

Partnership Recalibrated

The Next Era of U.S.-Israel Security Cooperation

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Much as the Middle East, the geopolitical environment, and the politics of the U.S. and Israel have shifted over the past decade, the U.S.-Israel relationship must evolve as well. The next bilateral memorandum of understanding should lay the foundation for the next phase of the security partnership.



OVERARCHING VISION:

Israel and the United States should use a next long-term bilateral agreement to transition the security relationship from a provider-recipient framework to greater partnership.

RATIONALE:

U.S.-Israel security cooperation advances American interests.

America needs security partners with sophisticated military and intelligence capabilities and a track record of joint work on missile defense and emerging technologies. Israel meets these needs, and the U.S.-Israel partnership is valuable to the United States and helps address shared global threats.

A stronger Israel means reassessing the nature of assistance.

As Israel's economy and defense capabilities have matured, the relationship should evolve from dependency to partnership.

Modernizing the relationship can help preserve it for the future.

Reframing the alliance around mutual benefits and shared strategic interests—rather than debates over aid alone—is essential to sustaining long-term American support for Israel.

THE NEXT MOU SHOULD:

Wind down U.S. security assistance.

Israel has a strong economy and an even stronger defense industry. U.S. and Israeli negotiators should consider how to use a next agreement to decrease routine annual allocations of Foreign Military Financing and increase other forms of security and defense cooperation, in accordance with U.S. laws related to technology-sharing, export restrictions, and other obligations.

Expand joint research and development to combat shared threats.

The U.S. and Israel should establish a high-level public-private expert working group to identify emerging threats and develop a plan for U.S.-Israel cooperation on research, development, and production to mitigate them.

Prioritize air defense, especially against future threats like drone technologies.

U.S.-Israel cooperation on missile and air defense will remain important. A next agreement should sustain support for joint missile defense R&D and production, including against next-generation weapons, and consider how the U.S. and its allies can benefit from next-generation technology.

Bolster integration across defense systems and increase opportunities for co-production.

The MOU should ensure the U.S. and Israel retain interoperability between defense enterprises and expand integration across their respective defense industries. It should also identify how Israeli production capabilities can be leveraged for mutually beneficial platforms, such as munitions and interceptors.

Ensure that Israel remains an active player within CENTCOM's regional defense architecture.

The next agreement should consider how Israel can continue to contribute to partners' capabilities and regional defense. CENTCOM should continue to fully integrate Israel into regional planning, exercising, and intelligence sharing. Progress on the Israeli-Palestinian front remains necessary to unlock greater regional cooperation with Israel.

Explore whether the legislative requirement to uphold Israel's Qualitative Military Edge is still applicable.

Regional integration, the growth of Israel's defense industry, and technological advancements may require reworking this mandate. If the intent of the law still applies, it may be time to update the terms.

Establish clear walls between future U.S.-Israel defense efforts and any Israeli cooperation with China.

How to insulate Israeli and American defense technology, platforms, and production capabilities from Chinese investment and espionage is something that the Israeli government will need to address if the U.S. is to consider lowering some of the barriers to defense industrial cooperation. The next agreement should bar China from operating shipping container terminals at Israeli ports, enforce stricter standards on Chinese investment in the Israeli high-tech sector and in critical infrastructure, and ensure Israel puts counter-measures in place against Chinese penetration.