



Israel

Summary and Key Points

Policy Proposals

1. Strengthen U.S.–Israeli strategic cooperation in intelligence sharing, missile defense, cyber defense, and counterterrorism.
2. Expand the Trump Administration’s Abraham Accords to include other Arab and Muslim states that are willing to normalize relations with Israel.
3. Encourage closer working relationships between Israel and Sunni Arab states.
4. Support Israel’s efforts to deter, and defend itself from, Iran and its proxies.
5. Push for the disarming of Hamas; a Hamas that still operates and governs in Gaza means continued violence and instability.
6. Consider incremental steps in Israeli–Palestinian peace negotiations, rather than rushing to failure on a comprehensive settlement.

Quick Facts

1. Israel has reshaped the Middle East by defeating Iran and its proxy network following Hamas’s October 7, 2023, attack.
2. The Abraham Accords have proven resilient, and even expanded in certain areas, since October 7.
3. In 2016, the United States pledged to provide \$38 billion in military aid to Israel over a 10-year period. That money is largely spent in the United States on American products supporting American businesses and American jobs.
4. The Department of War’s 2026 National Defense Strategy describes Israel as a “model ally”—the only country to be so described in the report.

What to Say About Israel

- Israel is a close U.S. ally that shares democratic values and common security interests. A strong U.S.–Israel partnership helps stabilize a dangerous region and protect American interests.
- Israel has the right to defend itself against attacks without outside pressure that weakens its security. Israel faces constant threats from Iran and terrorist groups that openly seek its destruction.

- Disarming Hamas is essential to ending cycles of violence and instability in the region.
- Expanding cooperation between Israel and Arab states, particularly through the Abraham Accords, has improved security and advanced peace and prosperity.
- U.S. support for Israel strengthens American credibility with allies and partners around the world and contributes to U.S. technological leadership across the globe.
- When allies like Israel are abandoned, violence increases and America pays a higher price later.

The Issue

Israel, the only genuine democracy in the Middle East, shares important values and interests with the United States. It faces significant security threats from Iran as well as from Arab states and extremist Islamic movements that refuse to accept its right to exist. This refusal to accept the existence of Israel manifested itself on October 7, 2023, when Hamas, an Iranian proxy, invaded Israel's southern communities and massacred about 1,200 people, injured thousands more, and abducted more than 250 to the Gaza Strip. The ensuing war saw Israel battle Iran and its proxies on seven fronts: Gaza, Judea and Samaria (the West Bank), Lebanon, Syria, Iraq, Yemen, and Iran. Iran has also threatened Israel with its arsenal of ballistic missiles, the largest in the region. Finally, Tehran's pursuit of nuclear capabilities remains a constant threat.

Hamas's October 7 attack—named Operation Al-Aqsa Flood—sought to unify the proxy network in a collective assault on Israel to destroy the Jewish state. While the operation had been in the planning stages for many years, the timing of Hamas's decision to launch the attack was heavily influenced by the progress made toward potential normalization between Israel and Saudi Arabia. In the weeks prior, both Israel's Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and Saudi Arabia's Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman had publicly indicated the warming relations between their two countries. Peace between Jerusalem and Riyadh would be a watershed moment in the Middle East and effectively the end of the so-called Arab–Israeli conflict.

On October 6, 2023, the Islamic Republic of Iran's strength was at its zenith. It had amassed the region's largest arsenal of ballistic missiles, provided financing, training, and arms to Hezbollah in Lebanon, to Hamas and Palestinian Islamic Jihad in Gaza, to the Houthis in Yemen, and to various militias in Iraq. Through the Assad regime in Syria, the Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps had a land bridge to Hezbollah and was able to establish a base of operations in the Syrian Golan to target Israel.

By the beginning of 2026, all of this was in ruins, as Israel defeated Hamas and Hezbollah, neutralized the Houthi missile attacks from Yemen, and executed Operation Rising Lion, alongside America's Operation Midnight Hammer, as part of the 12-Day War against Iran. In December 2024, the Assad regime in Syria fell, which has created political instability within that country but provided additional security for Israel's northern border. In February 2026, the United States launched Operation Epic Fury and Israel launched Operation Roaring Lion in Iran. The unprecedented military and intelligence cooperation between the two nations enabled them to eliminate much of the Islamic Republic's leadership, and deal devastating blows to Iran's ballistic missile arsenal, nuclear program, air force and navy, and military industries.

Israel demonstrated its military strength in the two-and-a-half-year campaign against Iran and its terror network and now finds itself in an unprecedented position in the region. Although its enemies are down, they are not out, and new ones are creeping into the picture. Turkey is using instability in Syria to encroach on that country's northern territory and influence Damascus. And it remains to be seen whether Hamas will fully disarm as per the terms set forth in the October 2025 ceasefire agreement. Hezbollah, too, is regrouping as it seeks to retain control over Lebanon.

Still, Israel is expanding its network of allies and partners. The Abraham Accords, brokered by President Donald Trump in September 2020, among Israel, the United Arab Emirates, Bahrain, and Morocco, held fast during the two-year war. In November 2025, Kazakhstan became the newest member of the Accords, with other countries likely to follow suit. Though Saudi–Israeli normalization was put on hold after October 7, it remains on the table.

On the Palestinian front, there is little progress to be made toward a peaceful resolution so long as (a) the Palestinian body politic remains politically divided between Hamas and the Palestinian Authority (PA), (b) Palestinians favor Hamas over the PA, and (c) the PA continues its glorification of terror and retains its “pay for slay” program, which provides stipends to Palestinian terrorists or their families for attempting to kill Israelis.

President Trump proclaimed his interest in reaching the “ultimate deal,” a peace agreement between Israelis and Palestinians during his first term. He did not endorse a “two-state solution” as envisioned in the Oslo Accords; instead, he indicated that he could accept any solution on which the two sides might be able to agree. Changing previous policy, his Administration stated that “the establishment of Israeli civilian settlements in the West Bank is not per se inconsistent with international law”¹ and cut U.S. aid to the PA to pressure it to take a stronger stand against terrorism. In early 2020, the Administration put forth the Vision for Peace in an effort to offer the Palestinians an economic path toward statehood. The PA rejected it outright.

The Biden Administration reversed many of the Trump Administration’s policies on Arab–Israeli issues. President Biden pledged to improve relations with the PA and reopened the consulate in Jerusalem that was closed in 2019 after serving as the U.S. diplomatic mission to the PA for 25 years. After October 7, 2023, President Joe Biden traveled to Israel to deliver a public “bear hug”—which came with strings attached and would limit the Israeli ability to operate to retrieve the hostages and defeat its enemies. At multiple points during the campaign, the Biden Administration held the Israelis back from prosecuting the war, which prolonged the conflict. The Administration also withheld munitions and parts necessary for Israel to defend itself.

In contrast, President Trump has established himself as the most pro-Israel President in U.S. history. Building on the accomplishments of the first term, the second Trump Administration supplied Israel with the weapons it needed to defend itself and coordinated with Israel during the 12-Day War and Operations Epic Fury and Roaring Lion.

Looking forward in the bilateral relationship, the future of the 2016 Memorandum of Understanding—in which the United States provides Israel with \$3.8 billion in annual foreign military financing—will be deliberated. In January 2026, Prime Minister Netanyahu publicly stated that he supports tapering off U.S. support to Israel over 10 years.

Recommendations

Strengthen U.S.–Israeli strategic cooperation. The political instability that has plagued the Middle East in recent years underscores the fact that Israel is America’s most reliable, stable, and effective ally in the region. Congress should support all efforts to enhance strategic cooperation with Israel, particularly in intelligence sharing, missile defense, cyber defense, and counterterrorism efforts.

Deprioritize the Israeli–Palestinian conflict. This is not a priority for the United States in the region. A final settlement cannot be brokered as long as the PA is unwilling and unable to make the deep compromises that a realistic peace requires. If considered, the United States should pursue incremental progress on security arrangements and confidence-building measures, as well as efforts to improve the welfare of ordinary Palestinians. Washington also should insist that the PA end its incitement of terrorist attacks and halt the annual subsidies of more than \$330 million that it pays to jailed terrorists and the families of “martyrs” killed in

confrontations with Israelis. A government that incentivizes terrorism is not a partner for peace negotiations. In Gaza, the United States should insist on the full disarmament of Hamas.

Penalize Palestinian terrorism and encourage moderation. The United States should veto any Palestinian efforts to attain unilateral statehood through the United Nations and should withdraw U.S. financial support for any U.N. agency that facilitates such efforts. It should also encourage the development of a practical working relationship between Israel and Sunni Arab states that face threats from Iran.

Expand the Abraham Accords to include other Arab and Muslim states. The Trump Administration should continue its efforts to expand the Accords, and look beyond the Middle East to the Caucasus, Central Asia, Southeast Asia, Africa, and even Latin America for additional members. Abraham Accords members could also help to isolate Hamas, subsidize Palestinian economic development, and encourage the emergence of a moderate Palestinian leadership that is willing and able to negotiate a peace treaty with Israel.

Support Israel's efforts to deter and defend against Iranian threats, particularly those emanating from Lebanon and Yemen. Hezbollah maintains a hold on Lebanon, though the government is required to disarm the terrorist group per the November 2024 ceasefire with Israel. It is actively reconstituting its forces as it establishes new leadership and recruits new fighters. Hezbollah maintains missile capabilities that threaten Israel and a tunnel system that threatens Israel's northern communities. The U.N. Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) was not able to prevent Hezbollah from establishing itself on Israel's northern border. The Houthis in Yemen remain a threat to Israel and to international shipping lanes. Israel responded to recurring missile and drone attacks from the Houthis with aerial strikes against their military, energy, and transportation infrastructure, as well as key military and political leaders. Still, the threat remains, and will require American, Arab, and European involvement to defeat it.

Help to strengthen Israeli missile defense capabilities. Israel continues to face the threat of ballistic missiles launched from Iran, Lebanon, or Yemen, and shorter-range rockets and drones launched by Hezbollah, Hamas, Palestinian Islamic Jihad, or Iraqi Shia militias.

Facts + Figures

FACT: Israel faces significant threats and has fought multiple wars with hostile neighbors including the:

- 1948 Arab–Israeli War,
- 1956 Suez War,
- 1967 Arab–Israeli War,
- 1973 Arab–Israeli War,
- 1978 South Lebanon conflict to push Palestinian terrorists back from Israel's border,
- 1982 Lebanon war to eject Palestinian terrorists from Lebanon,
- 2006 conflict with Hezbollah in Lebanon,
- 2008–2009 conflict with Hamas,
- 2012 conflict with Hamas and other Islamist terrorist groups,

- 2014 conflict with Hamas and other Islamist terrorist groups,
- 2021 conflict with Hamas and other Islamist terrorist groups, and
- 2023–2026 conflict with Iran and its proxy groups: Hamas, Hezbollah, and the Houthis

FACT: Israel was committed to a negotiated resolution of the Israeli–Palestinian conflict, though Palestinians had not negotiated in good faith. Since October 7, in light of the continued large-scale Palestinian support for terror attacks and Israel’s elimination, most Israelis no longer see an independent Palestinian state on the strategic heights overlooking Israel’s major cities as an acceptable option.

- Palestine Liberation Organization leader Yasser Arafat wanted a peace process to consolidate his control over the Palestinians, and he did not seek a genuine peace.
- Arafat never fulfilled his Oslo commitment to end terrorism. He turned a blind eye to Hamas’s terrorist attacks, released Hamas terrorists from jail, and ordered an overt return to terrorism in the second intifada in 2000.
- Israel withdrew from Gaza in 2005 and then saw it transformed into a base for terrorism after Hamas seized power in a 2007 coup.
- Hamas rejects not only peace negotiations with Israel, but Israel’s very right to exist.
- The PA, which broke off negotiations with Israel in 2014, has pushed for unilateral statehood by lobbying the United Nations in violation of its commitments under the 1993 Oslo Accords.

FACT: The United States has provided crucial military aid to Israel.

- In 2016, the U.S. pledged to provide \$38 billion in military aid over 10 years (\$33 billion to foreign military financing and \$5 billion for missile defense). This agreement replaced a previous \$30 billion 10-year agreement that ran through FY 2018. Much of this aid is spent in the United States on American products that create American jobs.
- The current package expires in 2028. The next agreement should see aid tapered off and replaced by co-investment in cooperative defense programs and strong economic, trade, and defense partnerships.
- The objective is to elevate the U.S.–Israel relationship to a strategic partnership that leverages both countries’ comparative capabilities and advantages.

FACT: Despite widespread claims by anti-Israel and antisemitic voices, Israel did *not* commit genocide in Gaza. On the other hand, Hamas’s actions on October 7 *were* genocidal.

- Israeli leaders made clear that the objective of the war was to defeat Hamas and return the hostages.
- While civilian casualties are a tragic consequence of any conflict in an urban environment, Israel went to great lengths to avoid these casualties.
- Whereas the average civilian-to-combatant death ratio in conflict since World War II is about nine-to-one, Israel achieved a nearly 1.5-to-one ratio.

Resources

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ENDNOTES

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