20 have been used by Israeli security forces since October 7 in instances inconsistent with its IHL [international humanitarian law] obligations or with established best practices for mitigating civilian harm," the report said.

Still, Israel's siege on Gaza continues, with access to food, water and electricity severely limited. UN experts have repeatedly warned of a "risk of genocide" in the territory. As a result, the Biden administration has faced pressure, particularly from the progressive flank of the Democratic Party, to address the humanitarian concerns by placing conditions on military aid to Israel.

After the report's release on Friday, progressive lawmakers expressed disappointment with its conclusions. Senator Chris Van Hollen, for example, stated it "fails to do the hard work of making an assessment and ducks the ultimate questions that the report was designed to determine."

Meanwhile, Republicans blasted the report as undermining Israel in its campaign against the Palestinian group Hamas. Senator Jim Risch, for instance, called the document "politically damaging" and said it would do long-term harm to U.S. allies beyond Israel.

"NSM-20 is aimed squarely at Israel in the near-term, but the additional highly-politicized reporting requirements will eventually be aimed at other American allies and partners across the globe, further impeding the delivery of security assistance and undermining our ability to deter China and Russia," he wrote in a statement.

Friday's report acknowledges limits to the US State Department's findings, pointing out that the information that Israel provided was not comprehensive. "Although we have gained insight into Israel's procedures and rules, we do not have complete information on how these processes are implemented," the report reads.

It also said the war itself creates barriers to understanding what is happening on the ground. "It is difficult to assess or reach conclusive findings on individual incidents" in Gaza, the report said, citing a lack of U.S. government personnel on the ground.

It also echoed Israeli accusations that Hamas could be manipulating civilian casualties for its own gains. Gaza, the report said, represents "as difficult a battlespace as any military has faced in modern warfare."

The report also sought to assess whether Israel was impeding the flow of aid into Gaza, another possible violation of international humanitarian law, as well as US law. It found "numerous instances during the period of Israeli actions that delayed or had a negative effect on the delivery of aid to Gaza."

Nevertheless, the report concluded that it could not assess that the "Israeli government is prohibiting or otherwise restricting the transport or delivery of U.S. humanitarian assistance within the meaning of section 620I of the Foreign Assistance Act."

Humanitarian groups, however, have reported for months that Israel systematically blocks large portions of aid from entering the Gaza Strip. Overall, the report said that U.S. intelligence agencies have "no direct indication of Israel intentionally targeting civilians", but they assessed that "Israel could do more to avoid civilian harm."

In addition, the State Department pledged to continue to monitor the situation in Gaza, particularly with regards to the delivery of aid. "This is an ongoing assessment and we will continue to monitor and respond to any challenges to the delivery of aid to Palestinian civilians in Gaza moving forward."

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