

Chapter 8: Preserving and Strengthening the Special Relationship with the United States

The American stance alongside Israel in the “Swords of Iron” war is unprecedented, except perhaps for the support the United States provided to Israel during the Yom Kippur War. The United States shares the goal of eradicating Hamas and creating a new security reality in the Gaza Strip. The American role thus far has been manifested in three main characteristics: an unequivocal political stance behind Israel, while providing continuous and significant military aid and ongoing strategic backing, and at the same time increasing efforts to shape “the day after” the war. Furthermore, it has once again been proven that, in times of security and crisis, the United States rushes to stand by Israel’s side, and Israel, for its part, is largely dependent on this support. When faced with the conduct of the rest of the international community, the strategic necessity of preserving the special relationship with the United States as a central pillar in safeguarding Israel’s national security has once again been proven.

The American government is currently focusing its efforts to promote a deal for the return of the Israeli hostages held by Hamas, which will include an extended cessation of the war in the Gaza Strip. During this period, the government will focus on steps toward ending the war and shaping a new regional order, based on the establishment of a Palestinian state, normalization between Israel and Saudi Arabia, and the creation of a front against Iran. However, Israel’s reluctance to formulate a vision for the “day after” and its opposition to the US government’s vision, coupled with Israel’s current intention to expand military operations in the Gaza Strip to the Rafah area, have become central points of contention between the Israeli government and the American administration.

A real crisis in relations is unlikely to occur until the presidential elections in November 2024. However, the tensions are mounting and a crisis could erupt during a second term, for either Joe Biden or Donald Trump, who harbors a certain resentment toward Prime Minister Netanyahu and Israel, in general. Moreover, it is important to consider Israeli conduct in the long term, given the demographic, economic, and social processes taking place in the United States. These processes could contribute to the erosion of the long-term American commitment to Israel even if they are not directly related to Israel. Israel is losing the support it had among many American publics, and recent polls indicate growing opposition to President Biden’s policy during the war in the Gaza Strip—particularly among supporters of the Democratic Party, but not exclusively. Criticism of Israel is also increasing among Jewish communities in the United States, which are currently facing increasing waves of antisemitism.

Disregard for these risks could have disastrous consequences for Israeli interests, as they have the potential to damage, sooner or later, the special relationship between the two countries. INSS has previously highlighted the risk to the special relationship with the United States and emphasized it as a serious threat. The current support for Israel has not fundamentally changed this threat; on the contrary, the American government’s

support for Israel stands in stark contrast to the criticism among large segments of the American public regarding the war and Israel's policies. The continuation of this situation accelerates the same long-term negative trends in American society, which endanger the special relationship.

We must strive to strengthen and stabilize the return of the United States to the Middle East, a trend that intensified following the war in the Gaza Strip. This is an extremely important geostrategic opportunity for the security of the State of Israel. The Israeli government's public skirmish with the US administration could accelerate problematic processes from Israel's point of view and contradict its interests. To prevent this, the security and diplomatic discourse must be enhanced through a professional, accurate, reliable, and discreet dialogue that also addresses the government's interests and maintains its attention toward the security concerns and needs of the State of Israel.