



# Key Middle East Provisions in the Fiscal Year 2025 National Defense Authorization Act

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A successful end is in sight for this year's National Defense Authorization Act ([NDAA](#)), after the Senate and House of Representatives completed many months of hard work to resolve hundreds of significant differences between their respective versions of the bill to get to a consolidated final product. The House passed the updated bill with a strong bipartisan vote of [281-140](#) on December 11 and the Senate voted [83-12](#) to end debate on the bill on Monday, December 16. A final Senate vote will occur as soon as today, and President Biden is expected to sign it into law shortly thereafter.

The NDAA remains must-pass legislation for Congress each year due to its importance in both framing U.S. national security policy across a broad spectrum of issues and enabling effective congressional oversight of the U.S. Department of Defense (DoD). As they have for the past few years, Congress also amended the final NDAA bill text to include the Intelligence and State Department Authorization Acts, contributing to the bill's 1,780-page mammoth size.

Dozens of provisions designed to strengthen U.S. security and advance U.S. interests in the Middle East were included in the final NDAA, including key provisions inspired and impacted by JINSA's original research.

## JINSA-Impacted Provisions

- **Strengthen regional security cooperation in the Middle East:**
  - » **Support ongoing efforts to integrate the Air and Missile Defense (IAMD) systems of U.S. allies and partners by authorizing the Secretary of Defense to advise and assist the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan in countering air and missile threats from Iran** and require the Secretary to assess the feasibility of further integrating Jordan in the emerging IAMD architecture, consistent with JINSA's [Build it and They Will Come](#) report recommendations; and
  - » **Expand cooperation in the space domain via the "Space Technology and Regional Security Act of 2024," or "STARS Act,"** which requires DoD to develop a strategy and data-sharing agreement to protect allies and partners in the Middle East from hostile Iranian activities in space, consistent with JINSA's [U.S. Should Leverage Middle East Partners to Boost Space Capabilities](#) brief.
- **Strengthen American and Israeli subterranean warfare capabilities** as recommended by JINSA's [The October 7 War: Observations](#) report:
  - » [Authorize](#) \$30 million in additional funding beyond the President's budget request to strengthen the United States – Israel Anti-Tunnel Cooperation program and [clarifying](#) this funding can be used to help Israel develop better technology to *maneuver* in tunnels, in addition to detecting, mapping, and neutralizing them; and

- » [Require](#) annual subterranean warfare exercises between American and Israeli military forces and calling for bolstering joint cooperation to develop technology to interdict terrorists and smuggling operations in the future.
- **Require the Secretary of Defense to provide a report and briefing on the operational value of the Al-Udeid Air Base in Qatar**, given the presence of Hamas and other United States-designated terrorist organizations in that nation, an issue JINSA first raised in 2017 with our op-ed [The Two Faces of Qatar, a Dubious Mideast Ally](#).
- **Help the State Department better protect Americans from being taken hostage by Iran and other hostile nations**, as recommended by JINSA's [Rethinking U.S. Hostage Policy in Gaza and Beyond](#) brief:
  - » [Require](#) the Special Presidential Envoy for Hostage Affairs to provide a strategy for reducing the likelihood of U.S. nationals being unlawfully or wrongfully detained or taken hostage; and
  - » [Enhance](#) United States Travel Advisories to Level 4 "Do Not Travel" nations such as Iran to discourage travel to these locations.

## Key Middle East Provisions

### Iron Dome Short-Range Rocket Defense System and Israel Cooperative Missile Defense Program Co-Development and Co-Production

- [Sec. 1644](#): Authorizes \$110 million in funding for the Government of Israel to procure components for Iron Dome through co-production of relevant components in the United States. Also includes \$40 million for the David's Sling Weapon System and \$50 million for the Arrow 3 Upper Tier Interception Program.
- [Sec. 1211](#): Further notes it is the policy of the United States to work with Israel to ensure adequate stocks of interceptors and weapons system components to defend Israel against air and missile threats from Iran and Iranian military proxies. The NDAA's [Joint Explanatory Statement](#) includes a requirement directing the Secretary of Defense, in consultation with the Secretary of State and the Government of Israel where feasible, to submit a report on the extent to which Israel was subject to aerial attacks, from rockets or missiles between October 7, 2023 and December 31, 2024, that Israel countered by deploying or utilizing not less than 50 Iron Dome interceptors, David's Sling or Arrow defense systems. The report shall include a listing of the number of said deployed interceptors, the estimated cost of deploying interceptors and components and munitions required for their replenishment.
- [Analysis](#): Consistent with the 10-year U.S.-Israel Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) and President's Budget request, the final NDAA fully authorizes funding for these important joint cooperative missile defense programs, which are vital to helping Israel maintain its Qualitative Military Edge (QME) and defend civilians from rockets and missiles. The reporting requirement will help clarify Israel's anticipated future needs in this area. While important, unfortunately by itself [Iron Dome Is Not Enough to Make Israel Safe](#).

### Further Improvements to Integrated Air and Missile Defense (IAMD) Efforts with U.S. Allies and Partners in the Middle East

- [Sec. 1643](#): Authorizes the Secretary of Defense to advise and assist the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan in countering air and missile threats from Iran. It would also require the Secretary of Defense to assess the feasibility of including Jordan in the multinational integrated air and missile defense architecture that is the process of being built under America's leadership in the Middle East and renew the reporting required originally mandated by the DEFEND Act of 2022 to report on progress made towards creating this system.

- **Analysis:** JINSA has been a fierce advocate for a comprehensive U.S. strategy for integrating the air and missile defense systems of our regional partners in the Middle East, beginning with our ground-breaking 2022 Abraham Accords Project report, [A Stronger and Wider Peace](#), and followed by our 2023 report [Build It and They Will Come](#). Given Jordan's key role in defeating Iran's attacks in April 2024, when the region's nascent air and missile defense alliance successfully neutralized a barrage of over 300 Iranian projectiles fired at Israel, this provision helpfully and explicitly underlines the importance of including Jordan in this emerging IAMD architecture.

### Report on U.S.-Israel Cooperation to Counter Iranian Drones

- **Joint Explanatory Statement:** Directs the Secretary of Defense to submit a briefing on the status of cooperation between the United States and Israel on efforts to counter threats from the Iran, including the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps and any Iran-backed group operating in Iraq, Syria, Lebanon, or Yemen specifically associated with the employment of unmanned aerial systems, including loitering munitions otherwise known as "suicide" or "kamikaze" drones.
- **Analysis:** As noted above, cooperation between Israel and its Arab neighbors paid significant dividends in April when the region's nascent IAMD alliance successfully neutralized a barrage of over 300 Iranian projectiles aimed at Israel. Additional insight into the evolving threats in the region to further improve these defensive systems would be valuable as a broader IAMD construct continues to evolve.

### Expanding and Deepening Defense Cooperation in Space Within CENTCOM's Area of Responsibility

- **Sec. 1609:** The "Space Technology and Regional Security Act of 2024" or "STARS Act", was originally introduced by Senate Abraham Accords Caucus Co-Chairs Sens. Jacky Rosen (D-NV) and Joni Ernst (R-IA), and requires the Secretary of Defense to prepare a space and satellite security assessment for partners in the Middle East to improve data sharing agreements; better coordinate intelligence, reconnaissance, and surveillance (ISR) capabilities; and better protect space systems from Iranian threats.
- **Analysis:** Previously JINSA-supported NDAA provisions such as the DEFEND Act, passed into law two years ago, helped strengthen U.S. efforts to foster better cooperation between Israel and its Arab neighbors against the mounting threat of Iran's missile arsenal. The STARS Act looks to further improve this air defense architecture by seeking ways to utilize 21<sup>st</sup> Century technology to better deter Iranian aggression in the space domain, in line with recommendations from JINSA's brief: [U.S. Should Leverage Middle East Partners to Boost Space Capabilities](#).

### U.S.-Israel Subterranean Warfare Provisions

- The bill **authorizes** \$30 million to continue United States – Israel Anti-Tunnel Cooperation under the Combating Terrorism Technology Support program umbrella. **Sec. 1212** further clarifies U.S. joint funding can be used to help Israel develop better technology to *maneuver* in tunnels, in addition to detecting, mapping, and neutralizing them.
- **Sec. 1213:** Requires annual subterranean warfare exercises between American and Israeli military forces and calls for bolstering joint cooperation to develop technology to interdict terrorists and smuggling operations in the future.
- **Analysis:** Hamas's use of tactical and strategic tunnels under Gaza has presented serious challenges for the IDF. These provisions were inspired by observations from JINSA's [The October 7 War: Observations](#) report which describes the effectiveness of IDF operations to dismantle Hamas's tactical and strategic tunnel network, including by adapting its tactics and

maneuvering simultaneously above and below ground, and the potential value to American forces adopting such tactics and procedures.

### Cooperation Between the U.S. and Israel on Emerging Technologies

- The final bill authorizes allocates \$154 million to jointly carry out research, development, testing, and evaluation with Israel in the areas of artificial intelligence, cybersecurity, robotics, quantum, and automation to meet emerging defense challenges posed by regional and global adversaries under the Combating Terrorism Technology Support program. Another requirement included in the [Joint Explanatory Statement](#) requests a briefing on the feasibility and advisability of including Israel in the National Technology Industrial Base (NTIB). A third ([Sec. 1214](#)) seeks to establish a partnership between the U.S. Defense Innovation Unit (DIU) and the Israeli military to enhance market opportunities for U.S.-based and Israeli-based defense technology companies, bolster Israel's industrial base, harmonize global security posture, and counter Iranian development of dual-use defense technologies.
- **Analysis:** JINSA has frequently contended examining ways for the U.S. military to take full advantage of Israel's capabilities as a Start Up Nation could provide significant long-term dividends to both nations.

### Implementation of a Middle East Exchange Program

- [Sec. 1221](#): Originally [introduced](#) by Senate Abraham Accords Co-Chairs Sens. Jacky Rosen (D-NV) and Joni Ernst (R-IA) as the Learning Integrated National Knowledge (LINK) Act, this provision will establish a military expert exchange program with Abraham Accords countries and other regional partners to connect strategic, operational, and tactical senior commanders and strengthen security and military partnerships, and thereby enhance regional cooperation and integration.
- **Analysis:** As JINSA previously recommended in [A Stronger and Wider Peace: A U.S. Strategy for Advancing the Abraham Accords](#), finding ways to encourage Israel and its new Arab partners to train and plan together under U.S. auspices helps build military-to-military ties, increases interoperability, and bolsters deterrence and operational effectiveness against shared threats.

### Developing Strategies to Secure the Gaza-Egypt Border from Hamas's Smuggling Operations

- [Joint Explanatory Statement](#): Requires the Secretary of Defense, in coordination with the Secretary of State, to submit a report outlining steps that Israel, Egypt, and the United States can take to enhance international security measures on the border between Gaza and Egypt to ensure Hamas and other actors do not use tunnels or methods via the Mediterranean Sea to smuggle weapons and illicit goods. The report shall include a detailed description and map indicating existing tunnels on the border between Gaza and Egypt.
- **Analysis:** The sizable number of cross-border tunnels between Gaza and Egypt continue to pose a security threat to Israelis and Palestinians alike, threatening the rise of a resurgent Hamas by enabling Hamas to smuggle further arms in and allowing Hamas leaders to escape from the Gaza Strip and continue to plot attacks from abroad. For more on this topic from JINSA, see: [Egypt-Gaza Tunnels Pose Threat to Israel's War Aims](#).

### U.S. Support for Targeting Senior Hamas Officials

- [Sec. 1615](#): Urges the Department of Defense to provide Israel intelligence, advice, and support, to the extent practicable and consistent with United States objectives, to assist in either capturing or killing senior Hamas officials in support Israel's pursuit of the lasting defeat of Hamas.

- **Analysis:** The measure is in response to a *Washington Post* [story](#) in May that seemed to imply the Biden administration was withholding “sensitive intelligence to help the Israeli military pinpoint the location of Hamas leaders” to limit IDF operations in Rafah. Such an implication provoked a strong backlash, since Hamas has been [designated](#) as a Foreign Terrorist Organization by the United States since 1997, and this language is designed to remove any ambiguity regarding U.S. policy.

### **Funding Restrictions on the U.S.-Joint Logistics Over the Shore System (JLOTS) Gaza Pier**

- **Sec. 1708:** Prohibits the use of DoD funding in fiscal year 2025 to acquire, construct, install, maintain, operate, or restore a pier off the coast of Gaza.
- **Analysis:** The provision reflects widespread concern over the effectiveness of the Gaza pier, including by JINSA Senior Fellow John Hannah who [argued](#) that “figuring out how things went so badly awry should be a target-rich environment for congressional oversight.” The pier faced significant operational challenges during its deployment, despite the investment of more than [\\$320 million](#) into the project. These challenges include two instances of the pier breaking apart due to rough waters and instances of humanitarian aid piling up on the nearby beach due to the [unwillingness](#) of UN workers to distribute the aid. Inspectors General at the Pentagon and the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) have also [launched](#) independent investigations.

### **Assessment on the Accuracy of Gaza Health Ministry Casualty Reporting**

- **Joint Explanatory Statement:** Direct the Director of the Defense Intelligence Agency (DIA) to submit a report and briefing assessing the accuracy of the reporting of the Gaza Ministry of Health. The report and briefing shall include the total reported casualty figures and the age and gender distributions.
- **Analysis:** This provision echoes concerns highlighted in JINSA’s [brief](#) on the challenges presented by Hamas’s manipulation of casualty statistics in order to achieve information warfare objectives. The Hamas-run Gaza Health Ministry has never distinguished between Hamas military operatives and civilians in its casualty reporting, nor has it distinguished between those killed as a result of IDF action and those as a result of Hamas action. The lack of consistent and precise casualty reporting remains problematic when assessing the human toll of the war in Gaza.

### **Assessment of Al-Udeid Air Base in Qatar**

- **Joint Explanatory Statement:** The Secretary of Defense shall provide a report and briefing on the operational value of the Al-Udeid Air Base in Qatar, given the presence of Hamas and other United States-designated terrorist organizations in that nation. The report must include details on the operational value of the base, whether the presence of Hamas and other terrorists in Qatar undermines the national security interests of the United States, and effect on United States Air Force operations in the Middle East if the United States were to redeploy elsewhere.
- **Analysis:** JINSA has long been skeptical of Qatar’s dual role hosting an important U.S. air base while simultaneously undermining American security by providing sanctuary to radical Islamic groups like Hamas. Clarifying the operational value of Al-Udeid will provide strengthened diplomatic leverage with Qatar moving forward. JINSA first raised this issue in 2017 with our op-ed [The Two Faces of Qatar, a Dubious Mideast Ally](#), and highlighted it repeatedly in the years since, including in a webinar this year with [Sen. Rick Scott \(R-FL\)](#), the lead sponsor of this provision.

## Strategy to Protect the Al-Tanf Garrison

- [Joint Explanatory Statement](#): Directs the Secretary of Defense to submit a report related to activities in Syria including the number and description of attacks by Iran-backed militias at Al-Tanf Garrison and other United States positions in Syria between October 7, 2023 and December 31, 2024; Russian violations of deconfliction agreements with the United States in Syria including Al-Tanf Garrison; and interactions between Iran-backed militias, the Islamic State of Iraq and al-Sham (ISIS), the Russian Federation, and the Assad regime.
- [Analysis](#): The provision seeks to bolster the U.S. presence at Al-Tanf Garrison and deter threats to American troops and partner forces following the death of three American soldiers from a [drone strike](#) on the facility on January 28, 2024. A group calling itself “Islamic Resistance in Iraq,” a conglomerate of Shi’ite factions supported by Iran across Syria, Iraq, Yemen and Lebanon, claimed responsibility for the attack. The attack came as the group has dramatically expanded its antagonistic behavior towards U.S. forces in the region.

## Prohibition on the Use of Funds to Iranian Entities

- Similar to provisions included in [last year’s NDAA](#), two provisions this year prohibit the use of DoD funding to Iran and Iranian-linked entities. [Sec. 1224](#) bars the use of DoD funds for the Iranian government, any person controlled by the Iranian government, or any person on the List of Specially Designated Nationals and Blocked Persons maintained by the Office of Foreign Assets Control (OFAC) at the Treasury Department. [Sec. 1057](#) further bars the use of DoD funds for the Iraqi Badr Organization.
- [Analysis](#): These provisions are intended to prevent a repeat of the 2016 transfer of \$1.7 billion in dollars and other currencies to Iran as part of a deal negotiated by the Obama administration to release several U.S. hostages held by Iran. The Departments of State and Treasury have been reluctant to issue sanctions against the Iraqi Badr Organization, a Shi’a Islamist political party and military organization, despite its deep ties to Iran’s Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps, over concern about the potential destabilizing impact of such a move on the Iraqi government, whose governing coalitions include these pro-Iranian groups.

## Notification to Congress Relating to Iranian Arms Trafficking

- [Sec. 1225](#): Requires the Secretary of Defense to notify Congress about any identified transfer of weapons, ammunition, or component parts by Iran to a terrorist proxy group or state actor outside of Iranian territory no later than 30 days after this occurs. The notification would also include a description of actions taken or planned to be taken by U.S. armed forces or a U.S. partner in the region to expose or thwart such transfers of weaponry.
- [Analysis](#): Iran’s vast network of smuggling routes have fueled its proxy groups and fomented instability throughout the region. In particular, supply lines through Iraq, Syria, and Jordan have created a direct pipeline of Iranian arms to Hezbollah, Hamas, Palestinian Islamic Jihad (PIJ) militants, which place millions of Israeli and Palestinian lives at risk. JINSA has [argued](#) that the United States must play a larger role in detecting, exposing, and preventing Iran’s smuggling operations, especially with regards to the West Bank and Lebanon.

## Analysis of Iran’s Support for Non-State Actors in North Africa

- [Joint Explanatory Statement](#): Requires the Secretary of Defense to provide a briefing on Iran’s support for non-state actors in North Africa and any threats that such support may pose to U.S. allies, partners, and interests in the region by May 1, 2025.
- [Analysis](#): Gaining a stronger understanding of how Iran may be attempting to expand its so-called “Axis of Resistance” to North Africa will improve efforts to counter such malign activity.

## Report on Assad Regime’s Support and Cooperation With Iran-backed Militias in Syria

- [Joint Explanatory Statement](#): Direct the Secretary of Defense, in consultation with the Secretary of State, to submit a report on Iran-backed militias in Syria by June 1, 2025 on existing and required authorities and resources to detect, monitor, and counter Iran-backed militias in Syria and protect United States servicemembers from Iran-backed militia attacks; freedom of movement of Iranian proxies, particularly between Abu Kamal and the deconfliction zone in eastern Syria, and the operational implications; efforts and capabilities of Iran-backed militias to transport weapons and weapons systems from Syria into Lebanon; and Iran's efforts and capabilities to sustain military threats on United States positions in Syria and maintain support to Hezbollah from Syria.
- [Analysis](#): Since the increase in proxy warfare in Syria following the October 7<sup>th</sup> attacks, JINSA has [argued](#) that the United States must prioritize countering Iran in Syria and work to diminish Iran's footprint and freedom to maneuver in one of the United States' most strategically significant areas of operation. The State Department and Defense Department alike have condemned the [Iran-backed proxy violence](#) and weapons smuggling operations in Syria since October 7<sup>th</sup> but largely refrained from taking significant steps to address these threats outside of a series of U.S. strikes on February 2<sup>nd</sup>. The stunning and rapid collapse of Syria's ruling Assad regime in recent days is the latest domino to fall in Iran's regional axis, further weakening Tehran's strategic deck of cards. Gaining as much insight as possible into prior Iranian activities in Syria to maintain the pressure on the Iranian axis will be particularly valuable moving forward.

### Countering the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS)

- [Sec. 1231](#): Reauthorizes U.S. assistance to counter the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria for one year and add a requirement for equipment and training to counter threats from unmanned aerial systems. Additionally, would increase the Overseas Contingency Fund from \$242 million to \$381 million to help counter the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria.
- [Analysis](#): Given rapidly shifting regional dynamics, ISIS has altered its terror operations and efforts to destabilize Iraq and Syria, prompting the need for increased U.S. support of trusted Syrian groups and officials who fight to prevent ISIS's rise. These provisions help ensure that the United States maintains its footprint in a region marred by the effects of terrorism.

### Extension of Authority to Provide Assistance to Vetted Syrian Groups and Individuals

- [Sec. 1232](#): Extend DoD authority to provide assistance to vetted Syrian groups for one year.
- [Analysis](#): Congress remains focused on at a minimum maintaining existing Syria policy by continuing to support the Syrian Democratic Forces who opposed Assad, including through military assistance. How this support will be impacted by recent events remains unclear.

### Report on Iranian Oil Sales Proceeds

- [Sec. 1707](#): Requires the President to submit a report assessing how the proceeds from illicit Iranian oil sales contribute to Iran's military and security budget. In particular, the report would examine how these proceeds are distributed between Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC), Hamas, Hezbollah, and other Iranian proxies.
- [Analysis](#): JINSA has long advocated that the key mechanism to deprive the Iranian regime of war funds is to limit its oil exports through strict enforcement of oil sanctions. When it came into office, the Biden administration suspended enforcement of most Iran sanctions in an unsuccessful bid to entice the regime to rejoin the 2015 nuclear deal. The results of this gambit have been disastrous. Iran's foreign currency reserves have skyrocketed and ["golden days"](#) have returned for the regime's various terror and repression arms. Getting greater clarity on exactly how much oil revenue Iran has been able to divert to fund its terrorist proxies would be a valuable exercise for the incoming Trump administration as they work to restore a Maximum Pressure campaign against Iran.

## Assessment of Iranian Centrifuge Installation

- [Joint Explanatory Statement](#): Directs the Secretary of Defense to submit a report not later than February 1, 2025, on Iranian centrifuge installation which includes an assessment of the types and numbers of centrifuges installed in declared and undeclared nuclear facilities in Iran since May 2021, the timeline required by Iran to produce weapons-grade uranium, the current timeline required by Iran to produce weapons-grade uranium, whether Iran has moved advanced centrifuges to facilities other than its safeguarded enrichment plants, including where and how many, if applicable, how many advanced centrifuges Iran would need of each type to enrich to weapons-grade, and whether a heavily fortified nuclear facility Iran is building near the Natanz site contains or will contain an enrichment plant.
- [Analysis](#): Despite the inclusion of [stringent reporting requirements](#) sponsored by Sen. Lindsey Graham (R-SC) in last year's NDAA for the Director of National Intelligence to report on the state of the Iranian nuclear program, the Biden administration has been [reticent](#) about providing Congress with the statutorily required reports. This duplicative provision is illustrative of continued congressional concern regarding Iran's efforts to develop a nuclear capability, and skepticism regarding President Biden's [claimed](#) "unshakeable commitment to prevent Iran from acquiring a nuclear weapon."

## Help the State Department Better Protect Americans from Being Taken Hostage by Iran And Other Hostile Nations

- [Sec. 7702](#): Directs the Specific Presidential Envoy for Hostage Affairs to provide a strategy for reducing the likelihood of U.S. nationals being unlawfully or wrongfully detained or taken hostage. [Sec. 7704-5](#) enhances United States Travel Advisories to Level 4 "Do Not Travel" nations and coordination with the transportation industry to discourage travel to Iran and other hostile nations.
- [Analysis](#): As noted by JINSA's [Rethinking U.S. Hostage Policy in Gaza and Beyond](#) brief compared to a decade ago, there has been a 175% increase in the number of hostage-taking incidents by hostile governments and terror groups involving Americans. That was before Hamas took around a dozen Americans, alongside some 240 others, hostage on October 7. The U.S. policy response – across continents and administrations – has often exacerbated this trend, rewarding hostage-takers with political and monetary concessions instead of deterring and penalizing them. There is an urgent need to change course to avoid more Americans being taken hostage and these provisions are a helpful step in that direction.

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