It is time to set President Trump straight

written by Prof. Zaki Shalom | 15.11.2026

President Donald Trump is entitled to take pride in his policies, emphasize his contribution to Israel's security, and seek political credit for it. But there is a line between gratitude to a friend and acceptance of the claim that he is the reason we exist—and Israel's prime minister must make that line clear.

During the 2024 election campaign, Trump warned that if Kamala Harris were elected, Israel would cease to exist within two years. Now he presents the same idea retrospectively: Israel would not exist were it not for Donald Trump. In an interview with *60 Minutes*, he linked America's protection of other countries to his demand that they reimburse it for the costs of war, mentioning Israel in the same context.

These are not merely compliments the president pays himself. They portray Israel as a country whose very existence depends on his benevolence.

That portrayal undermines Israel's standing. It replaces the image of a strong partner, possessing capabilities and bearing responsibility, with that of a country unable to survive without an outside savior. It could encourage Israel's enemies to believe that a political change in Washington would leave it defenseless, while conditioning its friends to view it as a burden dependent on their protection.

There is no need to deny the immense importance of the United States in order to reject this portrayal. Military assistance, intelligence cooperation, diplomatic support, and defense cooperation can be decisive. But partnership is not ownership, and gratitude is not a promissory note payable with a nation's very existence.

Nor is there any need to downplay the threats. The October 7 massacre was a national catastrophe. A broader attack could have brought an even greater disaster. The nuclear threat demands seriousness and responsibility, not empty self-confidence. Yet none of this entitles Trump to present Israel's destruction, had he not acted, as an established fact. It is a claim about a scenario that never occurred, not a fact that can be verified.

The lesson for Israel is not that we have no need for friends. It is that we must never entrust them with full responsibility for our fate. We must strengthen the alliance with the United States while preserving our ability to act independently and decisively. These two tasks complement each other; neither negates the other.

This does not mean that Israel should reveal its capabilities, detail operational plans, or announce targets for a nuclear response. It must maintain a clear deterrent message: anyone who attempts to destroy Israel cannot assume that they themselves will remain beyond danger. A state that launches nuclear weapons against Israel must understand that it is also putting its own existence at risk.

This message is intended to deny an aggressor any illusion that it could inflict catastrophe on Israel and emerge unscathed. There is no need to turn it into a sweeping threat against peoples and populations, nor to commit in advance to a particular military outcome, for it to be unequivocal.

Israel must therefore give the president a respectful and clear response. Not a quarrel, an insult, or a repudiation of friendship, but a statement of principle:

"Mr. President, Israel appreciates your friendship and the United States' contribution to its security. We seek to deepen this partnership. But Israel's existence is not a gift from an American president, nor does it depend on who occupies the White House. The responsibility for Israel's defense rests with us. We do not ask America to bear that responsibility in our place, and our gratitude must not be interpreted as an admission that we cannot exist without it. Israel will continue to build its strength, address its failures, and preserve its ability to defend itself. Anyone contemplating an attempt to threaten Israel's very existence must understand that they are also putting their own existence at risk."

This is how a sovereign state should speak to its ally: with appreciation and friendship, but without surrendering its dignity—or handing others responsibility for its fate.

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