Time for Israel to reassess its trump strategy

written by Prof. Zaki Shalom | 10.12.2025

In a speech delivered at the Reagan National Defense Forum on December 6, US Secretary of Defense Pete Hegseth expanded on the need for the United States to adopt a realist approach in shaping its global strategy.

The first principle of such an approach, he argued, is a dramatic enhancement of American military capabilities. No political achievements, he maintained, are possible without robust power. Equally important, however, is a clear understanding of how – and for what purposes – American power should be employed.

Hegseth outlined four principles governing the legitimate use of US force:

• Force is used only to defend vital interests.

• Force is used only with the intention of

achieving victory.

• Force is used only when goals are clear,

limited, and attainable.

• Force is used only as a last resort.

According to Hegseth, many past presidents abandoned the realist doctrine championed by Ronald Reagan. They weakened America's military posture, and turned the United States into "the policeman of the world." These administrations, he argued, initiated military missions that were either unconnected to core national security interests or were fundamentally unachievable – such as efforts to export democracy across the globe.

In the name of hollow ideologies, they embroiled the United States in futile wars around the world. President Donald Trump, Hegseth asserted, is now reversing this course and restoring a strategic approach rooted in national interest and military strength.

According to the secretary of defense, the principal objectives guiding American policy today include:

a. Defending the homeland, including securing US borders and developing advanced defensive systems against missiles and drones.

b. Deterring China through strength – maintaining military superiority to avoid direct confrontation.

c. Rebalancing the division of defense burdens with allies, thereby reducing strain on the US defense budget.

d. Accelerating the development of the American defense industry, ensuring that the United States remains the world's premier military power.

Hegseth's remarks, and the broader strategic worldview they reflect, require Israel to undertake a fundamental rethinking in its approach towards the Trump administration.

Israel must recognize that repeated references to its unique status – phrases such as "We are the only democracy in the Middle East," "We alone protect human rights in the region," or "We are a nation emerging from the Holocaust" – carry far less weight in the eyes of a US administration guided primarily by realist principles. Moral arguments, historical narratives, and appeals to shared values play a more limited role in this strategic environment.

The Trump administration seeks to see Israel as a strong, capable, and self-reliant ally. Unlike previous administrations, it is willing – even eager – to reduce Israel's dependence on the United States. Its expectation is that Israel will act as a partner capable of contributing to American security interests, not merely benefiting from them.

Therefore, the government of Israel will need to work diligently to persuade the Trump administration that its proposed policy frameworks regarding Gaza, Iran, Lebanon, and the West Bank advance not only Israel's national interests but also those of the United States.

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