

COMMITTEE ON
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FOREIGN RELATIONS

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HEALTH, EDUCATION, LABOR,
AND PENSIONS

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510-4607

February 21, 2024

The Honorable Joseph R. Biden, Jr.
President of the United States
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue NW
Washington, D.C. 20500

Dear Mr. President:

I understand from public reports that your Administration plans to submit to Congress a notice for another major transfer of U.S. weapons to Israel for use in the war in Gaza. I appreciate the Administration's intent to follow traditional congressional notification procedures for this transfer; these provisions should be applied equally to all nations. I write to urge that any such weapons transfers be defensive rather than offensive in nature.

I have long supported our ally Israel and have repeatedly emphasized our support for Israel's need to defend itself in the aftermath of the horrific Hamas attack of October 7, when more than 1,200 people were murdered and more than 240 people taken hostage. The shocking violence committed indiscriminately against women, children and elderly civilians was brutal beyond words. And the violence unleashed in the attack's aftermath has forced tens of thousands of Israelis to be displaced from their homes.

The Hamas attack on Israel was particularly despicable in that it was intended to derail a regional discussion that, for the first time in decades, was seriously focused on the future of a Palestinian state. There must be no repeat of October 7. This is one of the reasons why I voted in support of the recent Emergency National Security Supplemental Appropriations Act providing defense support to Israel.

It is also important to recognize the toll the war has taken on Palestinians. Nearly 30,000 Palestinians have been reported killed—two thirds women and children. Tens of thousands have been wounded and over 1.7 million people displaced. The facilities to deal with an injured and desperate population have been dramatically weakened. The amount of humanitarian aid allowed into Gaza has been grossly insufficient and starvation for thousands is a real threat. Hospitals in Gaza have been badly damaged and most are no longer functioning. These harsh consequences are tragic and are stoking escalating violence in the region. The fact that U.S.-provided weapons are being used in this conflict requires that future military support be carefully calibrated to promote Israeli self-defense without deepening the suffering of innocent Palestinian civilians.

Your Administration has been forward-leaning in promoting better flows of humanitarian aid and urging Israel to curb offensive military operations in Rafah. The U.S. has also been at the forefront in focusing on a need for a short-term ceasefire with a release of all hostages. A deal to release all

hostages, coupled with a truce of negotiable length to enable massive delivery of humanitarian aid to Gazans, would be the single best path to de-escalation of tensions in Gaza and across the region.

You strive for a difficult balance—supporting Israel’s right to defend itself while also obtaining the release of hostages, reducing the suffering of Palestinian civilians and de-escalating a regional conflict that threatens the security of the U.S. and other nations. In order to pursue that balance, I recommend that any transfer of arms to Israel focus on weapons enabling Israel to defend itself against future attacks from Hamas, Hizballah, Iran or other actors posing a threat to our ally. The restocking of Iron Dome and other defensive systems should be of paramount importance. But in this delicate moment, when parties are at the table trying to find a path to de-escalation, the Administration should be wary of weapons transfers that are likely to be used in offensive military action causing significant civilian casualties.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Tim Kaine". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Tim" and the last name "Kaine" clearly distinguishable.

Tim Kaine