

## II. Domestic Political Landscape

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### FEDERAL FUNDING PACKAGE OF \$1.6 TRILLION

After concerns of the government shutdown due to political disagreements, U.S. Congressional leaders reached an agreement on Sunday, January 7 to fund the federal government for the current fiscal year, which ends on September 30. The leaders agreed on a funding package of \$1.6 trillion, averting a potential partial government shutdown later this month. President Joe Biden welcomed the agreement. However, the Republican-controlled House of Representatives and the Democrat-controlled Senate still need to vote to pass the agreement. The funding package includes money for various federal agencies and programs, such as the Department of Defense, the Department of Health and Human Services, and the Department of Education. It also provides additional funding for border security and disaster relief efforts.

House Speaker, Republican Mike Johnson, stated in a message to lawmakers that the total amount includes \$886 billion for defense spending and \$704 billion for non-defense spending. President Biden signed the defense spending portion into law on December through the National Defense Authorization Act.

Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer and House Democratic Leader Hakeem Jeffries said in a joint statement that the estimated funding in the non-defense sector "will protect key local priorities like veterans' assistance, healthcare, and food aid" from the cuts sought by some Republicans.

The statement noted that non-defense spending amounts to \$772.7 billion, which is approximately \$69 billion more than what Johnson mentioned. Congress was scheduled to negotiate with the government this week ahead of the final deadlines set for January 19th and February 2nd to settle the issue of government spending by September.

This comes amid Republican demands to reduce the estimated spending for the fiscal year 2024 below the agreed-upon maximum limits in June.

### U.S. AID TO ISRAEL

The Senate thwarted a resolution on Wednesday, January 17 that placed conditions on U.S. assistance to Israel. The Council voted with a majority of 72 opposing votes against 11 supporting

votes for the project presented by independent progressive Senator Bernie Sanders. Despite the project's failure to garner the required votes for approval, as expected, its discussion in the Council was deemed an "exceptional" and crucial step. It demonstrates the growing opposition among supporters to President Joe Biden's policy towards Israel. Sanders based his proposal on the Foreign Assistance Act passed in 1961. For the first time since the law's enactment, he used a provision allowing Senate members to submit an official request to the State Department for a detailed report on whether Israel uses U.S. weapons in a way that violates human rights. If the State Department fails to provide evidence to the contrary, military aid to Tel Aviv is frozen.

This s was vehemently rejected by Republicans and some Democrats. Senate Republican leader Mitch McConnell, defending Israel, stated, "Israel takes exceptional risks to minimize civilian casualties, while Hamas and Islamic Jihad are striving to do the opposite. We should not mix the two, and that's why it's essential to reject Sanders' project."