

Trump's first year back in office expanded Israel's freedom of action

written by Prof. Zaki Shalom | 21.01.2026

Beyond Iran and Gaza, US President Donald Trump quietly expanded Israel's strategic and legal room for maneuver.

An open letter to Trump: Protect the free world from those who seek to dominate it

written by Ruth Wasserman Lande | 21.01.2026

'God has chosen you to deliver the free world from those who seek to dominate it and take away its liberties.

Why calls for a US withdrawal from NATO matter for Israel

written by Prof. Zaki Shalom | 21.01.2026

Although the likelihood that this legislation will lead to an actual US withdrawal from NATO is extremely low, its implications should not be underestimated.

Time for Israel to reassess its trump strategy

written by Prof. Zaki Shalom | 21.01.2026

Trump has repeatedly threatened to begin strikes on narcotics being smuggled overland in recent weeks.

Trump and Netanyahu's New Partnership

written by Dr. David Wurmser | 21.01.2026

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu meets President Trump this week at a time of upheaval in the U.S.-Israel relationship. The two leaders have a chance to set the contours of a new strategic framework.

Since launching its response to the Oct. 7, 2023, attacks by Hamas, Israel has redefined the dynamics of the Middle East. It has contained the plague of Iranian power, which spread throughout the region for nearly five decades, and established itself as a regional power—perhaps one without a clear rival. The Trump administration plans to support these developments via a novel foreign-policy framework: The U.S. will reduce its global footprint, empower its allies and enhance its own strength.

For most of the past 16 years, the Obama and Biden administrations complicated and undermined Israel's position in the Middle East. Their fear of escalation and entanglement—and belief that the region's most radical ideologies could be domesticated—led them to seek a series of cease-fires that spared Israel's mortal enemies, left conflicts to fester, and continually shackled the Jewish state. This, in

turn, reinforced America's regional reputation as a perfidious ally.

The Obama-Biden strategy also deepened American military involvement in the Middle East. The more Washington zip-tied Israel and other allies, the more the U.S. had to fill the security gap. In 2016, President Obama urged a Saudi-led coalition against seizing the Houthi-controlled Hodeidah port in the Red Sea, claiming humanitarian concerns. This helped delay plans by the United Arab Emirates to take the port in 2017. In 2022, under pressure from the Biden administration, the factions agreed to a cease-fire that left the Houthis in control of the port. Two years later, they are terrorizing the Red Sea, forcing the U.S. to increase its operations in the region.

The Obama-Biden approach followed a consensus held by American elites dating back to the end of the war between Israel and Egypt in 1970, when the U.S. pressured Israel to exercise restraint after Egypt violated the cease-fire. The idea was that the U.S. would foster peace by demanding Israel's strategic passivity in exchange for greater U.S. support, protection and funds. Israel's shift to a more reactive defense was disastrous. Egypt and Syria launched a surprise attack in the 1973 Yom Kippur War. But rather than abandon its reactive approach, Jerusalem continued it, growing more reliant on the U.S. for weapons and funds. The concept again failed catastrophically on Oct. 7. Now Israel has returned to its pre-1970 assertiveness, initiative and self-reliance.

Mr. Trump's return to the White House will reinforce Israel's new strategy. His America-first policy rests on two pillars. First, he promises "no new wars." Second, he seeks to rebuild global respect for the U.S. Such power and resolve, combined with the promise of a withering response when challenged or harassed, can deter war.

Yet Mr. Trump's first priority could contradict the second. If the world believes the U.S. is fundamentally averse to war, its enemies may not feel the fear and respect that underpins deterrence. This is particularly true for radical terrorist groups such as Hamas and al Qaeda, which value life so little that they are impervious to Western threats.

Mr. Trump can bring the two objectives into alignment by making powerful allies the leading edge of Western defense. Washington has for years allowed many of its allies to be strategically passive in exchange for greater military and financial

investment. Mr. Trump's desire to change this dynamic is the reason he's demanding that European countries increase their defense spending so they can independently counter threats to the Continent.

Israel's strategic shift toward strength aligns with Mr. Trump's global vision. But establishing this new relationship requires that Israel emerge from the current war not only as a U.S. ally but as a powerful proponent of Western values. In the short term, the greatest support the U.S. can lend Israel is weapons and diplomatic cover. In the long term, the U.S. must provide steadfast moral support for the survival and self-defense of the Jewish people in their homeland.

The alternative is a U.S. retreat from the region, which would invite attack and engender a global perception of American decline. Or the U.S. could revert to the policies of the past nearly six decades, when it increased its engagement while demanding Israeli weakness. Neither path has led to regional stability, reduced U.S. engagement in the Middle East, secured American interests, or enhanced global respect for the U.S.

American efforts to tether Israel, spare its enemies and compensate for Israeli weakness with its own forces have led to further entanglement and restricted Israel's ability to vanquish its enemies. In the Middle East, no ally is identified as a symbol of the West more than Israel, nor is any country as capable of fighting and defending itself even without American boots on the ground. Messrs. Trump and Netanyahu will surely discuss specific policies. More important, they will forge a new, innovative U.S.-Israel relationship that secures Israel's strength and makes use of it to advance America's interests.

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Netanyahu's White House visit

written by Lahav Harkov | 21.01.2026

When Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu meets with U.S. President Donald Trump on Tuesday, the leaders are expected to address a long list of interconnected issues with fateful repercussions for Israel's national security.

With the war in Gaza at a turning point, continued talks about normalization between Israel and Saudi Arabia, and Iran's nuclear program advancing further than ever before, Netanyahu has a key opportunity to strengthen Israel's position in the region. Netanyahu will be the first foreign leader invited to the White House in Trump's second term, and he will have the chance to try to align Israel and the U.S. positions on these critical issues.

Here are some of the top issues on the agenda:

Gaza ceasefire: Israel and Hamas entered a ceasefire agreement that was virtually identical to the one Israel had agreed to over six months before. While Hamas was not willing to consider the deal at all until shortly before Trump re-entered office, it came as somewhat of a disappointment on Israel's end that the deal could not be significantly improved following Trump's involvement.

The ceasefire went into effect on January 19, 2025, with Israeli hostages freed in exchange for Palestinian terrorists released from prison, along with a gradual withdrawal of the IDF from much of the Gaza Strip. While the hostages' release has been broadly celebrated in Israel, the deal is also viewed as a kind of devil's bargain by Israelis, who are well aware that Yahya Sinwar, the mastermind behind the Oct. 7 attacks, was released in such an exchange in 2011. Every terrorist released is a danger to Israelis.

In addition, Israel has had primarily negative experiences with outsourcing its security to others. It remains unclear whether the private contractors charged with inspecting Gazan pedestrians and vehicles returning to northern Gaza will be successful in ensuring that weapons and terrorists do not cross from southern Gaza northward, to areas that closely abut Israeli cities and kibbutzim.

Monday, February 3, marked day 16 of the deal, the day on which negotiations are meant to resume over the second stage of the deal, in which Israel would

move towards fully withdrawing from Gaza and the hostage-for-terrorist exchanges would continue.

Netanyahu's meeting with Trump is an opportunity to try to shape the next stages of the deal in a way which mitigates the risks to Israel, and allow Israel's advancement towards "total victory," as the prime minister has put it — eradicating Hamas as the dominant military and governing force in Gaza. Turning the second stage of the deal into an extension of stage one would be advantageous to Israel. Full military withdrawal from Gaza would allow Hamas to smuggle in weapons and terrorists in order to regroup militarily. Ending the war in a situation in which there is no governing alternative to Hamas being set up in Gaza, while the terrorist group continues to pocket humanitarian aid and uses it to enrich itself, is a recipe for only a very partial victory.

Relocation and reconstruction: One of Trump's favorite topics in recent weeks has been deportation and relocation — not only of illegal immigrants from America, but also the voluntary move of Gazans to other countries. Israeli officials suggested as much early in the war, but were rejected by leaders in the region, as well as by the Biden administration. Trump however has touted the idea of moving Gazans elsewhere, noting that large swaths of Gaza have been destroyed, and that having hundreds of thousands, perhaps over a million people living in rubble will make reconstruction difficult.

There is some concern in certain parts of the Israeli government about Trump's suggestion that Jordan and Egypt take in Gazan refugees. While there is a great deal of logic to that suggestion, certainly geographically and to some extent because of Egypt's responsibility due to its failure to curb Hamas smuggling, there is some concern in Jerusalem about the potential destabilization of its neighbors, leading to the suggestion that more distant Muslim-majority countries be considered as potential destinations as well.

Of even greater concern for Israel is who will fund and administer reconstruction in Gaza. While U.S. Special Envoy to the Middle East Steve Witkoff may believe that Qatar is doing "God's work" as a mediator in the hostage talks, Israel knows better. Israel understands that Qatar is really doing the work of jihadists, and trying to keep Hamas in power in Gaza. Netanyahu must relay to Trump that a Qatar-backed reconstruction or "day after" plan is unacceptable.

Broadening the circle of peace: Officials in the Trump administration and the Israeli government have talked about how normalization between Israel and Saudi Arabia, as well as other Arab and Muslim countries, is still possible. Riyadh's public statements have been accusatory towards Israel and insistent on tangible progress toward a Palestinian state in order to advance towards diplomatic relations. After suffering the worst attack on Jewish people since the Holocaust, which the Palestinian Authority has barely condemned, Israel is not inclined to make major concessions to the Palestinians, even while seeking ties with the Saudis.

The job of the U.S. is to find the middle ground, something Israel can do that will not endanger its national security or sovereignty, and that will be satisfactory for Saudi Arabia and allow its leadership to say that it helped the Palestinians. Trump has not given indications on where he stands on this question since entering office, but his enthusiasm for deal-making does not seem to have waned. With the Abraham Accords being one of the most positively-received policies of his first term, he's likely to push for their expansion.

Iran: The issue underpinning all others is the Islamic Republic of Iran. The mullahs' regime sponsored and trained Hamas before the Oct. 7 attack. Iran's proxies Hezbollah and the Houthis continued to attack Israel throughout the past year and three months. Iran directly attacked Israel multiple times. And Tehran continues to advance its nuclear program beyond the point that has a plausible civilian justification.

Israel took out much of Iran's air defenses in October 2024, leading many to think that a further attack, perhaps on oil production sites or nuclear facilities, was on the way. Neither happened in the short term, which sparked speculation that Israel was waiting for the Trump administration.

Now, Trump is using the possibility of an Israeli strike as a threat to Iran to try to bring the mullahs to the negotiating table and reach a new nuclear deal. Unlike the Obama administration, Trump is saying this openly. Hopefully, he will welcome Netanyahu's input on the matter, such that the deal will be worthwhile and not one that leaves a window for Iran to develop a nuclear weapon in a short time, as the last JCPOA deal did. A worthwhile deal would also curb Iran's ballistic missile program and its sponsorship of terrorist proxies around the world.

This week's meeting is a chance for Netanyahu and Trump to align their positions on the Iranian threat in order to better work together to weaken the Islamic Republic and eliminate its nuclear weapons program before it is too late. Israel and the US should keep military action against Iran on the table in case negotiations fail.

Isolationists: Netanyahu is arriving in Washington as the second Trump administration is still coming together. While some of the most prominent names — Secretary of State Marco Rubio, Secretary of Defense Pete Hegseth, National Security Advisor Mike Waltz — are strongly pro-Israel figures, there are other, lower-level administration figures who hold views that are of concern to Israel. Among those are people who think that the U.S. should fully disengage from the Middle East, and those who believe that while Iran may pose a significant threat to Israel, it does not pose a significant threat to America. Netanyahu can effectively explain the folly of such views to Trump, as well as to other administration figures he is set to meet this week.

Conclusion:

President Trump has made it clear that he wants Hamas defeated, Iran's nuclear program eradicated and normalization between Israel and Saudi Arabia to come to fruition. All of these issues are interconnected: The Saudis want to be able to point to some kind of achievement on the Palestinian front, which cannot happen when the war is still ongoing and Hamas retains some level of control in Gaza. Hamas is part of Iran's "Axis of Resistance," which also threatens Saudi Arabia, a country which took a friendlier approach to Israel in the past decade due to their shared enemy.

When Netanyahu is in Washington this week, it will be his job to connect these dots for Trump. President Trump would likely support a plan that would address all of the issues on the agenda. Netanyahu therefore has a historic opportunity to advance Israel's national security and move towards victory against the terrorists on Israel's borders and the Islamic Republic threatening it from afar — and to do it all in one package deal, with the support of the United States.

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A shared vision for the Middle East

written by Meir Ben Shabbat | 21.01.2026

A meeting between Israel's prime minister and the US president is always the most significant event on Israel's diplomatic calendar. This time, it carries implications for the entire region's future.

The meeting takes place at the start of the final term of a supportive, achievement-oriented, and results-driven president who isn't afraid to break frameworks and paradigms, and who readily employs unconventional tools and pressure points to reduce opposition.

It occurs against the backdrop of a struggle for global hegemony and the near-official opening of a trade war with far-reaching implications, not only for the global economy but also for the international political system.

The meeting comes as Israel stands at a diplomatic and security crossroads, facing decisions on several tensions: between the imperative to eliminate Hamas' rule and military capabilities in Gaza and the urgent return of all hostages in its custody, between the desire for normalization with Saudi Arabia and the requested price of ceasing combat in Gaza and returning the Palestinian issue to the negotiating table, between neutralizing Iran's nuclear threat and weakening its extremist regime versus concessions required in other issues to focus attention on this matter.

It's difficult to overstate the meeting's significance. Not only for the message its very occurrence sends, just two weeks after the president's inauguration and his first meeting with a foreign leader in this term, but also given its purpose and the initiatives it's expected to set in motion.

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and President Donald Trump will seek to present a shared vision for the Middle East and an agreed road map to achieve it. Additionally, they will aim to deepen and anchor the strategic relations between the US and Israel across a wide range of short and long-term issues. The directives emerging from this meeting will guide the diplomatic and

security establishment efforts in both nations.

The scale of opportunities presented by Trump's approach matches the magnitude of its inherent challenges. Netanyahu will need to prove that Israel is an asset to the US: militarily, technologically, and economically, demonstrating that partnership with Israel isn't just fulfilling an commitment between allies sharing ideological views and similar values, but also a worthwhile investment for the American superpower.

Netanyahu will seek to position Israel as a regional power capable of self-defense and able to lead a coalition of moderate nations against Iran and radical Islam. A power that will be a key player in economic and technological development initiatives and assist in advancing American interests in the region. Trump will be pleased to be convinced that Israel can serve as America's anchor in the Middle East - strong and victorious rather than dependent and hesitant.

In the spirit of his recent UN General Assembly speech, Netanyahu will propose to expand and deepen the Abraham Accords and transforming the Middle East, through Israel and its Arab partners, into a bridge connecting Asia and Europe, the Indian Ocean and the Mediterranean Sea. Along this bridge, railway tracks, energy pipelines, and fiber optic cables will be laid. Such an initiative would impact global trade and economy and the living standards of about a quarter of the world's population.

Regarding Iran, **the Trump administration clearly understands the need for an immediate change in approach.** The Biden administration's courtship were interpreted by Tehran as insurance against the use of force, increasing its boldness and weakening America's position across the region. The IAEA director general recently warned that Tehran is "pressing the gas pedal of uranium enrichment." Trump recognizes Iran's tactics to create delays in negotiations and is likely already convinced of the need to set a timeline for diplomatic efforts, considering the date set for renewing sanctions ("snap-back") and security-related considerations.

However, at the meeting's core will be the question - how to square the circle: how to achieve within a measured timeframe both the return of hostages, Hamas' destruction, a ceasefire (to progress with Saudi Arabia) and returning the Palestinian state issue to discussion (as demanded by Riyadh).

Recent declarations and moves may hint at the formula Americans might propose.

It will include four components: **First**, continuing implementation of the ceasefire and hostage return agreement. **Second**, establishing new governance in Gaza replacing Hamas - a kind of “organizing committee” comprising Palestinian Authority representatives and other organizations including Hamas, managing Gaza’s civilian affairs under supervision or guidance of an international-regional steering committee. **Third**, Trump’s migration plan, framed as a condition for and part of the reconstruction process. **Fourth**, strengthening the PA’s role subject to reforms it will undertake.

What would Israel receive under this formula? First, the hostages; second, Hamas’ government overthrow; third, possibility for profound change in Gaza following Trump’s plan and reconstruction program conditions; and fourth, normalization with Saudi Arabia.

What are the risks for Israel? **Foremost** - “Hezbollahization of Gaza” - externally, Gaza’s government won’t be identified with Hamas, but in practice would be its proxy since under this framework Hamas would remain the central power force in Gaza and under this government’s auspices would preserve its military capabilities. It’s no coincidence that Hamas already signals readiness for such a solution.

The second danger - military buildup - anyone thinking they can station “non-Hamas affiliated Palestinians from Gaza” at the Rafah crossing and assume they won’t allow Hamas’ strengthening ignores lessons from years of such experience. Truth be told, any entity besides the Israel Defense Forces tasked with border and crossing supervision cannot provide the minimum standard response Israel requires.

Third - erosion of reconstruction process conditions - Hamas has already proven its capabilities in this regard. The US and Israel struggle to control the many details related to reconstruction processes. Hamas knows how to exploit this well for its needs.

Fourth - renewal of the Palestinian “veto” over regional processes following the Palestinian issue’s return to the discussion table. This while the Palestinian Authority itself hasn’t condemned the Oct. 7 massacre, continues to indirectly

support attackers and struggles to deal even with terrorism in areas under its responsibility, as seen in Jenin and Tulkarem.

After Oct. 7, Israel cannot afford to compromise on the end result in Gaza. Demilitarizing this area and creating conditions ensuring no future threat to Israeli civilians' security are vital to guarantee this combat round will be the last. Countries around us, even those growing remarkably stronger, are watching Gaza - its end result will affect their relationship with us. We cannot be considered a regional power while this enemy continues to exist alongside us.

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How Trump Can Avoid Transition Traps Set By Biden

written by Dr. David Wurmser | 21.01.2026

Transitions of presidential administrations are tricky, and all the more so when, as from Biden to Trump, control is passing from one political party to another. There is much change, and there is much effort to avoid change. From my experience in previous transitions, this is especially true for transitions that pass from a left-leaning government to a conservative-leaning government. The majority of the government's employees identify more with the left than right—Harris won more than 90 percent of the vote in D.C., 74 percent in Montgomery County, Maryland; more than 65 percent in Fairfax County, Virginia. This is especially true as a conservative government that defines itself against the Washington establishment comes into power. So this particular transition, even more than most others, features a mad race by those loyal to the ideas of the previous administration to lock the new administration into policies of the outgoing administration.

There is a window of opportunity for the outgoing administration to do this during

transition because before the new team can take over, its most senior members must be confirmed by the Senate. At the outset, the unconfirmed personal staff of the president — the national security Advisor or special assistants — are the only ones on board. Because of security clearance requirements and the fact that an official has no authority to hire employees before he himself holds a position, second-tier and deeper down political appointments are slow to be filled. As a result, even those few aides who are installed in the first days of the president's terms still must rely on staff, bureaucracy, and in some cases even the appointees of the previous administration. An isolated president with a few lone staffers and no supporting bureaucracy is highly vulnerable to having policies and ideas foisted upon him unwillingly, unwittingly, or even somewhat dishonestly. I saw this in action myself in the transition in 2001. Indeed, as late as 2005, one major proliferation/arms control policy issue came up that demanded a fundamental policy reconsideration. When that was raised, the bureaucracy refused to allow the issue to be discussed because, it said, there had already been a final high-level policy decision. When? In early February 2001 — namely in the first weeks of the George W. Bush administration, before any staff below the cabinet level had come on board, and when even some cabinet members had not yet been confirmed.

There's room for such bureaucratic finagling both in the final days of the departing administration and in the early days of the new one.

Avoiding this transition trap depends largely on savvy and determination of some of the top staff of the new administration who take office immediately on January 20 in positions that do not require confirmation. They will help set and monitor the implementation of policy on behalf of the president. But they are outnumbered by the permanent bureaucracy and the holdovers from the outgoing administration. As a result, these early staffers sometimes get overwhelmed, manipulated, and barreled over into fulfilling the policy set by the previous administration. That can functionally lock the incoming administration into the failed strategic concept of the outgoing administration.

The outgoing Biden administration has set such a "transition trap" in place for the incoming Trump administration when it comes to Middle East policy. Trump's "America First" policy may be somewhat undefined, but he and his surrogates during the campaign promised a sharp departure from Biden's administration and the entrenched foreign policy bureaucracy. One clear principle is to treat friends

better than our enemies, because strong friends who project power both secure American interests and reduce their reliance on constant investment of American power. In terms of the Middle East, the most marked feature of this is strong support for Israel, and more respect to Saudi Arabia, the UAE, and Bahrain to protect themselves and defend against those who would challenge them.

The departing administration had an alternative view. The unapologetic assertion of regional power was seen as provocative and the support for allies had to be tempered by our desire to moderate and integrate (some would describe this as appease) our enemies. Israeli power was seen to make Israel too secure to be pliable to adopt policies preferred by Washington but rejected locally. The rising influence of progressivism on the left, moreover, sharpened this hostility to Israeli, Saudi, and UAE power and influence.

The actors during the transition include not only residual staffers but also foreign powers such as Qatar and Turkey. They aim to tether the new administration to the past and to prevent it from embarking on a new path.

The Biden team's strategic outlook in the Middle East rested on two pillars. First, that Iran can be moderated, integrated, and harnessed to provide regional stability. Second, that regional instability is primarily driven by the failure to solve the Palestinian problem, which in turn can only be solved by the creation of a Palestinian state within the 1948 armistice lines. The Abraham Accords were dismissed as a marginal event and not a real peace treaty — let alone strategic bloc forming — because they did nothing to bring about a solution to the Palestinian problem. Moreover, the solution to the Palestinian conflict was informed in the Biden era by ideas President Obama (much of the Biden team hailed from that administration) himself sketched in a meeting with the Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations a decade ago: Israeli strength reduced Israel's longing for peace, hardened Israeli will to reject compromise, and rendered it more immune to American pressure to impose concessions.

After October 7, 2023, these two pillars were reinforced in Washington rather than being discarded. The Biden administration resisted Israeli victory and destruction of its enemies akin to the 1967 victory. The administration restrained Israel's effort to bear down on all the proxies constituting Iran's ring of fire, and it capped and diminished Israel's strikes against Iran itself. At the heart of the State

Department's greatest efforts was the attempt to tap into Israeli vulnerabilities — such as the hostages — and desires — like peace with Saudi Arabia — and leverage them to impose on Israel strategic weakness and dependency. The Biden team hoped to be able to impose on Israel policies that Israel would normally reject as either strategically dangerous or ideologically repulsive. That explains the Biden team's efforts throughout the war to increase Israeli dependency and vulnerability and to prevent a solid Israeli strategic victory.

At the same time, Israel suffered trauma and vulnerability after October 7. Its world of ideas and paradigms — deterrence, condominium with Palestinians, status quo, slow moderation of the Palestinian political orbit — all crashed. Israeli weakness and pain did not make Israel pliable and dependent as President Obama had theorized a decade earlier but drove Israel into a defensive crouch and war it believed was its second war of independence — a desperate battle just to survive with little or no latitude for compromise, goodwill, or tolerated vulnerability. Israel was in its own battle of civilizational survival against absolute evil. As such, the world of the Biden team was dramatically different from the world as seen by Israel.

The incoming Trump administration's view of the region is much more aligned with Israel's view of the world and the region than it is with the Biden team's view. So the effort in this transition of the Biden team has been to ensure that policies, agreements and statements are made that lock the new administration into the Obama-Biden strategic paradigm, thereby derailing and sabotaging the principles of the "America First" agenda. This is similar to how the Obama administration, by allowing the enactment of U.N. Security Council Resolution 2334 of December 23, 2016, attempted to lock the incoming first Trump administration into its policies rejecting any Israeli legitimacy beyond the 1948 ceasefire lines.

In its twilight days, thus, the Biden administration has focused its efforts into obtaining a ceasefire between Israel and Hamas in Gaza. But Hamas would settle for nothing less than a full Israeli defeat and a return to the status quo ante of October 6 in terms of a powerful Hamas state ruling over all Gaza with improperly regulated access to resupply its weapons and access to the world through Egypt. Moreover, the aims of Hamas were not altogether opposed to every aspect of U.S. policy, which also sought to prevent a decisive Israeli offensive victory and reoccupation of Gaza. So to pursue its objective and to

secure a ceasefire, the administration leveraged what was at its disposal to prevail over Israel — namely Israel's hope to retrieve its hostages, its practical need to obtain arms supply from the United States, and its diplomatic need to have an American cover internationally. The war, the Biden team hoped, could actually advance the ideas that Israel cannot win militarily, must concede to the Palestinians in order to make peace, and that Israeli weakness can successfully impose Israeli malleability, and thus makes more likely peace and the establishment of a Palestinian state. To the extent that either the Gaza or Lebanon ceasefire are premised on Israeli hopes of U.S. support for addressing the Iran nuclear issue, they also again subjugate Israel to fiat by Washington on the Palestinian issue accordingly.

If the United States under the Trump administration adopts and carries through both agreements, and if it forces Israel neither to react to violations nor jettison either agreement at critical phases to finish the war that could not be finished under the Biden administration, then essentially the incoming administration perpetuates the world view on the Middle East that embodied the previous administration. Trump will be caught in the transition trap set by Biden.

A second trap concerns peace with Saudi Arabia. The Abraham accords were grounded in the idea that there is an overarching strategic interest for the UAE, Bahrain and others to align with Israel to face common enemies and to take advantage of the common capabilities to advance the economies, survival, and interests of each. Essentially, the big innovation was to remove the Palestinian veto over peace with Arab countries.

The Biden administration, through the ceasefire to the Gaza conflict, has essentially now reversed the Abraham Accords approach. It has instead welded progress in pursuing an Israeli-Saudi peace to the Palestinian issue. That grants the Palestinians — any Palestinian faction whether Hamas or the PLO — a veto over an Israeli peace treaty with any Arab country: the lowest common denominator Palestinian faction attains thus the ability to derail it. Apologists for this approach attribute it to accommodating Saudi public opinion, supposedly aroused by Al Jazeera images of Gaza. Yet the Biden attempt to make a Saudi-Israel agreement contingent on Palestinian participation in fact predates October 7, 2023. It is driven by Obama-Biden ideology, not by Saudi public opinion. The Biden administration had already *in 2022* forced Palestinian representation and involvement in all the Abraham Accords working groups, in effect paralyzing them

and making them moribund.

The third phase of the Gaza cease-fire — a regional state-building effort to rehabilitate Gaza — is essentially transformed also into the first phase of a peace-process between Israel and Saudi Arabia. So, under the terms of the cease-fire, Israel must accept a devastating, life-threatening strategic defeat in Gaza and allow essentially a Palestinian entity run by Hamas and its international supporters to arise there in order to get through the third phase and get into the serious process of making peace with Saudi Arabia. This forces Israel, if it wishes to have peace with Saudi Arabia, to suffer a catastrophic defeat in Gaza.

This is another “transition trap” set by Biden for Trump. By weakening Israel and depriving the U.S. of a strong ally, it renders the new Trump team unable to build a policy anchored to “American First” principles upon which it would most pride itself.

The ceasefire agreement between Israel and Hamas may be necessary in order to retrieve whatever live hostages Israel is able to repatriate. Retrieving those hostages has been an Israeli war aim from day one.

But it is a vital American interest under advertised “America First” principles to allow Israel to restart the war in Gaza and complete the destruction of Hamas, and also to allow Israel to enforce unilaterally U.N. Security Council Resolutions 1701 and 1559, which are embedded in the Lebanon ceasefire. If Hamas emerges with a story of victory in any form, not only will Israel face another October 7 soon, and not only will antisemitism explode exponentially globally, but cities and towns all over the West will suffer from a newly energized and encouraged global jihadi effort.

A new, dangerous narrative is already emerging regionally. Prominent Syrian Islamists aligned with the new Syrian government now argue that Syria’s Baathist regime fell not because Israel had annihilated the Hizballah/IRGC security infrastructure and substructure of Syria’s regime, leaving it unable to even mount a minimal defense of itself, but because the momentum of the great “victory” of Oct 7 “Al-Aqsa flood” had translated into a regional tide that swept out Assad & ushered in the beginning of a new Islamist era that will liberate Jerusalem, destroy the “Zionists,” and defeat the West. As long as Hamas rules Gaza and argues it survived, and thus won, the war, this view will grow and will haunt

Israel, Europe, and America.

The best way for Trump to escape the transition traps set by Biden is for the new president to understand when it becomes necessary for Israel to abandon the ceasefire agreement. After the last hostage Israel can hope to still retrieve has been liberated, Israel will have to finish the war in a way that results in an unambiguous, incontrovertible, complete victory.

This isn't only my own opinion. It's a view widely held by perceptive and serious senior figures in Israel and in America.

"Nobody will attack us, rape our women, burn people alive, kill 1,200 people, do the atrocities that Hamas did, and survive this," the founder and chairman of Israel's Defense and Security Forum, General Amir Avivi, said the other day. "As long as we keep this strategic understanding that we need to eradicate them, then they will also learn the price for doing what they did to us. They need to be eradicated."

The CEO of the Foundation for Defense of Democracies, Mark Dubowitz, said, "If you think Israel will let Hamas's murderers, rapists, and torturers escape justice, you don't understand post-Oct. 7 Israel. Justice will come, and it will be decisive."

Only a devastating defeat of regional radical threats will deflate global jihadi confidence and momentum. It will restore an era of peace through strength and make America safe again.

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How Israel should tackle

‘transactional Trump’

written by David M. Weinberg | 21.01.2026

With Donald J. Trump moving in three days’ time back into the White House, Israel must carefully calibrate its relationship with the new-old president and his team. Jerusalem has to evaluate what expectations and demands of Trump are realistic, and what price Israel will likely have to pay to meet his priorities.

This is especially true in light of the hostage-for-terrorist release deal that Trump forced down the throat of Israel (and Hamas) this week. What does this tell us about the incoming president’s proclivities and modus operandi?

The hostage deal and imposed ceasefire cannot come as a surprise.

For months now, Trump has made it clear that by his inauguration on January 20, he expects quiet on the Gaza front and other Mideast battle lines so that he can focus without interference on his priorities – which are immigration, the economy, and China. And reaching a grand Mideast strategic accord involving Saudi Arabia.

Everything else, Trump has intimated, can wait. This includes finishing-off Hamas and real military confrontation with Iran.

This is what Trump’s aides call “sequencing,” an ordered set of priorities where not everything can be tackled all at once and early on. In Hebrew, the relevant idiom is *parah parah*, meaning that you milk (or slaughter) one cow at a time.

It is not only a question of sequencing. It is also “transactional,” meaning that Trump runs his foreign policy with a business mindset: give and take.

Transactional Trump

Thus, “Transactional Trump” expects Israel to play along with his priorities, and this is especially true regarding a Saudi deal. The returning president intends to cut a tripartite American-Saudi-Israeli accord this year. For a range of reasons, this is one of Trump’s top priorities. It is well within reach, and it mostly jibes with Israel’s preferences.

However, Israel will have to swallow some bitter pills to facilitate this, like acquiescence to the US sale of F-35 fighter jets to Riyadh and acceptance of a US-

backed Saudi civilian nuclear program.

Netanyahu also may have to mutter something about a “pathway” to Palestinian independence in the distant future - even though neither he nor the Saudis nor most members of Trump’s team believe this is feasible or sensible.

Again, in the context of Trump’s transactional approach to politics and foreign policy, Israel will have to play its part in facilitating the Saudi deal.

IF ISRAEL does so, it will be well placed to expect a return from Trump down the line on issues closer to home - ranging from Israeli assertion of sovereignty in parts of Judea and Samaria, to pushback against nasty international organizations that are at Israel’s throat, to US supply to Israel of heavy ordnance weaponry necessary for striking Iran, and more.

And remember, even if Trump is not going to green light in the near term renewed and decisive warfare against Hamas, he and his team are not going to delegitimize Israel’s continuing wars against Palestinian terrorism in Gaza or Judea and Samaria (and against Hezbollah and jihadist terror from Lebanon and Syria) - the way that the Biden-Blinken-Harris team did.

We also are not going to hear Secretary of State Marco Rubio, National Security Advisor Mike Walz, and US Ambassador to Israel Mike Huckabee contribute to “Palestinianization” of regional politics by fetishizing Palestinians an “immediate” need for Palestinian statehood - especially after the Simchat Torah (October 7, 2023) invasion and massacres.

They are not going to qualify Israel’s “right” to defend itself by using the insidious Kamala Harris qualifiers “but” and “only.” “But too many innocent Palestinians have been killed, children, mothers...” said Kamala, and Israel can fight “only if this leads rapidly towards a two-state solution where the Palestinians have security, self-determination, and the dignity they so rightly deserve.”

Similarly, the Trump team is not going to justify and excuse the radical anti-American, anti-Israeli, and antisemitic rioters on American campuses by allowing that “they have a point” (another shoddy Harris quip).

And the Trump team, along with the Republican-dominated Congress, is not going to hide behind extreme liberal loyalties to the farce known as “international law,”

whose holy institutions like the ICC, ICJ and the UNCHR refugee agency have taken to assaulting Israel with false apartheid allegations and war crime arrest warrants.

The Trump team is not going to fuel the nasty campaign to delegitimize Israel's very presence in Judea and Samaria by conjuring-up and sanctioning so-called "violent settlers" and other "malign" Israeli civil society actors on the right-wing of the political map.

Pushback against all this by the Trump team is crucially important in rebuilding Israel's legitimacy and standing on the global stage.

FORCING IRAN off its nuclear weapon and regional hegemonic drives through concrete military action is Israel's top policy priority, and for this it needs Trump administration support and cooperation.

(Perhaps Israeli acquiescence in the Gaza ceasefire that Trump insisted upon will help in this regard. Perhaps. That would make the ceasefire deal with all its problematic aspects worthwhile – especially IDF withdrawals and the release of Palestinian terrorists from Israeli jails.)

But Trump is not there yet. Until President Trump is convinced – in my assessment, this will take some time – that no degree of "maximum" economic sanctions and no amount of his personal swagger and business acumen will do the trick in defanging Iran, he will not be ready to militarily confront the belligerent Islamic Republic.

But this doesn't mean that time must be wasted. There is a broad range of important immediate initiatives on the table, below the level of a direct military assault on Iran, for revitalizing the US-Israel partnership and for hemming Tehran in.

MY COLLEAGUE Asher Fredman of the Misgav Institute for National Security & Zionist Strategy has laid out a road map for taking the US-Israel alliance to new heights, in a 14-page focused policy paper. (Fredman also serves as director for Israel at the Abraham Accords Peace Institute.)

The paper details four areas for enhanced US-Israel strategic cooperation in the immediate term: defense, intelligence, and technological cooperation; countering

the shared threats from Iran and its proxies; expanding regional cooperation and the Abraham Accords; and countering and defunding anti-American, anti-Israeli and pro-terror activity in international organizations.

The brilliance of the paper is its detail. For example, Fredman has specific proposals for expanding joint R&D on cutting-edge military technologies like high-energy laser systems, space and satellite technologies, unmanned air, ground, surface and undersea vehicles, hypersonic weapons, military AI, and offensive and defensive cyber capabilities; and cooperation in advancing precision medicine, digital health, drug development and bio-convergence.

He also suggests adding Israel to NATO's Partnership Interoperability Initiative (PII) and granting Israel "Enhanced Opportunity Partner" status.

Regarding Iran, there are concrete proposals for enacting and aggressively enforcing sanctions on the "ghost fleet" transporting Iranian oil to Asia, and on any entity involved in the manufacture, sale, or transfer of Iranian military equipment or technology to other countries.

Also, imposition of sanctions on any financial institution that uses Iran's System for Electronic Payment Messaging (SEPAM) to verify or conduct a transition. And of course, the Houthis should be listed back onto the US list of Foreign Terrorist Organizations.

As for regional accords, even before any deal is reached with Saudi Arabia, there is much to do - like advancing the India-Middle East-Europe (IMEC) Corridor to counter China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI); and expanding the I2U2 framework encompassing India, Israel, the UAE, and USA, to involve projects in space, energy, water, agriculture, transportation, and health business, academic, and civil society platforms.

Pushing back against terrorism in international institutions should lead to defunding of the UNHRC, OCHA, UNESCO, the UN Special Rapporteur on the Palestinian Territories, CEIRPP, UNISPAL, the UN Division of Palestinian Rights and the anti-Israel departments of the UN Departments of Political and Peace-Building Affairs, Global Communications, and Public Information.

American victims of terror should be allowed to sue international organizations that provide resources to US-designated terrorist groups and that would

otherwise be immune pursuant to the International Organization Immunity Act.

In short, “Transactional Trump” is a challenge but also an opportunity. Israel has much to offer the US, and over time can realistically expect concrete returns.

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Expectations from Trump on the Middle East

written by Ruth Wasserman Lande | 21.01.2026

The arrival of President-elect Donald Trump, perceived as a dominant and strong leader, is already impacting the Middle East even before he has been sworn in.