



Shifting the Center of Gravity: Transforming the U.S.-Israel Security Partnership





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I. Executive Summary

Despite being a small country of 10 million, Israel today is arguably America's most important ally. The security benefits that the United States derives from this partnership far exceed the assistance it provides Israel. By a substantial margin, Israel is the leading military and intelligence power in a region of the world critical to U.S. interests. Its high-tech economy is among the most innovative and dynamic on the planet, driving investment and growth in the United States. Both its government and society are unabashedly pro-American. Yet, for a variety of complex reasons, Israel's political support in the United States has significantly eroded in recent years. Indeed, never in recent memory has there been a larger disconnect between the strategic contributions that an ally consistently makes to the enhancement of U.S. security and prosperity and its declining political standing among the American public.

We believe the choice to be clear. Israel's value as a U.S. partner is unmatched. It is already a critical U.S. ally. In the coming decades, as America increasingly shifts its strategic focus to Asia and as the technological competition with China becomes more intense, Israel's importance to U.S. national interests will only grow. That is why further deepening U.S. cooperation with Israel—militarily, technologically, and economically—will only strengthen American security and prosperity.

That said, given prevailing political winds at home, upgrading the U.S. alliance with Israel will require shifting the center of gravity of the bilateral relationship from providing U.S. military assistance—however mutually beneficial it may be to both countries—to true mutual collaboration. This should take the form of a new, and final, Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) that keeps U.S. military assistance at \$3.8 billion annually, on average, for the next ten years and is paired with new, mostly non-monetary initiatives that deepen and expand the U.S.-Israel partnership. It should also include shifting the center of gravity of U.S. force posture in the Middle East toward Israel and away from vulnerable bases near Iran, a shift that will provide U.S. forces greater security, interoperability, and freedom of action.

A. A Tale of Two Israels

i. Model Strategic Ally

Following the murderous October 7, 2023 attack, Israel degraded Hamas militarily, severely degraded Hezbollah, helped trigger the collapse of the Assad regime in Syria, and conducted the brunt of the 12-Day War against Iran in June 2025. Moreover, during this year's 40-day military campaign against Iran, America had an ally that, for the first time since the Second World War, fought shoulder-to-shoulder with it, carrying an equal share of the combat burden and risk, with historic levels of joint planning, intelligence integration, and operational coordination. This extraordinary cooperation was enabled by President Donald Trump's decision in January 2021, with little fanfare, to move Israel from the area of responsibility (AOR) of U.S. European Command (EUCOM) to that of U.S. Central Command (CENTCOM), America's Mideast military command, a move for which JINSA had advocated since 2018.¹

The Iran war underscored a reality that has grown increasingly obvious in recent years: No other U.S. ally comes close to matching Israel's military prowess. More Israeli Air Force (IAF) planes flew on February 28, the first day of the war, than there are combat aircraft in all of Britain's Royal Air Force.² Over the course of the war's first 40 days, Israel conducted nearly half of the total sorties flown against Iran.³ Israeli air bases and airports have hosted, and Israeli air defenses have protected, over 100 U.S. military aircraft, as well as

thousands of American military personnel.⁴ Israel has made clear that it is prepared to play a similar role should President Trump decide to resume major military operations.

Israel's extraordinary capabilities are combined with an unparalleled willingness to project power at great distance to combat our common adversaries. It does so not as a subordinate force making contributions at the margins of U.S. power but as a full partner in the fight. No other American ally, except Ukraine, has demonstrated a comparable willingness to fight at all, let alone develop cutting-edge combat capabilities and tactics that redound to America's benefit. Indeed, the United Kingdom, which for most of the post-World War II era legitimately laid claim to a special relationship as America's preeminent strategic partner, refused to even allow U.S. forces to use its bases on the eve of battle against an Iranian regime that has been at war with America and the West for nearly half a century.⁵ Other NATO nations, such as Spain, went even further, denying the use of its airspace to U.S. forces.⁶ Worse, Turkey, another NATO member, reportedly warned it would consider aligning with Iran.⁷

Former U.S. Secretary of State Alexander Haig once famously called Israel an "American aircraft carrier in the world that cannot be sunk, does not carry even one American soldier, and is located in a critical region."⁸ That description has never been more apt. But it no longer fully captures Israel's value as an ally. It now hosts and defends American servicemembers to enable American military operations designed to advance American national interests.

Iran's regime and its proxies are among America's foremost adversaries. They have killed nearly a thousand American soldiers and civilians over the decades, kidnapped more than 130, and authorized multiple assassination plots on U.S. soil, including against Trump himself.⁹ At every turn, Iran has sought to evict the United States from the Middle East, vows and seeks to destroy Israel, seeks to intimidate and sabotage America's Arab allies, and works increasingly closely with China and Russia. In a bid to assert exclusive control over some of the global economy's most vital chokepoints, Iran and its proxies obstruct freedom of navigation in the Strait of Hormuz and Bab el Mandeb. Iran's nuclear and missile programs already threatened Israel, Europe, and American bases on multiple continents. If reconstituted, those programs would eventually threaten the American homeland itself.

Beyond its direct military actions against Iran and its proxies, and its extensive support of U.S. military operations, Israel's deployment during this war of advanced air defense systems and troops to the United Arab Emirates underscores its growing role and potential as a security provider to the broader region. Israel's expanding arms sales and military support to other U.S. partners like Azerbaijan, India, Germany, and Greece further demonstrate its ability to contribute to stability and security efforts from Europe to South Asia. Obviously, Israel cannot replace the United States as the Middle East's main security provider, but it can certainly continue to take on more regional responsibilities to enable the United States to divert more of its resources to other key theaters of great power competition, especially the Indo-Pacific.

As JINSA Distinguished Fellow Ron Dermer predicted more than a decade ago when he was Israel's ambassador to the United States, Israel has arguably already become America's most important ally in the 21st century, as Britain was in the 20th century.¹⁰ Still, our alliance with Israel has so much more to offer the United States. Through direct investment and basing firms in the United States, Israel's high-tech, start-up economy has generated billions of dollars and tens of thousands of jobs in America.¹¹ Its incredible intelligence capabilities, world-leading expertise in missile defense, and rapid development of cutting-edge, dual-use technologies in cyber, artificial intelligence, quantum computing, directed energy, and space can provide the United States a crucial advantage, both militarily and economically, in the global competition against China that no other U.S. ally can match.

ii. Politically Unpopular

Against this background of astounding advancements in U.S.-Israel military collaboration, and the bright potential for further efforts to strengthen the strategic partnership, the notable erosion of American political support for Israel in the last few years has been especially jarring. Sixty percent of Americans had an unfavorable view of Israel in a Pew poll conducted this past spring.¹² Last month, almost half of the Democratic Members of the House of Representatives voted against any U.S. military assistance to Israel.¹³ Criticism of, if not hostility toward, Israel has become a litmus test in many Democratic primary races. On the political right, President Donald Trump, House Speaker Mike Johnson, and much of the Republican Party remain staunchly pro-Israel. However, there are loud voices on the populist right that express caution or even hostility to Israel. Vice President JD Vance recently claimed unnamed elements in the Israeli government were trying to influence America's public debate and "keep the war going on indefinitely."¹⁴ Prejudice infuses some of the hostility, but a good deal of it on the left is tied to a decidedly negative view of America itself, while some of it on the right reflects deep-rooted opposition to U.S. global leadership and, as a corollary, the view that Israel's interests do not align with, and even detract, from an "America First" foreign policy.

B. Recommendations

Such, broadly, is the political and military backdrop of the U.S.-Israel relationship. In one direction lies a stronger, more secure, and more prosperous America, bolstered by an Israeli partner that helps shoulder the burden of common defense, anchors a more stable Middle East, and innovates advanced technologies to help power continued American global preeminence. In the other direction lies the collapse of U.S. credibility, the unraveling of U.S. partnerships, a Middle East increasingly dominated by radical actors hostile to U.S. interests, and an opening for China to expand its global influence. The choice should be clear. We believe that rather than surrendering to the negative political currents against Israel, President Trump and his administration should vigorously make the case for the U.S.-Israel strategic partnership's value proposition and set forward a bold and ambitious agenda that aims both to transform and cement it for decades to come.

i. New and Final MOU

The first order of business in deepening the partnership between the United States and Israel will be negotiating a new MOU. This would succeed the current MOU, set to expire in September 2028, that provides \$3.3 billion in U.S. military assistance (Foreign Military Financing, or FMF) annually to Israel and another \$500 million annually for missile defense cooperation.¹⁵ Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has said the next MOU should be the last involving U.S. funding of Israeli purchases of U.S. military equipment.¹⁶ There are legitimate reasons for this.

First, foreign assistance is rarely popular in the United States, and assistance to Israel has become especially controversial, particularly among Democrats. This is the case even though the United States spends much more on military basing in and assistance to other American allies, such as Germany (\$7.6 billion annually on average) and Japan (\$5.3 billion). And, at an average of \$13.3 billion per year in direct U.S. financial support plus \$17.5 billion worth of U.S. military equipment annually since 2022, military assistance to Ukraine, America's only other frontline partner actively fighting our shared adversaries, outstrips U.S. aid to any other country.¹⁷ Over the same period, Israel has received, even with supplemental assistance required to replenish Israeli stocks depleted by the post-October 7 wars, an estimated \$42

billion in similar U.S. assistance—roughly one-quarter of the amount of U.S. defense support for Ukraine since 2022.¹⁸

Second, Israel is less in need of military assistance compared to 2016, when the current MOU was signed, at least outside major wars. Since 2016, Israel's nominal gross domestic product (GDP) and GDP per capita have nearly doubled to over \$700 billion and approximately \$70,000, respectively, ranking 26th and 20th globally—higher than many European countries.¹⁹ Moreover, Israel spends heavily on its own defense—currently almost eight percent of its GDP, triple what many European countries spend.²⁰ While the current MOU's \$3.8 billion per year remains significant, it has declined as a percentage of Israel's GDP (from 1.2 to 0.5 percent) and defense budget (from 21.5 to 8.5 percent) since 2016.

While important changes in the exact nature of the U.S.-Israel relationship might be warranted, it will be important to ensure that they occur not as part of some panicked effort to appease those seeking to downgrade or even rupture the partnership, but one that is mindful of persistent major strategic challenges and opportunities.

Accordingly, given almost three years of war, the need to be prepared for current and future military challenges, and the pivotal role Israel plays in supporting U.S. military operations and broader security efforts across the region, we believe it best to conclude a new, and final, MOU that, while equal in total dollar amount to the current one—\$3.8 billion annually for ten years—will zero out at the end of the decade. This would represent a de facto decline in American support as the \$3.8 billion pledged in 2016 would be worth the equivalent of \$5.4 billion today, when adjusted for inflation.

While keeping the same topline \$3.8 billion amount, the new MOU should shift the allocation of these funds. As demonstrated in the Iran war, given the criticality of air defense interceptors and the need for new, lower cost technologies for countering missiles and drones, we support spiking the air defense portion of U.S. assistance from \$500 million to \$1.5 billion annually, while reducing the level of FMF to an average of \$2.3 billion annually to keep the overall level of U.S. support constant. Considering the risks that a future post-Trump administration or Congress might seek to reduce the foreign assistance at some point, we would prefer greater annual assistance in the initial years, while maintaining the overall 10-year total at \$38 billion. Sustaining the requirement set by the current MOU, a new agreement should stipulate zero offshore procurement (OSP) for the duration, meaning every dollar of annual FMF must be spent by Israel on U.S.-made defense items. Despite potential political headwinds, we would also recommend the United States frontload some of this assistance, given the need for Israel to replenish its ammunition after three years of war, some of which was expended fighting alongside the United States.

The current discussions on a new MOU are the first opportunity for the United States to secure its interests by working more closely with its most militarily capable partner. But it should only be the beginning, not the end, of building a deeper and stronger alliance with Israel.

ii. Deepening the Partnership, Shifting the Center of Gravity

Indeed, while much of the focus of current negotiations has been on the level of U.S. security assistance the agreement provides, it is equally important to capitalize on this moment of transition to transform the U.S.-Israel relationship into a truly equal, mutually beneficial partnership.

Therefore, beyond concluding final terms for military assistance to Israel, the new MOU should also simultaneously agree to new, mostly non-monetary initiatives that clearly advance the security of both nations. These initiatives will properly shift the center of gravity of America's regional military posture,

operations, and cooperation to Israel, given the latter's very favorable conditions: staunchly pro-American, within range of Iran but not too close to it, the most secure country in the Middle East for U.S. bases and assets, and the one that will maximize U.S. military freedom of action.

We believe the following ten recommendations would contribute to this shift in the center of gravity, which would have a major positive impact for U.S. security:

1. Establish a new permanent U.S. military presence at Israel's well-defended southern Ovda air base, and at other Israeli military bases. It would be a natural extension of the close collaboration between these two powerful militaries, while expanding U.S. freedom of operation across multiple theaters.
2. Erect a forward operational headquarters for CENTCOM in Israel to provide operational planning, mission command, and oversight of U.S. and partner forces in the Middle East. Such a command post would be more secure in Israel than anywhere else in the region. It could also serve as a joint U.S.-Israel operations command.
3. Set Israel as a regional U.S. arsenal hub by prepositioning there significant amounts of U.S. munitions needed for U.S. operations in the Middle East and beyond. Israel offers both an ideal logistical location at the intersection of major theaters—the Middle East, Europe, and Africa—and the best security among all regional countries. This can be partly accomplished by expanding and modernizing the stockpile of U.S. weapons already pre-positioned in America's depot in Israel, known as WRSA-I.
4. Establish a bilateral working group with Israel focused on joint development of emerging, critical, and cost-effective technologies, such as counter-hypersonic interceptors or directed energy systems. This new mechanism should be modeled on Pillar II of the Australia-United Kingdom-United States (AUKUS) security partnership.
5. Formally include Israel in President Trump's Golden Dome project to protect the American homeland from aerial attack. Incorporating Israel's world-class, combat-proven air and missile defenses offers the fastest and most affordable way to build the architecture the United States needs to make Golden Dome sustainable for the long term.
6. Establish a framework for joint procurement and mass co-production, with Israel, of key raw materials, weapons components, and basic munitions for each country's use.
7. Formalize and expand bilateral intelligence sharing on Iran, its proxy networks, and its growing ties with other shared adversaries like China and Russia.
8. Create a standalone partner status for Israel—such as "Model Ally"—that confers mutual benefits, such as authorities to move ahead with joint defense research and development (R&D) and co-production, formal inclusion of Israeli companies in the U.S. defense industrial base, and a form of Qualitative Military Edge (QME) updated for the 21st century. This partnership status would be a substantive upgrade from existing categories—most notably that of Major Non-NATO Ally (MNNA), which has been devalued by its inclusion of questionable partners, like Qatar.
9. Conclude a limited U.S.-Israel Mutual Defense Treaty (MDT), triggered by the high bar of existential threat to Israel or Iranian use of weapons of mass destruction against U.S. bases in the region. This narrow MDT would formalize the alliance, bolster deterrence against shared enemies—especially

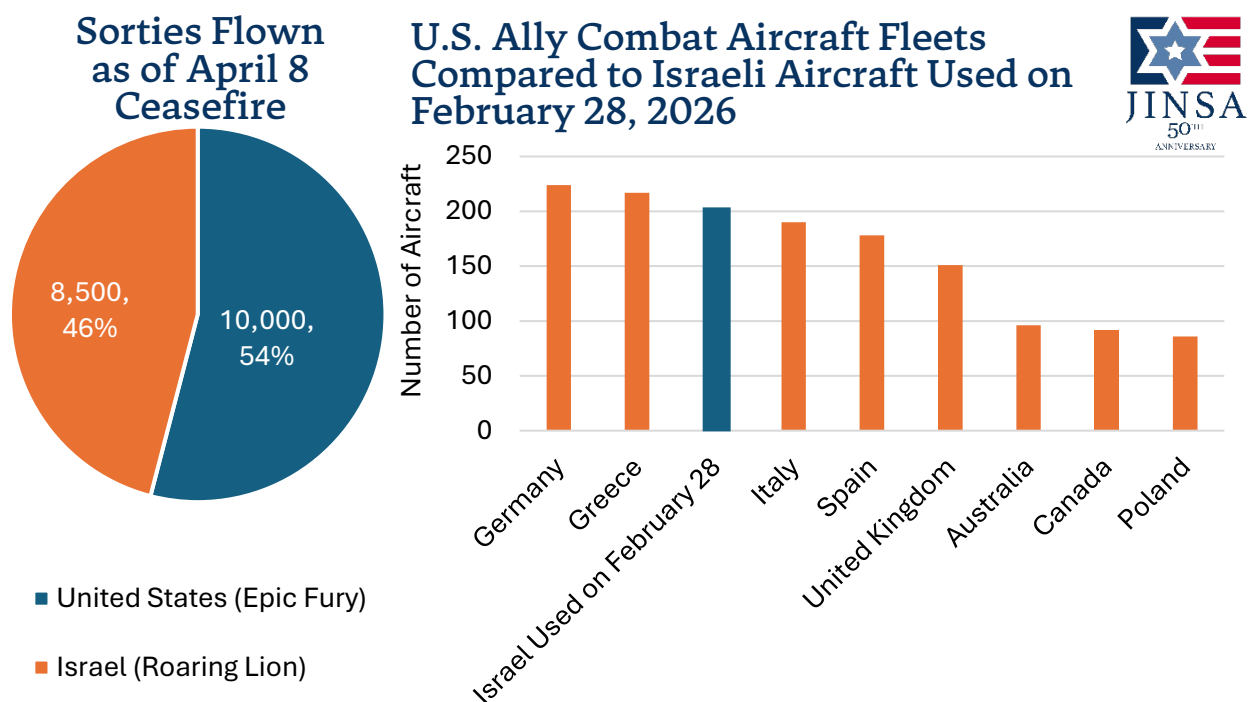
those committed to Israel’s destruction—and provide a buffer against political headwinds aiming to precipitously degrade strategic cooperation in ways harmful to U.S. security. This could be especially important following agreement on a final MOU that ends FMF for Israel within a decade.

After JINSA proposed such a limited MDT and drafted a treaty in 2018-19, the late Senator Lindsey Graham became its most ardent and prominent American champion. It would be fitting to conclude an MDT to honor his memory.

10. Concentrate on expanding and deepening CENTCOM-led defense cooperation and integration between Israel and key Arab states—starting with air defense, intelligence, and maritime security cooperation—with the aim of turning a bilateral, limited U.S.-Israel MDT into a multilateral Middle East version of NATO. Membership in such a security structure should be conditioned on Arab members normalizing relations with Israel, offering U.S. forces freedom of action, committing to significant defense spending, and aligning against Chinese, Russian, and Iranian influence. This would be a stabilizing force in the region. Achieving this ambitious vision will become more challenging if the Iran war ends in something less than an unambiguous U.S. strategic success or leads to another U.S. disengagement from the region.

II. The Low Costs of the Israel Alliance

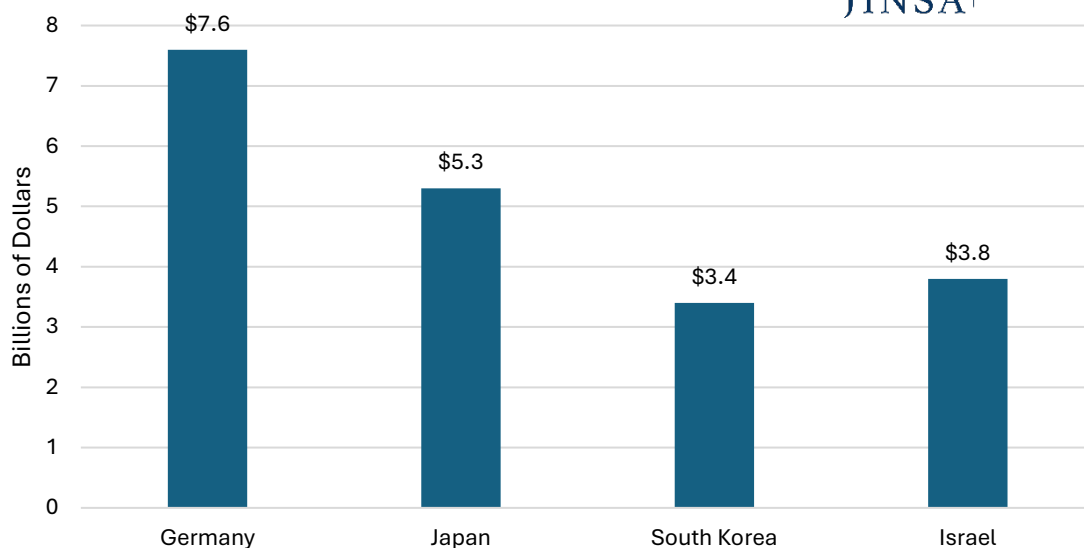
Partnership with Israel is a bargain for the United States. For more than 80 years, U.S. policymakers have understood that American security is bolstered by alliances that maintain stability, deter threats, and, when needed, help defeat them. But alliances can be costly. Particularly those the United States forged during the Cold War on the basis of a permanent military presence, such as in Germany, Japan, and South Korea.²¹ Compared to each of these countries, the partnership with Israel costs less and delivers more value.



U.S. spending in support of the security of its partners shows a pattern that runs opposite to the public debate over U.S. support for Israel. The United States spends the most on Germany, Japan, and South Korea, driven almost entirely by basing costs rather than foreign military aid. While such costs may have been a bargain during the Cold War, when they enabled collective frontline defense against a peer superpower, this logic no longer obtains. Germany received a yearly average of \$7.6 billion in combined U.S. basing and military aid spending since 2010, roughly double Israel's \$3.8 billion under the current memorandum of understanding (MOU). In the same time period, Japan received about 40 percent more U.S. support than Israel—\$5.3 billion annually.²² Personnel costs alone, which average \$3.4 billion a year in Germany and \$2.8 billion in Japan against \$4.5 million in Israel, account for most of the gap, since Israel hosts no comparable permanent U.S. troop presence.²³

Likewise, the United States spent roughly the same on South Korea as Israel every year from 2010 through 2023, averaging \$3.4 billion annually.²⁴ Ukraine's wartime assistance exceeded all four by a wide margin. As of January 2026, the State Department reported \$66.9 billion in U.S. military assistance since Russia's February 2022 invasion, an annual average of roughly \$16.7 billion, more than double Germany's yearly total and over four times Israel's \$3.8 billion annually under the current MOU.²⁵

Average Annual U.S. Spending on Key Allies and Partners, 2010-25



However, these countries, as well as other North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) allies in which the United States maintains forces, depend on the United States for their security. American troops are stationed there not just as a political reassurance but as a tripwire and a security guarantee. It is the certainty that, in the event of a conflict, U.S. troops will also be in harm's way and, therefore, the United States will be drawn in to fight on behalf of its allies that provides the deterrent value of arrangements like NATO.

The security logic of the U.S. partnership with Israel, on the other hand, is the reverse of these other allies. Rather than spending on a U.S. military presence in Israel, U.S. assistance has helped build the Israeli military into one of the most capable fighting forces in the world. That prowess defends not just Israel but American national security interests as well. Unlike other U.S. allies, Israel fights so that Americans will not have to.

Indeed, the United States is beginning to understand the value of partners who are willing to shoulder the burden of common defense rather than depending on U.S. troops. The Australia-United Kingdom-United States (AUKUS) partnership represents a shift toward building more Israel-like allies. The trilateral security agreement covering advanced military technology aims at expanding Australia's submarine fleet so that it can take on a greater share of defending the Indo-Pacific and be more interoperable with U.S. forces. To both meet the U.S. Navy's own fleet requirements and build the three to five Australian submarines promised under AUKUS, the United States spent roughly \$9.8 billion through 2024 with more programmed through 2028, a sum that compares favorably with the costs of ensuring Israel's military edge.²⁶

With the U.S. defense budget approaching, or even exceeding, \$1 trillion annually, building alliances is a cost-effective way for the United States to maintain its security. And among U.S. allies, Israel costs less and delivers more than many others.

III. Detailed Recommendations

To reflect the emergence of Israel as America's most capable 21st-century partner, the two countries should simultaneously conclude an array of agreements that transform the bilateral security relationship, and advance both countries' strategic interests, for decades to come. The agreements should include a new and final 10-year MOU on U.S. military assistance to Israel, plus many non-monetary initiatives.

1. Conclude New & Final MOU

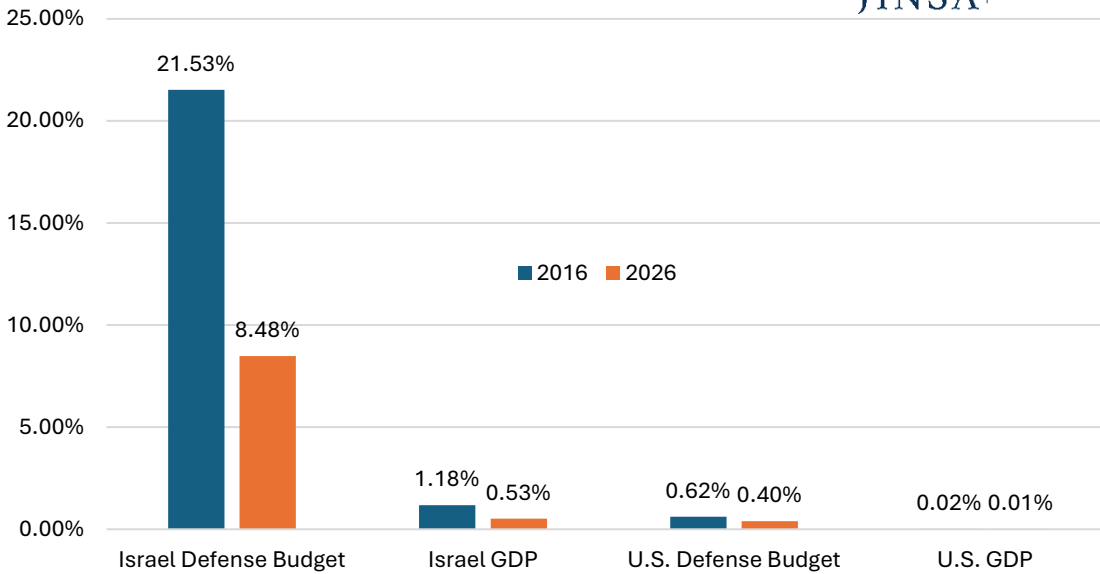
The current ten-year MOU concluded under the Obama administration, which expires in September 2028, stipulates that Israel receives \$3.3 billion in foreign military financing (FMF) and \$500 million for missile defense annually. By this MOU's conclusion, all FMF will be spent in the United States, supporting the U.S. defense industry.

Such a decade-long agreement on military assistance provides Israel with predictable financing for long-term procurement of latest-generation U.S. combat aircraft, aerial refueling tankers, and other platforms as well as fostering interoperability through Israeli procurement of those systems. Prime Minister Netanyahu has said he wants to zero out this military assistance over the course of the next MOU, but he and his government have not yet clarified any details.

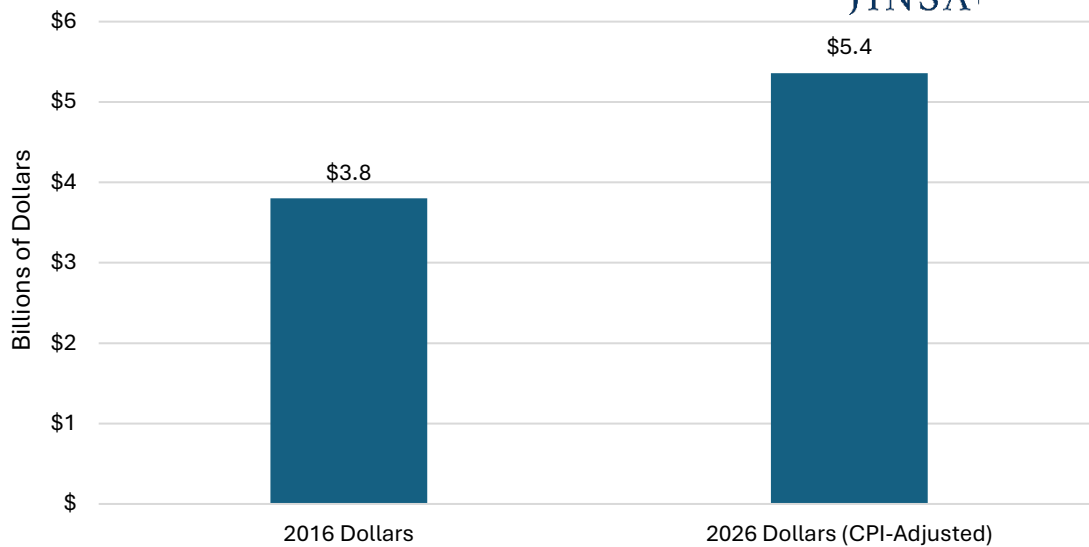
We believe there should be a fourth and final 10-year MOU to begin in fiscal year 2029, which starts October 1, 2028, after the current agreement expires. The FMF should align with Israel's growing roles in defending U.S. interests. In 2021, and in line with JINSA's recommendation, Israel frontloaded the current MOU's remaining FMF to expedite procurement of U.S.-made aerial platforms with long lead times for delivery.²⁷ In the years since, Israel has placed an estimated \$18-25 billion in new orders with U.S. defense companies to expand further this crewed aircraft fleet—including KC-46A aerial refueling tankers, F-15I and F-35I combat aircraft, and helicopters—over the next decade-plus.²⁸

At the same time, FMF should reflect how the bilateral partnership has changed markedly over the past decade as military cooperation pushes into new frontiers, Israel's economy and defense industry advance, and its regional diplomatic and security roles grow. In light of these developments, as well as holdups in U.S. arms transfers in recent years, Israeli leaders have made clear their country's preference to become more independent in defense production in the coming years. A new MOU should reflect these underlying changes.

2016 MOU as Percent of Defense Budgets and GDP



Nominal and Inflation-Adjusted 2016 Amount



Thus, we believe that the next MOU should remain set at \$3.8 billion in average annual U.S. financial assistance over 10 years, to allow Israel to replenish and modernize its military after three years of intensive multifront war. However, the FMF portion of this total package should decrease to \$2.3 billion per year on average, enough to cover the contracts for new weapons systems that Israel has already signed. At the same time, the current MOU's provision of \$500 million for annual missile defense cooperation should expand to \$1.5 billion per year in a new agreement, however with both countries putting in that amount to jointly develop and build air defenses, given the increasing importance and value for both countries in developing and fielding these systems against threats from Iran and others.

2. Base U.S. Forces in Israel Permanently

JINSA first recommended rotating U.S. forces through Israel in September 2024, and then filled in details in a November 2025 report, which recommended the U.S. Air Force (USAF) explore basing options at Ovda Airbase in Israel.²⁹ Following the latter, the United States conducted its first-ever operational deployment of combat aircraft to Israel by sending 11 F-22 stealth fighters to Ovda in the days preceding Epic Fury.³⁰ In parallel, the United States deployed a similar number of KC-46 and KC-135 aerial refueling tankers to Israel's main international airport.³¹ While U.S. bases in Kuwait, Qatar and other regional Arab countries were repeatedly hit, American military personnel and assets based in Ovda were not at risk during the war, thanks to Israeli air defense systems and Israel's location beyond range of Iran's most capable, short-range projectiles.³² And unlike in Arab countries, U.S. forces did not face access or overflight restrictions.

The U.S. choice of Ovda is very fitting. The base meets the de facto U.S. gold standard for such facilities, having been built to American specifications in the 1980s to implement the Camp David Accords.³³ As part of contingency planning preceding the 12-Day War, certain additional features were added to the base to meet potential U.S. requirements.³⁴ The most costly and crucial infrastructure already is on-site, in abundance, to accommodate the needs of U.S.-made F-15, F-16, F-18, F-22, and F-35 combat aircraft, as well as aerial refueling tankers, large transport aircraft, and helicopters.³⁵ In addition to on-site air and missile defenses, this includes runways, hardened shelters, parking ramps, hardstands, fuel bunkers, storage for ammunition and other supplies, housing, and even a dedicated terminal for U.S. use.³⁶

Indeed, the United States made significant use of Israeli bases during the war, none more so than Ovda. At the height of the war, some 5,700 U.S. servicemembers operated from the southern Israeli base, including representatives of every service branch and the special operations community. The linchpin of U.S. operations at Ovda was the U.S. Air Force's newly reconstituted 455th Air Expeditionary Wing. Alongside the 455th and its squadron of F-22 Raptors, the United States also deployed 24 F-15Es, 10 F-35s, six EA-18s, and one P-8 to Ovda.³⁷ Many of these aircraft were housed in Ovda's 10 hardened shelters, each accommodating 8 aircraft, which Israel modified to maximize compatibility with American combat aircraft.³⁸ They also had access to Ovda's existing fuel supply, munitions storage and assembly, and maintenance capabilities.³⁹ U.S. warplanes were able to fully utilize the base almost from the moment they touched down, enabling them to fly some 4,300 sorties from Israel during Operation Epic Fury.⁴⁰

The success of this deployment to Ovda, the base's significant existing infrastructure, and Iran's punishing retaliation against bases closer to the Gulf, reinforce prewar arguments for expanding U.S. basing options in Israel as the key element of a more resilient and sustainable U.S. regional force posture. The United States should take Israel up on its offer to relocate U.S. assets and activities in the region to bases in Israel, and to strengthen America's presence in that country more generally. The country offers reliable access, favorable geography, and operational support unlike anywhere else in the Middle East. The IAF already maintains high standards for training, maintenance, and logistics of its U.S.-made aircraft, which can easily be adapted for U.S. use. Indeed, the U.S. and Israeli air forces are highly interoperable and, as evidenced during Epic Fury, increasingly well-versed in the rhythms of joint planning and operations.

Unlike other U.S. regional facilities, Israel's airbases already are protected by a world-class, multi-layered air defense network, and they offer greater warning time than bases farther east to counter Iranian missile and drone threats. Indeed, the Patriot air defense battery and Roadrunner counter-drone system that U.S. forces deployed to Ovda were not used a single time during the war, compared to bases around the Gulf, such as al-Udeid, which were hit multiple times and required U.S. forces to often "bug out" and sleep in their cars in the desert.⁴¹

At the same time, Israeli bases are still within striking range of Iran for U.S.-made combat aircraft that are provided with in-air refueling or external fuel tanks. And the country's geostrategic location, at the crossroads of three continents, is well-suited to support U.S. rapid global mobility by hosting tanker and transport aircraft.

Most immediately, Ovda provides ample space and security to host additional U.S. combat, aerial refueling, and transport aircraft. It also is ready to accommodate prepositioning of critical munitions, including as part of a larger effort to replenish and modernize WRSA-I. Ovda also can provide much-needed USAF maintenance and other logistical services. The United States should consider regular rotational deployments through Ovda, including by detaching units from other regional airbases. Ovda's wide-open topography, including extensive spaces for U.S.-only activities, also could host U.S. Army and Marine Corps units for live-fire exercises. It could also host permanent schools and/or training certification programs in Israel, co-developed with U.S.-Israel military leadership, for urban/subterranean warfare, air defense, air combat operations, and combat search and rescue.

The United States also should explore basing options at Israel's Nevatim and Ramon airbases, both of which also are built to U.S. specifications. Additional consideration should be given to homeporting or more regular rotations of U.S. Navy vessels at Israeli Navy bases at Haifa and/or Eilat. The United States could view Haifa as an additional option to its current posture in Bahrain, and as a hub to merge CENTCOM and EUCOM naval operations and domain awareness activities. Rotations through Eilat also could bolster U.S. force presence in the Red Sea, whose shipping chokepoints confront threats to freedom of navigation without confining U.S. vessels in cramped operating environments like Hormuz.

Building on the interoperability of USAF and IAF platforms, and the invaluable experience of fighting together in the current conflict, Israeli bases more generally can become a regional CENTCOM hub for prepositioning, combined exercises, planning, and even operations. Strengthening our partners' operational capabilities can, in turn, enable them to assume added responsibilities for collective defense.

3. Create Regional U.S. Prepositioned Arsenal Hub in Israel

The United States has long prepositioned munitions in Israel (WRSA-I), but for years, at least until 2023, generally neglected it. It should now turn this stockpile into a regional arsenal to support U.S. operations throughout the CENTCOM AOR as well as to support Israeli and other partners' emergency needs. This will require first restocking and modernizing WRSA-I after years of war and obsolescence and then expanding it, ideally including Ovda, into a regional hub.

The United States should fulfill WRSA-I's clear purposes to support Israeli and U.S. wartime requirements, and to obviate any need for ad hoc emergency resupplies. Well before Israel's 2021 CENTCOM move or even October 7, 2023, WRSA-I served firstly as a dumping ground for low-priority munitions largely unsuitable for expected U.S. or Israeli contingencies. This problem worsened as conflicts in Ukraine and the Middle East drained the depot of even these low-priority stocks. WRSA-I needs munitions and materiel that can best act as a ready reserve for meeting evolving but persistent Iran-led threats. This includes air-to-ground munitions (AGM), Joint Direct Attack Munition (JDAM) tailkits, air and missile defense interceptors, 155mm artillery rounds, 120mm tank rounds, and relevant spare parts and materiel for use by either country's forces in the region.

The United States also should consider converting WRSA-I from a bilateral construct to a regional prepositioning hub available for all U.S. operations in the Middle East as well as Israeli and regional partner

wartime requirements. This would build upon and strengthen the larger trend of regional security cooperation that has followed in the wake of Israel's reassignment to CENTCOM's AOR. As part of this modernization and restocking, the United States should consider expanding its prepositioning footprint to include Ovda, with its protected ammunition dumps and other secure storage facilities. Compared to existing U.S. storage sites in other Middle East countries, Israel's layered air and missile defenses also offer greater physical security. And Ovda provides the added benefit of making critical air-to-ground munitions readily available for U.S. and Israeli operations from the base.

4. Erect U.S. Forward Operational Headquarters in Israel

The United States should establish a forward operational headquarters in Israel. This would reflect and reinforce positive trends already underway in U.S.-Israel defense cooperation and transform the ad hoc deployment of U.S. personnel to Israel to coordinate Operations Epic Fury and Roaring Lion into a permanent structure. This command post would conduct operational planning, mission command, and oversight of U.S. forces in the Middle East. It will also provide additional capability to support allies and partners in the region. Being situated in Israel would provide it with greater security than anywhere else in the region. It could also evolve into a joint operations center with Israel.

5. Co-Develop Next-Generation Technologies Through a Pillar II-Like Structure

The United States should establish a bilateral working group with Israel, modeled on Pillar II of the Australia-United Kingdom-United States (AUKUS) security partnership. Pillar II organizes the three countries into working groups to co-develop next-generation technologies.⁴² This is supported by congressional appropriations. An analogous U.S.-Israel structure should focus on joint development of emerging and critical technologies and be structured to pursue jointly financed R&D projects that bring key technologies swiftly to fruition and meet U.S.-Israeli needs.

Each AUKUS Pillar II working group pairs government, military, and technical officials from the three countries to identify shared priorities and coordinate activity, a model a U.S.-Israel structure should adopt to move technologies from concept to fielded capability faster than either country could alone.⁴³ A U.S.-Israel structure should similarly pair these working groups with manufacturers to jointly field a next-generation counter-hypersonic interceptor or directed-energy system, to demonstrate the partnership can deliver a much-needed capability on a set timeline.

Decades of joint U.S.-Israel R&D and co-production resulted in the Arrow, David's Sling, and Iron Dome systems that intercepted Iranian missiles and drones alongside U.S. forces during Iran's 2024 attacks against Israel, the June 2025 12-Day War, and Operation Epic Fury this year, giving a Pillar II-like structure an operational track record to build upon.⁴⁴ In addition to being a world leader in the dual-use potentials for artificial intelligence (AI) and other cyber capabilities, quantum computing, machine learning, and synthetic biology, Israel currently is pioneering next-generation air and missile defenses, lower cost directed energy systems, subterranean sensors, and counter-unmanned aerial systems (C-UAS). As part of a concerted and jointly funded effort, Israeli R&D in additive manufacturing and related fields could support shared needs for mass production of weapons components and other attritable defense-related materiel.

6. Formally Include Israel in Golden Dome

The United States should formally include Israel in the Golden Dome air defense architecture for the U.S. homeland by establishing a mechanism to expand joint production and acquire Israel's world-class, combat-proven air and missile defenses at the necessary scale. Acquiring lower-cost Israeli systems, including Arrow, David's Sling, Iron Dome, and Iron Beam, would enable the United States to purchase more

launchers, interceptors, and sensors for less money, freeing up funds for the next generation of strategic and space-based technologies.⁴⁵ This shift would move the U.S.-Israel security relationship away from foreign military assistance from the United States to Israel and toward shared cooperation, with systems that the United States helps co-produce with Israel helping to build a sustainable Golden Dome. Framed this way, Israel would function as a contributor to U.S. homeland defense rather than a beneficiary of U.S. support, with the MOU directing resources toward joint procurement and long-term industrial planning instead of one-directional aid.

As JINSA has argued, acquiring Israeli air defenses offers the fastest and most affordable way to build the architecture the United States needs to make Golden Dome sustainable for the long term.⁴⁶ This would build on a coproduction relationship the United States has already funded for decades. The United States has contributed more than \$14 billion to research, develop, and coproduce Arrow, David's Sling, and Iron Dome, establishing joint manufacturing facilities across more than 100 companies in over 30 states.⁴⁷ A new agreement should expand this coproduction and dedicate funding for production-line expansion at U.S. and Israeli facilities, fully leveraging this existing industrial base and production capacity instead of standing up new programs that take years to mature.

Israel would gain from this arrangement as well, since integration into Golden Dome would give Israeli firms access to larger and more predictable U.S. procurement streams than Israel's defense industrial base could sustain on its own. Demonstrating the inclusion of Israeli-designed systems in Golden Dome would give the United States a basis to bring other partners into similar arrangements, reducing risk to the homeland and strengthening the global supply chains on which the United States and its partners depend.

7. Co-Produce Vital Munitions and Components

The United States and Israel should create a framework for joint procurement and co-production of critical minerals and strategic materials, weapons systems components, attritable munitions, and potentially higher-end capabilities. Both countries have identified more resilient defense industries and supply chains as core national security interests. American planners already recognize the value of co-production and stockpiling with allies, including overseas, while Israel is initiating efforts to grow production capacity, stockpile more munitions and materials, make this infrastructure more resilient by moving it underground, and bolster relevant supply chains. And even as Israel pursues greater self-reliance on these fronts, the Israel Defense Forces's (IDF) interoperability with U.S. forces, and Israel's value as an armory to support joint operations, are only growing in importance as intense and prolonged multi-front, munitions-intensive conflicts become more commonplace for both countries.

8. Expand the Sharing of Intelligence

A new MOU also is a prime opportunity to formalize and expand bilateral intelligence sharing on Iran, its proxy networks, and its growing ties with other shared adversaries like China and Russia. Cooperation also should reduce barriers to exchanging and comparing information on the performance of U.S. platforms and weapons systems against adversary capabilities. Israel's impressive intelligence collection and covert operations have been on display for years in its attacks on high-value nuclear, military, and leadership targets across the Middle East. Moreover, the IDF is often the first or most active operator of U.S. platforms and weapons systems, and now the two countries increasingly operate in parallel against Iran-related threats, yet classification barriers reduce or prevent the sharing of valuable lessons that can improve each country's performance and planning.

9. Expand the Special Relationship

Complementary to a narrow MDT, the United States should pursue a standalone partner status for Israel that codifies and promotes key areas of cooperation. Perhaps call it “Model Ally,” drawing from the 2026 U.S. National Defense Strategy’s description of Israel. Among other benefits, this could create the proper authorities to move ahead with joint R&D and co-production. This sui generis partnership status would go beyond relevant U.S. partnership categories in which Israel already is included—most notably as a Major Non-NATO Ally (MNNA)—while also working around partnerships from which it effectively is excluded, chiefly the Five Eyes (FVEY) signal intelligence-sharing network of America and its Anglophone formal allies. Because America tends to work through formal alliances when it comes to joint R&D and DIB integration—most notably recently, the AUKUS military technology partnership—an MDT would be complementary to these options for enhancing Israel’s official status as a U.S. partner.

Such a partnership should include the following provisions:

- **Updating QME for the 21st Century:** U.S. support for Israel’s self-defense at acceptable cost to itself, known as Israel’s “qualitative military edge” (QME), has long been a pillar of Israel’s ability to uphold U.S. interests and regional stability, and has been codified in U.S. law since 2008. Generally, this support consists of arms sales of cutting-edge U.S. platforms and technologies to Israel, coupled with de facto restrictions on sales of similar capabilities to other Middle Eastern countries. While continuing these policies, the United States should officially update QME to leverage Israel’s changing abilities to support U.S. interests. In synch with a new MOU, this should include Congressional action formalizing America’s self-interest in bolstering Israel’s quantitative and technological edges (QTE). Among other priorities, these new legal criteria could boost cooperation in space and cyber domains and expand and coordinate bilateral defense industrial base (DIB) production to meet shared threats from Iran and its great power supporters China and Russia. Codifying Israel’s QTE also could entail incentives for private sector American investment in Israel’s thriving defense start-ups.
- **Offsets:** events since October 7, 2023, shine harsh light on how political and material constraints can undermine effective U.S. resupply of Israel’s wartime needs, and on America’s own potential needs for replenishment during a high-intensity conflict. A new partnership status should include offset programs focused on reciprocal logistical support to mitigate wartime shortages. Standard practice in one form or another in many U.S. defense sales deals, an offset agreement could guarantee timely resupplies of U.S. munitions and other materiel to Israel in exchange for Israeli investment in U.S. defense production or arms sales to the United States, and vice versa.
- **DIB integration:** much as Israel’s inaugural MNNA status helped expedite certain arms transfers, joint military R&D, and stockpiling, a new formal partnership status would better align and streamline bilateral DIB cooperation. This could include adding Israel to the multilateral U.S. National Technology and Industrial Base (NTIB) or granting it equivalent status bilaterally. Known unofficially as the FVEY of defense industrial cooperation, the NTIB facilitates members’ joint efforts on defense-related R&D, munitions production and procurement, supply chain resilience, and emergency resupplies. Removing existing statutory barriers on these fronts would go hand-in-hand with a new MOU, updating QME, and offsets. Following JINSA’s September 2025 recommendations to enhance bilateral DIB cooperation along these lines, the FY27 National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) directs the Pentagon to establish a U.S.-Israel DIB Working Group to identify opportunities for deeper industrial integration and assess the feasibility and policy requirements for adding Israel to the NTIB.⁴⁸

10. Establish Limited U.S.-Israel Mutual Defense Treaty

There is perhaps no better way to signal that Israel will form the core of a new Mideast security architecture—especially with agreement on a final MOU that ends U.S. military assistance to Israel in a decade—than to conclude a limited U.S.-Israel MDT, which JINSA has recommended for many years.⁴⁹

Such an MDT, as is the case with other U.S. defense treaties, would treat an attack on either party in a given geographic area as an attack on both by committing the signatories to consult with one another in such instances. However, reflecting Israel's priority to retain its strategic independence, and America's concern to avoid strategic overextension, the mutual defense "Article V" clause of a U.S.-Israel treaty should be narrow, with a higher threshold for activation, than existing U.S. MDTs with 53 allies across five continents (including NATO). Specifically, the pact should activate only in a very limited set of exceptional circumstances: use or threat of use of weapons of mass destruction against territory controlled by Israel or against U.S. forces based in Middle Eastern countries sharing diplomatic ties with Israel; or a major armed attack that poses an existential threat to Israel.

JINSA first proposed a U.S.-Israel MDT and issued a draft treaty in 2018-19.⁵⁰ The idea drew the support of Prime Minister Netanyahu and the interest of Presidents Trump and Biden.⁵¹ Several U.S. senators, led by Lindsey Graham, championed it in Congress. In September 2023, Biden and Netanyahu privately discussed the MDT in New York during the United Nations General Assembly, with plans for follow-up discussions the following month between senior American and Israeli officials in Washington.⁵² Hamas's October 7, 2023, assault froze this promising momentum, along with parallel efforts toward Israel-Saudi normalization.

A treaty, which would require bipartisan support from at least 67 U.S. Senators, would serve several important purposes.

First, at a time when Israel has become a political football, a treaty would constrain a future American president who is cold or hostile to Israel from sacrificing this singular military and intelligence partnership on the altar of their own short-term political whims and calculations. Just as Cold War-era pacts made U.S. commitments predictable and credible over the course of decades—regardless of changing politics and foreign policies in Washington and foreign capitals—a treaty alliance with Israel would strengthen and stabilize one of America's top security partnerships against domestic efforts to abruptly and arbitrarily condition or downgrade it.

Second, a treaty adds more certainty of deterrence to regional dynamics. As Churchill asserted in his 1946 "Iron Curtain" speech, when he recommended a postwar Anglo-U.S. alliance: "If there is to be a fraternal association of the kind I have described, with all the extra strength and security which both our countries can derive from it, let us make sure that that great fact is known to the world, and that it plays its part in steadying and stabilizing the foundations of peace. There is the path of wisdom. Prevention is better than cure."⁵³ A formal U.S.-Israel alliance also would ease doubts about continued U.S. leadership and reliability in the Middle East and globally. Indeed, there might be no greater endorsement of U.S. credibility than for Israel, a country viscerally committed to defending itself by itself, to agree to an MDT.

Finally, a formal alliance would better align U.S. and Israeli national security policies not just in the Middle East but globally, and especially on China. JINSA's draft treaty contains language to deepen intelligence and technological cooperation and develop a common approach to dual-use goods and sensitive technology trade and investment.⁵⁴ The pact also would give Israel greater diplomatic and strategic flexibility to support U.S. policies outside the region because of its official status as an American ally.

11. Deepen Regional Defense Cooperation to Establish a Limited, U.S.-Led Regional Mutual Defense Treaty

We now recommend going further by accelerating the Israeli-Arab defense cooperation that was happening before, and during, the Iran war to create a limited regional security treaty, a sort of Mideastern version of NATO, except where the trigger is not simply an armed attack on any member, but the higher threshold of an existential threat. Epic Fury only reinforced the U.S. imperative to firm up a regional security architecture that, by defraying the direct burdens on American forces and resources, would enable the United States to devote greater attention to competition against China and Russia without sacrificing Middle East stability.

Achieving that ambitious vision will be difficult, particularly if the Iran war ends in something less than an unambiguous U.S. strategic success or leads to another U.S. disengagement from the region. On the one hand, the impressive U.S.-Israeli military cooperation and achievements—combined with Iran’s decision to broaden the conflict by attacking vital Arab targets—should reinforce for America’s other regional partners the value of closer ties with the United States and Israel. On the other hand, the inability of the United States to adequately help deter and defend effectively their territories (including America’s own bases) from sustained Iranian assault, as well as challenges in restoring freedom of navigation to their vital economic lifeline in the Strait of Hormuz, has intensified Arab concerns about the continued reliability and value of American security guarantees. This has led them to engage in unhelpful hedging behavior toward Iran and potentially other U.S. adversaries, such as China, while diversifying security relations beyond Washington. The Saudis will likely be reluctant for now to join a U.S.-Israel treaty structure, in the aftermath of the Gaza war, but the United Arab Emirates, which has remained steadfast in allying with Israel and the United States during the war, might be more inclined.

As a result, the push toward an ambitious NATO-like regional security architecture can be advanced by building on those narrower areas of defense cooperation and integration where Israeli, Arab, and U.S. interests clearly overlap. In the first instance, the United States should focus on restoring the momentum toward expanding Israeli-Arab security cooperation that has been quietly occurring, mostly out of public view, since Israel’s 2021 move into CENTCOM’s area of responsibility.

The Iran war has exposed gaps in critical areas like air and missile defense—in particular counter-drone capabilities—maritime security, and intelligence where much closer collaboration and integration with Israel and the United States could deliver major security benefits to the Arab countries. Similar shared interests may exist to develop and finance new defense technologies and diversify the production of important munitions or other key defense components across the region.

This sustained effort to reestablish confidence in the concrete mutual benefits and value proposition of increased U.S.-Israel-Arab defense cooperation would become the foundation for establishing a far more ambitious NATO-like Middle East mutual defense pact. Unlike last year’s extension of an unreciprocated U.S. security guarantee to Qatar, this should be a genuinely collective defense agreement with high standards, in which an official American security umbrella is linked to specific political and military requirements from regional beneficiaries.

Countries would be able to join only upon meeting certain conditions. First, they would have to normalize relations with Israel. Not just make peace with Israel but conduct ties that promote normalcy between the two countries. That means no anti-Israel or anti-Semitic school textbooks or news programs. While the United Arab Emirates would meet that condition, Jordan and Egypt, despite having peace agreements with Israel, currently do not. Second, members should offer the U.S. access to a military base, from which the

United States would have broad freedom of action, and flyover rights for military action. Third, the countries would have to spend at least four percent of GDP on defense. Additionally, this security structure should feature a mechanism to expel a country if it changed its policies or no longer met these conditions, something that NATO lacks. Finally, this new security architecture should include concrete commitments to U.S.-led regional economic integration and broader alignment on countering malign Chinese, Russian, and Iranian influence on dual-use technology, trade, and related security issues. Potential partners for a new U.S.-led regional security architecture and recipients of even a limited mutual defense treaty should be forced to choose between America and its adversaries, not to mention its enemies.

This ambitious new regional security architecture would form a bulwark against dangerous, aggrandizing countries, such as Iran. Its conditions would incentivize peaceful and stabilizing behavior, including the expansion of the Abraham Accords, and would address some concerns President Trump has had about some NATO members. By building further on the historic Abraham Accords and Israel's move to CENTCOM, this new U.S.-led architecture also could bolster regional maritime security cooperation, air and missile defense integration, joint planning and exercising, regional stockpiling, and munitions co-production that help distribute the shared burdens of countering Iran and other threats more equitably and sustainably away from their traditional resting place on America's shoulders. Such a new, more secure, more cooperative, and U.S.-aligned Middle East could then become a vital trade, development, and communications corridor to compete with Beijing's Belt and Road Initiative and promote long-term regional stability through greater prosperity and interconnectivity.

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