

*Report shows Blinken ignored
U.S. assessments that Israel
blocked aid to Gaza*

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Washington, September 25 (RHC)-- U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken ignored assessments by United States government agencies and officials indicating that Israel blocked U.S. aid to Gaza earlier this year, a new report has revealed, with the top U.S. diplomat presenting a different conclusion to Congress.

Investigative news outlet ProPublica reported on Tuesday that the US Agency for International Development (USAID) told the State Department in a late April report that Israel was subjecting US humanitarian aid destined for Gaza to “arbitrary denial, restriction and impediments”.

ProPublica said that officials in the State Department's refugee bureau also found in April that "facts on the ground indicate US humanitarian assistance is being restricted."

But in May, Blinken delivered a State Department report to Congress with a different conclusion. "We do not currently assess that the Israeli government is prohibiting or otherwise restricting the transport or delivery of U.S. humanitarian assistance," the State Department said in its May 10 assessment.

The leaked memos would have had major implications on US policy had they been adopted by Blinken, including on US weapons shipments to Israel.

The U.S. provides Israel with at least \$3.8 billion in military aid annually, and this year, Biden approved an additional \$14 billion in assistance to help fund the Israeli government's Gaza war efforts.

That support has drawn widespread condemnation and scrutiny as the Gaza war drags on.

The State Department's May report, which ultimately concluded that Israel was not blocking U.S. aid to Gaza, at the same time outlined how Israeli officials had encouraged protests to block the assistance from reaching Palestinians.

The document also said that Israel implemented "extensive bureaucratic delays" on the delivery of aid and launched military strikes on "coordinated humanitarian movements and deconflicted humanitarian sites."

The Israeli military has killed more than 41,000 Palestinians in Gaza while enforcing a strict siege on the territory that has brought its population to the verge of famine. At least 34 Palestinian children have died of malnutrition this year, according to the Gaza Government Media Office.

In March, CIA Director Bill Burns finally recognized that Palestinians in Gaza are starving. "The reality is that there are children who are starving," Burns told U.S. senators during a briefing. None of the senators reacted to the revelation. The CIA chief shamelessly admitted: "They're malnourished as a result of the fact that humanitarian assistance can't get to them."

Earlier this year, the White House acknowledged Israeli efforts to block US aid to Gaza, as well.

Israeli Finance Minister Bezalel Smotrich had publicly stated that he was blocking U.S.-provided flour for Gaza, prompting a White House response. "I wish I could tell you that flour was moving in, but I can't do that right now," White House spokesperson John Kirby told reporters on February 15th.

ProPublica reported on Tuesday that U.S. Ambassador to Israel Jack Lew urged Blinken to accept Israeli assurances that Israel was not blocking aid to Gaza. "No other nation has ever provided so much humanitarian assistance to their enemies," Lew told subordinates, according to the report.

The International Court of Justice has ruled that Gaza is under Israeli occupation.

Under the Fourth Geneva Convention, an occupying power has the "duty of ensuring the food and medical supplies of the population" in the territory it occupies.

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