

Shared values, shared skies: Inside America's deepest Middle East partnership

written by Ruth Pines-Feldman | 05.07.2026

As the US marks 250 years since its Declaration of Independence, it celebrates a quarter of a millennium of global leadership, military power, economic strength, and technological innovation.

Over the past several decades, one of the most significant and distinctive pillars of American foreign policy has been its alliance with Israel. This relationship extends far beyond a conventional partnership between states. It is built on shared values, strategic interests, deep societal ties, and a level of security and technological cooperation that has few parallels in the international system.

From recognition to strategic alliance

The relationship between the two countries began almost immediately following the establishment of the State of Israel. The US was the first country to recognize Israel, only minutes after its declaration of independence.

President Harry Truman made the decision despite opposition from elements within the State Department and the American security establishment, which questioned Israel's ability to defend itself against its neighboring states.

The "special relationship" did not emerge immediately. During the 1950s, the administration of president Dwight Eisenhower sought to strengthen ties with Arab states and draw them closer to the Western camp as part of the broader Cold War competition with the Soviet Union and the struggle for influence over Middle Eastern oil resources.

The strategic shift began during the 1960s and 1970s. Israel's victory in the Six Day War in 1967, combined with the expansion of Soviet influence across the Middle East, increased Israel's value as a strategic asset for the US and was strengthened during the administration of president Lydon B. Johnson, who had a close personal relationship with Israeli prime minister Golda Meir.

Under president Richard Nixon, Washington gradually developed a broader framework of military assistance, intelligence cooperation, and diplomatic coordination with Jerusalem, helping replace Israel's previous reliance on European partners, particularly France, which had imposed an arms embargo on Israel.

By the 1980s, the term "special relationship" had become a standard description of the alliance, reflecting a partnership based on shared strategic interests and a common geopolitical outlook.

Over time, defense cooperation expanded significantly. Joint missile defense programs, particularly the Arrow missile defense system, became symbols of the depth of the partnership. Israel also emerged as a center of technological innovation.

Unprecedented cooperation

The direct confrontation with Iran between 2024-2026 demonstrated the extent to which US-Israel security relations have evolved beyond the traditional model of military assistance.

During Iran's missile and drone attacks against Israel in April and October 2024, American forces actively participated in intercepting incoming threats targeting Israel.

A key factor behind this cooperation was Israel's transfer to US Central Command (CENTCOM) in 2021, integrating Israel into the US-led regional security architecture through joint planning, intelligence sharing, military exercises, and regional defense initiatives. The Abraham Accords facilitated this process by creating new opportunities for regional cooperation.

The strengthening of ties was reflected at the highest operational levels. General Michael Kurilla, who served as CENTCOM commander from 2022-2025, maintained frequent engagement with Israeli defense and intelligence officials during major regional operations and crises. Joint assessments involving the IDF, Mossad, Shin Bet, and American counterparts focused on Iran, Hezbollah, the Houthis, and other Iranian-backed militias across the region throughout the war.

At the same time, real-time intelligence cooperation reached unprecedented

levels. Coordination expanded across signals intelligence, satellite surveillance, missile-launch detection, drone tracking, and strategic warning systems.

Another indication of the alliance's depth was the visible American military presence in Israel during Operation Epic Fury/Rising Lion in 2026.

The deployment of US refueling and transport aircraft transformed Israel into a forward logistical hub for regional operations and reflected an unprecedented level of trust.

For the first time, Washington was able to rely on Israel as a primary operating platform rather than on other regional bases that had been repeatedly targeted by Iran and its proxies.

The confrontations with Iran produced a new model: a full operational partnership. The alliance between Jerusalem and Washington has evolved into one of the closest security relationships maintained by the US outside NATO. Israel demonstrated that it is not merely a passive ally but a strategic partner, enabling broader Western objectives.

In this sense, Israel continues to serve as a key pillar of Western influence in the Middle East and as an active contributor to regional stability under the broader framework of American leadership.

Changing alliance

One of the defining characteristics of the relationship today is the changing balance within the alliance.

Israel in 2026 is not the Israel of the 1950s, 1960s, or even the 1980s. Its economy ranks among the strongest in the developed world and has demonstrated resilience despite the prolonged multi-front conflict imposed upon it. Its defense industries are global leaders in cyber technology, air and missile defense, artificial intelligence, and unmanned systems.

As a result, there is growing recognition within Israel that it should gradually reduce its reliance on American assistance in areas where it can achieve greater strategic self-sufficiency. This does not signify a weakening of the alliance. On the contrary, it reflects a transition from a model of dependency to a model of partnership.

Israel will continue to rely on the US for diplomatic support, strategic coordination, and cooperation against global threats. At the same time, it is committed to expanding its domestic production capacity for ammunition, spare parts, and critical weapons systems to reduce exposure to political fluctuations in Washington.

A strategic challenge

Despite the strength of the security partnership, the alliance faces significant long-term challenges.

For decades, support for Israel enjoyed broad bipartisan backing in the US. In recent years, however, public opinion has become increasingly polarized.

Polling data indicates declining support among younger Americans, university students, and segments of the Democratic Party. Generational gaps have widened, with younger voters expressing more critical views of Israeli policies than previous generations.

At the same time, new voices have emerged within parts of the Republican Party, particularly among younger conservatives who advocate a more restrained foreign policy and question extensive American involvement overseas.

Although support for Israel remains strong among large segments of the American public, the bipartisan consensus that characterized much of the relationship for decades can no longer be taken for granted.

For Israel, this represents a long-term strategic challenge. Preserving strong ties with both major political parties, expanding engagement with younger generations will be essential to maintaining the alliance's long-term strength.

Looking ahead

At the 250th anniversary of American independence, the US-Israel alliance stands as one of the most successful strategic partnerships of the modern era. It has survived wars, political crises, disagreements between leaders, and profound changes in the international system.

The coming decades will bring additional changes, but the alliance between Jerusalem and Washington is likely to rely less on traditional patterns of

assistance and more on cooperation.

This is the central significance of the US-Israel alliance in the twenty-first century: not a relationship between a superpower and a small state, but a strategic partnership between two countries that share interests, values, technological capabilities, and a common vision for regional stability and security.

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