

From Partner to Ally: The Case for a U.S.-Israel Mutual Defense Treaty

KEY FINDINGS

- The United States has a historic opportunity to establish a U.S.-led Middle Eastern security architecture through a mutual defense pact (MDP) with Israel that would pledge each partner to come to the other's defense in exceptional circumstances.
- Upgrading Israel from a partner to an ally would address common threats, stabilize the region, and serve as a genuine force multiplier to advance U.S. global interests while reducing the need for American boots on the ground.
 - » The United States currently has 52 treaty allies on five continents, but none in the Middle East, even though the region is home to enduring U.S. interests and one of its most capable partners: Israel.
 - » For seventy-plus years, no war has ever threatened the existence of any U.S. treaty ally.
 - » The Biden administration's National Defense Strategy [highlights](#) the value of MDPs, noting that “mutually-beneficial alliances...are our greatest strategic advantage.”
 - » JINSA first proposed such a pact with Israel, including a draft treaty, in 2018.
- New developments highlight the increasing importance of establishing this alliance.
 - » The Ukraine conflict is a reminder of why MDPs matter: Russia clearly avoids risking escalation with NATO, enabling U.S. allies to do more to support Kyiv.
 - » Meanwhile, the Middle East grows more volatile, with Iran, Russia, and China surging into the region, while traditional partners question America's staying power.
- Alongside a U.S. security guarantee for Saudi Arabia as part of Saudi-Israel normalization, an MDP with Israel would lay the cornerstone for a new Middle East security architecture that leverages U.S. regional partnerships to advance U.S. interests. Key benefits include:
 - » Providing a unique extra layer of shared deterrence to reduce the risk of war by giving Iran serious pause before going nuclear or escalating its threats to America and Israel.
 - » Sharpening America's focus to compete against China and Russia, by reducing the risks of major Middle East conflict without requiring more U.S. boots on the ground.
 - » Deepening U.S.-Israel intelligence cooperation and joint development of the full spectrum of cutting-edge civilian and military technologies to ensure their primacy over adversarial competitors for decades to come.
 - » Better aligning Israeli policy with America's on China and Russia.

- » Signaling continued U.S. regional commitment that will encourage Israel-Arab security cooperation and reduce Arab partners' incentives to hedge toward Tehran, Beijing, and Moscow.
- » Enhancing Israel's freedom of action and actually strengthening its ability to defend itself by itself to better counter Tehran's regionwide military entrenchment, thus reducing direct burdens on the United States and remaining true to Israel's founding ethos.
- » Stabilizing the U.S.-Israel partnership and supporting Israel's self-defense for decades to come, including via a long-term MOU on bilateral security assistance.
- JINSA's proposed treaty would apply only under exceptional circumstances in a limited geographic area:
 - » An existential threat to Israel; or
 - » The use, or threat, of weapons of mass destruction against Israel or U.S. forces based in Israel's Abraham Accords partners.
 - » Compared to existing MDPs, this higher threshold serves both countries' interests in avoiding being triggered by frequent lower-level armed attacks against Israel.
- Like all of America's alliances, an Israeli MDP would fully acknowledge each ally retains its full sovereignty and independence, including strategic and military freedom of action.
 - » While each treaty commits the allies to treat an attack on one as a threat to their own security, it only requires that they confer in the event either of them activates the treaty and respond in ways consistent with their constitutional provisions and processes.
 - » The United States and its allies have regularly pursued separate foreign policies, often over each other's objections, for seventy-plus years while still upholding their respective MDPs.

America's Global Network of Mutual Defense Pacts

