

IMPORTANT ASPECTS OF THE STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIP BETWEEN ISRAEL AND THE USA

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Abstract: The strategic partnership between Israel and the United States is a cornerstone of both nations' foreign policies, deeply rooted in shared values, democratic principles, and mutual interests. This alliance spans political, military, and economic domains, with security cooperation being a primary pillar. The U.S. provides Israel with substantial military aid, ensuring the latter maintains its qualitative military edge (QME) in a region marked by volatility. This support is critical for Israel's defense against external threats, especially from hostile neighboring countries and non-state actors like Hezbollah and Hamas.

Economically, the U.S. and Israel engage in robust trade relations, bolstered by the U.S.-Israel Free Trade Agreement, the first such agreement signed by the United States. This agreement has fostered the exchange of technology, research, and innovation, particularly in defense, cybersecurity, and healthcare sectors.

Politically, the partnership is strengthened by bipartisan support in the U.S. Congress, despite occasional disagreements over specific policies, such as settlement expansions or approaches to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. The two countries collaborate closely on counterterrorism, intelligence sharing, and strategic initiatives in the Middle East, such as curbing Iran's nuclear ambitions.

This partnership also reflects the broader geopolitical landscape, where Israel serves as a key U.S. ally in a region of strategic importance. Overall, the U.S.-Israel relationship is multifaceted, emphasizing security, economic cooperation, and political alignment, which together form a durable alliance in global diplomacy.

Keywords: *US, Israel, Strategic partnership, Counterterrorism, Qualitative military edge (QME), Geopolitical alignment.*

INTRODUCTION

Henry Kissinger writes in his famous work *Diplomacy*: "As if by a law of nature, every century a country emerges with the power, desire, and moral aspiration to shape the international system according to its values." [Henry Kissinger (1994): 525]

In the 20th century, no country had as strong or diverse an influence on international relations as the United States. America's involvement in the Middle East was driven by a policy of containment, aimed at resisting Soviet expansionism globally, and a doctrine of collective security, which encouraged the formation of NATO-like alliances to counter existing or potential threats.

US-Israel relations are of particular significance to modern world history and politics. Israel has achieved many of its greatest economic and defense successes with direct support from the United States. For decades, the close relationship between the US and Israel has been rooted in shared democratic values, religious connections, security interests, and collaboration on various economic, scientific, and military issues.

THE MAIN PART OF THE ARTICLE

After World War II, there was a widespread sense of moral guilt and responsibility for the 6 million Jews who perished during the Holocaust. This sentiment significantly bolstered international support for the creation of the State of Israel. On November 29, 1947, the UN General Assembly passed Resolution 181 (II), which called for the partition of Palestine into two states—one Jewish and one Arab—in the former British mandate territory. The partition plan was supported by both the USA and the USSR, as well as countries from Eastern and Western Europe. [Inga Zabakhidze (2023): 44]

The State of Israel was proclaimed on May 14, 1948, at 6:01 p.m. Washington recognized the new state "de facto" just 10 minutes later, at 6:11 p.m. This unprecedented speed is easily explained by Washington's view of Israel as a strategic asset for strengthening its influence in the region. The Soviet Union followed with "de jure" recognition on May 17. [Inga Zabakhidze (2023): 49-50]

The Arab states vehemently opposed the creation of a sovereign State of Israel and its recognition as the homeland of the Jewish people. Arab resistance led to four major wars—in 1948, 1956, 1967, and 1973. In each conflict, Israel's military superiority, largely supported by American aid, was evident. [Henry Kissinger (1994): 529-530]

Meanwhile, economic relations between Saudi Arabia and the United States quickly overshadowed political interaction. Diplomatic ties were officially established in 1939. In the Middle East, U.S. policy was heavily driven by oil interests. The rapid expansion of Saudi oil production made U.S. oil companies key lobbyists for closer political ties between the two nations.

In February 1943, President Franklin D. Roosevelt was informed that Saudi Arabia had the largest oil reserves in the world. Just one week later, he declared that the kingdom was vital to U.S. defense capabilities and extended the Lend-Lease Act to Saudi Arabia. While Saudi Arabia maintained official neutrality during World War II, in practice it maintained friendly relations with the Allies.

In the fall of 1943, at the invitation of President Roosevelt, Saudi Princes Faisal and Khaled—future rulers of Saudi Arabia—paid an official visit to the United States. During their visit (Roosevelt was in constant contact with Ibn Saud), it was decided to establish an American military base in Dhahran, Saudi Arabia. This base, opened in 1946, became the first U.S. military infrastructure in the Middle East. During their stay, the princes toured the New York Stock Exchange, major industrial centers, Hollywood, Princeton University, and a naval base. Following their U.S. visit, they traveled to the United Kingdom, where they were hosted by King George VI, and met General Charles de Gaulle in Algeria. The insights gained from these meetings reinforced the Saudi royal family's belief that the United States was the most powerful nation, dominant in shaping the postwar world order. [Henry Kissinger (2021): 192-205]

The strategic relationship between the United States and Saudi Arabia was formalized in February 1945. On February 14, 1945, after the Yalta Conference, President Roosevelt met King Ibn Saud aboard the USS Quincy in Egypt. In 1951, a defense cooperation agreement was signed, enabling the export of American military equipment to Saudi Arabia and the training of Saudi forces. To pay for military imports and services, Saudi Arabia opened an irrevocable letter of credit with a U.S. bank, facilitating advance payments to the U.S. Treasury. [Robert O. Freedman (2012): 25]

In 1948, U.S. President Harry Truman officially recognized Israel as a sovereign state, acknowledging its provisional government under David Ben-Gurion. In the years that followed, Israel not only strengthened its status as one of the world's most advanced nations but also deepened its relationship with the United States, which significantly influenced Israel's foreign policy, political behavior, and internal affairs.

It is crucial to highlight Israel's key role in U.S. foreign policy. Despite its small size, Israel boasts one of the strongest economies in the region and a culturally homogeneous, prosperous society. It has developed advanced nuclear capabilities and has been the largest annual recipient of U.S. foreign aid since 1976, enjoying a uniquely privileged status compared to other aid recipients. The strong Jewish lobby in the United States has long influenced U.S. foreign policy toward Israel, contributing to the consistent pro-Israel stance of successive American administrations.

U.S.-Israel relations have experienced both highs and lows over the years. Successive U.S. administrations have taken different approaches to key issues, including Israel's nuclear arsenal and the ongoing Israeli-Palestinian conflict. The transition from the Obama administration (Democrat) to the Trump administration (Republican) had a significant impact on the partnership between the two countries, particularly in terms of policy direction and diplomatic tone.

During World War II, the Holocaust revealed that Europe could not protect its Jewish populations, positioning the United States as a final refuge for many Jews. Today, the U.S. is home to the largest Jewish population outside of Israel.

After the establishment of Israel in 1948, U.S. concerns about Israeli security took a back seat during the presidency of Dwight D. Eisenhower in the 1950s (1953-1961). His relationship with Israeli Prime Minister David Ben-Gurion was notably cool, and U.S.-Israeli relations were strained during the 1956 Suez Crisis. However, after the 1958 Iraqi revolution, Washington began to see Israel's stability and democratic values as strategic assets in a volatile Middle East. [Robert O. Freedman (2012): 232]

Under President Eisenhower, the "Eisenhower Doctrine" was adopted, aiming to protect the Middle East from Soviet influence, especially in countries dependent on the region's energy resources. However, the administration's overtly anti-communist foreign policy fueled anti-American sentiment in the Arab world. This led Washington to eventually revise its strategy, culminating in the adoption of the Nixon Doctrine, which pursued a relatively softer approach to Middle Eastern policy.

It wasn't until the presidency of John F. Kennedy (1961-1963) that the U.S. began selling arms to Israel, marking a new phase in their relationship. Notably, the U.S. provided Israel with HAWK anti-aircraft missiles, enabling the country to better counter the Soviet-backed Egyptian forces. [Robert O. Freedman (2012): 150]

A new phase in U.S.-Israel relations began during Richard Nixon's presidency (1969-1974). In September 1970, during the 1973 Yom Kippur War, a substantial supply of American weapons helped Israel repel attacks by Egypt and Syria, allowing it to go on the offensive. After the war, U.S. Secretary of State Henry Kissinger's "shuttle diplomacy" led to a peaceful coexistence between Israel and Egypt.

During Jimmy Carter's presidency (1977-1981), a significant shift occurred in U.S.-Israel relations. Egyptian President Anwar Sadat surprised the world by visiting Israel and meeting Prime Minister Menachem Begin, a bold step that even caught the U.S. off guard. Sadat's realignment into an anti-Soviet orbit was driven by Egypt's national interest and paved the way for intense diplomatic efforts. This culminated in the 1978 Camp David Accords, hosted by Carter, and the subsequent 1979 Israel-Egypt peace treaty. As a result, Egypt was expelled from the Arab League, and Sadat faced condemnation, ultimately leading to his assassination. However, his courageous act inspired others who sought peace with Israel. Notably, Israel and Syria had signed a disengagement agreement in 1974.

U.S.-Israel relations further strengthened during Ronald Reagan's presidency (1981-1989). In November 1988, under U.S. pressure, Yasser Arafat, leader of the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO), accepted UN Security Council Resolution 242, renounced terrorism, and recognized Israel. [Robert O. Freedman (2012): 38]

However, relations cooled during George H. W. Bush's presidency (1989-1993). U.S. Secretary of State James Baker and Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Shamir clashed over Israeli settlement construction in the West Bank. Bush withheld loan guarantees needed to resettle Soviet Jews in Israel until the settlement activity was halted. Tensions remained high, even after Yitzhak Rabin became Israel's prime minister in 1992.

Despite these challenges, during the Persian Gulf War, U.S. troops were deployed to protect Israel. With continued American support, Israel solidified its status as an untouchable regional power.

On September 13, 1993, the State of Israel and the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) signed the Oslo Accords in Washington, D.C., following secret negotiations. In recognition of their efforts toward peace, Yasser Arafat and Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin were awarded the Nobel Peace Prize.

In July-August 2000, President Bill Clinton facilitated a meeting between the two parties at Camp David, hoping to achieve a breakthrough before the end of his term. However, the summit did not yield positive results. It wasn't until 2002 that the Palestinian Authority expressed agreement with Clinton's proposed plan. [Bruce Jentleson (2015): 551-556]

For many years following Israel's independence in 1948, U.S. military and economic aid to Israel was minimal. This changed significantly in the early 1970s, particularly after the signing of the Camp David Peace Accords in 1979. Since the 1980s, U.S. aid to Israel has averaged approximately \$3 billion per year.

After the signing of the U.S.-Israel Free Trade Agreement (FTA) in 1985, trade became the central feature of U.S.-Israel economic relations, replacing aid. For instance, in 1985, Israel's \$2.7 billion in exports to the U.S. accounted for nearly three-quarters of the \$3.7 billion it received in economic and military aid. Since World War II, Israel has been the largest cumulative recipient of U.S. foreign aid. While Israel was the leading

annual recipient from 1976 to 2004, Iraq took that title in 2005. Since 1985, U.S. aid to Israel has stabilized at about \$3 billion per year, with total U.S. aid reaching 20 percent of Israel's GDP in 1979. [Robert O. Freedman (2012): 135]

Since Israel's independence, there have been four phases of increased U.S. aid, both to Israel and the region. From 1948 to 1967, aid was relatively small, but it increased significantly during the following periods: 1967-1972, 1973-1974, 1980-1981, and 1984-1985. Since then, the level of assistance has remained stable.

During the 1970s, the U.S. Congress sought to bolster Israel's military and economy through foreign aid. In 1970, Israel received \$30 million, which rose to \$545 million in 1971. The first U.S. military grant to Israel was awarded in 1974, coinciding with French President Charles de Gaulle's refusal to supply military equipment to Israel as a protest against its actions during the Six-Day War. [Robert O. Freedman (2012): 16]

One reason for the increase in aid in the early 1970s was Israel's compliance with U.S. requests to withdraw its troops from occupied territories following the Yom Kippur War. American influence was crucial; without it, Israel might not have agreed to such withdrawals.

The fourth and final increase in U.S. aid to Israel occurred in 1984-1985, primarily aimed at economic recovery. Israel was facing a severe economic crisis, with inflation exceeding 400 percent and significant national debts. In response, Prime Minister Shimon Peres implemented an economic stabilization plan in 1985, in collaboration with the Histadrut (trade unions) and the industrial association. Additionally, this increase was driven by Israel's military needs to maintain parity with neighboring Arab countries, which were receiving Soviet arms.

In August 2007, the Bush administration announced a \$6 billion increase in military aid over the next decade, with annual increments of \$150 million. By 2009, Israel received nearly \$2.8 billion, and in 2010, the amount rose to almost \$3.8 billion. In 2011, it received \$3.2 billion, and the U.S. government requested an additional \$205 million to continue developing the Iron Dome, a short- and intermediate-range missile defense system designed to intercept threats from groups like Hezbollah and Hamas. The Iron Dome, jointly developed by Israel's Rafael Advanced Defense Systems and the American company Raytheon, successfully intercepted more than 2,700 of the approximately 3,000 rockets fired from the Gaza Strip by May 10, 2021. [Bruce Jentleson (2015): 552]

Israel enjoys several special privileges from the U.S. government. For example, it is allowed to allocate 26 percent of its aid for the purchase of Israeli-made military equipment—a benefit not granted to any other U.S. aid recipient. This has significantly contributed to the development of Israel's defense industry. Some experts argue that the substantial annual U.S. aid encourages private and semi-private Israeli defense companies to focus more on exports, as a large portion of Israel's military purchases is spent on American equipment. As a result, Israel has emerged as a global leader in arms sales, ranking among the top ten largest arms exporters in the world.

Another significant advantage pertains to weapon purchases. Typically, countries seeking to buy weapons from the U.S. must go through the Department of Defense. However, Israel can bypass this process and negotiate directly with American companies. Additionally, while the minimum purchase price for other countries is \$100,000, Israel is permitted to buy weapons at lower prices.

From the analysis of U.S. foreign policy toward Israel, it is evident that the Trump administration aimed to distance itself from the approaches of President Obama and previous administrations. This often led to unpredictable actions and, at times, a disregard for international law. [Bruce Jentleson (2015): 566-567]

The sudden announcement to move the U.S. embassy from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem marked a significant political maneuver, one that President Obama had cautioned against, believing it would provoke not only the Palestinians but also the broader Muslim world. Ignoring Obama's warnings and critical voices within his own administration, President Trump took a radically different approach to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, reversing decades of established policy that had not even entertained the idea of relocating the embassy. In a move that would have been unthinkable under Obama, Trump made this controversial decision in less than a year.

Equally significant was the Iran nuclear deal, which Obama viewed as a positive diplomatic achievement. Trump not only opposed the agreement but also threatened to withdraw from it immediately unless reforms were implemented. He disregarded the concerns of U.S. European allies, who had also signed the deal in hopes of fostering peace with Iran. Trump urged these allies to find ways to modify the agreement, which he deemed "inadequate" and "beneficial only to Iran." With this stance, he aimed to dismantle one of Obama's notable international diplomatic successes. Although both leaders recognized the threat posed by Iran's nuclear program, their strategies for addressing it were markedly different.

The two-state solution, a long-standing policy embraced by successive U.S. administrations, faced changes under Trump. Traditionally, both Republican and Democratic presidents had supported this framework as the "only way" to achieve peace, urging Israel and Palestine to negotiate a mutually agreeable resolution. However, upon taking office, Trump indicated that the U.S. would no longer commit to this solution, believing it wiser to explore alternative approaches that might prove more effective.

On September 20, 2023, President Joseph Biden Jr. met with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu in New York. They discussed bilateral, regional, and global issues, with Biden congratulating Netanyahu and the people of Israel on the Jewish New Year. The President reaffirmed the strong bond between the two nations, rooted in shared democratic values and the U.S.'s steadfast commitment to Israel's security. During their meeting, both leaders reiterated their resolve to ensure that Iran never acquires nuclear weapons. They also explored prospects for a more integrated, prosperous, and peaceful Middle East, including efforts to deepen and expand normalization of relations with regional countries.

The two leaders welcomed the historic announcement made at the G20 regarding the development of the India-Middle East-Europe Economic Corridor (IMEC), which involves the United Arab Emirates, Saudi Arabia, Jordan, and Israel. They discussed how this initiative could benefit the entire region, highlighting real investment opportunities and new forms of cooperation between continents.

In light of the ongoing tension and violence in the West Bank, President Biden emphasized the urgent need for immediate measures to improve security and economic conditions, as well as to preserve the viability of both states for a just and lasting peace between Israelis and Palestinians. To this end, he called on all parties to honor their

commitments made earlier this year in Aqaba, Jordan, and Sharm El-Sheikh, Egypt, which included refraining from further unilateral actions. Biden and Netanyahu, along with their teams, agreed to consult with regional partners to initiate meaningful talks in the Aqaba/Sharm format as soon as possible. The President also expressed concern about potential fundamental changes to Israel's democratic system that could occur without broad consensus. [Michael V. Shterenshis, (2019): 55]

On October, 2023, the renewed conflict and Israeli bombardment from the Gaza Strip significantly altered the political landscape in the Middle East. This situation continues to evolve and requires thorough analysis, though there is hope that lasting peace can eventually be achieved in the region.

CONCLUSION

The United States, a dominant global power in the 20th century, played a crucial role in shaping the Middle East through its policy of containment and collective security. The strong and enduring U.S.-Israel alliance, rooted in shared values and strategic interests, has been a key factor in both countries' foreign policies and regional dynamics.

The U.S. played a significant role in the creation of the State of Israel and the establishment of strong diplomatic and military ties with both Israel and Saudi Arabia. These relationships were driven by a combination of strategic, economic, and ideological factors. The U.S.-Israeli alliance, rooted in shared democratic values and security interests, has been a cornerstone of U.S. foreign policy in the Middle East. The U.S.-Saudi relationship, initially driven by oil interests, evolved into a strategic partnership based on mutual security concerns. Both alliances have had a profound impact on the geopolitical landscape of the region.

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