

Bolstering U.S.-Israel Defense of Shared Interests: *An Agenda for the Biden Administration*



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Executive Summary

Urgent challenges and opportunities await the new Biden Administration and 117th Congress in the broader Middle East. Though the Administration may prefer to first address domestic priorities, unfortunately the world won't wait – especially the Middle East. Shia extremist Iran and Sunni revisionist Turkey actively threaten U.S. national security and international stability more generally, while Israel faces challenges as it continues to defend U.S. interests ably.

At this inflection point, the Jewish Institute for National Security of America (JINSA) is releasing a series of three related policy papers on the major issues confronting the Middle East. This first paper details the benefits to the United States of, and specific ways to build upon, strong security cooperation with Israel and the diplomatic breakthroughs of the Abraham Accords. Succeeding reports will lay out the twin threats from Iran and Turkey and will provide additional recommendations for American policymakers.

Collectively, these papers emphasize how Washington needs to help shape events in a region that still matters greatly to U.S. national security, even amid a daunting slate of other pressing foreign and domestic policy priorities. For decades, administrations from both parties have officially identified interests in the greater Middle East that are vital to U.S. national security: ensuring a strong Israel; combatting Islamic extremism; safeguarding the free flow of energy through the Persian Gulf; and contributing to peace and stability.¹ Now the Biden Administration must confront growing threats to these interests from longstanding adversary Iran, which again approaches the threshold of nuclear weapons capability while its regionwide military footprint expands and entrenches. A less appreciated but growing challenge comes from traditional NATO ally Turkey, which under President Erdoğan pursues an increasingly interventionist, pro-Islamist and militarized foreign policy to assert dominance across the Middle East and Eastern Mediterranean.

To focus on other challenges, however, the new administration also has signaled its intent to retrench from the Middle East.² Fortunately, it can continue to defend U.S. interests, and square this circle of rising regional threats and retreating U.S. presence, by strengthening the security partnership with Israel. Indeed, for years now Israel has taken the lead in pushing back militarily against Iran, including deterring and preparing for major conflict with Tehran and its proxies, while also helping catalyze a nascent diplomatic and defense coalition against Turkey. Israel's status as a high-technology powerhouse also offers valuable opportunities for collaboration that could sharpen America's competitive edge in vital defense technologies.

Now the Biden Administration and Congress must expand on key Trump-era successes to bolster cooperation against shared threats. The Abraham Accords between Israel and key U.S. partners like the United Arab Emirates (UAE) and Bahrain underscore the importance of American leadership in building concentric pressures to counter Tehran's aggression. They also demonstrate the benefits of tightening U.S. defense ties with Israel instead of seeking daylight with Jerusalem, prioritizing rapprochement with Tehran or waiting on an elusive Israeli-Palestinian peace agreement. The Trump Administration's recent decision to reassign Israel to the area of responsibility for American forces in the Middle East, known as U.S. Central Command (CENTCOM), which JINSA pressed for, should be viewed as parting gift that can further enable Israel to work with our shared Arab partners, defend U.S. interests and uphold regional stability.³

Looking ahead, the docket of mutually-beneficial opportunities for deeper U.S.-Israel security ties is both urgent and wide-ranging. Several of them will necessitate enhanced coordination against shared threats and vulnerabilities; most if not all will also require ensuring Israel's ability to deter or defeat shared adversaries at acceptable cost to itself. Indeed, U.S. law requires the United States uphold this Israeli "qualitative military edge" (QME). President Biden, other leading American officials and the 2020 Democratic Party platform have underscored how this not only is important in itself, but also upholds U.S. national security interests and stabilizes the Middle East without requiring American boots on the ground.⁴

Many of the recommendations laid out below draw from JINSA research and policy proposals that run the gamut of U.S.-Israel security cooperation, and now have been updated or expanded to reflect our two countries' increasingly shared threats and opportunities at the outset of a new American administration and Congress.

1. Upgrade the Prepositioned Weapons Stockpile in Israel

The recent decision to reassign Israel to CENTCOM smooths the way for the Pentagon to bolster deterrence against Iran by upgrading its stockpiles of prepositioned weapons in Israel.⁵ Known as WRSA-I, this is intended as a readily-accessible reserve for Israel to obtain vital munitions in an emergency such as wartime, and as such is officially part of supporting QME. However, for multiple reasons the stockpile currently contains largely outdated or expired weaponry instead of the precision guided munitions (PGM) that Israel will need in abundance to prevent or prevail in a major conflict with Iran and/or Hezbollah.

Upgrading this stockpile is increasingly urgent for both countries' interest in countering Iran and its proxies. Fortunately, by creating a new paradigm for WRSA-I as a key node in America's defense posture in the Middle East, moving Israel to CENTCOM creates new incentives for the United States to fill the depot with critical PGMs. Given both Israel's reassignment to CENTCOM and the Abraham Accords, WRSA-I also now can be expanded into a regional hub providing for the needs of Israel, U.S. forces in the Middle East and possibly Arab partner countries as well. As part of this, the United States should consider relocating some existing CENTCOM stocks to Israel.⁶

2. Accelerate Israeli Procurement of U.S. Weapons

For decades, bilateral memoranda of understanding (MoU) have stipulated U.S. defense assistance for Israel, which the latter uses to support QME by purchasing U.S.-made weapons and other defense products. But although the current Obama-era MoU represents the largest such U.S. commitment to an ally ever, Israel now is on the frontlines of much more urgent and intensive shared challenges from Iran and Turkey than when the agreement was initially negotiated and signed. The expected further American drawdown from the region will magnify these challenges.

Therefore the United States should shift forward, or "frontload," the outlays in the MoU to help Israel continue to defend itself against shared threats. This could accelerate Israeli procurement of an additional squadron of F-35 combat aircraft, upgraded F-15 combat aircraft, KC-46 aerial refueling tankers, CH-53K, CH-47 or V-22 long-range transport helicopters as well as missile defenses and interceptors; this also would support the U.S. defense industry.⁷

There are any number of public or private financing options Jerusalem and Washington could select to frontload the MoU without altering its terms or raising the annual cost to the United States. Regardless which financing option would be pursued, and given the enormity of challenges to Israel's QME already rendering many of the assumptions behind the current MoU moot, the United States and Israel also should declare their intent to begin working on the next MoU that would be set to commence in 2028. Likewise, active discussions should move ahead on lowering entry barriers and further integrating Israel's start-up defense industrial capacity into America's defense manufacturing base.

3. Bolster Intelligence and Technology-Sharing Ties

The United States already benefits substantially from intelligence cooperation with Israel, including recent Israeli intelligence coups like the seizure and revelation in 2018 of highly valuable information on Tehran's covert efforts to build a nuclear weapon, and warning the United States of possible Iranian attacks on U.S. interests in the Gulf in 2019. However, classification barriers prevent Israel from sharing and comparing with the United States much of what it learns from its extensive operational experience.⁸

The United States therefore should raise Israel's information-sharing clearance to the level enjoyed by members of the "Five Eyes" agreement enabling full cooperation on signals intelligence and other highly sensitive information. The Biden Administration also could issue an executive order creating a presumption of approval of sharing with Israel information, military equipment and technology (see Appendix).

4. Address the Problematic Israel-China Nexus

Both countries confront the challenge of China's global strategy to gain access to vital infrastructure, dual-use technology and intellectual property with which to accrue geopolitical and economic advantages. But Israeli efforts thus far to address the problem have not evinced an appreciation of the extent of the Chinese threat nor of the seriousness of U.S. concerns; Washington is neither providing Israel enough guidance on how to enact the reforms it is requesting, nor is it doing enough to help Israel find substitutes for dangerous Chinese investments.

As will be laid out extensively in a forthcoming JINSA report analyzing these problems and providing detailed recommendations, the United States should help Israel adopt a thorough and coordinated whole-of-government strategy for assessing and responding to the threats posed by China. The United States and Israel also should work together to create an economic coalition that can be joined by other like-minded allies. These efforts can be complementary to deeper bilateral strategic cooperation more generally; for instance, addressing U.S. concerns about Chinese investment in Haifa port could pave the way for enhanced U.S. naval deployments in Israel, including possibly relocating two forward-deployed *Arleigh Burke*-class guided missile destroyers from Rota, Spain, to a new homeport in Haifa.⁹

5. Enhance Bilateral Defense R&D

As technological and geopolitical rivalry with China heats up, there also is a growing realization in the United States that national security is intertwined with the ability to "out-innovate" strategic competitors. Accordingly, the United States should work with Israel – the original

“start-up nation” – and build off the two countries’ past joint research and development (R&D) successes with Iron Dome and other world-class systems by setting their combined sights on the next logical cutting-edge joint ventures. The most promising prospects are in space, particularly the development of sensors and advanced microsattellites, as well as artificial intelligence (AI) and machine learning, unmanned vehicles and robotics, advanced military medical technology, directed energy and hypersonic weapons.¹⁰

Progress on these ventures, and ensuring U.S. technological advantages more generally, will require addressing bureaucratic roadblocks and outmoded ways of thinking about U.S. defense innovation. America’s defense R&D budgeting process would benefit from greater risk acceptance by the Pentagon and Congress, and the U.S. defense sector as a whole must concertedly address its “Not Invented Here” prejudice that reflexively rejects innovations just because they were not developed domestically – even if they originated from a technology powerhouse like Israel. More specifically regarding Israel, the United States should consider granting it Tier 1 Strategic Trade Authorization (STA1) status. Congress should consider establishing a permanent umbrella body to oversee R&D collaboration among the United States, Israel and potentially Arab Gulf partners; it also should contemplate authorizing and funding the creation of a joint research unit that consists of engineers and officers from both the United States and Israel who commit to long-term defense research projects.

6. Pursue a Common Diplomatic Front with Israel

Beyond the more directly defense-related bilateral agenda, there are also pressing strategic issues where more robust diplomatic cooperation between the United States and Israel will be crucial. First, as renewed U.S. nuclear diplomacy with Iran appears likely, and as certain Biden nominees already have suggested, American officials must support Israel’s ability to maintain pressure on Tehran while also heeding one of the existing agreement’s key shortcomings – namely, that it was negotiated over the heads of U.S. partners in the Middle East that would be most directly and immediately affected by it.¹¹ This consideration becomes especially pertinent if the new administration pursues its stated objective of negotiating a follow-on agreement to address Iran’s regional aggression and/or missile proliferation. Therefore, as it already does with its European allies, the United States must consult proactively with Israel and other regional partners as part and parcel of any prospective effort to rejoin the existing nuclear deal and/or seek a follow-on agreement.

Second, the Biden Administration should capitalize on the diplomatic and strategic momentum from the Abraham Accords and Israel’s reassignment to CENTCOM to deepen regional cooperation under U.S. auspices. Working with Israel, the United Arab Emirates (UAE), Bahrain and potentially other regional partners, the United States should pursue a much-needed theater-wide missile defense network to provide much better early warning and redundant defenses against Iran’s proliferation of precision missiles and drones, among other threats.¹² Progress here also could help lay the groundwork for normalization efforts with other countries by enabling Israel to begin building tacit ties with additional Arab neighbors, under CENTCOM’s auspices. The existing accords also could be strengthened by expanding certain arenas of U.S.-Israel R&D defense collaboration to include the UAE or other Arab partners.

Third, American diplomats should build effective counterpressure against Turkish aggression through much more persistent engagement with, and public backing of, the Israel-Greece-Cyprus “trilateral” forum for coordination on regional energy, security and economic issues.

Washington also should consider participating in joint military exercises among Israel, Greece, Cyprus and others in the region, or at least sending observers.¹³ Additionally, the United States could expand and entrench the Abraham Accords by supporting Emirati efforts to work more directly with, and possibly join, the existing Israel-Greece-Cyprus trilateral. American diplomats also should work with Israel and the other members of the EastMed Gas Forum (EMGF) to confront Turkey with a common diplomatic front and cooperatively develop the region's major recent energy discoveries and its potential for significant additional finds.¹⁴

7. Defend Continued Defense Assistance to Israel

Advancing a productive U.S.-Israel security agenda also will have a domestic component for the Biden Administration and the new Congress. Despite the clear strategic benefits to the United States of defense assistance to Israel – of which the new president and members of his cabinet have spoken repeatedly – there has been a growing chorus of calls in the progressive wing of the Democratic Party to condition U.S. defense assistance on Israeli policy toward the Palestinians.¹⁵

Now it is critical to reestablish bipartisan consensus on the importance of U.S. military aid to Israel. This will require the Biden Administration and other Democratic Party leaders clearly making the case that aid to Israel is critical both to protecting U.S. national security interests and to creating the conditions that might enable peace with the Palestinians. Administration officials and Democratic Congressional leaders should engage progressives to clarify how such assistance can actually have beneficial impacts on Israeli policy toward the Palestinians. They also should issue public statements, resolutions, public letters and hearings, as well as clearer and more fully elaborated justification and explanatory language in future authorizing legislation on U.S. defense assistance to Israel, making the case for how such assistance is in America's self-interest.

Strategic Context

It has perhaps become cliché to observe how every incoming presidential administration will be too focused on domestic issues to devote proper time and energy to foreign policy. Perhaps that statement has never been truer than for the new Biden Administration and 117th Congress, yet U.S. attention and resources also will be strained by a dizzying array of major international challenges – everything from COVID-19 and climate change to China’s increasingly disruptive, and ever more global, ambitions. Like his two immediate predecessors when faced with similar panoplies of problems, President Joe Biden and key incoming officials in his administration have pledged to reduce overseas commitments and refocus on preferred priorities by significantly downsizing America’s presence in the Middle East. Then candidate Biden’s March 2020 *Foreign Affairs* essay called for “bringing the vast majority of our troops home from the wars in Afghanistan and the Middle East;” writing in the same journal two months later, his now National Security Adviser Jake Sullivan argued for “reducing an outdated U.S. military footprint without creating fresh insecurity...” and needing to “manage the Iranian challenge with fewer forces in the region.”¹⁶

At the same time, stability in that region still matters to the United States and international security more broadly. Accordingly, leading American policymakers from both parties, including President Biden, still articulate the Middle East’s continued importance and impact on U.S. national security. In the past year, Biden has said repeatedly he has “no illusions about the challenges the regime in Iran poses to America’s security interests, to our friends and partners and to its own people,” and he has called for “a smart way to counter the threat that Iran poses to our interests” and the need to “more effectively push back against Iran’s destabilizing activities.”¹⁷ A month before he was elected, Biden likewise called to “press Turkey to refrain from any further provocative actions in the region against Greece, including threats of force,” and more generally for the need to defuse tension in the Eastern Mediterranean.¹⁸

Yet even as Iran, Turkey and other threats persist or intensify while America’s regional presence recedes, U.S. strategy can square this growing divergence between means and ends by strengthening the bilateral security partnership with Israel. The Jewish state has taken the lead in defending U.S. interests in the Middle East by defending itself; going forward, Washington can further a range of national security interests, both within the region and beyond, by expanding already-robust, mutually-beneficial defense cooperation with Israel.

A. Middle East Still Impacts U.S. National Security

For decades, administrations from both parties have officially identified the broader Middle East as vital to U.S. national security, and to international stability more generally.¹⁹ Energy security has always been a pivotal element of this policy. Today, even as its own domestic energy output rises, U.S. economic vitality is highly interdependent with global energy markets; any country threatening to dominate the Middle East could severely disrupt the one-third of worldwide oil output that comes from the region.²⁰ This interest is sharpened by ongoing discoveries of sizable undersea natural gas reserves in the adjoining Eastern Mediterranean that could help reduce Europe’s dependence on Russian imports, and with it Moscow’s strategic leverage over key NATO allies.²¹ Any country dominating the Middle East also would pose acute threats to the very existence or viability of longstanding U.S. partners, and

to the credibility of American guarantees to uphold stability in the region and more broadly. This interconnects with another U.S. regional interest, namely ensuring a strong and secure democratic ally in Israel – including supporting Israel’s qualitative military edge (QME). The United States also maintains abiding strategic and humanitarian interests in preventing the broader Middle East from being a breeding ground for Islamic extremism and mass refugee exoduses.

Iran’s concerted pursuit of Middle East hegemony poses the clearest and foremost threats to these interests. Its accelerating progress toward nuclear weapons capability, including resuming production of 20 percent low enriched uranium (LEU) at the start of this year, raises the specter of an unprecedentedly intense war involving any number of U.S. regional allies and possibly drawing in American forces as well. Tehran’s approach to the nuclear threshold also could catalyze an untenable nuclear proliferation cascade throughout the region, and would be the death knell of the Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT).²² Even without nuclear weapons, Iran has capitalized on U.S. retrenchment from the region to entrench itself and its proxies in Lebanon, Syria, Iraq and Yemen, including through regionwide proliferation of increasingly precise missiles and drones.²³ This reflects a larger Iranian arms buildup that likely will be amplified by the effective end of the U.N. conventional arms embargo on Iran last fall. In addition to enabling it to threaten key military assets and other critical infrastructure of the United States and its partners, as well as crucial energy chokepoints, across the Middle East, Iran’s regional expansion and the brutality with which it has been conducted only exacerbates sectarian and other tensions that promote terrorism and worsening refugee flows from the region.²⁴

But Iran is not the sole major challenge to U.S. interests there. In recent years Turkey under President Erdoğan has steadily abandoned its traditional role as a democratic NATO bulwark for an interventionist, pro-Islamist and militarized foreign policy that increasingly places it at odds with the United States, Europe and the Middle East. This includes Ankara’s aggressive and illegitimate claims to wide swathes of the Eastern Mediterranean that threaten peaceful energy development, as well as its widespread support for regional Muslim Brotherhood-affiliated groups – including Hamas – and growing, if mostly tacit, strategic cooperation with Russia. Similar to Iran, Turkey is underwriting its destabilizing ambitions with a massive domestic arms buildup and purchases of game-changing weaponry from U.S. strategic competitors like Russia.²⁵ Erdoğan also demonstrates a disturbing and cynical readiness to exploit humanitarian issues as leverage over his NATO allies, often exacerbating refugee crises in the process. Much of the Arab world also is engaged in massive arms-buying sprees in response to the twin threats from Iran and Turkey, including the United Arab Emirates’ (UAE) recent purchase of F-35 combat aircraft and other advanced weaponry from the United States. Though these countries are U.S. partners and increasingly friendly with Israel, there remains a non-negligible risk in the Middle East that today’s friend could become tomorrow’s adversary.²⁶

Rising great power competition also threatens the broader Middle East. China’s regional presence has mushroomed in recent years, in service of its grand strategy to control infrastructural and technological assets that drive the global economy and accrue geopolitical advantages to Beijing. This includes efforts to acquire cutting-edge dual-use technologies through research and development (R&D) partnerships, as well as the better-known Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) that cuts across the Middle East to link Europe and East Asia. The sheer extent of, and challenges posed by, China’s BRI ambitions in the region are evident in its relations with U.S. allies and adversaries alike: in Israel, Beijing’s acquisition of Haifa’s civilian port, and its potential to use the facility for espionage of the adjacent naval base, already

jeopardizes further U.S. naval visits there; in Syria, China is expanding its economic and military influence, and in Iran it agreed a \$400 billion, 25-year bilateral strategic cooperation last summer that could provide economic and military advantages to both countries at the direct expenses of Israel, the United States and many of our Arab partners.²⁷

B. Israel's Roles in Defending U.S. Interests

The United States has long viewed Israel as a pillar to help uphold its strategic objectives in the broader Middle East. Beginning at the height of the Cold War, when Israel was the main force pushing back against Soviet regional influence, the policy became known as supporting the Jewish state's "qualitative military edge" (QME). This concept was codified in U.S. law in 2008 as Israel's ability to counter or defeat credible military threats at acceptable cost to itself, and subsequent laws make it official U.S. policy to support Israel's QME. As then Vice President Biden said in 2012, "American support for Israel's security is not just an act of friendship ... it's in the fundamental national interest of the United States." In 2016, he reiterated how "We're committed to making sure that Israel can defend itself against all serious threats, maintain its qualitative edge with a quantity sufficient to maintain that."²⁸ Indeed, such support reflects America's inherent interest in ensuring the survival of the region's only democracy and longstanding U.S. ally, but it also underscores the extent to which empowering Israel's self-defense helps protect U.S. national security as well without requiring more American boots on the ground.

This is no small consideration, with the Biden Administration likely to echo its predecessor's calls for partners to share the burdens of collective defense as the United States draws down from the region and as it looks to repair some of the recent fissures that have emerged with our traditional allies. For years now the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) have assumed the main burden of pushing back militarily against Iran's regional expansion and proliferation of precision capabilities that threaten not only Israel but also America's Arab partners and many U.S. assets in the region. In recent years it also has led intelligence and counterproliferation efforts which reportedly helped foil dozens of terrorist attacks by Iran, its proxies and Islamic State, while also setting back or revealing key aspects of Iran's nuclear program.²⁹

Often in cooperation with the United States, cutting-edge Israeli R&D programs provided both countries with invaluable new capabilities like the Iron Dome air defense system, while also enabling Israel to effectively shield U.S. allies like Jordan and Egypt under its air defense umbrella.³⁰ And both the Abraham Accords and growing strategic cooperation with Greece and Cyprus represent major breakthroughs in Israel's ability to work with like-minded U.S. partners to pick up the slack from America's Middle East drawdown and general inattention to rising Turkish-driven security competition in the Eastern Mediterranean. Separately, Israel's status as a high-technology powerhouse also offers valuable opportunities for collaboration that could sharpen America's competitive edges in its growing great power competition with China.

Now the Biden Administration and Congress must expand on key Trump-era successes to bolster bilateral and multilateral cooperation against shared threats, and to help Israel continue filling the gaps between U.S. ends and means in the Middle East. The Abraham Accords between Israel and key U.S. partners like the UAE and Bahrain underscore the importance of American leadership in building concentric pressures to counter Tehran's aggression. They also demonstrate the benefits of tightening U.S. defense ties with Israel instead of seeking

daylight with Jerusalem, prioritizing rapprochement with Tehran or waiting on an elusive Israeli-Palestinian peace agreement. In this vein, the recent U.S. decision to reassign Israel to the area of responsibility for American forces in the Middle East, known as U.S. Central Command (CENTCOM), will facilitate greater Israeli defense coordination with its new Arab partners and enable American forces in the Middle East to benefit from the IDF's extensive operational experience in countering Iran and terrorism in the region.³¹

These Israeli endeavors have been critical for supporting regional stability and deterrence without placing more direct burdens on the United States. Yet they also point to the open horizons for expanded bilateral and multilateral security cooperation under the new Biden Administration.

Next Steps for a U.S.-Israel Security Agenda

The docket of mutually-beneficial opportunities for expanded U.S.-Israel security cooperation is both extensive and urgent. Whether directly or indirectly, much of this will entail significant, and visible, steps to ensure Israel's QME against myriad challenges from Iran and its highly capable proxies, as well as Turkey and prudently even Israel's increasingly well-armed Arab neighbors. Such efforts would build on the October 2020 joint declaration by Secretary of Defense Mark Esper and Defense Minister Benny Gantz confirming America's commitment to Israel's QME, which was signed shortly after a U.S. announcement that the UAE would become the only other Middle East country besides Israel to possess F-35s.³² While not explicitly related to Israel's QME, other items on this docket nevertheless would bolster each country's security by targeting shared vulnerabilities or tightening diplomatic coordination to address shared threats.

1. Upgrade the Prepositioned Weapons Stockpile in Israel

Among other things, the recent January 2021 decision to reassign Israel from the area of responsibility for U.S. forces in Europe (U.S. European Command, or EUCOM) to those for the Middle East (CENTCOM) could smooth the way for the Pentagon to upgrade its stockpiles of prepositioned weapons in Israel. Known as WRSA-I and maintained until now by EUCOM, this is intended as a readily-accessible reserve for Israel to obtain vital munitions in an emergency such as wartime. Such an insurance policy helps Israel deter aggression and minimizes the need for a challenging resupply of weapons from the United States, as occurred during the 1973 Yom Kippur War; accordingly, since it was first established in the 1980s, American officials have stated repeatedly how WRSA-I is critical to Israel's QME.³³

However, for multiple reasons the stockpile currently contains largely outdated or expired weaponry instead of the most capable, latest-generation precision guided munitions (PGM) – in particular Joint Direct Attack Munitions (JDAM) – Israel will need in abundance to prevent or prevail in a major conflict with Iran and/or Hezbollah. As part of its successful ongoing “campaign between the wars” to preemptively roll back Iran in Syria and elsewhere, Israel already has expended many of the tens of thousands of U.S.-made PGMs it purchased in recent years. Moreover, amid strains on America's own inventories from air campaigns against Islamic State, al-Qaeda and the Taliban, and with EUCOM focused on great power competition with Russia in Europe, WRSA-I has become a low priority for PGM restocking.

By creating a new paradigm for WRSA-I as a key node in America's counter-Iran posture in the Middle East, moving Israel to CENTCOM creates new incentives and opportunities for the United States to upgrade the depot with critical PGMs. This could even be viewed as an alternative to the massive ongoing sales of such weaponry to individual Arab states such as Saudi Arabia which has become controversial within many elected U.S. officials. By essentially further supporting Israel's QME, this upgrade would bolster the IDF's ability to not only defend itself but also support U.S. and moderate Arab interests by rolling back the military footprint of Iran and its proxies and by preparing for a looming major war against those forces.

With Israel in CENTCOM, WRSA-I also now can be expanded into a regional hub providing for Israeli emergency needs and CENTCOM's projected wartime requirements, in contrast to EUCOM's bilateral concept for the stockpile. Reflecting new possibilities for cooperation

embodied in the Abraham Accords as well as Israel's security cooperation with Egypt and Jordan, a regionalized stockpile could support contingency operations by Arab partner countries as well. As part of this, and to help avoid recurrent PGM shortages, the United States should consider relocating some existing CENTCOM stocks to Israel, which provides a more secure prepositioning location than other U.S. depots in the region. This would not initially involve new U.S. financial outlays.

2. Accelerate Israeli Procurement of U.S. Weapons

For decades, a centerpiece of U.S. support for Israel's QME has been defense assistance that enables Israel to purchase U.S.-made weapons and other defense products. This is spelled out in successive memoranda of understanding (MoU), including the current Obama-era agreement to provide Israel a total of \$33 billion in foreign military financing (FMF) plus \$5 billion for joint missile defenses, with the total amount for each divided evenly over U.S. fiscal years 2019-28.³⁴ Yet thanks to Iran's precipitous regional and nuclear expansion, Turkey's widening aggression and an ensuing Arab arms race to counter both threats, Israel now faces more urgent and intensive security threats to its QME than when this agreement was negotiated and signed; expected further American drawdowns from the region will magnify these burdens. Early in 2021 Israel's Defense Minister Benny Gantz discussed the strong Israeli preference for purchasing a third F-35 squadron in the very near term future.³⁵

Therefore the United States should shift forward, or "frontload," the outlays in the MoU to help Israel continue to defend itself against these urgent threats and prepare for looming major conflict with Iran and Hezbollah, without raising the annual cost of the MoU to the United States. Among other capabilities, this could accelerate Israeli procurement of critically-needed U.S. defense systems, including an additional squadron of F-35 combat aircraft, upgraded F-15 combat aircraft, latest-generation KC-46 aerial refueling tankers, CH-53K, CH-47 or V-22 long-range transport helicopters as well as missile defense systems and interceptors for these systems. In tandem with upgrades to WRSA-I (see above), frontloading also could enable much-needed replenishment of Israel's PGM stocks and reduce the risks the United States would have to conduct emergency resupply of Israel in wartime.³⁶

Frontloading would send a clear strategic signal to the broader Middle East of American policymakers' readiness to deter shared threats from Iran and others. It also would provide economic benefits. Israel already must spend the lion's share (and eventually all) of these funds on U.S.-made equipment. By enabling Israel to offer larger, longer-term contracts and assuring greater demand upfront, accelerated Israeli procurement could offer more stability for U.S. defense contractors and provide cost efficiencies that accompany bulk purchases – a relevant consideration particularly for Israel's efforts to acquire PGMs.

There are several public and private financing options to frontload the MoU without altering its terms or raising the annual cost to the United States. Most straightforwardly, the Israeli government could borrow commercially against MoU funds and decide to pay the interest in shekels or out of funds set forth in the MoU. The U.S. government would not be party to such a loan and would incur no expenses or risk associated with it. The U.S. government could enable Israel to borrow at a lower rate by guaranteeing a commercial loan, as it has done in past decades. Congress would need to authorize setting aside funds only to cover the highly unlikely contingency of an Israeli default. Washington could issue its own loan directly to Israel at a lower interest rate than Israel might find on the open market; this would entail U.S. budget

outlays and Congressional action. Separately, Congress could reauthorize and re-appropriate funds set forth in the MoU, though this would entail significantly more budget “scoring” of the entire grant amount added to pay interest.

Regardless which financing option would be pursued, and given the enormity of challenges to Israel’s QME already rendering many of the assumptions behind the current MoU moot, the United States and Israel should declare their intention to begin working on the next MoU that would be set to commence in 2028.³⁷ Likewise, active discussions should move ahead on lowering entry barriers and further integrating Israeli start-up defense industrial capacity into America’s defense manufacturing base.

3. Bolster Intelligence and Technology-Sharing Ties

The United States already benefits substantially from intelligence cooperation with Israel, including recent Israeli intelligence coups like the seizure and revelation in 2018 of highly valuable information on Tehran’s covert efforts to build a nuclear weapon, and warning the United States of possible Iranian attacks on U.S. interests in the Gulf in 2019.³⁸ Successes to date reflect both the unprecedentedly strong bilateral intelligence ties forged under the Obama Administration, and the fact the IDF spends by far the most time of any U.S. partner on the frontlines against shared adversaries.

However, classification barriers prevent Israel from sharing and comparing with the United States much of what it learns from such operations, including highly relevant data on the performance of U.S. and adversary capabilities alike – for instance the interaction between U.S. and Russian systems when Israeli operates F-35s in Syrian airspace covered by advanced S-400 air defenses. Equally important, similar barriers can prevent Israel from accessing the most advanced technologies for its U.S.-made weapons platforms, thereby undercutting its ability to defend American interests.³⁹

The United States therefore should raise Israel’s information-sharing clearance to the level enjoyed by the United Kingdom, Australia, Canada and New Zealand, who are signatories with the United States to the “Five Eyes” agreement enabling full cooperation on signals intelligence and other highly sensitive information. While diplomatic and policy obstacles prevent Israel joining this elite closed-door institution, just as they do for formal U.S. allies like Germany, instructions could be issued to release to Israel any intelligence pertaining to its security that is releasable to the Five Eyes. The Biden Administration also could issue an executive order creating a presumption of approval of sharing with Israel information, military equipment and technology (see Appendix).

4. Address the Problematic Israel-China Nexus

The United States and Israel face overlapping challenges from China’s global strategy to gain access to vital infrastructure, dual-use technology and intellectual property with which to grow its own geopolitical power and military capabilities while simultaneously undermining its competitors’ economic vitality. Israel is a close U.S. partner, on which Washington increasingly leans to protect its interests in the Middle East, and it is also a “start-up nation” on the frontlines of technological breakthroughs and a target of Chinese economic exploitation. Israel’s defense export apparatus underwent a profound and comprehensive overhaul over the past two decades since the infamous “Phalcon” affair of 2000, in which Israel cancelled the sale of

airborne early warning systems to China under U.S. pressure. Today Israeli military innovations and upgrades are strictly banned from sale to China, and an ongoing productive dialogue between the Pentagon and its counterparts in Israel is conducted to ensure continued rigorous oversight.⁴⁰

But while the United States has begun the complicated process of protecting itself from China's predatory strategy, in key respects Israeli counterefforts to date have not evinced an appreciation of the extent of the Chinese threat nor of the seriousness of U.S. concerns. To a much greater extent than the United States, Israel also lacks a comprehensive, systematic legal framework to screen inbound investment and outbound exports for problems precisely liked those posed by China. At the same time, and even as it looks increasingly to reexamine its economic relations with Beijing, Washington is not providing Israel enough guidance on how to enact the far-reaching legal and institutional reforms it is requesting. Nor has the United States shown sufficient recognition of the challenge of finding substitutes for dangerous Chinese investments nor a willingness to help Israel overcome that obstacle.

Therefore, the United States and Israel must make concrete efforts to address this challenge together. But perhaps most importantly of all, they also must take action together to build a new economic coalition that replaces the dependencies that China uses to weaken the international order. By taking the threat seriously, reforming its investment review and export control regimes, and harnessing its innovative private sector to the challenge of replacing China, Israel can secure its prosperity, draw even closer to the United States, and establish itself as a founding member of a new 21st-century strategic alliance. In return, the United States needs to make clear to Israel that will provide it with technical and economic assistance in making these difficult changes and reward it with an enhanced strategic partnership.

In addition to frontloading and improved bilateral intelligence sharing (see above), the United States can work with Israel to develop requisite protections in multiple, mutually-reinforcing ways. Building off its own existing mechanisms, the United States should provide guidance to help Israel adopt a thorough and coordinated whole-of-government strategy for assessing and responding to the threats posed by China. Such an Israeli strategy could review misappropriation of Israeli technology, strengthen counterintelligence efforts against foreign infiltration of Israeli academia, systematize protocols for screening inbound investments, bolster Israeli unilateral export controls and link Israel to relevant multilateral export control agreements.⁴¹

The United States should continue to assist and encourage Israel in developing such protections by providing information on U.S. best practices, making available American government experts to advise and consult with Israeli counterparts, acknowledging Israel's need for foreign investment, expanding U.S. financing for infrastructure projects in Israel, enabling U.S. government investment in Israel's technology sector, providing clear requirements for and assurance of granting Israel Tier 1 Strategic Trade Authorization (STA1) status and updating the U.S.-Israel Free Trade Agreement.

The United States and Israel also should work together to create investment and export opportunities that are safe for democracy, thereby establishing an economic coalition that can be joined by other like-minded allies. This would involve negotiating and signing a robust Bilateral U.S.-Israel Investment Treaty, creating a Select Committee on Technology Control as part of the U.S.-Israel Joint Economic Working Group and exploring a multinational Trusted

Capital Program. These efforts can be complementary to deeper bilateral strategic cooperation more generally; for instance, addressing U.S. concerns about Chinese investment in Haifa port could pave the way for enhanced U.S. naval deployments in Israel, including possibly relocating two forward-deployed *Arleigh Burke*-class guided missile destroyers from Rota, Spain, to a new homeport in Haifa.⁴²

U.S. policies with respect to China are undergoing their largest change since Nixon went to Beijing. Grasping that shift in full, in a clear-eyed way, and joining it is vital for Israeli security and prosperity as well as the continued strength of the U.S.-Israel partnership.

5. Enhance Bilateral Defense R&D

If Israel's status as a high-technology powerhouse increasingly makes it an attractive target for Chinese exploitation, it also reflects the fruits of a longstanding, mutually-beneficial R&D relationship with the United States – particularly in the defense sector. As a signal example, bilateral development of Israel's multilayered missile defense architecture – Iron Dome, David's Sling and Arrow – represents one of most successful joint ventures in history, with both countries now fielding some or all these world-class systems. And now, as technological and geopolitical rivalry with China (and to a lesser extent Russia) heats up, there is a growing realization in the United States that national security is intertwined with the ability to “out-innovate” strategic competitors. Counter-terrorism technology, life-saving armored vehicle defenses, counter-tunneling breakthroughs and cooperation on directed energy technology are among the other notable recent achievements in this arena, though they represent only the tip of the iceberg of possibilities over the coming decade.

Accordingly, the United States and Israel should build on decades of proven successful joint defense R&D efforts by setting their combined sights on the next logical high-technology defense-industrial joint ventures.⁴³ The most promising prospects are in space, particularly the development of sensors and advanced microsatellites, as well as artificial intelligence (AI) and machine learning, unmanned vehicles and robotics, directed energy and hypersonic weapons and advanced military medical technology. A Congressionally-mandated July 2020 Pentagon report from the Office of the Assistant Secretary of Defense for Research & Engineering reaffirmed the advantages of cooperation with Israel in such cutting-edge fields.⁴⁴

Progress on these ventures, and ensuring U.S. technological advantages more generally, will require addressing bureaucratic roadblocks and outmoded ways of thinking about U.S. defense innovation. Game-changing technological advances inherently involve certain risks of failure, but because R&D appropriations ultimately come from taxpayer dollars, the Pentagon understandably is averse to tackling riskier projects that might result in Congressional questioning over perceived wasted resources. Therefore the defense R&D budgeting process would benefit from fewer punishing mechanisms from Congress – for example, reduced or zeroed budget authorizations and appropriations – and greater tolerance for unsuccessful ventures if the Pentagon can demonstrate the worthiness of the initial investment. Complementarily, the Defense Department – from top leadership down through program managers – must begin making clear that such risk-taking is a vital element of ensuring U.S. technological superiority, and that transformational – as opposed to incremental – progress is needed. This process is nascent in the Pentagon's Defense Innovation Unit (DIU) and Army Futures Command, which have begun adapting more agile commercial-sector practices to the sclerotic defense research and acquisition systems, but this process must accelerate to make

up for lost time. Furthermore, the U.S. defense sector as a whole must concertedly address its “Not Invented Here” prejudice that reflexively rejects innovations just because they were not developed domestically. Part of combatting this mindset is an admission that good technology, such as that culled from cooperation with tech powerhouses like Israel, can encourage the development of improved technology at home, thus staving off innovation stagnation in the United States.

More specifically regarding Israel, and in addition to granting it STA1 status (see above), Congress should consider establishing a permanent umbrella body to oversee R&D collaboration among the United States, Israel and potentially Arab Gulf partners. It could identify joint capability gaps, minimize duplication of effort and direct resources more coherently based on shared policy priorities. Congress also should authorize and fund the creation of a joint U.S.-Israel R&D unit consisting of engineers and officers from both nations investigating and rapidly moving forward with prototyping, testing and fielding of both immediate tech breakthroughs and long-term defense research projects. Language contained in the recently-passed FY2021 U.S. National Defense Authorization Act may be a first step towards this laudable goal, but is still too narrow to capitalize on the full synergistic potential of American-Israeli collaboration to leverage emerging disruptive defense innovations for mutual security and to keep pace with near-peer threats in China and Russia.

6. Pursue a Common Diplomatic Front with Israel

Beyond the more directly defense-related bilateral agenda, there are also pressing strategic issues where more robust diplomatic cooperation between the United States and Israel will be crucial.

A. Approaching Nuclear Negotiations with Iran

Renewed diplomacy with Tehran over its nuclear program appears likely, including possibly the United States rejoining the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) as a prelude to further talks. This raises a host of serious concerns about inherent flaws in the JCPOA itself, but American officials also should heed one of the key shortcomings in the process of how that deal came about – namely, that it was negotiated over the heads of U.S. partners in the Middle East that would be most directly and immediately affected both by Iran’s pursuit of nuclear weapons capability and the regional implications of the windfall sanctions relief provided to Tehran under the agreement.

Therefore, as it already does with its European allies, the United States must consult proactively with relevant Middle East countries – foremost Israel, which will continue bearing the brunt of upholding U.S. interests in the region – as part of any prospective effort to rejoin the JCPOA and/or secure a follow-on agreement containing much stronger safeguards against Iran’s nuclear and regional threats. Building on the model of the Abraham Accords, serious U.S. engagement with Israel and Arab partners will present a cohesive regionwide front to Tehran.

To this end, the Biden Administration should establish open channels with high-level Israeli and Arab officials to resolve, or least minimize, public disputes over Iran policy and avoid undermining America’s bilateral relationships with its partners in the region more generally. Moreover, the State and Defense departments should conduct an internal review of the JCPOA

that solicits inputs from key domestic and international stakeholders, particularly Israel and other U.S. partners in the Middle East. Among other things, this process should consider explicitly what steps the United States will have to take to ensure Israel's QME and the security of its Arab partners.

As the turbulence surrounding the JCPOA's review by Congress in 2015 made clear, the legislative branch is another key stakeholder in the success or failure of any nuclear diplomacy with Iran. Accordingly, Congress should set up working groups with leadership from relevant committees in the House and Senate, as well as senior administration officials, to resolve legislators' concerns that a prospective agreement with Iran reflect the very real security concerns of Israel and our Arab partners.

Also, administration officials must avoid repeating the mistake from JCPOA talks of downplaying the viability of military options against Iran's nuclear program. American diplomats must convey to Iran both U.S. and Israeli preparedness to pursue such options if necessary. The credibility of such pledges can be underscored by highly visible military exercises with Israel and contingency planning to neutralize Iran's nuclear facilities and counter potential retaliation by Iran and/or its proxies in response to Israeli military action, as well as by public announcements of these steps.⁴⁵

B. Building on the Abraham Accords

Israel's normalization agreements in recent months with the UAE, Bahrain, Sudan and Morocco represent a diplomatic and strategic breakthrough in the Middle East, and America's involvement in helping secure them underscores their direct importance for strengthening regional stability and upholding U.S. interests. The recent decision to reassign Israel to CENTCOM reinforces these positive developments and offers opportunities to further bolster ties among U.S. partners in the region. This in turn could help fill some of the vacuum of power that will result from expected further drawdowns of American forces from the Middle East.⁴⁶

Thus the Biden Administration certainly should capitalize on the momentum created by these breakthroughs to deepen cooperation among Israel and its new Arab partners, in addition to pursuing normalization agreements with other countries where feasible. Israel's recent assignment to CENTCOM offers new areas for cooperation with the UAE, Bahrain and potentially others on a wide range of defense and security issues, foremost on pursuing a much-needed theater-wide missile defense network to provide much better early warning and redundant defenses against Iran's proliferation of precision missiles and drones.⁴⁷ Progress here also could help lay the groundwork for normalization efforts with additional countries by enabling Israel to begin building tacit ties with other Arab neighbors under CENTCOM's auspices. The existing accords also could be strengthened by expanding certain arenas of U.S.-Israel R&D defense collaboration to include the UAE or other Arab partners.

C. Supporting Eastern Mediterranean Stability

Somewhat understandably, American strategists largely have overlooked the Eastern Mediterranean since the end of the Cold War. Now the ongoing discovery of significant offshore energy reserves by Israel, Cyprus, Egypt and potentially others in the future, combined with rising Turkish hostility and the return of great power competition to the region, necessitates greater U.S. engagement with this increasingly pivotal geostrategic crossroads.⁴⁸

Fortunately, as in the heart of the Middle East, steps already taken by Israel and other U.S. partners in the region also advance U.S. interests. It is incumbent on Washington to encourage further such cooperation that promotes energy security, applies brakes on largely unchecked Turkish aggression and signals to allies and adversaries alike that the Eastern Mediterranean is back as a critical focus for U.S. grand strategy. To date, U.S. involvement has been mostly rhetorical, even as U.S. companies are already extracting natural gas from Israeli and Cypriot fields, and as more American companies appear set to become involved in Eastern Mediterranean energy exploration.

The new administration should undertake much more persistent diplomatic engagement with, and public backing of, the Israel-Greece-Cyprus “trilateral” forum for coordination on regional energy, security and economic issues. The preceding administration took initial, occasional steps to signal general U.S. support for the trilateral, but American officials now should consider expanding the forum into a quadrilateral format with full U.S. participation.⁴⁹ Among other benefits, this would underscore America’s commitment to defending the legal rights of its companies as they become more involved in Eastern Mediterranean energy exploration. Washington also should consider participating in joint military exercises among Israel, Greece, Cyprus and others in the region, or at least sending observers. Additionally, the United States could expand and entrench the Abraham Accords by supporting Emirati efforts to work more directly with, and possibly join, the existing Israel-Greece-Cyprus trilateral.

American diplomats also should work with Israel and the other members of the EastMed Gas Forum (EMGF) to further the cooperative development of the region’s major recent energy discoveries and its potential for significant additional finds. This forum, which was established in early 2020 and which also includes Cyprus, Egypt, Greece, Italy, Jordan and the Palestinian Authority as current members, is yet another instance of proactive initial Israeli policies that can advance U.S. interests. Greater U.S. involvement in this consortium offers the advantage of working with pro-U.S. countries that already share the overarching goal of turning the region into a major energy hub, and that have taken concrete steps to coordinate among themselves toward that end. It also would help create meaningful opposition to Turkey’s growing efforts, amid the COVID-19 pandemic, to thwart these efforts by EMGF countries.⁵⁰

7. Defend Continued Defense Assistance to Israel

Advancing a productive U.S.-Israel security agenda also will have a domestic component for the Biden Administration and the new Congress. As stated above, defense assistance to Israel is an inherently sound investment that produces outsized returns for U.S. national security. The current MoU on defense assistance, the largest ever such commitment to a U.S. ally, was negotiated by the Obama-Biden Administration, and senior members of the new administration, including the president himself, have been outspoken in their support for the MoU and the benefits to U.S. interests of ensuring Israel’s QME. Both during and since the Obama-Biden Administration, President Biden has maintained a rhetorical firewall protecting this assistance from very real, and often contentious, policy disagreements with Israel over the Palestinians, Iran or other issues.⁵¹

Yet, amid both the most recent Democratic presidential primary and the expected but then postponed Israeli extension of sovereignty (what some call “annexation”) to parts of the West Bank last summer, there has been a growing chorus of calls in the progressive wing of the Democratic Party to break down this firewall and condition U.S. defense assistance on Israeli policy toward the Palestinians.

Going forward, given growing momentum behind calls for conditioning aid, it will not be enough for the new administration simply to continue insisting on this firewall. Reestablishing a bipartisan consensus on the importance of U.S. assistance to Israel, without conditions, is critical. This will require Biden Administration officials and other Democratic Party leaders clearly making the case that aid to Israel is critical both to protecting U.S. national security interests, by preserving America's relationship with its most important and capable strategic and operational partner in the Middle East, and to creating the conditions that might enable future peace with the Palestinians, just as it historically has supported normalization with a growing number of Arab states. Indeed, effective rules already are embedded in U.S. law to restrict how Israel can use U.S. defense assistance, and Washington has exercised consistent vigilance ensuring Israel complies with these requirements.

Furthermore, rather than being used against Palestinians, U.S. military assistance to Israel helps protect Palestinians and Israelis alike, affording Jerusalem a level of strategic patience that minimizes its need or urgency for potentially escalatory military campaigns. It also conforms with an established pattern dating back to the Israel-Egypt peace treaty and the Oslo Accords of U.S. security assurances for Israel, in exchange for Israel taking serious risks to accomplish peace with its Arab neighbors and the Palestinians. In this light, the MoU is not merely an aid package to Israel but a vehicle for encouraging peace.

Therefore the Biden Administration should prioritize engaging progressives to counter the growing hostility to military aid for Israel, and to clarify how such assistance can actually have beneficial impacts on Israeli policy toward the Palestinians. It also should issue public statements explaining how U.S. security guarantees can enable Israel to take strategic risks in pursuit of a comprehensive peace agreement with the Palestinians, and update Obama Administration statements and publications that laid out how Israel's QME contributes to Middle East stability and serves vital U.S. national security objectives. Congress should echo these arguments through its own statements of policy, resolutions, public letters and hearings, as well as clearer and more fully elaborated justification and explanatory language in future authorizing legislation on U.S. defense assistance to and strategic cooperation with Israel, explaining how such assistance is in America's self-interest.

Appendix

Draft Executive Order for U.S.-Israel Sharing of Information, Military Equipment and Technology:

“It is the policy of the United States to approve sharing of information with Israel, as well as licenses and other approvals for exports and imports of Defense Articles and Defense Services (e.g., technology), destined for or originating in Israel, including but not limited to those identified in the International Traffic in Arms Regulations, (e.g., Category XI (Military Electronics) and Category XII (Fire Control, Laser, Imaging, and Guidance Equipment) in Section 121.1, The United States Munitions List, of Title 22, Chapter I, Subchapter M of the Code of Federal Regulations.”

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