

## **AJC Policy: Maintaining Israel's Security and Promoting Israel's Legitimacy**

The U.S. and Israel enjoy an unparalleled special relationship based on a shared dedication to democratic principles, the rule of law, religious pluralism, and individual liberty, and common strategic objectives. The U.S. and Israel also share a commitment to achieving an enduring regional peace that assures the security of the Jewish people in their historic homeland and self-determination and expanded opportunity for the Palestinians.

Longstanding bipartisan support for Israel in Congress and the U.S. government, as well as the enduring tradition of providing U.S. security assistance to Israel, is critical. No nation in the world cooperates more fully and reliably with the U.S. than the State of Israel in strategic planning, intelligence-sharing, military training, and technological development. It is no coincidence that the antidemocratic forces in the world that demonize Israel also view the United States as their enemy. Cooperation in combating such forces is of mutual benefit, and continued expansion of U.S.-Israel ties advances the strategic interests of both nations.

### Israeli-Palestinian Peace

As difficult as it would be to achieve, a negotiated settlement of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict based on the principle of two states for two peoples is the most sustainable path to a secure, democratic, Jewish future for Israel, and for the achievement of self-determination for the Palestinian people. A Palestinian state will not only help assure Israel's security, it will fulfill the long-awaited national aspiration of the Palestinian people and bolster stability and prosperity throughout the region.

Historically, the U.S. has played a pivotal role—as a facilitator of negotiations—in helping to achieve major breakthroughs in the Middle East peace process, from the Camp David Accords in 1978, through the Peace Treaty between Israel and Egypt in 1979, to the Peace Treaty between Israel and Jordan in 1994. Today, given the regional complexities, advancing an agreement between the Israelis and Palestinians must involve the broader region.

The U.S. continues to remain an active partner in trying to negotiate a lasting settlement between the parties. However important the U.S. role, face-to-face negotiations are the only practical path for creating a viable Palestinian state existing side-by-side in peace and security with democratic Israel. While the support the “Peace to Prosperity” plan has received in Israel and among several of Israel's Arab neighbors is encouraging, Palestinian leadership must return to the negotiating table. For too long, Palestinian voices have been missing from the table largely due to their own rejectionism. We decry Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas's repeated repudiation of negotiations in favor of seeking recognition of Palestinian statehood in the United Nations, or otherwise promoting an internationally imposed solution. Similarly, we reject proposed efforts by any individual nation—aside from those directly affected by the conflict—that seek a short-cut around direct, bilateral negotiations to resolve final status issues between the Israelis and Palestinians. Such efforts impede rather than advance a two-state solution.

To bolster the chances for a lasting peace, it is crucial that Israel and the Palestinians build stronger economic and interpersonal connections. For these populations that have been in opposition for so long, they need to start building trust through mutual interests and mutually beneficial ventures. Joint economic activities would not only help develop the Palestinian economy and boost employment opportunities, it has the potential to begin laying the foundation for more positive relations between Israelis and Palestinians. Likewise, people-to-people exchanges that humanize each other, foster community and peaceful coexistence, and work to counter incitement and extremist propaganda are a necessary component of long-term stability. **The Partnership Fund for Peace Act** is legislation introduced in both the House and Senate that seeks to create these types of economic and interpersonal connections.

We also welcome the recent increase in contacts between Israel and a number of Arab states, and believe this offers a potentially important dimension to the peace process, not to mention the tangible benefits that come from increased contact and cooperation. Indeed, it may offer the best pathway to a peace deal. We continue to urge Arab states to undertake further tangible confidence-building measures, which could materially strengthen Palestinian advocates of reconciliation and weaken Hamas and other rejectionists. Progress between Israel and its Arab neighbors must not depend on, nor will it substitute for, an Israeli-Palestinian accord, however, it could help create a regional environment far more conducive to reaching such an agreement.

#### Addressing threats posed by Hamas and Hezbollah

A significant barrier to peace, and a daily threat to Israel's civilian population, is the presence of Hamas, a terrorist organization that has ruled Gaza for more than a decade. Rather than join with the Palestinian Authority to create the institutions necessary for building a prospective and peaceful Palestinian state, Hamas remains committed to using violence to achieve its long-term goal of destroying Israel. Hamas devotes its resources to terrorist activities rather than caring for its civilians. As a result, Gazans suffer. Additionally, the continued presence of Hamas as a political and economic leader in Gaza threatens and undermines the viability of the PA.

The gross human rights violations committed by Hamas are numerous and well-documented. Since its takeover of Gaza in 2007, Hamas has summarily executed and tortured civilians, and continuously puts the civilian population of Gaza at risk. Hamas intentionally positions missile launch facilities, weapon stockpiles, and fighters near mosques, hospitals, homes, and schools. The terrorist organization routinely launches rockets, mortars, and incendiary kites and balloons into Israel, terrorizing the civilian population, and provoking deadly confrontations along the border fence aimed at causing casualties that can elicit international sympathy.

Hezbollah is a global terrorist organization armed and supported by Iran and acting as a proxy force, sowing discord and spreading terror throughout the Middle East. According to intelligence sources, Hezbollah has more than 100,000 increasingly sophisticated rockets and missiles prepared to fire at Israel at any time, giving it a larger arsenal than many national militaries. But Hezbollah's global footprint extends well beyond the Middle East, with support networks in Europe, Africa, Southeast Asia, and North and South America. Its operatives use hubs around the world to recruit members, raise funds, procure weapons, smuggle drugs, conduct surveillance, and, when feasible, instill terror and destruction. For the security of the U.S., Israel, and our allies around the world, **all nations should swiftly designate Hezbollah in its entirety as a terrorist organization.**

Recognizing the persistent danger to Israel from terrorist forces such as Hamas and Hezbollah—and the existential threat posed by Iran should it ultimately realize its nuclear ambitions—America's unwavering commitment to the safety and security of Israel is paramount. Israel's right to defend itself must be upheld, domestically and internationally, if it is called into question. Our country must continue to ensure that Israel retains the qualitative military edge necessary for its security, which requires military assistance to Israel as well as scientific research and other non-military programs of shared interest.

#### Refuting the Boycott, Divestment, Sanctions movement and other efforts to delegitimize Israel

Attempts to isolate Israel diplomatically or commercially are thinly disguised attacks on Israel's very legitimacy. The boycott, divestment, sanctions (BDS) movement demonizes and discriminates against Israel through a campaign of misleading and offensive criticism that too often crosses the line into outright antisemitism. The United States and other countries should reject any attempts to exert undue economic pressure on Israel in lieu of constructive efforts to reach a two-state solution through direct negotiations. Additionally, the U.S. should continue to assure that opposition to BDS

remains a principal U.S. trade objective and the U.S. should reaffirm the authority of state and local government entities to invest in Israel and Israeli companies and likewise refuse to invest in companies that engage in BDS.

Anti-Israel bias at the UN, whether at the UN Human Rights Council or at the UN Security Council, is counterproductive and unjust. At the UN Human Rights Council, nations adopt more resolutions on Israel than on any other country, including Iran, North Korea, China, and Burma. The U.S. must continue to counter anti-Israel sentiment at the UN through strong leadership and increased engagement.

### Recognizing Jerusalem as Israel's capital city

Jerusalem has been uniquely connected to the Jewish people and Jewish consciousness for millennia. Although Israel declared Jerusalem its capital soon after the country achieved independence in 1948, neither the U.S. nor much of the rest of the world accepted that designation, making Israel the only nation in the world not permitted to choose its own capital and the only nation whose capital was not recognized by the international community. Instead, for decades, nations, including the U.S. chose to house their embassies and diplomats in Tel Aviv.

In 1995, Congress passed the Jerusalem Embassy Act, which recognized Jerusalem as Israel's capital, declared that the city should remain undivided, and called on the U.S. to relocate its embassy to Jerusalem. For decades, both Republicans and Democrats reaffirmed their commitment to this idea. In 2018, President Trump made the longstanding U.S. commitment a reality by opening the doors to the U.S. Embassy in Jerusalem, officially relocating the U.S.'s diplomatic offices from Tel Aviv. Since the U.S. relocated its embassy to Jerusalem, several other nations have announced that they are following suit or are considering such a move.

Given that the Prime Minister's Office, the Knesset, and nearly all government offices have been situated in Jerusalem since Israel's independence nearly 70 years ago, it is inexplicable that countries around the world have refused to recognize Israel's capital. Such negation has enabled widespread denial of any Jewish link to Jerusalem, in the public square and at the UN where Arab and Muslim nations regularly aim to adopt resolutions that ignore historical facts and deny Jewish ties to the city. The U.S. decision to move our embassy to Jerusalem should be heralded and other nations should be urged to recognize Jerusalem and relocate their embassies there.

*This policy paper is meant to be a resource for candidates. It is one of several that outlines AJC standpoints and policies on issues of core concern to our organization and our community.*

*AJC, founded in 1906, is the Jewish community's global advocacy organization. Its mission is to enhance the security and well-being of the Jewish people and Israel, and to advance human rights and democratic values around the world. In addition to its New York headquarters and its Office of Policy and Diplomatic Affairs in Washington, D.C., AJC has 22 U.S. regional offices, 12 overseas posts, and 37 partnerships with Jewish communities and institutions worldwide.*

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