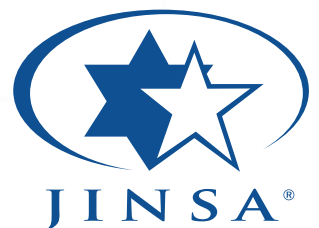


ATLAS SUPPORTED: Strengthening U.S.-Israel Strategic Cooperation

JINSA's Gemunder Center U.S.-Israel Security Task Force

Chairman Admiral James Stavridis, USN (ret.)

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I. Executive Summary

“Beautiful,” is how Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu recently described the relationship between the United States and Israel, two liberal democratic countries which acutely share many values and security interests.

The United States recognized the State of Israel minutes after the Jewish state was established 70 years ago this month, but a bilateral strategic partnership only began several decades later during the height of the Cold War. Unlike many of Washington’s treaty alliances from that era, the partnership with Jerusalem is not premised on American troops serving as tripwires on Israel’s frontlines. Rather, the purpose is to work closely together to advance shared security interests, including the United States ensuring Israel has the tools to defend itself by itself.

The principal threat to Israel and the United States in the Middle East no longer is the Soviet Union, which long ago collapsed, but is Iran’s ascending hegemony. And most immediately it is Iran’s growing entrenchment in Syria and the rapidly escalating risk of a serious Israel-Iran conflict there and in Lebanon, directly and by proxy. Even as this threat grows, America remains wary of further military engagement in the Middle East beyond the approaching defeat of ISIS in Iraq and Syria, leaving Israel exposed and in need of more and higher quality tools to defend itself and, effectively, U.S. security interests.

Opportunity unfolds from the waning hostility to Israel among Sunni Arab leaders and their growing convergence of interests against Iran, ISIS and the Muslim Brotherhood, and the budding of unprecedented, albeit still limited, cooperation. Still, the Israelis and most Sunni Arab states are not, and are unlikely to become, close allies.

This task force was established under the auspices of the Jewish Institute for National Security of America (JINSA) to examine with fresh eyes how to update the U.S.-Israel security relationship amid dramatic regional changes to meet growing dangers and capitalize on new opportunities. Others before us have articulated compelling arguments for the fundamental importance of bilateral U.S.-Israeli cooperation, so our mission focused instead on concrete recommendations to expand the mutual benefits of this partnership. In addition to our own collective experiences as senior American military officers and policy experts, our research was informed in part by extensive meetings with current and former Israeli national security officials.

We believe the cornerstone of U.S. policy toward the Middle East should be a bolstering of the U.S.-Israel security relationship. Washington can and should support its strategic partner by: elevating Israel to a top-tier ally, on par with Great Britain and Australia; frontloading the military assistance MoU and prepositioning materiel to give Israel more and higher quality tools to defend itself, by itself, against the Iranian and other threats; facilitating expanded cooperation between Israel and our Sunni Arab allies; supporting Israel’s legitimate security needs against the rapidly growing Iranian threat in Syria and Lebanon; and investing together in next-generation military technology and other new frontiers for cooperation.

Israel has always been and remains a pivotal strategic partner. The United States should seize the opportunity to take greater advantage of it.

A. Dramatic Changes in the Middle East

The Iranian regime is not only a revisionist power but a revolutionary one with global ambitions to export its Islamic revolution and terror. Most immediately, it seeks to dominate the Middle East, overthrow U.S. allies – including annihilating Israel – and expel the United States from the region. It is succeeding in extending its grip in the Middle East through a growing regionwide network of proxies, orchestrated centrally from Tehran against the United States, Israel and other American allies. Iran had lacked this capability in modern history, but as a result of reduced U.S. involvement in the Middle East and sanctions relief from the nuclear deal of 2015 – the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) – an emboldened and freer Iran is developing the ability to carry out its hegemonic ambitions.

Tehran's expanding influence is stunning in its extent and rapidity. In a few short years it has established a northern crescent that scythes across Iraq and Syria to Beirut and the Mediterranean, placing Iranian-led forces on the borders of Israel and Jordan and bolstering its supply of game-changing weaponry to its main proxy Hezbollah. Iran's expanding presence in Syria as a forward-operating base against Israel is raising the very real near-term prospect of a major direct conflict between the two countries, which would likely include Iranian proxies in Syria and in Lebanon. Such a conflict could well drag in the United States.

Iran is also establishing a southern crescent encircling the Arabian Peninsula. With Iran's and Hezbollah's support, the Houthis in Yemen rain down missiles on Saudi Arabia and threaten sea lines of communication around the vital energy chokepoint of Bab el Mandeb. At the same time Iran's own military capabilities are galloping forward under the JCPOA, putting Tehran on a trajectory to possess an extremely robust nuclear weapons program – including long-range ballistic missiles – and advanced conventional weapons as the deal sunsets.

Iran's march across the region threatens more conflict; undermines and endangers U.S. allies such as Israel, Saudi Arabia, Jordan, the United Arab Emirates and others; fuels a new generation of jihadists; drives refugees toward European and U.S. shores; risks disruption of international energy supplies; and hazards nuclear proliferation. Yet the United States is not currently positioned to confront and counter the Iranian threat. American desires to reduce the U.S. military footprint in the Middle East and the current focus on the threat of Sunni jihadism have reduced the political will and military capabilities needed to roll back Iranian aggression.

At the same time as America recedes in the Middle East, Israel's longstanding ethos of self-defense has led it effectively to do America's bidding by confronting increasingly dangerous Iranian actions in the region. More recently, spurred by U.S. reluctance, Sunni Arab states have begun proactively defending their interests as well. Yet, neither of these forces can fully curtail Iran's adventurism on their own, nor are they able to capitalize on their shared interests and work explicitly together.

B. Recommendations

It is in the U.S. interest that Israel continue to thwart Tehran's ambitions, but those interests are not well served by leaving Israel to stand alone against the Iranian menace. The United States has much to gain from further bolstering the U.S.-Israel security relationship and the ability of Israel to help defend broader U.S. regional interests. This should take the form of both

improving Israeli capabilities and ensuring that it also has support from other partners in the region, namely the Sunni Arab states.

Specifically, our task force recommends the United States improve its partnership with Israel in six ways:

- Elevate Israel's official standing as an ally to that of Australia.
- Frontload the MoU to ensure Israel's qualitative military edge (QME).
- Replenish and regionalize prepositioned munitions stockpiles in Israel.
- Drive Israeli-Arab regional security cooperation.
- Support Israel's legitimate security needs against the Iranian threat in Syria.
- Develop new frontiers for bilateral military cooperation and R&D in space and other cutting-edge weapons fields.

1. Elevate Israel's official standing as an ally to that of Australia

Israel remains one of America's closest allies, and confronts alone a shared Iranian threat, yet it does not have the appropriate standing. For instance, Israel's current designation as a "major non-NATO ally" is a status it shares with Tunisia and Afghanistan. Instead, the United States should largely treat Israel as it does Britain and Australia, in terms of sharing signals and other intelligence, weapons technology and other vital information, as well as joint contingency planning and exercising.

Raising the level of the bilateral partnership will facilitate much more effective collaboration, enhance Israel's ability to possess the capacity to confront its threats and defend itself by itself, and enable it to play a greater role in countering Iranian aggression and helping secure other U.S. interests in the Middle East. It also will boost the deterrence of Israel and the United States by sending a loud strategic signal that the bonds between our two countries are stronger than ever.

1a. Improve bilateral sharing of weapons technology and intelligence

While the United States and Israel already share a great deal of intelligence, to the benefit of both countries, we recommend raising Israel's information-sharing clearance to the level enjoyed by the United Kingdom, Australia, Canada and New Zealand, who are signatories with the United States to the "Five Eyes" agreement enabling full cooperation on signals intelligence and other highly sensitive information. While diplomatic and policy obstacles prevent Israel joining this elite closed-door institution, just as they do for formal U.S. allies like Germany, there is nothing to prevent the American president from issuing an instruction to release to Israel any intelligence that is releasable to the Five Eyes that also pertains to Israeli security.

The United States already suffers from insufficient exchange of intelligence. For instance, among all U.S. partners, Israel spends by far the most time on the frontlines against our shared adversaries, learning invaluable lessons that are directly relevant to U.S. forces in their current or prospective missions. However, classification barriers often prevent Israel from discussing and comparing their lessons learned with their American counterparts.

Exchanging information about Israel's experience is crucial for the United States, precisely because the IDF is often the first to deploy U.S. weapons systems against potential and real

U.S. adversaries. Action should be taken to lower the classification barriers that prevent Israel from sharing and comparing with the United States the performance of both U.S. and adversary capabilities, even when Israel identifies malfunctions or design flaws in U.S. weapons systems.

Equally important, Israel's lack of top-tier ally status can prevent it from accessing the most advanced technologies for its U.S. weapons platforms. This undercuts Israel's capacity to defend itself against shared threats and should be rectified.

For the sake of efficiency and time, we recommend the issuance of an executive order that creates a presumption of approval of sharing with Israel information, military equipment and technology.

Such an executive order could include such language:

"It is the policy of the United States to approve sharing of information with Israel, as well as licenses and other approvals for exports and imports of Defense Articles and Defense Services (e.g., technology), destined for or originating in Israel, including but not limited to those identified in the International Traffic in Arms Regulations, (e.g., Category XI (Military Electronics) and Category XII (Fire Control, Laser, Imaging, and Guidance Equipment) in Section 121.1, The United States Munitions List, of Title 22, Chapter I, Subchapter M of the Code of Federal Regulations."

1b. A formal U.S.-Israel alliance?

The United States' formal alliances come from mutual defense treaties, the heart of which is an Article V provision committing each signatory to consider an armed attack on one as an attack on all. The United States has such alliances with NATO, Australia, Japan, New Zealand, Philippines, South Korea, Thailand and most of the Americas.

Yet Israel notably is not a formal U.S. ally, despite repeated affirmations from the White House and Congress, as well as polls continually showing the American people's view of Israel as one of our closest partners. Israel has not sought such an alliance, given its ethos of self-defense and insistence that it never asks, nor intends to ask, Americans to give their lives on its behalf. Nor do Israeli officials want their hands tied by any expectation they would need U.S. approval for critical national security decisions. For these and other reasons successive Israeli leaders have demurred whenever formal alliance with the United States is proposed, instead favoring more limited formal strategic ties.

However, a mutual defense pact does not always connote or require that each party approve the other's strategic decisions. Nor would it mean American soldiers would help fight Israel's wars. Rather, a mutual defense pact could offer greater deterrence against shared threats, and would strengthen information-sharing between the two countries' defense establishments.

Therefore, amid ongoing changes in the region, the time has come for top U.S. and Israeli officials to engage in bilateral discussions reexamining the possibility of a stand-alone mutual security treaty without constraints on either party's actions globally.

1c. Upgrade Israel to “all but Article V” NATO partner

In addition to a prospective mutual security treaty, the United States and Israel can bolster shared deterrence, joint planning and exercising by upgrading Israel's status as a NATO partner. Alongside six other Middle Eastern countries including Egypt and Jordan, for years Israel has coordinated with NATO on general regional security issues through the alliance's Mediterranean Dialogue. Out of this initial partnership, Israel's ties with NATO have grown steadily, and now include counterterrorism and maritime security cooperation, information-sharing and transfers of defense-related materials.

Given shared threats to Israel and the alliance, and the mutual benefits that would accrue from deepening cooperation and aligning certain IDF and NATO procedures and equipment, the next logical step is to upgrade Israel to an “all but Article V” NATO partner by joining the Partnership Interoperability Initiative (PII). This would increase Israel's ability to exchange intelligence and plan and conduct operations and exercises with NATO members – without actually becoming a member of the alliance. It would also reinforce deterrence by signaling that Israel is capable and willing to operate in tandem with the combined power of the United States and much of Europe.

1d. Homeport two U.S. Aegis destroyers in Haifa

Another step short of alliance that would benefit both countries would be relocating two forward-deployed U.S. Navy *Arleigh Burke*-class destroyers (DDG) from Rota, Spain, to a new homeport in Haifa, Israel. This would make their mission of European missile defense against Iran more executable, balance the new Russian naval presence in Syria, lay the groundwork for a prospective regional missile defense network, reinforce Israeli deterrence and provide greater U.S. force presence against Iran in the region.

1e. Review reassigning Israel from EUCOM to CENTCOM

Finally, the United States should explore shifting Israel from U.S. European Command's (EUCOM) area of responsibility (AOR) to that of Central Command (CENTCOM). Short of reassigning Israel, the United States could consider enhancing Israel-CENTCOM cooperation on critical issues like regional missile defense and prepositioning of weapons.

Historical animosity to Israel from the rest of the Middle East prompted its current grouping with European countries in the Pentagon's combatant command structure, which divides the U.S. military's global responsibilities into unified geographical and functional commands.

As those animosities begin to soften and Israel's cooperation with its Arab neighbors actually strengthens, the United States – in consultation with Israel's ministry of defense and general staff – should review reassigning Israel to CENTCOM. While retaining Israel in EUCOM would allow two combatant commands to continue devoting resources to our Middle East allies, moving Israel to CENTCOM, or at the very least creating more opportunities for cooperation, could streamline U.S. efforts to foster more collective defense among Israel and its Arab neighbors. Hesitation about switching Israel to CENTCOM could be addressed by first strengthening the existing “ICE” forum (Israel-CENTCOM-EUCOM) as a bridge to eventual Israeli inclusion in CENTCOM.

Most immediately, enhanced Israel-CENTCOM ties could include missile defense coordination between Israel and its neighbors in CENTCOM, first and foremost Jordan and Egypt. Shifting Israel to CENTCOM also could simplify the prepositioning of U.S. warfighting materiel in Israel for potential operations in CENTCOM's area of responsibility, such as against Iran. It could also provide a platform to expedite the sharing of regional intelligence with Israel. Processes aside, such a move would be an important public statement reifying a growing common regional front against Tehran.

2. Frontload the MoU to ensure Israel's qualitative military edge (QME)

The United States is required by U.S. law since 2008 to uphold Israel's "qualitative military edge" (QME) over its neighbors, which ensures Israel can counter and defeat real or potential threats at acceptable cost. The United States needs to supply Israel the tools that enable it to have the capacity to meet its current and growing threats, which entails changing certain mechanisms of U.S. defense cooperation with Israel, as well as transfers of certain U.S. capabilities to Israel. This also communicates an unmistakable deterrent against shared rising threats. When the United States decides to provide advanced weapons Arab allies, steps should be taken to offset such arms sales with provisions to ensure Israel maintains its QME.

The changing strategic situation, especially the intensifying competition with Iran and its proxies – most immediately, the heightening prospects for major war on Israel's northern borders – and augmented U.S. arms sales to its Arab allies, necessitates accelerating the timetable for the United States to provide weapons systems to Israel.

U.S. support for Israeli purchases of American weapons (foreign military financing, or FMF) is a key pillar of Israel's QME. The United States should prepare to frontload the 2016 bilateral memorandum of understanding (MoU) – under which the United States is set to provide \$33 billion in FMF and \$5 billion in missile defense funding, spaced evenly over ten years – without adding one cent to it. A fast-tracked schedule could allow Israel to acquire a host of weapons to meet growing threats from Iran and elsewhere, including:

- Air-attack capabilities, prioritizing more F-35 squadrons with F-15s and F-16s as interim options.
- Mobility capabilities, whether CH-53K and C-47 cargo helicopters or V-22 aircraft.
- Adding air refueling tankers by prioritizing KC-46s, with the interim option of KC-135Rs (U.S. law already calls for providing aerial refueling tankers to Israel).
- Precision munitions, including GBU-39 and GBU-53/B small diameter bombs and AGM-114 Hellfire missiles, as well as additional Joint Direct Attack Munition (JDAM) kits for unguided munitions.
- Unmanned aerial vehicles (UAV) with electronic warfare capabilities to bolster missile defenses by jamming enemy radars and command and control.
- Semi-submersible naval vessels, specifically *Alligator*-class commando craft, and amphibious landing craft to support Israeli naval and special operations.

The United States could also transfer surplus fighter and tanker aircraft to Israel through the Excess Defense Articles (EDA) program.

3. Replenish and regionalize prepositioned munitions stockpiles in Israel

The United States should replenish its stockpiles of prepositioned war material in Israel (War Reserve Stock Allies – Israel, or WRSA-I) with adequate advanced munitions for the heightened intensity of future conflicts involving the United States or Israel. It is critical these capabilities be interoperable between both countries, enabling either to draw from the stockpile in emergencies or joint contingencies.

With potential operations against Iran, Hezbollah and Hamas – perhaps simultaneously – requiring greatly increased quantities of air-to-ground weapons, the highest restocking priorities should be laser and GPS precision-guided munitions with full protocols that are interoperable between the United States and Israel – including stocks to supplement those purchased by Israel using FMF. Reflecting the new permanent U.S. presence in Israel, WRSA-I should also include stocks of critical non-surplus munitions such as THAAD and PAC-3 interceptors and SM-3 missiles.

Part of this replenishing could be conducted quickly by simply relocating some existing CENTCOM regional stocks to Israel, a very secure partner country. This move would not initially involve new U.S. financial outlays.

WRSA-I should also be re-envisioned from a bilateral concept into a regional prepositioning hub containing relevant materiel to support EUCOM's and Israel's projected wartime requirements, CENTCOM contingencies, and potentially operations of other U.S. allies such as Egypt, Jordan, Saudi Arabia and United Arab Emirates.

4. Drive Israeli-Arab regional security cooperation

The United States should seek to drive Israeli-Arab security cooperation, acting like a hub with allied spokes. Just as the hub never touches the ground, this arrangement would respect U.S. wariness about deepening its own involvement on the ground while still allowing it to play the regional leadership role and facilitate cooperation among allies that would otherwise be impossible. The United States could triangulate information sharing and, potentially, facilitate direct *sub rosa* communication between Israel and Arab countries across a spectrum of security issues.

With Iran's rapid development and proliferation of missiles posing a threat to Israel, Arab allies, and U.S. assets, the United States should lead in developing a region-wide, multi-layered missile defense network that integrates U.S. and our allies' capabilities for mutual benefit and enhanced deterrence. The United States would serve as the hub for shared early warning between Israel and Arab countries – first and foremost Jordan and Egypt – by expanding Israeli cooperation with CENTCOM countries and potentially linking Israel indirectly to CENTCOM's Air and Space Operations Center (AOC). The United States should also pursue a joint missile defense architecture with its Arab allies as it has with Israel, including joint command and control centers.

Cooperation is also possible against Iran's southern crescent of influence in Yemen and the Red Sea. By facilitating Israeli intelligence sharing and operational coordination with Saudi Arabia and United Arab Emirates, the United States could enable more effective action against Iranian arms transfers to the Houthis via Oman and against Hezbollah operations in Yemen.

The United States and Israel should also work together more concertedly to stabilize vital allies Egypt and Jordan. The United States can encourage greater military interoperability between Israel, Egypt and Jordan through more coordinated foreign military financing for these countries. U.S. leadership can also enable greater Israeli-Egyptian maritime security coordination in the Red Sea against the shared Houthi threat, perhaps under the auspices of the U.S. Navy's own enhanced presence in the area.

Moreover, Congress immediately should allocate, and the administration immediately should provide, the full \$1.3 billion in prescribed annual military aid to Egypt. Recent declines in economic assistance should also be reversed to help Egypt address the underlying causes of instability at home. Egypt, in turn, should reconsider its weapons purchases from Russia and France that seem unrelated to the fight against Iran and terror.

5. Support Israel's legitimate security needs against the Iranian threat in Syria

The United States and Israel have yet to confront Iran with a common front in Syria, despite shared challenges posed by the Tehran-led axis there. With a sense of urgency, the United States should coordinate much more closely with Israel to support its ally's legitimate security interests in Syria against Iranian encroachment, especially as a direct clash looms large there between Israel and Iran.

American leaders must articulate clear support for Israel's redlines and ensure Israel has diplomatic backing for its right to preemptive self-defense. The United States should also provide proper authorities to its relevant combatant commands to formulate joint strategic objectives with Israel and share intelligence on Iran's presence in Syria. This will bolster deterrence by presenting Iran with Israel's unique ability to operate in the "gray zone" and the unmatched scale and sophistication of U.S. combined-arms firepower. The two countries will also need to coordinate non-kinetic options, including cyber and special operations, sanctions and a counter-messaging campaign targeting Iran's efforts to delegitimize the U.S. presence in Syria. Wherever feasible, U.S. and Israeli diplomats should try to reach tactical accommodation with Russia by exploiting Moscow's and Tehran's divergent goals in Syria.

6. Develop new frontiers for bilateral military cooperation and R&D

The United States and Israel should expand upon their extraordinarily close collaboration in research and development (R&D) of military technology by looking to space, particularly the development of advanced military satellites, and other cutting-edge fields. These could include: offensive and defensive cyber operations; artificial intelligence (AI); directed energy; hypersonic weapons; unmanned vehicles; and counter-hybrid warfare, including special and maritime operations, particularly littoral defense of critical infrastructure. Such ventures would enhance Israel's defensive posture and provide the United States advanced capabilities it might not otherwise possess.

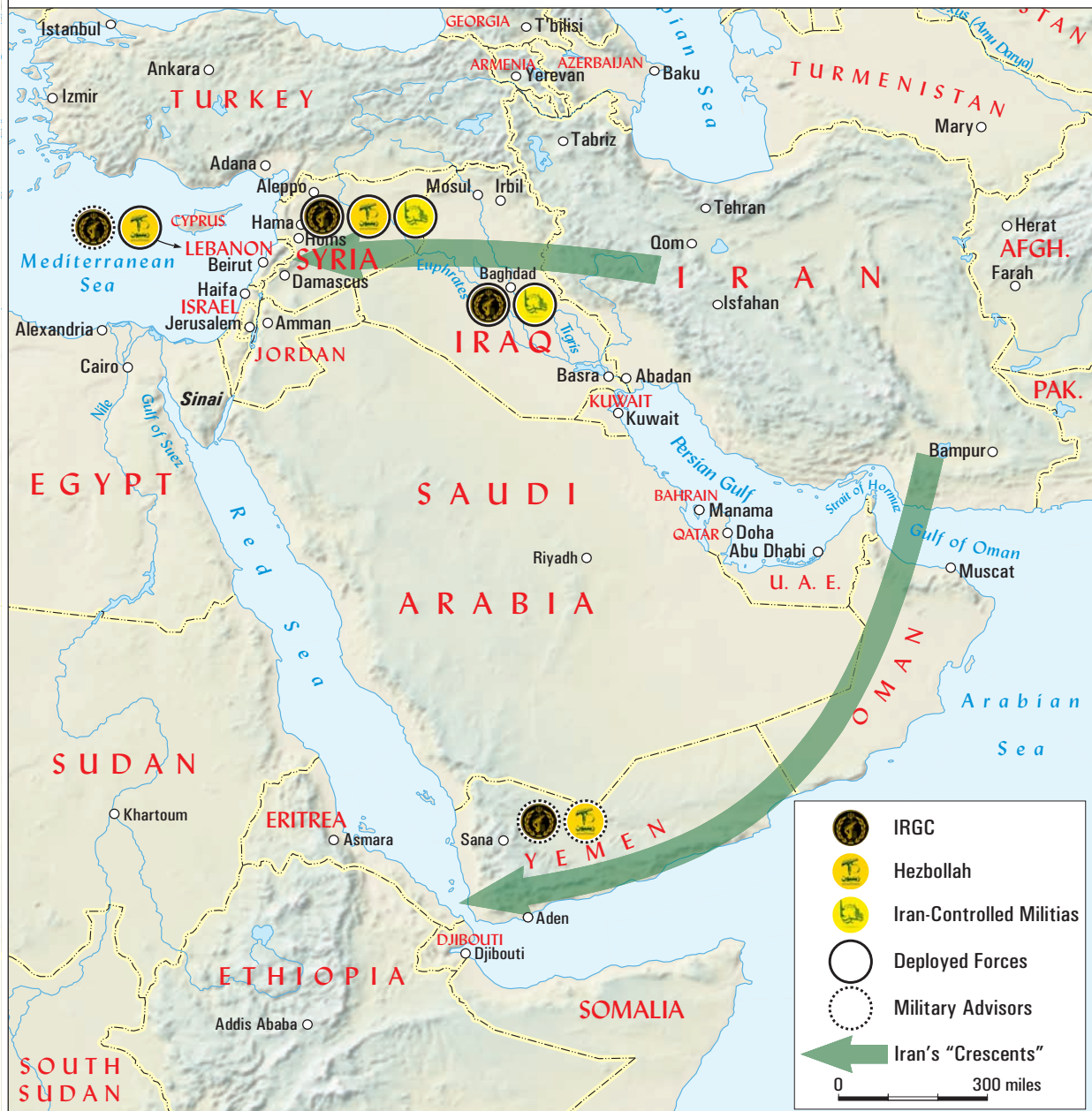
Using the shared costs and benefits of the Arrow missile defense program as a model, the United States and Israel should work to develop advanced capabilities and closer cooperation in these areas, beginning with miniaturized, relatively low-cost hyperspectral satellites whose military importance is only increasing in a world where enemies that were previously "easy to find, hard to kill" are now "hard to find, easy to kill."

The United States and Israel should also explore new joint ventures in cyberspace, where the two countries reportedly have cooperated to great effect already. With Iran's hegemonic ambitions increasingly spilling into cyberspace, the United States and Israel should jointly develop new technology to defend against Iranian attempts to infiltrate sensitive networks, and to attack Iran's digital vulnerabilities.

This naturally should encourage cooperation on AI as well. Spurring U.S.-Israeli joint R&D endeavors in AI, particularly in the private sector, can accelerate the advances either country could make on its own and ensure that both maintain a qualitative military edge over their adversaries.

Given the proliferation of advanced military capabilities to Iran, its proxies and other strategic competitors, the United States and Israel should also consider deeper bilateral cooperation on directed-energy weapons, hypersonic and unmanned vehicles (air, ground, surface and undersea), and capabilities germane to counter-hybrid, special and maritime operations – in particular littoral defense of critical infrastructure.

Iran's Northern and Southern Crescents of Expansion



II. Strategic Overview

The Middle East is undergoing dramatic, and often rapid, changes unparalleled in its modern history. These changes portend promise as much as peril.

The peril stems from an unrelenting Iranian campaign for regional hegemony. From Tehran, the Iranian regime commands a wide array of forces, ranging from the expeditionary Quds Force of its own Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps (IRGC), to conventional Syrian troops and unconventional proxy forces in Syria, Iraq, Lebanon and Yemen. With these troops, Iran has laid waste to the region's post-World War I order as its sphere of influence expands at the direct expense of the United States and its allies, most alarmingly its ongoing entrenchment in Syria.

The promise comes from the reactions generated by Iran's brutal regionwide offensive. For the first time in history, our Israeli and Sunni Arab allies' interests are convergent. Reflecting the unprecedented nature of this mutual threat and the uncertainty of U.S. commitments to their defense, our Sunni Arab partners are also beginning to adopt Israel's longstanding readiness to assume its fair share of burdens for regional security.

The United States cannot afford to ignore the danger posed by Iranian aggression. If left unchecked, Iran's march across the region will spark further conflict, including a potential full-scale war with Israel in the near future over Syria. It also will undermine and endanger other U.S. allies such as Saudi Arabia, Jordan and United Arab Emirates, fuel a new generation of jihadists, drive more refugees toward European and U.S. shores, threaten international energy supplies and raise the risks of regional nuclear proliferation. Yet the United States currently is not positioned to confront and counter the Iranian threat.

The American public's repeated rejection of the costs and complexities of trying to foster stability and order in the region has often forced policymakers to do more with less in the Middle East, sometimes with disastrous results. Additionally, a focus on the threat of Sunni jihadism, as manifested by the self-declared Islamic State (ISIS), has detracted attention and resources from the larger Iranian threat.

Yet there is another constant in America's encounters with the modern Middle East – one that, if leveraged properly, can reduce the American blood and treasure that would have to be expended to counter Iran.

That constant is Israel. Regardless of recurrent ups and downs in their political relationship, security cooperation between the United States and Israel only goes from strong to stronger, increasingly making Israel an anchor for securing U.S. interests in the region.

Indeed, the Iranian threat and Americans' aversion to overseas commitment places the burden of defending U.S. interests in the Middle East more squarely on Israel, our closest and most capable regional ally. Therefore, expanded and new forms of bilateral cooperation are vital to advance shared security interests, including the United States ensuring Israel has the tools to defend itself by itself. Moreover, by facilitating tacit cooperation between Israel and our Sunni Arab partners, who see eye-to-eye on the regional threat emanating from Tehran but have no official ties with each other, the United States can bolster the anti-Iranian coalition, lay the foundation for a more stable Middle Eastern order and restore its regional leadership without putting more American boots on the ground.

A. Growing Iranian threat to the Middle East

The Iranian regime is not only a revisionist power but a revolutionary one with global ambitions, seeking to export its Islamic revolution and terror across the globe. Most immediately, it seeks to dominate the Middle East, overthrow U.S. allies – including annihilating Israel – and expel the United States from the region. Worse, it is on a trajectory to become the regional hegemon through a growing network of proxies, orchestrated centrally from Tehran against the United States, Israel and other U.S. allies.

Iran's expanding influence is stunning in its extent and rapidity. As a result of reduced U.S. involvement in the Middle East and sanctions relief from the nuclear deal of 2015 – the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) – an emboldened and freer Iran is carrying out its hegemonic ambitions along two major axes of advance.

One axis scythes across Iraq and Syria to Lebanon and the Mediterranean. Currently this represents the most pressing Iranian threat, as its expanding presence in Syria as a forward-operating base against Israel is raising the very real near-term prospect of a major direct conflict between the two countries, which would likely include Iranian proxies there and Hezbollah in Lebanon. Such a conflict could drag in an unprepared United States as well. The other axis encircles the Arabian Peninsula and its vital energy chokepoints, threatening other key U.S. allies and freedom of navigation.

As Iran's presence deepens across the region, its regime is dominated increasingly by hardliners like the IRGC that view the United States and our allies – Israel foremost – as archenemies. Should Iran's power continue growing, this revolutionary regime would become the first modern Middle Eastern power to marry the ability and intent to predominate the region.

Iran's expansive ambitions date back millennia, when the Persian Empire encompassed the Middle East and fringed the Mediterranean, Red and Arabian seas. Today it boasts a well-educated, young and growing population – the second-largest in the region – and massive energy reserves (the second-largest in the world).¹ As the world's only Shiite state, and a revolutionary one, Iran has developed a powerful network of sectarian militias to project its power across the region, most notably Hezbollah in Lebanon.

More recently, as part of its precipitous growth in defense spending, Iran has begun developing significant arms manufacturing capabilities, churning out assault rifles, drones, precision weapons, ballistic missiles and everything in between.² With great weapons production comes great proliferation: Iran provides thousands of missiles to Hezbollah in Lebanon, while standing up and arming thousands of Shiite militiamen from across the region to fight under the IRGC and Hezbollah in Iraq and Syria. Iran reportedly is even building missile manufacturing sites in Lebanon and Syria.³ IRGC and Hezbollah military advisers also oversee Iran's supply of missiles and other arms to the Houthis in Yemen, who in turn use them against U.S. Navy ships and allies like Saudi Arabia and United Arab Emirates (U.A.E.).

These interventions around the region give Iran and its proxies valuable combat experience and a growing sense of ascendancy. The IRGC and the sectarian militias under its control have replaced the Assad regime as the major ground force in Syria, and are now consolidating their control of the country as a second front against Israel. Iran has also made clear it expects U.S. forces to leave Syria, voluntarily or not.

Combined with its political and military sway in Iraq, Tehran now feels it is close to solidifying its northern crescent of influence: the so-called “land bridge” running from Iran straight to the Mediterranean and Hezbollah. Its destabilizing confidence was on display in February, when it triggered the first direct clash with Israel in Syria by sending a military drone into Israeli airspace.

Though less directly under Tehran’s control, its southern crescent of influence – through Oman to Yemen and Bab el Mandeb – allows Iran to project power and directly threaten Saudi Arabia and sea lines of communication vital to the United States, Israel, U.S. Arab allies and the global economy. Iran’s partnership with Yemen’s Houthis has also has mired Saudi Arabia and U.A.E. in a seemingly endless conflict that diverts their attention from other key battlefields.

Absent a strategy to confront its regional aggression, Iran’s rise is set to continue. As part of the JCPOA, U.N. conventional weapons and ballistic missile embargoes on Iran will begin expiring in a few years. Iran can then expand and upgrade its aging military equipment to latest-generation platforms, pursue more accurate and longer-range missiles and proliferate these capabilities to Hezbollah and other proxies.

B. Israel’s vital role in defending mutual interests

As one of the closest American allies in the world, and the closest in the region, Israel has long been a cornerstone of U.S. power projection in the Middle East. Unlike many of Washington’s treaty alliances from that era, the partnership with Jerusalem is not premised on American troops serving as tripwires on Israel’s frontlines. Rather, the purpose is to work closely together to advance shared security interests, including the United States ensuring Israel has the tools to defend itself by itself.

This is increasingly relevant amid Iran’s rise and U.S. efforts to reduce its own commitments abroad. As the Trump Administration’s new National Security Strategy states, “allies and partners magnify our power. We expect them to shoulder a fair share of the burden of responsibility to protect against common threats.”⁴ This was echoed in the administration’s National Defense Strategy: “we will uphold our commitments *and* we expect allies and partners to contribute an equitable share to our mutually beneficial collective security [italics added].”⁵ Israel’s longstanding ethos of self-defense therefore complements U.S. policy, creating a strong incentive for the United States to provide Israel the tools for defending shared interests.

Israel’s uniquely proactive role is also paramount amid the rising threat from Iran, first and foremost in Syria. For years it has been the front line against Tehran and its proxies, in everything from missile defense and kinetic strikes to cyberwarfare and intelligence-gathering. In addition to blunting Iran’s entrenchment in Syria, this gives Israel invaluable operational experience against our shared adversaries’ capabilities. Israeli operations in Syria, for example, are a veritable testing laboratory for the performance of U.S. systems against those of Iran, Hezbollah and even Russia. Moreover, Israel’s highly sophisticated, multi-layered missile defense network – much of it co-developed with the United States – shelters key parts of the Middle East, including some U.S. bases, against Iranian missile proliferation.

C. New opportunities for U.S.-led regional defense

Israel, however, is not the only regional power alarmed by Iran. U.S. Arab allies increasingly see eye-to-eye with Israel on the shared threats posed by Iranian expansionism, and by ISIS and the Muslim Brotherhood. Most notably, the longstanding threat to Israel from Hezbollah's thousands of Iran-supplied missiles is now much more concrete to Saudi Arabia, which faces a regular onslaught of missile attacks from the Houthis. This growing alignment among U.S. allies is reflected in similar statements from Israeli and Saudi officials about the unifying threat from Tehran. Their rhetoric also matches the Trump's Administration's focus on the Iranian threat as the organizing theme for its Middle East policy.

Moreover, spurred by U.S. reluctance, Sunni Arab states have begun proactively defending their own interests. Though the United States remains involved in the region, Americans are wary of further engagement in the Middle East beyond the approaching defeat of ISIS in Iraq and Syria. A 2016 Pew poll showed a nationwide margin of more than four to one wanted the new president to prioritize domestic over foreign policy, compared to a slim majority a decade ago.⁶ Presidents Obama and Trump have also emphasized the need for U.S. allies to assume more duties for shared defense, whether in the Middle East, Europe or East Asia.⁷

When combined with the metastasizing Iranian threat, this means Israel's longstanding insistence on defending itself is now being replicated by neighboring countries that relied for decades on U.S. guarantees and tripwires to defend them. Israel's neighbors have faced notable growing pains in the process, whether against the Houthis in Yemen or ISIS in Sinai.

Despite their convergent interests and willingness to spread the responsibility for regional security more equitably, however, Israel and U.S. Arab allies have no official ties, and therefore low prospects for effective coordination that would channel their parallel policies toward shared goals. To an unprecedented extent, the United States will need to lead tacit coordination between Israel and its budding Arab partners against the Iranian threat network.

III. Recommendations

Against this backdrop of unprecedented changes in the Middle East and Israel's growing strategic importance to the United States, the Jewish Institute for National Security of America (JINSA) convened this task force to examine with fresh eyes how to update the U.S.-Israel security relationship to meet growing dangers and capitalize on new opportunities. Others before us have articulated compelling arguments for the fundamental importance of bilateral U.S.-Israeli cooperation, so our mission focused instead on concrete recommendations to expand the mutual benefits of this partnership. In addition to our own collective experiences as senior American military officers and policy experts, our research was informed in part by extensive meetings with current and former Israeli national security officials.

It is in the U.S. interest that Israel continue to thwart Tehran's ambitions, but those interests are not well served by leaving Israel to stand alone against the Iranian menace. The United States has much to gain from further bolstering the U.S.-Israel security relationship and the ability of Israel to help defend broader U.S. regional interests. This should take the form of both improving Israeli capabilities and ensuring that it also has support from other partners in the region, namely the Sunni Arab states.

Specifically, our task force recommends the United States improve its partnership with Israel in six ways:

- Elevate Israel's official standing as an ally to that of Australia.
- Frontload the MoU to ensure Israel's qualitative military edge (QME).
- Replenish and regionalize prepositioned munitions stockpiles in Israel.
- Drive Israeli-Arab regional security cooperation.
- Support Israel's legitimate security needs against the Iranian threat in Syria.
- Develop new frontiers for bilateral military cooperation and R&D in space and other cutting-edge fields.

A. Elevate Israel's official standing as an ally to that of Australia

The U.S.-Israel bilateral relationship is among the strongest in the world. Security, intelligence and technological cooperation is unprecedentedly high, economic interdependence is growing and shared cultural and political traditions place Israel solidly in the Western community of liberal democracies. In 2017 Israelis' favorability of the United States was the highest in the world while Americans had more positive views of Israel than of many U.S. treaty allies.⁸

American General Alexander Haig famously made the case for Israel as "the largest American aircraft carrier in the world that cannot be sunk," but Israel's value as a partner is manifold.⁹ While its geostrategic position makes Israel valuable for projecting U.S. power in the Middle East, more crucially it projects its own power in service of mutual interests and assumes its fair share of burdens in doing so. This is near-unique among U.S. allies, and increasingly important amid growing regional threats and Americans' reticence for overseas involvement.

Yet despite its importance to U.S. national security, in many respects Israel is treated merely as a partner rather than a true ally. Its current designation as a "major non-NATO ally" – a status it

shares with Tunisia and Afghanistan among others – provides certain fringe benefits. However, by falling short of the status extended by the United States to allies like Great Britain and Australia, Israel's current designation undermines U.S. and Israeli deterrence and limits more mutually beneficial cooperation on a host of defense-related issues.

Raising the level of the bilateral partnership will facilitate much more effective collaboration, enhance Israel's ability to possess the capacity to confront shared threats and defend itself by itself, and will enable it to play a greater role in countering Iranian aggression and helping secure other U.S. interests in the Middle East. It also will send a loud strategic signal that the bonds between our two countries are stronger than ever.

Therefore, it is crucial to enhance the U.S.-Israel partnership in sharing signals and other intelligence, weapons technology and other vital information, as well as joint contingency planning and exercising.

1. Improve bilateral sharing of weapons technology and intelligence

While the United States and Israel already share a great deal of intelligence, to the benefit of both countries, we recommend raising Israel's information-sharing clearance to the level enjoyed by the United Kingdom, Australia, Canada and New Zealand, who are signatories with the United States to the "Five Eyes" agreement enabling full cooperation on signals intelligence and other highly sensitive information. While diplomatic and policy obstacles prevent Israel joining this elite closed-door institution, just as they do for formal U.S. allies like Germany, there is nothing to prevent the American president from issuing an instruction to release to Israel any intelligence that is releasable to the Five Eyes that also pertains to Israeli security.

Currently the United States suffers from insufficient exchange of intelligence with Israel. For instance, among all U.S. partners, Israel spends by far the most time on the frontlines against our shared adversaries. The IDF learns invaluable lessons from this combat, much of which is directly relevant to U.S. forces in their current or prospective missions. However, classification barriers often prevent Israel from discussing and comparing their lessons learned with their American counterparts.

Exchanging information about Israel's experience is crucial for the United States, precisely because the IDF is often the first to deploy U.S. weapons systems against potential and real U.S. adversaries. Israeli pilots are the first to fly F-35 multirole fighters in airspace covered by advanced Russian S-400 air defenses in Syria, just as they have been the first to identify and strike enemy tunnels – similar to those employed by ISIS – using U.S. aircraft. An Israeli battery was the first to use a U.S.-made enhanced PAC-3 interceptor against a UAV, in this case launched from Syria.¹⁰ The IAF also has accumulated extensive operational data from its combat usage of U.S. precision-guided munitions.

However, classification barriers prevent Israel from sharing and comparing with the United States the performance of both U.S. and adversary capabilities, even when Israel identifies malfunctions or design flaws in U.S. weapons systems. There is apparent apprehension that such exchanges could allow partners to reengineer systems or components, or modify and advance technologies, over which the United States seeks to maintain control. Yet Great Britain and Australia enjoy higher clearance levels than Israel for exchanging sensitive information, despite the fact these countries are not battle-testing U.S. and adversaries' systems anywhere near the extent of Israel.

Equally important, Israel's lack of top-tier allied status can prevent it from accessing the most advanced technologies for its U.S. weapons platforms. This undercuts Israel's capacity to defend itself and shared threats and should be rectified.

For the sake of efficiency and time, we recommend the issuance of an executive order that creates a presumption of approval of sharing with Israel information, military equipment and technology, using language such as:

"It is the policy of the United States to approve sharing of information with Israel, as well as licenses and other approvals for exports and imports of Defense Articles and Defense Services (e.g., technology), destined for or originating in Israel, including but not limited to those identified in the International Traffic in Arms Regulations, (e.g., Category XI (Military Electronics) and Category XII (Fire Control, Laser, Imaging, and Guidance Equipment) in Section 121.1, The United States Munitions List, of Title 22, Chapter I, Subchapter M of the Code of Federal Regulations."

Such an order would facilitate much-needed bilateral reviews related to the operation, maintenance, performance and modification of weapons and intelligence equipment and systems identified in the United States Munitions List (USML) that involve "design methodology" and "engineering analysis," as these terms are defined in the U.S. regulatory regime controlling the export of military-related technologies (International Traffic in Arms Regulations, or ITAR).

2. A formal U.S.-Israel Alliance?

The United States' formal alliances come from mutual defense treaties, the heart of which is an Article V provision committing each signatory to consider an armed attack on one as an attack on all. The United States has such alliances with NATO, Australia, Japan, New Zealand, Philippines, South Korea, Thailand and most of the Americas.

Notably, Israel is not one of these formal U.S. allies. In addition to being a "major non-NATO ally," Israel is uniquely designated as a "major strategic partner" of the United States, granting preferential treatment from certain U.S. defense programs and access to WRSA-I. Also unique is the planning concept of Israel's "qualitative military edge." Enshrined in U.S. law, this requires the U.S. government ensure the sale or export of weapons to any other Middle East country will not adversely affect Israel's ability to deter or defeat potential adversaries at acceptable cost.

Yet these agreements do not an alliance make. Then President George W. Bush's pronouncement that "we will rise to Israel's defense, if need be" notwithstanding, the United States and Israel are not officially committed to each other's defense.¹¹ This is the case despite repeated affirmations from the White House and Congress, as well as polls continually showing the American people's view of Israel as one of our closest partners.

Israel has not sought such an alliance, given its ethos of self-defense and insistence that it never asks, nor intends to ask, Americans to give their lives on its behalf. Nor do Israeli officials want their hands tied by any expectation they would need U.S. approval for critical national security decisions. For these and other reasons successive Israeli leaders have demurred whenever formal alliance with the United States is proposed, instead favoring more limited formal strategic ties.

However, mutual defense pacts do not always connote or require that each party approve the other's strategic decisions. The United States currently has such arrangements with 50 countries on five continents. These formal alliances have not straitjacketed their members' strategic freedom of maneuver, as U.S. treaty allies have long histories of pursuing independent security policies, including Britain in the Falklands, France in Vietnam and Algeria, and coalitions of the willing in the Balkans, Iraq and Libya.

Nor would it mean American soldiers would help fight Israel's wars. Rather, it could offer greater deterrence against shared threats by bolstering the message of strategic commitment already being sent to the region with the recent decision to station U.S. troops permanently in Israel. It could also strengthen information-sharing between the two countries' defense establishments.

Therefore, amid ongoing changes in the region, the time has come for top U.S. and Israeli officials to reexamine the possibility of a stand-alone mutual security treaty without constraints on either party's actions globally.

3. Upgrade Israel to an “all but Article V” NATO partner

In addition to a prospective mutual security treaty, the United States and Israel can bolster shared deterrence, joint planning and exercising by upgrading Israel's status as a NATO partner.

Israel's and NATO's shared trajectory already points in this direction. Alongside six other Middle Eastern countries including Egypt and Jordan, for years Israel has coordinated with NATO on general regional security issues through the alliance's Mediterranean Dialogue. Since 2010, growing threats from the south (and Russia) have encouraged greater burden-sharing between NATO and certain non-members, with the alliance offering the latter “a substantial role in shaping the NATO-led operations to which they contribute.”¹² Israel has already taken the lead in this regard, participating in longstanding NATO counterterrorism, maritime interdiction and critical infrastructure protection missions across the Mediterranean. Homeporting two DDGs in Haifa (below) would add missile defense to the list of Israel's contributions to NATO.

Given shared threats to Israel and the alliance, and the mutual benefits that would accrue from deepening cooperation and aligning certain IDF and NATO procedures and equipment, the next logical step is to upgrade Israel to an “all but Article V” NATO partner by joining the Partnership Interoperability Initiative (PII). Launched in 2014, the PII designated non-members Australia, Finland, Georgia, Jordan and Sweden as “enhanced opportunities partners,” essentially enabling them to share intelligence and conduct operations and exercises with the same degree of coordination and joint planning as NATO members – without NATO's Article V collective defense requirement.

PII status therefore would reinforce deterrence by signaling that Israel is capable and willing to operate in tandem with the combined power of the United States and much of Europe. It also would enable the alliance to maximize the opportunities presented by Israel's shared maritime threat picture with Europe, its proximity to resurgent Russian activity in the Eastern Mediterranean, and the IDF's highly advanced capabilities and extensive recent combat experience.

4. Homeport two U.S. Aegis destroyers in Haifa

Another step short of alliance that would benefit both countries would be relocating two forward-deployed U.S. Navy *Arleigh Burke*-class destroyers (DDG) from Rota, Spain, to a new homeport in Haifa, Israel. Homeporting U.S. ships in Haifa was explored and ultimately rejected in past decades, though this would have involved expanding the harbor and port facilities to accommodate much larger aircraft carriers. Since then, Haifa has hosted regular port visits by U.S. Navy ships, and has undergone extensive improvements as part of an ongoing process to make it the third-largest port in the Mediterranean.

Homeporting two DDGs in Haifa would make their missions of European missile defense against Iran and rapid response support to U.S. Central Command (CENTCOM) more executable. The center of gravity for these missions is the eastern, not western, Mediterranean, meaning the shorter transit times from Haifa could increase these ships' operational availability in theater. Because *Aegis*-equipped ships provide midcourse intercept of short-to-medium-range missiles, Haifa is also a much more logical homeport than Rota for deterring or denying missile threats from Iran and its proxies, most urgently in Syria.

Simultaneously, a forward-deployed U.S. naval presence in the eastern Mediterranean would help balance the new Russian naval presence in the region, including its new naval base nearby at Tartus in Syria and its more aggressive presence in the Black Sea. It would also address the worrisome gap in forward-deployed U.S. missile defense ships in the Middle East. In recent years, DDGs homeported in Bahrain have been replaced by smaller littoral combat and mine countermeasures ships, leaving a vacuum of missile defense destroyers between Spain and Japan.¹³ Splitting the four DDGs currently at Rota into a "2 west, 2 east" posture in the Mediterranean would address this imbalance and provide more truly regional missile defenses.

Basing U.S. DDGs in Israel also would underscore America's commitment to Israel's defense and would extend deterrence against the missile arsenals of Iran and Hezbollah. It would also interweave the United States more effectively into a proposed regional missile defense network with Israel and U.S. Gulf Arab partners (below), and would provide greater U.S. force presence against Iran more generally in the region.

5. Review reassigning Israel from EUCOM to CENTCOM

Finally, the United States should explore shifting Israel from U.S. European Command's (EUCOM) area of responsibility (AOR) to that of CENTCOM. Short of reassigning Israel, the United States could consider linking it to CENTCOM to enhance operational coordination on critical issues like regional missile defense and prepositioning of weapons.

Israel is somewhat anomalous in the Pentagon's combatant command structure, which divides the U.S. military's global responsibilities into joint geographical or functional commands. Historical animosity toward Israel from the rest of the Middle East prompted its placement in EUCOM with primarily NATO countries, making it a EUCOM exclave surrounded by CENTCOM's AOR encompassing the greater Middle East.

Those animosities are softening amid Israel's unprecedentedly strong cooperation with Egypt and Jordan, and the growing potential for more U.S.-led coordination with certain Gulf Arab states. Therefore, in consultation with Israel's ministry of defense and general staff, the United States should review reassigning Israel to CENTCOM, or at least creating more opportunities for cooperation between the two.

While retaining Israel in EUCOM would allow two combatant commands to continue devoting resources to our Middle East allies, moving Israel to CENTCOM could streamline U.S. efforts to coordinate among Israel and its Arab neighbors, and could simplify the prepositioning of U.S. warfighting materiel in Israel for potential operations in CENTCOM's area of responsibility, such as against Iran (see below). It could also provide a platform to expedite the sharing of regional intelligence with Israel. Processes aside, it would be an important public statement reifying a common regional front against Tehran.

Putting Israel in CENTCOM would not end its cooperation with EUCOM, since it has the strongest institutional and operational ties to NATO of any non-member country. However, hesitation about switching Israel to CENTCOM could be addressed by first strengthening the existing "ICE" forum (Israel-CENTCOM-EUCOM) as a bridge to eventual Israeli inclusion in CENTCOM.

At the very least, the United States should explore options to bolster Israel's operational links to CENTCOM, most immediately coordinating missile defense and early warning with countries in CENTCOM's AOR like Jordan (see below).

B. Frontload the MoU to ensure Israel's qualitative military edge (QME)

The American public has registered its growing disaffection with seemingly interminable, inconclusive and costly engagements abroad, even as traditional hotspots across the globe – the Middle East, Northeast Asia, Eastern Europe – remain hot or grow warmer. America's reticence for foreign entanglements is spurring certain allies to invest more in self-defense, with mixed results.

At the same time, the United States should reinforce success, and deterrence, by ensuring Israel can continue doing what it always does: defend against shared threats. The urgency and growing scale of these threats, preeminently the Iranian-led challenge to regional security necessitates changes to certain mechanisms of U.S. defense cooperation with Israel, as well as transfers of certain U.S. capabilities to Israel.

The changing strategic situation, especially the intensifying competition with Iran and its proxies and augmented U.S. arms sales to its Arab allies – most immediately, the heightening prospects for major war on Israel's northern borders – necessitates accelerating the timetable for the United States to provide weapons systems to Israel.

The United States is required by U.S. law since 2008 to uphold Israel's "qualitative military edge" (QME) over its neighbors, which ensures Israel can counter and defeat real or potential threats at acceptable cost. U.S. support for Israeli purchases of American weapons (foreign military financing, FMF) is a key pillar of Israel's QME.

In September 2016 the United States and Israel agreed a memorandum of understanding (MoU) for \$33 billion in U.S. FMF for Israel, plus \$5 billion for joint missile defense, all spaced evenly over fiscal years 2019-28. The U.S. economy will be a key beneficiary, since Israel must spend the lion's share (and eventually all) of these funds in a given year on U.S.-made equipment. The Obama Administration should be recognized for concluding this agreement, which represents an unprecedented level of U.S. commitment to an ally.

Instead of spreading FMF evenly across the next decade, however, United States should prepare to frontload this assistance where appropriate, without adding a cent overall. This will better enable both countries to keep pace with the growing shared threat from Iran and its proxies. While the new MoU prohibits changes to the overall FMF level for the duration, its terms do not preclude changes in the annual provision of FMF, as long as the ten-year total remains the same.

Shifting forward some of these outlays will give Israel a critical edge in the accelerating competition with Tehran. While addressing some aspects of Iran's nuclear program, the JCPOA's sanctions relief gives Tehran resources and a green light to become more aggressive outside the bounds of the agreement. No more than two years from now, the U.N. conventional weapons embargo on Iran will expire, followed in 2023 by the end of a similar embargo on its ballistic missile program. Beginning 2026, its breakout time for a nuclear weapon can begin shrinking and eventually approach zero starting in 2031.

These milestones will occur mostly during the new MoU, setting a course for Iran to develop even greater power projection capabilities than it can bring to bear currently in the region's multiple battlefields. Frontloading the MoU will bolster Israel's deterrence against an increasingly capable Iran and strengthen its ability to prevail in any conflict quickly if deterrence collapses.

A fast-tracked FMF schedule could allow Israel to acquire a host of weapons to meet growing threats from Iran and elsewhere, including:

- Air-attack capabilities, prioritizing more F-35 squadrons with F-15s and F-16s as interim options. Israel's current inventories are too small or old to carry advanced munitions and keep pace with an increasingly contested operating environment featuring advanced air defenses over Syria – as evidenced by Israel's recent decision to keep F-15s at home on alert against Iran rather than participate in joint exercises in the United States.¹⁴ While more F-35s would give Israel significant capability advantages over its competitors, at roughly half the cost of an F-35 – and with far more operating experience by the Israeli Air Force (IAF) – new F-15s and F-16s will enable Israel to expand its fleet while it completes existing plans to onboard two new F-35 squadrons by 2023.
- Mobility capabilities, whether CH-53K and C-47 cargo helicopters or V-22 aircraft.
- Adding air refueling tankers by prioritizing KC-46s, with the interim option of KC-135Rs. Similar to its fighter squadrons, Israel needs to upgrade an aging tanker fleet kept aloft by harvesting second-hand tankers for spare parts.¹⁵ Though the IAF prefers the KC-46's advanced capabilities, ongoing U.S. procurement delays mean KC-135s are far more abundant and come in at roughly half the unit cost of the KC-46.¹⁶ U.S. law calls for providing air refueling tankers to Israel.¹⁷

- Precision munitions, including GBU-39 and GBU-53/B small diameter bombs and AGM-114 Hellfire missiles, as well as additional JDAM kits for unguided munitions. The IAF already stocks some of these weapons; however, the ability to strike hardened and underground targets has become critical for Israeli deterrence and warfighting with the proliferation of thousands of such sites – including missile command, manufacturing, storage and launch sites – in Lebanon, Syria and Gaza. Accelerated transfers to Israel may require the United States to increase its own production of such munitions, stockpiles of which have been drawn down by counter-ISIS operations.¹⁸ U.S. law calls for providing such munitions to Israel.¹⁹
- Unmanned aerial vehicles (UAV) with electronic warfare capabilities to bolster missile defenses by jamming enemy radars and command and control.
- Semi-submersible naval vessels, specifically *Alligator*-class commando craft, and amphibious landing craft to support Israeli naval and special operations.

As an interim measure to supplement procurement of these and other platforms using FMF – stimulating demand for U.S. defense production in the process – the United States could also transfer fighter and tanker aircraft to Israel through the Excess Defense Articles (EDA) program. This program makes any defense articles the United States declares as excess available to other countries, either at reduced cost or as a grant. Indeed, the IDF is uniquely resourceful in refurbishing aging U.S. military aircraft for active service in Israel.

C. Replenish and regionalize prepositioned munitions stockpiles in Israel

By law, since the 1990s the United States has maintained materiel prepositioned in Israel for wartime contingencies, known as War Reserve Stockpiles – Israel (WRSA-I).²⁰ Israel can draw from these stocks with U.S. permission, as it did most recently during the 2014 Gaza conflict when it ran low on certain munitions.²¹

Today, WRSA-I urgently needs to be stocked with adequate munitions to reflect the heightened intensity of future conflicts involving the United States or Israel. It should also be re-envisioned from a bilateral concept into a regional prepositioning hub for U.S. and allies' operations throughout the Middle East.

Foremost, the United States needs to fill critical WRSA-I capability gaps for potential operations against Iran, Hezbollah and Hamas – perhaps simultaneously – requiring far higher rates of air-to-ground munitions expenditure than previous rounds of conflict in 2006, 2008-9, 2012 or 2014. Simply put, neither the United States nor Israel has enough munitions at hand to keep up with the proliferation of hardened and underground targets identified by Israeli or U.S. intelligence. Many of these gaps have been widened by the U.S. drawdown from WRSA-I for counter-ISIS operations, though the Pentagon is requesting an increase in such munitions for continued operations against ISIS.²²

The highest restocking priorities should be laser and GPS precision-guided air-to-surface munitions with full protocols that are interoperable between the United States and Israel – including stocks to supplement those purchased by Israel using FMF – to enable either country to draw from the stockpile in emergencies or joint contingencies. These can replace phased-out ammunition still occupying space in the stockpile. Reflecting the new permanent U.S.

presence in Israel, WRSA-I should also include stocks of critical non-surplus munitions such as THAAD and PAC-3 interceptors and SM-3 missiles.

Part of this replenishing could be conducted quickly by simply relocating some existing CENTCOM regional stocks to Israel, which is a very secure partner country. And it would not initially involve U.S. financial outlays.

Prepositioning these supplies will enhance readiness, and by extension deterrence, while minimizing the likelihood the United States will have to consider massive emergency resupply of Israeli forces in wartime as it did in 1973.

The United States should also expand WRSA-I from a bilateral concept into a regional stockpile covering regional contingencies beyond U.S. and Israeli operations. Similar to the Cold War-era NATO prepositioning concept for U.S. forces in Europe (Prepositioned Organizational Material Configured to Unit Sets, or “Pomcus”), a regionalized WRSA-I would better enable the United States to surge forces into the Middle East on short notice.

A regionalized stockpile would still cover EUCOM's and Israel's projected wartime requirements, while also containing relevant materiel to support CENTCOM contingencies and potentially operations of partner countries in its AOR such as Egypt, Jordan, Saudi Arabia and United Arab Emirates.

D. Drive Israeli-Arab regional security cooperation

Unprecedented regional threats call for unprecedented regional measures. A single country, Iran, threatens to dominate the Middle East for the first time since the region's modern boundaries were sketched out a century ago. This creates the conditions for Israel and key Arab leadership to coordinate their energies in concert against Tehran.

Yet the hindrances to cooperation currently are at least as strong as the incentives. Lacking any history of formal relations, little trust or benefit of experience has accrued between Israel and Saudi Arabia, United Arab Emirates and other Arab countries that, like Israel, are now working assiduously to counter Iranian aggression. Moreover, persistent hostility to Israel in much of the region complicates efforts by Arab regimes to cooperate openly with the Jewish state. Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman's groundbreaking April 2018 public statement, that “there are a lot of interests we share with Israel” and that Israel has a right to its own land, reflects both the very rudimentary state of current Israel-Arab relations as well as the real potential for future cooperation.²³

U.S. leadership is indispensable for creating a functional, if informal, Israeli-Arab coalition that forces Iran to spread its resources and attentions across a broader common front. The organizing principle should be a U.S. hub with allied spokes, rather than a collective defense alliance like NATO. Just as the hub never touches the ground, this arrangement would respect U.S. wariness about deepening its own involvement on the ground while still allowing it to play the regional leadership role and facilitate cooperation among allies that would otherwise be impossible. The United States would triangulate information sharing and, potentially, facilitate direct *sub rosa* communication between Israel and Arab countries on multiple security issues.

1. Create a U.S.-led regional missile defense network with Israel and Sunni Arab states

Missiles are a central element of the growing dangers posed by Iran and its proxies, making missile defense the most urgent arena for regionalized cooperation against Iran.

The entire region lives under the darkening shadow of Iran's increasingly accurate and survivable medium-range, nuclear-capable ballistic and cruise missiles. As indicated by its urgent need for precision munitions, Israel confronts a missile threat an order of magnitude greater than Lebanon in 2006 or Gaza since. The United States and its Gulf allies are vulnerable to Iranian missile proliferation in the Persian Gulf and southern Arabian Peninsula – the latter also threatening Israel's vital sea lines of communication through the Red Sea.

Since 2015, Tehran and its proxies (including Syria's Assad regime) have launched roughly 100 missiles in combat in Syria and Yemen, and IRGC missile boats fired rockets in close proximity to a U.S. carrier operating in the Persian Gulf.²⁴ Increasingly these come in salvos – for instance Iran firing seven missiles at ISIS targets in Syria from its home soil in June 2017 – that could overwhelm individual missile defense batteries.²⁵ Iran's and its proxies' missile capabilities will advance further as U.N. embargoes on Iran's conventional weapons and missile programs expire over the next five-plus years, as per the JCPOA.

Currently the United States and its allies are unequipped to address these threats. The region's missile defenses are disparate and stove-piped, separated further by the absence of regular bilateral ties between Israel and Gulf countries. On one hand, Israel's multi-layered, combat-tested systems are among the world's most advanced. These systems, many of which were codeveloped with the United States, are also integrated with U.S. early-warning satellites and radar stationed in Israel. On the other hand, Saudi Arabia, United Arab Emirates and other Arab allies possess U.S. missile defense systems and are well-situated geographically for early detection of missile launches from Iran or Yemen, yet they lack persistent intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance (ISR) or space-based early warning capabilities.

As part of the broader effort to promote regional security cooperation against Iran, U.S. leadership is needed to develop a regionwide, multi-layered missile defense network that integrates U.S. and allies' capabilities for mutual benefit and enhanced deterrence.

The United States must be the hub for shared early warning between Israel and Arab countries, including enhancing Israel's operational coordination with CENTCOM and potentially linking Israel indirectly to CENTCOM's Air and Space Operations Center (AOC).

Utilizing real-time data from Gulf radars would augment Israel's warning time and provide more detection angles, and vice versa. This would improve cueing for multiple interceptors needed to defeat large salvos, as well as reducing the required number of interceptors through better discrimination between missile warheads and engines in flight. Bolstering Israel's ties to CENTCOM could provide greater strategic depth for both the United States and Israel by incorporating key allies like Jordan and Egypt into Israel's robust missile defense architecture. The United States should also integrate its own existing capabilities in the region, including *Aegis*-equipped naval vessels with SM-3 interceptors and their associated radars.

A more comprehensive threat picture would also create redundancies in each country's defenses, and bolster defenses against cruise missiles, whose guidance systems make them more difficult than ballistic missiles for a single radar to track. Tighter integration would also improve Israeli interception of Iranian missiles overflying neighbors' territories, much as U.S.-Israel bilateral cooperation helps Israeli-based systems defend U.S. bases and allies in the region.²⁶

The United States should also pursue a joint missile defense architecture with its Sunni Arab allies as it has with Israel, including joint command and control centers.

2. Coordinate actions against Iran's southern crescent in Yemen and the Red Sea

With U.S. backing, Israel, Saudi Arabia and others also could act much more concertedly against Iran's southern crescent of influence that is currently expanding into Yemen and the Red Sea.

Iran is successfully shipping weapons to its Houthi proxies and their Hezbollah advisers, in direct violation of a U.N. Security Council resolution.²⁷ This lethal aid worsens the conflict in Yemen and allows the Houthis to barrage Saudi Arabia with missiles. It also presents the new threat of Houthi anti-ship missiles and mines targeting U.S. and allies' naval vessels and maritime traffic around Bab el Mandeb, a major global maritime chokepoint.²⁸

To date the United States, Saudi Arabia and U.A.E. have not halted illicit Iranian weapons shipments into Yemen, many of which transit neighboring Oman. Saudi Arabia and U.A.E. have also struggled to locate and destroy Houthi missile launch sites or dent Hezbollah's battlefield advisory presence there. From farther afield, Israel collects unparalleled intelligence on Hezbollah's presence in Yemen as part of its monitoring of Hezbollah activities worldwide.

The United States could enable Israeli cooperation with Saudi Arabia and U.A.E. to act much more effectively against Iranian arms transfers to Yemen, while minimizing the risks of becoming more deeply involved itself. Given Saudi and Emirati difficulties employing missile defenses against Houthi missiles in flight, such coordination could enable them to intercept these missiles "left of launch" before they could be fired.

U.S. auspices would also be vital for sharing Israeli intelligence and coordinating operations against Hezbollah in Yemen, where its support for the Houthis exacerbates the dire military situation on the ground and contributes directly to the growing threat to sea lines of communication from anti-ship missiles.

3. Support Egypt and Jordan as bulwarks of regional stability

The United States and Israel also should work together more concertedly to stabilize Israel's peace partners Egypt and Jordan, which serve as linchpins for regional security against ISIS and Iran. Currently, both exist on the margins of stability amid profound socioeconomic and security challenges, and their unprecedentedly good cooperation with Israel has been a lifeline while U.S. assistance fluctuates. Their destabilization or possible collapse would pose an existential threat to Israel and serious dangers to the United States and Europe, including the

loss of the Suez Canal, new terrorist safe havens and renewed torrents of refugees from the Middle East and North Africa.

Israel already works under the table with Cairo and Amman to support U.S. interests. Covert Israeli military operations and intelligence sharing with Egypt are pivotal for containing ISIS in Sinai and Gaza.²⁹ Alongside bilateral naval coordination, this helps secure the Suez Canal. Egypt's location also makes it crucial for buffering instability – and ISIS – in neighboring Libya, and its expedited access for U.S. naval vessels transiting the Suez Canal is crucial for U.S. power projection across the Middle East.

Jordan plays a key role in the anti-ISIS coalition in Syria, and as a major safety valve for refugees – hosting the world's second-highest number per capita – but at the cost of ballooning deficits and budget shortages. With instability on multiple borders and internally, it is pivoting to Israel as a major trade and military partner.³⁰ Paralleling Egypt, Jordan's geographic position lends strategic depth to Israel and the Suez Canal, in this case against ISIS and Iran in Syria and Iraq. Like Israel, Jordan is deeply threatened by the prospect of Iranian entrenchment in Syria.

Despite Egypt's importance to regional stability, three consecutive U.S. administrations as well as Congress have withheld crucial security assistance that could be directed to counter-ISIS operations and promoting interoperability with U.S. and Israeli forces. The United States also reduced economic support, even as Egypt grapples with severe unemployment, resource shortages, rapid population growth and insufficient foreign investment.³¹

Assistance to Jordan trends in the opposite direction, in sharper acknowledgement of the kingdom's role in U.S. security and its precarious stability. A February 2018 MoU on U.S. assistance to Jordan provides \$1.3 billion annually for five years, up from the previous MoU or \$1 billion per year for only three years.³² Unlike the MoU with Israel, this agreement favors economic over security assistance.

The United States urgently needs to strengthen its partnerships with Egypt and Jordan. Fraying bilateral ties only encourage Cairo to court partners like Russia that are adversarial to U.S. interests. Congress immediately should allocate, and the administration immediately should provide, the full \$1.3 billion in mutually agreed annual military aid to Egypt, effectively reversing recent decisions to penalize Cairo for human rights concerns. While such concerns are important, U.S. policy should prioritize shared threats from ISIS and Iran and the lack of stable alternatives to the current government. Economic assistance should also be increased to help Egypt address its underlying causes of instability. Egypt, in turn, should reconsider its weapons purchases from Russia and France that seem unrelated to the fight against Iran and terror.

The United States also should encourage greater military interoperability between Israel, Egypt and Jordan through more coordinated FMF for these countries, especially considering the IDF already provides U.S. equipment and spare parts for Jordanian counter-ISIS operations. U.S. leadership can also enable greater Israeli-Egyptian maritime security coordination in the Red Sea against the shared Houthi threat, perhaps under the auspices of the U.S. Navy's own enhanced presence in the area. Egypt's fleet is the largest of any Middle East country, and Israel's the most capable. Both countries enjoy greater naval infrastructure than the United States – including bases – along the Red Sea coast, complementing the U.S. Navy's ability to project power through the Arabian Sea and Bab el Mandeb.

E. Support Israel's legitimate security needs against the Iranian threat in Syria

The United States and Israel have yet to confront Iran with a common front in Syria, where the years-old conflict is entering a new phase that poses increasingly shared challenges to both countries. With a sense of urgency, American policymakers should coordinate much more closely with Israel against rising dangers from Tehran and its proxies in Syria, especially as a direct clash looms large there between Israel and Iran.

Until recently, Iran focused its energies in Syria on preventing Assad's fall rather than directly threatening Israel or the United States. Its gaze focused inward, it could not gamble on any escalation with Israel that might expand the conflict. Consequently, Tehran did not retaliate against any of a hundred Israeli airstrikes on its weapons transfers to Hezbollah or its attempts to build bases for itself and its proxies. Iran's self-deterrence also limited direct hostilities with U.S. and Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) which were reclaiming most of Syria east of the Euphrates River from ISIS.

With Assad's rule now seemingly assured under Tehran's auspices, Iran's presence in Syria poses a more direct threat to Israel and the United States, with the very real prospect of a full-scale direct Iran-Israel conflict in the near future. Syria is the geographic keystone in a crescent of influence connecting Tehran directly to Lebanon and the Mediterranean, making it a springboard for setting up bases in Syria and presenting Israel with the very real threat of a two-front war for the first time since 1973.

With the Middle East's strategic heartland entering its fold, Tehran also becomes a U.S. competitor for overall regional predominance and threatens to compromise the U.S.-led coalition's ongoing counter-ISIS campaign in Syria and Iraq. Reflecting the importance of this region to its expansive ambitions, Iranian commanders are demanding U.S. forces abandon Syria – voluntarily or otherwise.

It is therefore in America's interest that Israel not face the growing Iranian threat in Syria alone, especially as the seeming likelihood of a major clash between the two has risen precipitously in recent months. In his Iran strategy announcement last October, President Trump pledged to “work with our allies to counter the [Iranian] regime's destabilizing activity and support for terrorist proxies in the region.”³³

The United States must put this rhetoric into action by supporting Israel's determined efforts to halt Iranian advances in Syria.

First, American leaders must ensure Israel has diplomatic backing for its right to preemptive self-defense, including upholding its redlines against a permanent Iranian presence in Syria and weapons transfers to Hezbollah.

Going forward, more consistently robust messaging can make clear the illegitimacy of Iran's presence in Syria and its aggression against Israel, which seeks only to secure its borders and prevent Iran entrenching in Syria and bolstering Hezbollah. As part of a broader effort to support Israel's right to self-defense at the United Nations, American policymakers can cite U.N. resolutions demanding all Iranian and proxy forces “immediately withdraw” from Syria³⁴

and prohibiting Iranian weapons transfers to Syria and Lebanon.³⁵ The United States should also state clearly it retains the option to use force in response to aggression by Assad and his allies, including but not limited to the use of chemical weapons against Syrian civilians.

The United States and Israel also must work together much more proactively to halt further Iranian aggression from Syria. Existing bilateral forums like the Joint Political Military Group meet far too infrequently and cover too wide a spectrum of issues for effective and timely coordination, all the more so in light of the growing near-term prospects for a direct Iran-Israel conflict in Syria. The two countries took the smallest of steps forward in December 2017 by establishing a working group to formulate policy for the “day after” the Syrian conflict,³⁶ but that day quickly arrived with the advent of direct but limited Israel-Iran hostilities this February.

Now the United States should provide relevant combatant commands – EUCOM, CENTCOM and Special Operations Command (SOCOM) – the proper authorities to coordinate strategy, exchange intelligence and develop contingencies to deter or deny Iranian violations of Israel’s redlines in Syria. This should include joint discussions about any potential Israeli-Hezbollah conflict spilling over into a wider war that would include Iran and its proxies in Syria, thereby potentially affecting U.S. and allied forces in Syria as well. Aligning these efforts will bolster deterrence by presenting Iran with Israel’s unique ability to operate in the “gray zone” and the unmatched scale and sophistication of U.S. combined-arms firepower.

The two countries also should expand cooperation on cyber and special operations, as well as sanctions on Hezbollah and the IRGC that could materially impact those groups’ ability to wage war in Syria and Lebanon.

American national security officials should push back against Iran’s information campaign that seeks to delegitimize both the U.S. presence in Syria and Israel’s very existence, similar to their efforts targeting the legitimacy of Russia’s presence in Syria by calling its “both arsonist and firefighter.”³⁷ As indicated by recent mass protests across Iran, Tehran is vulnerable to messages highlighting the human, economic and reputational costs of its brutal efforts to entrench itself in Syria and elsewhere.

Wherever feasible, the United States and Israel also should try to isolate Iran in Syria through tactical accommodation with Russia. Despite their coordinated battlefield roles – Iran the anvil, Russia the hammer – the two countries operate under different incentives and objectives in Syria. With the internal rebellion winding down, Russia has largely achieved its core goals: demonstrating its post-Cold War resurgence, securing air and naval bases along the Mediterranean coast – currently its only such facilities outside the former Soviet Union – and ensuring Syria’s postwar regime honors these agreements, even if that regime is a rump Alawite statelet or the titular head of a Syrian confederation. These military successes give Russia a major role, and a big stake, in avoiding an Israel-Iran collision. As suggested by Russian diplomats’ public contradictions of IRGC commander Qasem Soleimani’s vow to destroy Israel, Moscow maintains a certain wariness of Iran’s designs for the next phase of conflict in Syria.³⁸

F. Develop new frontiers for bilateral military cooperation and R&D

The United States and Israel should expand upon their extraordinarily close collaboration on military technology R&D. Indeed, bilateral development and funding of Israel's multilayered missile defense architecture – Iron Dome, David's Sling and Arrow – is one of the largest and most successful joint defense ventures in history.

The two countries now should set their combined sites on the next high-technology joint venture in alliance-building, the next "Arrow." The most promising prospects are in space, particularly the development of advanced military satellites. New frontiers for joint development also beckon in cyberspace and artificial intelligence (AI); directed energy weapons; hypersonic weapons; unmanned vehicles; and counter-hybrid warfare, including special and maritime operations, particularly littoral defense of critical infrastructure. Such ventures would enhance Israel's defensive posture and provide the United States advanced capabilities it might not otherwise possess, as evidenced by the recent application of the IDF's Trophy active protection system (APS) to U.S. M1A1 tanks and the potential application of Iron Curtain APS to U.S. armored vehicles.

Using the shared costs and benefits of the Arrow program as a model, the United States and Israel should launch a defense-industrial joint venture to develop miniaturized, relatively low-cost hyperspectral satellites. The military importance of such technologies, which provide more redundancies and greater signal coverage than previous-generation satellites, is increasing. Enemies that were previously "easy to find, hard to kill" – armored columns, for instance – are now "hard to find, easy to kill," especially when adversaries shed their uniforms, move underground and intermingle with civilians. Israel's defense sector is particularly well-suited to fill U.S. capability gaps, given Israel's ability to produce satellites with impressive intelligence-collection capabilities relative to their smaller payloads. A joint venture in this domain could potentially include budding Arab partners with demonstrated interest and capacity to pursue cutting-edge technologies.

The United States and Israel should also explore new joint ventures in cyberspace, where the two countries reportedly have cooperated to great effect already. Though never confirmed as a U.S.-Israeli operation, the Stuxnet cyberattack on Iran's nuclear program in 2010 inaugurated a new dimension of conflict with Iran. Tehran soon developed offensive cyber capabilities of its own in response, including completely destroying some 30,000 computers at Saudi oil company Aramco in 2012 and targeting U.S. critical infrastructure and intellectual property.

With Iran's hegemonic ambitions increasingly spilling into cyberspace, the United States and Israel should develop jointly new technology to defend against Iranian attempts to infiltrate sensitive networks, and to attack Iran's digital vulnerabilities. The United States and Israel should create a shared map of Iranian networks and develop joint operational plans for how, and under what conditions, they could be exploited. This will require bilateral investments in researching and maintaining a cutting-edge cyber arsenal to outpace Iranian countermeasures. Moreover, since Iran's cyber aggression extends to other U.S. regional partners, the United States and Israel could explore ways to extend their high-grade military cybersecurity measures to the military and critical infrastructure networks of Saudi Arabia, U.A.E. and others.

Cybersecurity cooperation could encourage the United States and Israel to push ahead together on emergent technologies like AI. Machine learning and adaptation has myriad military applications, and in many ways embodies the newest arms race. Joint R&D endeavors in AI, particularly in the private sector, could give the United States significant strategic advantages over its competitors in, for example, the speed and accuracy of analyzing intelligence collected by unmanned vehicles, the ability of defenses to counter cyberattacks or the ability of unmanned weapons systems to make autonomous battlefield decisions.

Given the proliferation of advanced military capabilities to Iran, its proxies and other strategic competitors, the United States and Israel should also consider deeper bilateral cooperation on a range of critical capabilities. Advancements in directed-energy weapons, which emit highly focused energy such as lasers or microwaves to neutralize targets, could bolster defenses against shared threats. Such weapons can fire extremely high-speed beams from unlimited magazines, and thus at lower cost per shot than existing weapons, suiting them well against the spread of lower-end asymmetric threats – for example, artillery salvos or suicide drones – and swarming tactics employed by adversaries like Iran and Hamas. Both countries have been pioneers in this field, but tighter cooperation can accelerate advances either country could make on its own to ensure that both maintain a qualitative military edge over their adversaries.

Close partnership with Israel's high-tech sectors could enable new U.S. advances in hypersonic cruise missiles and glide vehicles, whose R&D programs in the United States currently are under-resourced.³⁹ These weapons, which are designed to travel at near-ICBM speeds and distances without necessarily leaving the atmosphere or following ballistic trajectories, could provide capability for precision conventional strikes anywhere on the globe in as little as an hour. Moreover, the maneuverability and sheer velocity of such weapons would make them more survivable than conventional platforms against advanced air defenses and anti-access, area denial (A2/AD) capabilities like those possessed by Russia, China or Iran. Assuming the United States continues to draw down its overseas force presence, hypersonic weapons could play a pivotal role in enabling the United States to continue sustaining deterrence and projecting power globally.

Building on each country's advanced R&D programs for unmanned vehicles, the United States and Israel should also look into joint efforts to develop unmanned air (UAV), ground (UGV), surface (USV) and undersea (UUV) vehicles. Such platforms are increasingly valuable for surveillance and reconnaissance, force protection, precision strike, logistics and ordnance disposal (including naval mines), among other missions, as operating environments for U.S. and Israeli forces become more contested.

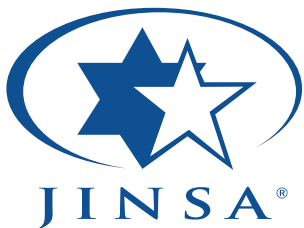
Advancements across this spectrum of cutting-edge capabilities should go hand-in-hand with closer bilateral collaboration against emergent, next-generation threats. Whether the IRGC, Hamas, Hezbollah, ISIS or "little green men" in Eastern Europe and now Syria, increasingly the United States and Israeli confront "hybrid" adversaries: enemies armed with large arsenals of sophisticated weaponry but employing tactics of insurgent, terrorist or other non-state actors to deny victory to more powerful conventionally-armed opponents like the United States and Israel.

Our two countries must train, exercise and prepare to operate together more closely against the growing threats posed by such groups. One priority should be special operations, already strong suits of the U.S. military and IDF. Maritime operations must be another priority. In particular, littoral defense of critical infrastructure will be paramount in prospective conflicts involving U.S. allies against Iran or Hezbollah, which have accumulated significant missile capabilities to target civilian installations such as offshore energy platforms or desalination plants that are so critical to the security of U.S. allies like Israel and Saudi Arabia.

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