AJC POLICY: ISRAEL

Still a young nation, Israel has established a thriving democracy, a vibrant civil society, a vigorous press, an enviable economy, cutting-edge research and technology, and a high quality of life. Israel's value proposition makes it a strategic partner for a growing community of nations. Bolstered by the historic Abraham Accords, Israel’s circle of peace is ever expanding across the Middle East and North Africa while mutually beneficial partnerships in Europe, the Americas, Africa, and in the Asia-Pacific region deepen.

Promoting Israel’s Place in the World
Strengthening the U.S.-Israel Alliance
The U.S. and Israel enjoy an unparalleled relationship based on a shared dedication to democratic principles and common strategic objectives. America’s enduring, bipartisan tradition of bolstering the Jewish state’s defense capabilities and promoting Israel’s place in the international arena must be preserved and strengthened. Expanded ties serve the strategic interests of both countries.

A secure Israel is paramount to America’s national security. In a strategically vital region, Israel is the West’s first line of defense against threats to regional and global peace. Regular joint military exercises and close collaboration on military technology strengthen America’s defense capabilities. The Iron Dome missile defense system – jointly developed by the U.S. and Israel – has saved countless lives; a range of other Israeli security innovations, advanced in partnership with the United States, are in the pipeline.

Safeguarding Israel’s Security
The Iranian regime poses a significant threat to Israel and to regional and global security. Underpinned by a radical and antisemitic ideology, Tehran is actively pursuing nuclear weapons, advancing its ballistic missile program, and funneling millions to terror proxies in Yemen, Iraq, Syria, and Lebanon.

Iran supports Gaza-based terrorist groups Hamas and Palestinian Islamic Jihad, as well as the Lebanon-based Hezbollah – among the world’s most powerful terror groups. Hezbollah, responsible for the deaths of hundreds of American and European service members, has an estimated 150,000 missiles aimed at Israeli cities. All nations should designate Hezbollah in its entirety as a terrorist organization.

Over the past seven decades, U.S. military aid has been key to ensuring Israel can defend its citizens against attacks from enemy states and terrorists seeking its destruction. The May 2021 conflict between Israel and Hamas highlighted the critical importance of America’s close defense cooperation with Israel and the need to maintain the Jewish state’s qualitative military edge in the Middle East. Any proposals to condition security assistance to Israel are inimical to U.S. national interests.

Defending Israel’s Legitimacy
While the U.S. relocated its embassy from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem in 2018, most other governments have resisted the reality that the capital of Israel is Jerusalem, as it has been for millennia. A widespread denial of a Jewish link to Jerusalem has fueled frequent resolutions at the United Nations (UN) that ignore historical facts and deny Jewish ties to Jerusalem. Jerusalem has been connected to the Jewish people for thousands of years, and the U.S. should continue to urge recognition of Jerusalem as Israel’s capital.
While great progress has been made at the UN in terms of addressing antisemitism and Holocaust denial, select member states continue to press an anti-Israel agenda. In 2021 alone, the UN General Assembly passed 14 resolutions condemning Israel. North Korea, Iran, and Syria were only censured once each for their devastating human rights breaches. Similarly, the boycott, divest, and sanction (BDS) movement seeks to single out Israel through a hateful campaign of economic and cultural isolation. The rhetoric of that movement too often crosses the line into outright antisemitism by demonizing and applying double-standards to the only Jewish state in the world.

Leaders should be focused on finding new mechanisms to better integrate Israel, the Palestinians, and the Arab world – rather than undermining efforts to advance prosperity, stability, and understanding. Criticism of Israel should be put in context; America’s unique and historic alliance with Israel serves the national interests of both countries, advancing peace and stability in a volatile region.

Cultivating New Allies

The Middle East

The Abraham Accords opened new lines of collaboration, allowing governments to leverage new resources and new allies to address regional challenges – from Iran’s aggression and nuclear ambitions to religious extremism, incitement, and political unrest. 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 more conducive regional environment to reach a lasting and mutually beneficial agreement. The U.S. plays a crucial role in encouraging deeper and more widespread cooperation. America should spearhead a regional strategy to encourage security cooperation, economic growth, and technological innovation as well as advance understanding and forge closer people-to-people collaboration.

The Eastern Mediterranean

Israel’s most secure border is that with the Mediterranean Sea. Driven by overlapping interests and values, Greece, Cyprus, and Israel continue to deepen and widen cooperation in nearly every imaginable bilateral and trilateral sphere. Increasingly, other nations in the Middle East and North Africa are seeking engagement in the structures being built by the 3 + 1 partnership among the U.S., Greece, Cyprus, and Israel, widening the circle of peace. As Turkey persists with dangerous provocations in Greece and Cyprus, the U.S. should accelerate and deepen engagement to foster the democratic partnerships in the region and promote vital security, economic, and energy cooperation among the four countries. As European partners seek to reduce their reliance on Russian gas, new attention should focus on how Israel, Egypt, Greece, and Cyprus can work together to help diversify Europe’s energy needs.

Israeli-Palestinian Peace

While Israel has established formal relations with three Arab states since the last months of 2020, progress remains out of reach on negotiating a solution to the long and bitter Israeli-Palestinian conflict, with political forces on both sides ill-positioned to offer and implement substantial compromise, and mutual trust and public support for a two-state formula waning, even as security cooperation continues. The success of the Abraham Accords – with Israel and Arab neighbors working to meet common challenges and expand opportunity across the region – offers hope for the emergence of a more favorable climate to approach the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and achieve a just, pragmatic, and durable resolution. A negotiated two-state solution, with a democratic and nonmilitarized Palestinian state coexisting with the democratic and pluralistic state of Israel, would best serve the interests of both peoples and advance regional stability.

Efforts by the Palestinian Authority (PA) to seek unilateral recognition of statehood through the United Nations and the International Criminal Court run counter to the long-term possibilities of peace and cooperation. Additionally, the PA must take steps to stop incitement and end its “pay for slay” stipends for jailed terrorists and their families, a morally reprehensible practice that incentivizes further violence.
Israel and the Palestinians must build stronger economic and interpersonal connections. Joint economic ventures not only help develop the Palestinian economy and boost employment, but can also lay the foundation for more positive relations – and eventual political progress – between Israelis and Palestinians. Likewise, people-to-people exchanges that build trust, foster community and peaceful coexistence, and work to counter incitement and extremist propaganda are a necessary component of long-term stability.