

Is U.S. Military Aid to Israel Really Exceptional?

written by Noam Yakoby | 27.10.2026

Key Points

- S. military aid to Israel is frequently portrayed as uniquely large and disproportionate. Assessments based on foreign assistance alone omit other substantial forms of U.S. spending on security partnerships. Aid to Israel is highly visible as a foreign assistance line item, while the larger costs of defending treaty allies, through permanent troop deployments, overseas bases, and deterrence infrastructure, are recorded within the U.S. defense budget.
- When placed in the broader context of U.S. alliance management, assistance to Israel appears far less exceptional. Historical estimates place the gross annual baseline costs of U.S. military presence in Europe, Japan, and South Korea at approximately \$29.1 billion, \$5.2 billion, and \$3.3 billion, respectively.^[1] These figures primarily capture personnel, basing, and associated operating costs and do not include the full costs of military equipment, reinforcement capabilities, and broader deterrence infrastructure. By comparison, the United States provides Israel with approximately \$3.3 billion in annual military assistance and an additional \$500 million annually for joint missile defense cooperation; most of these funds are spent on U.S.-produced defense equipment.
- Unlike many U.S. treaty allies in Europe and East Asia, which host large permanent American military deployments, Israel does not rely on a comparable permanent U.S. combat presence. U.S. assistance instead strengthens Israel's independent defense capabilities while contributing to American regional deterrence, intelligence, defense industrial capacity, technological innovation, and operational expertise.
- The analysis does not conclude that American aid to Israel should continue in its current form. However, it challenges the claim that U.S. aid to Israel is uniquely disproportionate by placing it within the broader context of American spending on other security commitments. Accordingly, as American and Israeli leaders develop their next

Memorandum of Understanding, they should evaluate U.S. expenditures in support of Israel within this comparative perspective.

[1] The Europe estimate reflects the gross cost of the U.S. military presence as calculated by IISS. The Japan and South Korea figures are derived from GAO estimates of the total cost of the U.S. military presence and are presented before adjusting for host-nation contributions. The Europe estimate refers to 2018, while the Japan and South Korea figures represent annual averages for 2016-2019.

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