



## President Obama: 'Patron' of the Israeli Occupation. Extensive US Military Aid to Israel

Par [Marjorie Cohn](#)

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*President Barack Obama has agreed to give Israel a record \$38 billion in military aid over the next 10 years, cementing his legacy as the strongest financial supporter of Israel ever to occupy the White House. Obama, whom Israeli journalist Gideon Levy calls "the patron of the occupation," increased the amount of money the U.S. provides Israel each year from \$3.1 to \$3.8 billion.*

Although the corporate media portray the relationship between Obama and Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu as chilly, Obama put his money where his heart apparently is with the unprecedented allocation of military assistance to Israel.

Netanyahu, who described the increase in U.S. monetary aid as "unprecedented" and "historic," characterized it as "the greatest accomplishment since sliced bread," according to Aaron David Miller, vice president of the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars. "The bond between the United States and Israel is unbreakable," Obama declared on Sept. 21 as he shook hands on the deal with Netanyahu.



*Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu (center left) talks with President Obama in New York last week. (Video still from [The Jerusalem Post](#))*

The annual \$3.8 billion, more money than the U.S. gives to any other country, will fund the continuing Israeli military occupation of Palestinian lands, now in its fifth decade.

Israel exercises complete control over every aspect of Palestinian life in the West Bank, East Jerusalem and Gaza. That includes borders, airspace, ingress and egress of people and goods, and the seashore and waters off the coast of Gaza. The occupation violates fundamental human rights of the Palestinians.

Two years ago, 60 Israeli youths signed an open letter to Netanyahu announcing their refusal to serve in the Israeli military because of the dehumanization of Palestinians living under occupation. In the occupied Palestinian territories, they wrote, "human rights are violated, and acts defined under international law as war-crimes are perpetuated on a daily basis." The signatories cited "assassinations (extrajudicial killings), the construction of settlements on occupied lands, administrative detentions, torture, collective punishment and the unequal allocation of resources such as electricity and water."

Flavia Pansieri, former United Nations deputy high commissioner for human rights, [said last](#)

[year](#) that human rights violations “fuel and shape the conflict” in the occupied Palestinian territories, adding, “[h]uman rights violations in the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, are both cause and consequence of the military occupation and ongoing violence, in a bitter cyclical process with wider implications for peace and security in the region.”

Israel took over the West Bank and East Jerusalem by military force in 1967 and has held it under military occupation ever since. U.N. Security Council Resolution 242, passed in 1967, refers to “the inadmissibility of the acquisition of territory by war” and calls for “withdrawal of Israel armed forces from territories occupied in the recent conflict.” Yet Israel continues to occupy the Palestinian territories it acquired in the Six-Day War between Israel and nearby Arab countries that year.

Since 1967, Israel has transferred more than half a million of its own citizens into the Palestinian territories. It persists in building Jewish settlements in the West Bank, which is occupied Palestinian territory.

But a state that is occupying territory that is not its own cannot build settlements on that territory and transfer its own citizens into them. Under Article 8.2(b)(viii) of the International Criminal Court’s [Rome Statute](#), such action constitutes a war crime.

In criticizing Israel’s building of Jewish settlements on Palestinian lands, Secretary of State John Kerry said that since Obama was inaugurated in 2009, the number of Israelis in the West Bank and East Jerusalem has grown by 95,000, including 15,000 during the past year alone. Israel plans to build 2,400 new housing units in the settlements as it demolishes more and more Palestinian homes.

Kerry’s criticism rings hollow as the Obama administration consistently uses its veto in the Security Council to block the Palestinians’ campaign to block illegal Israeli settlements in the West Bank. Obama is reportedly considering a council resolution to set the parameters for an Israeli-Palestinian peace agreement, although the powerful pro-Israel lobby opposes such a move.

As this article is being written, the [Women’s Boat to Gaza](#), with 13 women aboard, is sailing to Gaza to protest Israel’s blockade of what is often called the world’s largest “open-air prison.” In Gaza, 1.8 million people live on a 140-square-mile strip of land. It is one of the most densely populated areas in the world. Gazans cannot enter or leave without Israeli permission. They cannot import or export goods without Israeli permission. They cannot fish in their own waters without Israeli permission.

In July 2014, Israel invaded Gaza and killed 2,251 Palestinians, the majority of them civilians. The number of Palestinians wounded was 11,231, including 3,540 women and 3,436 children. On the Israeli side, six civilians and 67 soldiers were killed and 1,600 were injured. Tens of thousands of Palestinians lost their homes, and the infrastructure was severely damaged. Numerous schools, U.N.-sanctioned places of refuge, hospitals, ambulances and mosques were intentionally targeted by Israel.

Israel used the “Dahiya doctrine” to apply “disproportionate force” and cause “great damage and destruction to civilian property and infrastructure, and suffering to civilian populations,” as defined in the 2009 U.N. Human Rights Council (Goldstone) report. These acts constitute evidence of war crimes under Article 8 (2)(a) of the Rome Statute.

U.S. political leaders and the corporate media portray a false equivalence of firepower between Israelis and Palestinians in Gaza. But Israel's use of force greatly exceeds that of the Palestinians.

The White House and Congress condemn the rocket fire into Israel by Hamas and the "deliberate targeting of civilians." But Washington says Israel has a right to defend itself, justifying Israel's bombing campaign in Gaza and blaming Hamas, while minimizing Israel's role in creating and escalating the violence.

Israel's overwhelming use of military force constitutes collective punishment, which is a war crime. The laws of war, also known as international humanitarian law, are primarily found in the [Geneva Conventions](#). Article 33 of the Fourth Geneva Convention, to which Israel is a party, specifically forbids collective punishment. It says, "No protected person [civilian] may be punished for an offense he or she has not personally committed. ... Reprisals against protected persons and their property are prohibited."

The U.N. secretary-general characterized Israel's blockade of Gaza as "a continuing collective penalty against the population of Gaza."

"Israel is able to act with utter impunity because of the military, economic and political support it receives from governments around the world," according to Zaid Shuaibi, a spokesman for the Palestinian BDS (Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions) National Committee. Israel would be unable to carry out its policies of aggression in Gaza without the support of the United States.

Actress Lisa Gay Hamilton, who is on the Women's Boat to Gaza, wrote, "I'm here because I'm concerned about the effects of war and blockade on the women, as schools, hospitals, and homes have been periodically destroyed and sources of power and water compromised. ... I'm here because my president just increased U.S. military aid to Israel from \$3.1 to \$3.8 billion per year over the next 10 years, with ... no mention of the situation in Gaza."

Fifty-seven percent of Democrats and 40 percent of Republicans think the increase in military aid to Israel is too high.

Hundreds of Israeli officials, intellectuals and artists signed an open letter to Jews worldwide to oppose the occupation. The 470 signatories, including high-ranking officers of the Israel Defense Forces, ambassadors, ministers, high government officials and members of the Knesset, wrote: "The prolonged occupation is inherently oppressive for Palestinians and fuels mutual bloodshed. It undermines the moral and democratic fabric of the state of Israel and hurts its standing in the community of nations."

In his Sept. 20 farewell speech to the U.N. General Assembly, Obama appeared to oppose Israel's permanent occupation and settlements, saying, "Surely Israelis and Palestinians will be better off if Palestinians reject incitement and recognize the legitimacy of Israel ... (and if) Israel recognizes that it cannot permanently occupy and settle Palestinian land."

But Obama's actions speak louder than his words. Although he has the power to condition U.S. aid to Israel on ending the occupation and ceasing construction of Jewish settlements on Palestinian land, Obama has chosen instead to serve as "patron of the occupation."

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