



US legislators renew push for additional aid to Israel after Iran attack

Description

US : Ninety lawmakers in the United States Congress have urged House Speaker Mike Johnson in a letter to immediately advance a foreign funding bill that includes \$14bn in assistance to Israel.

The letter, sent on Sunday and made public on Monday, followed Iran's unprecedented attack over the weekend, in which it fired hundreds of missiles and drones at Israel to retaliate for a deadly attack early this month on its consulate in Syria's capital, Damascus.

"Time is of the essence, and we must ensure critical aid is delivered to Israel and our other democratic allies facing threats from our adversaries around the world," read the brief letter, which was signed mostly by Democrats but also included Republican lawmakers such as Joe Wilson, the chairman of the Middle East foreign affairs subcommittee in the House of Representatives.

"We urge you to put the Senate Supplemental Aid package on the floor for an immediate vote when we return on Monday."

Separately, Hakeem Jeffries, the highest ranking Democrat in the House, called on fellow lawmakers on Monday to pass the \$95bn foreign funding bill, which includes aid to both Ukraine and Israel.

In February, the Senate passed the measure but pressure from conservatives in his party has led Johnson, a Republican, to block the measure in the House. For a bill to become law in the US, it must be approved by both chambers of Congress and signed by the president.

"The gravely serious events of this past weekend in the Middle East and Eastern Europe underscore the need for Congress to act immediately. We must take up the bipartisan and comprehensive national security bill passed by the Senate forthwith," Jeffries wrote in a "dear colleagues" letter, characterising the vote as a "Churchill or Chamberlain moment".

The Iranian attack on Israel late on Saturday, which caused only minor damage after most projectiles were intercepted, has renewed the push for the House to pass the Senate-approved bill, all but

drowning out calls for conditioning aid to the Israeli government over its conduct in the war on the Gaza Strip.

Republicans have sought to uncouple aid to Ukraine from funding for Israel. Alternately, many Republican legislators have also tried to link their domestic policy agenda to the Israeli aid package.

For example, last year, the Republican-controlled House passed a \$14.5bn measure for Israel that would slash funding for the Internal Revenue Service (IRS), the US tax agency. The Senate did not take up the proposal.

Many US legislators condemned Iran's attack on Israel, painting Israel as the victim of unprovoked aggression.

But Iran said it was engaging in legitimate self-defence after it blamed Israel for an April 1 air raid on its consulate in Damascus, which killed seven members of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps, including two generals.

The administration of President Joe Biden has refused to condemn the Damascus consulate bombing but the US is now calling for de-escalation.

Washington, which helped Israel shoot down hundreds of Iranian drones and missiles, has hailed the efforts to largely thwart the attack as a victory, suggesting Israel should not retaliate.

In Congress, members from both major parties have called for prioritising US support for Israel.

In his first comment on the Iranian attack late on Saturday, Republican Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell called on Congress to "do its part" to back Israel "without delay".

"The national security supplemental that has waited months for action will provide critical resources to Israel and our own military forces in the region," he said in a statement.

Palestinian rights advocates have argued that the US must enforce its own laws that prohibit military aid and weapons transfers to parties engaged in violations of international humanitarian law.

The Israeli offensive in Gaza has killed more than 33,000 people. Israel has also imposed a suffocating blockade on the territory, causing Samantha Power, the head of USAID, to say last week that famine was under way in the enclave.

The White House has dismissed demands to condition aid to Israel, often restating its "ironclad" commitment to the country and urging Congress to approve the foreign funding bill.

"Rather than asking for additional military aid to Israel, the Biden administration should immediately suspend all arms transfers to Israel and any other rogue government that has used US weapons to commit genocide and attack embassies of neighboring countries," Raed Jarrar, the advocacy director for Democracy for the Arab World Now, told Al Jazeera in a statement.

"Sending additional weapons to Israel is not only a violation of international law, it's also a violation of US law that prohibits arming countries committing genocide and blocking

humanitarian aid from starving populations.”

By Al Jazeera Staff

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