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# counterpunch

edited by alexander cockburn and jeffrey st.clair

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### *The Ultimate Earmark*

## U.S. Military Aid to Israel

By KATHLEEN and BILL CHRISTISON

In these days of economic crisis, budget overruns, earmarks, and multi-billion dollar bailouts, when Americans are being forced to tighten their own belts, one of the most automatic earmarks—a bailout by any measure—goes to a foreign government but is little understood by most Americans. U.S. military aid to Israel is doled out in annual increments of billions of dollars but remains virtually unchallenged while other fiscal outlays are drastically cut.

The United States and Israel signed a Memorandum of Understanding in August 2007 committing the U.S. to give Israel \$30 billion in military aid over the next decade. This is grant aid, given in cash at the start of each fiscal year. The only stipulation imposed on Israel's use of this cash gift is that it spend 74 per cent to purchase U.S. military goods and services.

The first grant under this agreement was made in October 2008, for FY2009, in the amount of \$2.55 billion. To bring the total 10-year amount to \$30 billion, amounts in future years will gradually increase until an annual level of \$3.1 billion is reached in FY2013. This will continue through FY2018.

Israel is by far the largest recipient of U.S. foreign aid. Since 1949, the United States has provided Israel with \$101 billion in total aid, of which \$53 billion has been military aid. For the last 20-plus years, Israel has received an average of \$3 billion annually in grant aid; until now the grant has been a mix of economic and military aid.

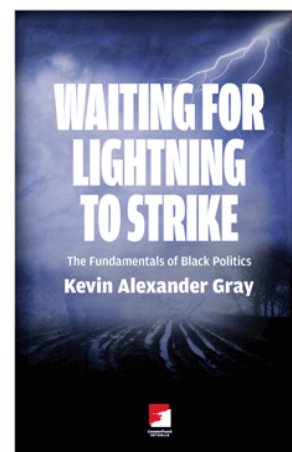
Israel receives its aid under vastly more favorable terms than any



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other recipient. Egypt, for instance, receives \$2 billion a year in economic aid, but this is a loan and must be repaid. Saudi Arabia also has U.S. military equipment in its arsenal, but it buys and pays for this equipment and is not given it, as Israel is.

Aid to Israel can be said to benefit the United States because it is spent to purchase equipment manufactured here. But this recycling of federal monies into the arms industry is not the wisest way to spur general economic recovery. In fact, in the midst of a financial crisis, incurring a long-term obligation of this magnitude is highly irresponsible.

When Israel attacks Palestinians, as during the recent assault on Gaza, its instruments of destruction are U.S. fighter jets and attack helicopters, U.S. missiles, U.S.-made white phosphorus, U.S.-made Caterpillar bulldozers. All of this American-made destruction is clearly identifiable to television audiences throughout the Arab and Muslim world, where viewers receive a steady diet of news showing Palestinian civilians being killed by weapons made in the USA. It is from this vast population, which feels kinship with Palestinians and feels itself to be under assault from the United States, that terrorists such as Osama bin Laden are able to find recruits.

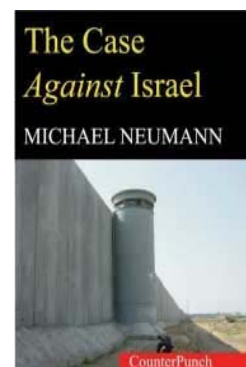
The U.S. Foreign Assistance Act stipulates that no aid may be provided to a country that engages in a consistent pattern of violations of international human rights laws. Israel has been charged by human rights organizations such as Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch with precisely such violations during the Gaza assault and in past attacks. Israel also violates the Arms Export Control Act, which stipulates that U.S. weapons must be used only for "internal security."

This arms package, furthermore, seriously undermines the mission of U.S. peace mediators such as former Senator George Mitchell, recently appointed by President Obama as envoy to the Middle East. As long as Israel can rest assured that it is guaranteed an annual arms package in the billions, it will have no incentive whatsoever to heed Mitchell's mediation efforts, to make the territorial concessions necessary to reach a peace agreement, to stop building settlements and other infrastructure in the occupied Palestinian territories, or to stop its attacks on Palestinians.

By committing itself to this arms package, the United States is undermining with one hand the very peace agreement it is trying to promote with the other hand.

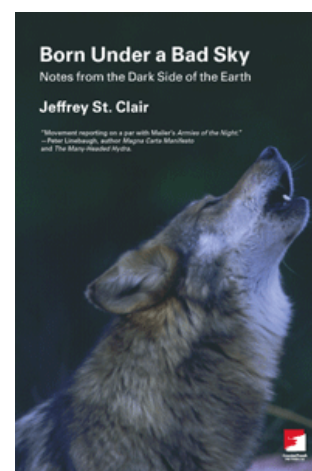
These distortions of U.S. national interests must stop.

**Kathleen and Bill Christison** have been writing on Palestine and Israel for several years. Kathleen is the author of two books on the Palestinian situation and U.S. policy on the issue, while Bill has written numerous articles on U.S. foreign policies, mostly for CounterPunch. They have co-authored a book, forthcoming in June from Pluto Press, on the Israeli occupation and its impact on Palestinians, with over 50 of their photographs. Thirty years ago, they were analysts for the CIA. They are members of the Stop \$30 Billion Coalition in Albuquerque, NM. They can be reached at [kb.christison@earthlink.net](mailto:kb.christison@earthlink.net).



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