

**Israel-Hamas war**

## US will not stop military aid to Israel over approach to Gaza

Washington satisfied by country's aid efforts despite humanitarian groups warning people are being 'starved' in enclave



Palestinian children wait to receive food distributed by an aid organisation in Deir al Balah, Gaza, on Monday © Omar Ashtawy/APA Images/dpa

**James Shotter** in Jerusalem and **Neri Zilber** in Tel Aviv and **Felicia Schwartz** in Washington YESTERDAY

The US has said that it will not withhold military aid to Israel because it had taken steps to improve the humanitarian situation in Gaza, even as human rights groups said Palestinians in the shattered enclave were being “starved”.

“Over the past 30 days, Israel has taken a number of steps to address the measures laid out in the letter,” state department spokesperson Vedant Patel said on Tuesday, referring to the message sent last month to Israel by the US secretaries of state and defence.

“We at this time have not made an assessment that the Israelis are in violation of US law,” he added.

Washington last month told [Israel](#) to take “urgent and sustained actions” to improve the catastrophic conditions in the Palestinian enclave within 30 days and warned that if it did not, US military aid to Israel could be at risk.

However, after secretary of state [Antony Blinken](#) was briefed on Monday by Israeli minister of strategic affairs Ron Dermer on how his government had improved conditions in Gaza, the Biden administration decided that no further action was needed.

US officials said they still expected Israel to allow more aid trucks into Gaza so as to improve conditions in the enclave.

Patel said Washington had “seen some progress being made” and that it would not change its policy on providing weapons to Israel.

However, in a report published as the US deadline expired on Tuesday, eight aid groups, including Oxfam, Save the Children, Anera and the Norwegian Refugee Council, said Israel had not met “any of the specific criteria” set out by the US last month.

“Israel not only failed to meet the US criteria that would indicate support to the humanitarian response, but concurrently took actions that dramatically worsened the situation on the ground, particularly in northern Gaza,” the report said.

“People are being starved in Gaza: Israeli military operations have denied them critical food aid and basic necessities, which has, in turn, caused conditions approaching famine for 800,000 Palestinian civilians across Gaza.”

The US's demands last month came after Israel launched a fresh offensive in the north of the enclave, killing hundreds of people and displacing thousands, and deepening the humanitarian crisis in the territory.

The demands included allowing at least 350 trucks of aid into Gaza each day; opening a new route into the enclave for aid deliveries; letting people sheltering in an overcrowded coastal “humanitarian zone” in al-Mawasi move inland ahead of winter; ensuring aid groups had “continuous access” to northern Gaza; and halting legislation designed to stop UNRWA, the UN agency for Palestinian refugees, from operating in Gaza.

Former president Donald Trump's victory in last week's US election meant that any action taken against Israel by the Biden administration would likely have been reversed when he takes office in January.

Trump's announcement on Tuesday that he would nominate former Arkansas governor Mike Huckabee to be the next US ambassador to Israel was a signal that the new administration will continue to support Israeli policies in the West Bank and Gaza. Huckabee has been a fierce defender of Israel and its claims to the West Bank.

US officials on Tuesday said that Israel had reopened the Erez crossing into Gaza and opened another at Kissufim, had worked with Jordan to waive customs requirements, and also addressed capacity issues at checkpoints that Washington believes will help increase the number of aid deliveries.

But the report by the eight aid groups — which also include Mercy Corps, MedGlobal, Refugees International and Care — found that Israel had failed to comply with 15 of the 19 US demands — and had only partially complied with the remaining four.

The report also said aid deliveries to Gaza were far below what the US had demanded, with an average of just 42 trucks a day entering the enclave since the US issued its letter. Access for aid groups to northern Gaza also remains restricted: the UN said on Tuesday that of 50 requests aid groups had made to Israeli authorities to access northern Gaza in October, Israel had rejected 33.

Meanwhile, Israel has now passed legislation that will make it harder for UNRWA to operate in Gaza and the occupied West Bank. The report said only a limited number

of people in al-Mawasi had been able to move inland, while an additional aid crossing into Gaza was only due to open today.

Israeli officials on Monday rejected completely the description of the dire humanitarian situation in Gaza laid out by the UN and other international aid groups.

“There is no humanitarian crisis in Gaza. Period,” said one Israeli official, adding that the demands in the US letter did not quite reflect the “reality on the ground” and hinted that there may have been “other considerations” behind it.

The official said Israel was already implementing much of what had been asked, including increasing humanitarian assistance to the strip overall after what he termed a “very weak” October due to the Jewish holidays and increased military operations.

Yet even the Israeli military’s data has not shown a discernible increase in the entry of aid so far in November.

*Data visualisation by Aditi Bhandari*

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