

## Trump Victory

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**Donald Trump has been elected president of the United States after a fierce campaign, defeating Vice President Kamala Harris. His return to the White House follows significant internal tensions in the United States, including concerns about immigration, inflation, and crime. Trump will likely focus initially on domestic issues, especially the crisis on the southern border. During his previous term, he won over Israelis through his support for the Abraham Accords, recognition of Israeli sovereignty over the Golan Heights, and the relocation of the US Embassy to Jerusalem. However, Trump is a divisive figure in the United States, making it imperative for Israel to maintain bipartisan support in Congress, among the American public, and in the American Jewish community. During the transition period, Israel should work to maintain close dialogue with American counterparts, particularly given its multi-front war against Iran. Under the new administration, if Iran and global powers negotiate a new nuclear deal, Israel should seek to influence its terms rather than oppose it outright.**

Donald Trump has defeated Vice President Kamala Harris in a tight and highly contentious US presidential election, running a campaign focused on the threat posed by immigration while touting his record on the economy, crime, and foreign policy. Trump's victorious campaign helped drive a new Republican majority in the Senate, creating the conditions for him to wield his office to fundamentally transform the American system. The control of the House of Representatives has not yet been determined.

During the two-month transition period, President Biden, freed from electoral and political constraints, will likely seek to establish his legacy and, in the Middle Eastern context, bring about a swift end to the war and promote a deal to return the hostages. In this context, Biden may not hesitate to use even more leverage over Israel. It is therefore imperative that Israel maintain close ties with the outgoing administration while also formulating a strategy and developing ties with the incoming Trump administration's transition teams, attempting to reach an understanding with the president-elect on a shared strategic agenda. Considering the congressional confirmation process and the time needed to staff critical positions in the bureaucracy, it is crucial that Israel reach early understandings with the new administration as it takes office, as its focus during the early days following the inauguration will be on building and setting its policy priorities.

## Domestic Implications

Trump's victory, with his running mate Ohio Senator J. D. Vance, symbolizes the rise of the populist and nationalist wing of the Republican Party. Trump's inflammatory campaign rhetoric—often tinged with racially coded and violent imagery—his improvisational style, his tolerance of antisemitism within parts of the Republican base, and his promise to wield the powers of his office against his political enemies have drawn accusations of authoritarianism. They also raise concerns about the possibility of civil unrest and unprecedented legal and constitutional challenges.

While he will face fierce Democratic resistance, Trump enters his second term with a greater understanding of Washington's machinery, a loyal network of advisors, and greater control over his own party. Furthermore, he has pledged to staff the federal bureaucracy with party loyalists. Consequently, he is well positioned to advance his agenda and legislation within Congress and govern with fewer checks and balances than before. His top domestic priority will be his signature campaign promise to detain and deport millions of undocumented immigrants and pursue immigration reduction measures.

## Foreign Policy: More Questions than Answers

Trump's transactional worldview and aversion to traditional instruments of American power will shape US foreign policy. His "America First" approach includes a commitment to increase trade barriers and engage in industrial protectionism primarily through tariffs, arguing that free trade has hurt American workers and the working class. This orientation also entails skepticism about Washington's policy of [global engagement and the defense of the liberal world order](#). Trump's defenders note that "[America First does not mean America alone](#)" and that his previous term in office included strengthening American relations in the Indo-Pacific and with Israel and the Gulf States. Yet ultimately Trump is not governed by a specific doctrine but, as his former National Security Advisor Robert O'Brien argues, by ["his own instincts and to traditional American principles that run deeper than the globalist orthodoxies of recent decades."](#)

This lack of an overarching doctrine leaves more questions than answers for an international system experiencing the greatest intensification of great power competition since the Cold War. The most likely arena where Trump's populist instincts will come to the fore will be in trans-Atlantic relations, more specifically in Washington's relations with its European allies and the war in Ukraine. Trump has long complained about "free riders" and states that "don't pay their fair share" and he has forcefully advocated that all NATO countries meet their obligations to spend 2% of their GDP on defense. He has threatened on numerous occasions to withdraw the United States from NATO, and a second term in office could see greater tensions within

the alliance. As for Ukraine, Trump has spoken about ending the war and criticized the significant American financial support to Kyiv. As a result, there is a significant possibility that Trump will drastically reduce American aid and support significant Ukrainian concessions to Russia.

China will certainly be a major concern for Trump. If [Asia-focused policymakers](#) are appointed to key roles in the administration, the Middle East may be sidelined, as Washington shifts its attention to [confronting China in East Asia](#). However, if key appointees see the challenge posed by China as interconnected with conflicts involving Iran and other actors, then Israel and the Middle East region may continue to receive American attention and resources.

### **Israel and the Middle East**

Trump's first tenure in office was marked by support for both Israel and the Gulf States—particularly Saudi Arabia and the UAE—culminating in the Abraham Accords. His support for Israel included recognizing Israeli sovereignty in the Golan Heights, transferring the US embassy to Jerusalem, withdrawing from the JCPOA (the Iran Nuclear Deal), and assassinating Quds Force commander Qasem Soleimani. Given this record, it is no wonder that prior to the elections, polls indicated that [most Israelis preferred Trump to Harris](#).

On Iran, Trump is expected to turn up the rhetorical heat and restore significant economic sanctions. He may also support using force against Iranian figures involved in regional terrorist activities. However, the Trump administration [will likely be reluctant to act militarily against Iran's nuclear capabilities, fearing US involvement in a new Middle Eastern war](#). Even the support he currently expresses for Israeli military actions against Tehran may not necessarily persist after the election. This will leave Trump with two options to deal with Tehran: sanctions, which have limited effectiveness in stopping the nuclear program, and negotiations. Thus, despite his open disdain for the Iranian regime, Trump may end up approving negotiations with Tehran, which [he has previously supported](#). Trump's temperament and relationship with the current Israeli leadership will make it more challenging for Israeli leaders to openly object to these negotiations as they did in attempts to prevent the enactment of the 2015 Iran nuclear deal.

On Israel, Trump's erratic policy tendencies raise many questions. The most pressing area of interest is Israel's ongoing war with the Iranian-led axis of resistance in Lebanon and Gaza. Trump has expressed his wish to see the war in Gaza [end before he takes office on January 20](#), but he has not openly detailed his vision for the day after. If the past is any indication, Trump is unlikely to use US military assistance to restrain Israel. However, considering his support for the Abraham Accords and a "Deal of the Century" with the Palestinians, there is a possibility that the Trump administration would

endorse some version of a two-state solution with extensive Israeli land annexations. If the Saudis agree to such a deal, it could lead to Saudi and broader Arab support for the reconstruction of Gaza, reforms within the Palestinian Authority, and the signing of defense agreements between Israel, Saudi Arabia, and the United States. Conversely, with some of his advisers and the Israeli government suggesting that they do not consider the Israeli–Palestinian conflict key to regional stability, he could avoid linking movement on the two-state solution with any efforts to expand the Abraham Accords. Given the Saudis’ insistence on such a linkage, this approach would likely undermine efforts to promote a new regional accord. Finally, Trump will likely pressure allies to fend off international investigations against Israeli leaders and soldiers by the International Criminal Court (ICC).

Two major areas to watch are Trump’s response to domestic Israeli politics and his administration’s commitment to direct aid to Israel. As for Israeli politics, Washington’s objections to the judicial overhaul were another factor restraining the Israeli government’s efforts to reshape its constitutional regime. Trump will likely be more sympathetic than Biden to judicial reforms. As for aid, it is not at all clear that Trump’s general support for Israel will manifest in material ways. Trump consistently opposes foreign aid, [advocating for grants to be replaced with loans](#), which could create challenges for Israel as its reliance on US military aid has grown and negotiations over the next defense aid Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) will begin during his tenure.

### **Policy Recommendations**

- Israel should strive to maintain bipartisan support in Congress as Democratic votes are critical for approving a new MOU for defense procurement and US commitments in an Israeli–Saudi deal. This requires investing considerable effort to bridge gaps with Democratic lawmakers.
- If American focus shifts toward China and the Indo-Pacific, Israel must demonstrate its value as a US ally and strategic partner as Washington reallocates resources eastward. A key aspect of this is countering China and its allies through increased regional integration.
- In the event of a renewed nuclear deal between Iran and the global powers, Israel should work with its American partners to help shape a deal that is more favorable to Israel’s interests, rather than openly opposing the US administration.

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