



Issue Backgrounder: Israel/Palestine

Background: Israel/Palestine includes the state of Israel and the territories of the West Bank and Gaza. Gaza is a small, heavily populated territory south of Israel along the Mediterranean Sea; the West Bank is a larger territory east of Israel bordering the state of Jordan. There are [2.1 million Palestinians](#) in Gaza plus [3.3 million](#) in the West Bank. There are [9.5 million in Israel](#)—80 percent Israeli Jews and 20 percent Palestinians—plus [500,000 Israeli settlers](#) in the West Bank.

The state of Israel was [established](#) in 1948, leading to a large number of Palestinians becoming refugees, many of them going to Gaza. Israel has annexed East Jerusalem and Golan, and threatened to annex the West Bank and occupy Gaza permanently. Hamas, considered a terrorist group by Israel and the United States, technically governs Gaza while the Palestinian National Authority governs the West Bank; Israel occupies both militarily. The recent cycle of mass violence started with an attack by Hamas on southern Israel on October 7, 2023 followed by an Israeli military assault on Gaza; together these attacks killed more than 67,000 Palestinians (including at least 20,000 children) and approximately 2000 Israelis (Source: [UN/OCHR](#)), and left 251 Israelis hostage in Gaza. This was the fifth war between Israel and Hamas and by far the most brutal.

The United States has long been Israel's most important supporter. The U.S. has [supplied](#) more than \$130 billion in arms to Israel—about two-thirds of Israel's weapon imports—with current assistance totaling at least \$3.8 billion annually. The Biden and Trump administrations have delivered missiles, bombs, and armored personnel carriers in 2024 and 2025.

Current Status: A U.S.-brokered ceasefire has taken hold, all living Israeli hostages have been returned, many Palestinian prisoners were released, and Israel has withdrawn from parts of Gaza. But many aspects needed for a lasting ceasefire—who will govern Gaza, whether Israeli forces will withdraw fully, whether Hamas will disarm, how Gaza will be rebuilt—have yet to be agreed. Humanitarian assistance has restarted since the ceasefire, after having been cut off for months, leading to [famine](#) conditions in Gaza. Tensions are also high in the West Bank, where Israeli settlers have escalated [attacks on Palestinians](#) to displace them from their land.

Why the Faith Community Cares: The world's three Abrahamic religions—Judaism, Christianity, and Islam—all have their roots in Israel/Palestine, and all their scriptures call for peace. For Christians, Jesus told us to love our enemies (Matthew 5:44), put down our swords (Matthew 25:52), and said "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called children of God" (Matthew 5:9).

Why FAN Cares: St. Francis of Assisi is one of the great peacemakers, who traveled to Egypt at great personal risk to try to stop the war between Christians and Muslims. He opposed the use of arms and forbade his followers from carrying them. As followers of Jesus in the footsteps of Francis today, we must also be peacemakers and oppose the use of violence to settle conflicts.



Bill Briefer: H.R. 3565 (Israel/Palestine)

Bill Summary: Since taking office, the present Administration has continued the pattern of recent Administrations and approved a series of arms sales to Israel totaling over \$12.5 billion. Independent investigations have also found that U.S. weapons have been used in unlawful attacks that killed dozens of Palestinian civilians, including children. The Block the Bombs Act, H.R. 3565, introduced by Representative Delia Ramirez (IL-3), would prohibit the President from selling, transferring, or exporting certain defense articles or services to Israel, except in specified circumstances. The prohibition would encompass offensive weapons, including BLU-109 bunker buster bombs, 2,000-pound bombs, Joint Direct Attack Munitions (JDAMs), 120mm tank rounds, and 155mm artillery shells. The US may sell, transfer, or export such defense articles or services to Israel if (1) a law is enacted specifying the purposes for which such articles or services may be used, and (2) Israel provides written assurances that the defense articles or services will be used for those specific statutory purposes and in a manner consistent with certain other laws, including international human rights laws.

Current Status: After the bill was introduced in May of 2025, the bill was referred to the House Committee on Foreign Affairs, but has not advanced since then, meaning it has not been marked up, voted out of committee or scheduled for floor consideration. The Congressional Progressive Caucus, a group of 100 progressive members of the US House of Representatives and the Senate, have formally endorsed the bill. The bill has 55 cosponsors.

Senate Briefer: S.J. 34 (Israel/Palestine)

Bill Summary: Senate Joint Resolution 34 expressed congressional disapproval of certain arms sales to Israel, including 1,000-pound bombs, Joint Direct Attack Munitions (JDAMs), and services to support those weapons. Though not identical to the House bill 3565, it was similar in intention.

Current Status: This resolution is not under current consideration. S.J. 34 was introduced by Senator Bernie Sanders in March 2025; on July 30, the Senate Foreign Relations Committee voted against moving the bill forward with a vote of 24 in favor and 73 against. The fact that 24 Senators voted in favor of the bill, however, was considered an important signal of rising dissatisfaction with Israel's conduct of the war in Gaza.

FAQs:

- **How is HR 3565 still relevant in light of the recent ceasefire?**
 - Increasing public criticism of Israel's assault on Gaza, including unprecedented discussion of cutting off weapons, played a key role in bringing about the ceasefire. It is important to keep the pressure on both parties to respect the ceasefire and work to resolve outstanding issues.



- **How is SJ 34 still relevant if the Senate already rejected it?**
 - The Senate Joint Resolution, although rejected in committee in late July, was remarkable for drawing so much support for stopping export of the most lethal arms to Israel. It is relevant to congratulate the senators who had the courage to vote for it and ask others why they did not. Especially if the Gaza ceasefire fails, it will be important for the Congress to signal disapproval for sending more arms to Israel that can be used to inflict massive civilian casualties.
- **What is the value of these bills if only Democrats have endorsed them so far?**
 - Our lobbying maintains attention to this issue, and endorsements provide leverage on the President and Israel to ensure a permanent ceasefire. We want to be people of faith who speak for finding just solutions, not pouring arms into a region beset by war.
- **Why are we only prohibiting some weapons rather than all weapons?**
 - Although we seek the integral disarmament Pope Francis called us toward, this bill focuses on a narrow set of the most deadly weapons used in Gaza and the West Bank as an initial step. This is strategic to get more members of Congress to consider support.
- **If our member has already endorsed this, what can we ask them to do?**
 - If your meeting is with a representative who has already cosponsored this bill, you can ask them to encourage their peers to do the same. You could also ask the member to speak directly with the chair of the committee the bill is sitting in and other members to persuade them to move the bill forward.