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REASSESSING THE US-ISRAEL SECURITY RELATIONSHIP

The war in Gaza, rising extremist Jewish terror in the West Bank and the US-Israel war with Iran have highlighted the need for a fundamental reassessment of the US-Israel security relationship. The use of American weapons in ways that have resulted in mass civilian casualties and raised serious concerns about war crimes, alongside policies that diverge from US interests, has intensified scrutiny of how American support is structured and delivered. These developments underscore the need for a more sustainable approach that ensures America's support for Israel is not a blank check.

At the same time, the US-Israel security relationship remains a central pillar of American policy in the Middle East. It reflects decades of close cooperation and overlapping strategic interests. At its best, this partnership has delivered benefits to both countries — from intelligence sharing and joint military operations to technological innovation and regional deterrence.

This memo outlines a framework for recalibrating the US-Israel security relationship across its three core components: arms sales, financial assistance and operational cooperation in order to create a more sustainable alliance that reflects the [views](#) of most American Jews:

1. **Arms sales** encompasses the sale of US weapons systems, ranging from aircraft and precision-guided munitions to missile defense technologies.
2. **Direct financial support** is primarily the roughly \$3.8 billion the US provides annually in Foreign Military Financing (FMF) and funding for missile defense combined with periodic supplemental packages, which Israel uses to procure US-manufactured defense equipment.
3. **Operational cooperation** includes joint military planning, intelligence sharing, military-to-military cooperation and coordinated operations from counterterrorism efforts to regional deterrence.

The goal of this reassessment is to advance the broader American interest of a more stable and prosperous Middle East that includes both Israelis and Palestinians living in security and freedom. The best way to achieve that is through a US-Israel security relationship that treats Israel as a normal ally — not an exception that receives unquestioning, blank check support from the United States.

➔ **The United States should phase out direct financial support for arms sales to Israel and treat Israel as it does other wealthy US allies.**

Israel faces real security challenges that require a significant defense investment. With a per capita GDP comparable to leading US allies such as the United Kingdom, France and Japan, as well as an annual defense budget of [over \\$45 billion](#), it has the financial means to address these challenges. It does not require almost \$4 billion per year in US financial subsidies to purchase weapons (including \$3.3 billion in FMF annually, roughly half of America's FMF budget for the entire world). Continuing this assistance is both unnecessary and politically counterproductive, creating avoidable tensions in US domestic politics and in the bilateral relationship. A responsible and relatively rapid phase-out of all financial assistance, including for ballistic missile defense, is now supported by figures from across the political spectrum, such as Prime Minister Netanyahu, Senator Lindsey Graham, and Congresswoman Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez. This reform would normalize the relationship and place Israel in the same category as other capable allies that purchase US defense equipment without subsidy.

➔ **US arms sales and other forms of assistance to Israel should be fully consistent with American law.**

US law already contains several key universal conditions on the provision of security assistance to foreign countries through the Foreign Assistance Act.

- [Section 502B of the Foreign Assistance Act](#) prohibits security assistance to any country whose government engages in a consistent pattern of gross violations of internationally recognized human rights.
- Similarly, [Section 620M of the Foreign Assistance Act and 10 U.S.C. 362](#), which together are known as the “Leahy Laws,” prohibit certain US assistance to individual units of a foreign security force if there is credible information implicating that unit in the commission of gross violations of human rights.
- [Section 620I of the Foreign Assistance Act](#) prohibits US security assistance or arms sales to any country that blocks or restricts the transport or delivery of US-backed humanitarian aid.

In recent years, some of these laws have not been enforced, and special vetting processes unique to Israel have undermined their credibility. For example, both the Biden and Trump Administrations did not enforce Section 620I of the Foreign Assistance Act as vigorously as Congress had intended, continuing an unrestricted flow of arms even when the Israeli government was blocking the delivery of US-backed humanitarian aid to Gaza. Similarly, the State Department created a special Israel Leahy Vetting Forum, and while special forums have also been created for Egypt and Ukraine, Israel's is the most permissive of any country in the world. This has led to unique processes and standards that applied only to Israel and resulted in non-enforcement of the Leahy Laws. These exceptional practices need to end, as they incentivize a lack of accountability and continuation of problematic behavior and policies. The United States should apply the same legal standards to Israel as it does to all other partners, withholding assistance when those standards are not met and restoring it once compliance is achieved.

➔ **US arms sales to Israel should be further conditioned to incentivize alignment with American interests and laws — as has been the case with other allies and partners — when their behavior is inconsistent with US interests.**

Both Congress and the President have taken steps in the past to [place specific](#), additional conditions on arms sales to certain allies, beyond those already contained in US arms export law. When Israeli policies do not align with American policies and interests, Israel should not be able to use American weapons for those policies. That is why J Street supports the [Ceasefire Compliance Act \(CCA\)](#), which makes clear that Israel must adhere to the October 2025 ceasefire agreement and 20-point plan for Gaza that it previously agreed to, facilitate the entrance of humanitarian aid into Gaza, prevent de facto and de jure annexation of the West Bank and take material steps to prevent settler violence. If these conditions are not met, the CCA dictates that Israel cannot use US weapons in Gaza or the West Bank. These are commitments the Israeli government already made, which should be entirely achievable but are currently not being met. Conditioning support in this way reinforces accountability and helps steer policy toward outcomes that advance both US interests and long-term Israeli security.

➔ **The United States should maintain a strong security partnership with Israel where our interests align.**

Israel remains a valuable ally, and the United States should continue to help protect the state and people of Israel. The US also benefits meaningfully from the relationship. Intelligence sharing has been critical in campaigns such as the fight against ISIS, while joint operations such as Israel's 2006 strike on Syria's secret nuclear facility have advanced shared security goals. Israeli technological innovations include the [Trophy Active Protection System](#) to protect tanks, which has in recent years been integrated into US tanks, and Israeli technological enhancements to the F-35 fighter jet that have now been added to American planes. Where US and Israeli interests align, this cooperation, including joint research and technological investment, should continue. However, all future Research and Development agreements with Israel must include genuine cost-sharing and aim to produce defense items that both countries plan to field. They cannot become a backdoor for continued US subsidies to Israeli defense.

➔ **The United States should continue to sell short-range air and ballistic missile defense (BMD) capabilities to Israel.**

Systems such as Iron Dome, David's Sling and Arrow are jointly developed by Israel and the United States, with American companies working alongside Israel to produce the interceptors for these systems. As such, even though the systems are Israeli, they incorporate US technology. Therefore, as the US responsibly phases out financial subsidies to Israel and Israel buys these systems itself, the sales are still likely to require Congressional notification. Congress should continue to support the sale of interceptors and other system components. These systems are purely defensive and have saved countless civilian lives by intercepting attacks from Hamas, Hezbollah, Iran and others. Protecting civilians should be a moral imperative for US policy. This is especially true given that approximately 500,000 American citizens live in Israel, meaning these systems directly protect US nationals as well.