

The Trump Administration—Policy Recommendations for Israel

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Main Points

The return of Donald Trump to the US presidency could bring significant global changes, intensifying competition among the great powers—the United States, China, and Russia. Trump’s “America First” policy, which defined his first term in office, is expected to continue shaping his administration’s foreign policy. The administration’s guiding principle will be “ending wars, not starting them,” emphasizing agreements that advance American interests from a position of strength. This approach will primarily rely on political and economic pressure, with the potential for military posturing—while aiming to avoid direct military engagement or prolonged conflicts.

During Trump’s second presidency, US–Israel relations are expected to strengthen, reflected in the administration’s broad support for Israel’s strategic, security, and economic needs, along with opportunities to enhance technological and defense cooperation. However, potential differences may arise on key issues, particularly regarding policy toward Iran, the war in Gaza, the Palestinian issue, and Israel’s relations with China and Russia.

As the new administration formulates its policies in the coming months, Israel has an opportunity to establish early coordination on critical issues. Israel should prioritize a comprehensive strategic dialogue aimed at shaping a new reality in the Middle East, focusing on advancing normalization with Saudi Arabia and weakening Iran. This includes ensuring that developments in Syria and Lebanon align with Israel’s interests. At the same time, Israel should demonstrate an understanding of the administration’s priorities, carefully balancing its own strategic needs with US expectations.

Additionally, efforts should be made to anchor the US–Israel relationship within the framework of a new memorandum of understanding (MOU), while negotiating a defense agreement. This should be part of a long-term strategy to address potential challenges to the future of the special relationship between the two countries. A key part of this effort is maintaining bipartisan support for Israel among the American public and in the political arena, as well as improving ties between the State of Israel and American Jewry.

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The Current Situation

Donald Trump's return to the White House marks the beginning of a new era on the global stage and is expected to bring significant changes to the international balance of power. The great power competition between the United States and China—and likely also with Russia—is expected to intensify, particularly if Trump's efforts to impose a dialogue and secure deals or agreements through US leverage fail. At the heart of this geopolitical rivalry lies the ongoing struggle for global hegemony between Western nations, led by the United States, and those whom the Americans see as challenging the existing global order. This struggle is expected to continue, despite Trump's message that his administration will be less committed to imposing a Western-led world order and will instead focus more on prioritizing US interests.

Trump's policy in his second term will continue to concentrate on distinct American interests, with an aggressive approach toward perceived adversaries, while expecting allies to align with the United States. This means carefully building partnerships that promote the administration's economic and security priorities.

The Middle East remains a central arena of tensions for the competing global powers but also a region of economic and security opportunities. In this context, Trump is expected to enhance US support for Israel, although tensions may arise, particularly regarding efforts to promote regional de-escalation. This would include exerting pressure on Iran, while also pursuing an agreement with Tehran and expanding the Abraham Accords, with an emphasis on advancing normalization between Israel and additional Arab countries. These efforts are likely to include attempts to end the fighting in the Gaza Strip and possibly the introduction of an updated version of the "Deal of the Century" as the preferred means of achieving that goal. In this regard, Trump himself has stated that, in his view, the hostage deal between Israel and Hamas, brokered with his direct involvement, should serve as leverage for advancing a framework that will facilitate the expansion of the Abraham Accords.

In addition to challenges on the international stage, the Trump administration is expected to face a wide range of domestic issues, primarily the swift implementation of sweeping changes, as promised during the election campaign. It appears that the new president has been careful to appoint loyal individuals to key posts in his administration, committed to executing the transformation he seeks within the US government. This includes dismantling the professional bureaucracy in major departments, the military, intelligence agencies, and the Department of Justice and replacing the personnel with those dedicated to his administration's agenda.

In the background, Trump is also motivated by a desire to secure his legacy and gain international recognition, particularly with the possibility of winning a Nobel Peace Prize. However, it is important to note that, at this stage, there is still uncertainty regarding the administration's overall policy direction, especially concerning key international issues. Furthermore, Trump demonstrated during his first term in office

that his decisions are not always based on a structured process but are often driven by unpredictable impulses.

Key Focus Areas of the Trump Administration

Emphasis on “America First”: In his second term, Trump is expected to continue and even strengthen the trend toward relative isolationism, which was apparent in his first term and reflects his clear preference for narrow American interests over prioritizing international cooperation. Indeed, Trump is likely to continue reducing US support and involvement in international institutions, primarily NATO and the UN, while demanding—and potentially increasing tensions—that its allies take greater responsibility for their own defense. However, given the scope of global challenges, it is highly likely that his administration will still be compelled to engage in partnerships with allies and consider their interests. For the administration, the leading principle will be “ending wars, not starting them.” This will be pursued through efforts to reach agreements that advance American interests from a position of strength, with an emphasis on political and economic pressure, and possibly also by projecting military power, while aiming to avoid direct military action or entanglements. Nevertheless, it is still too early to determine how the administration will respond if it fails to achieve agreements and settlements, or how it will react to new external developments that require US involvement.

China: The confrontation with China will remain a central focus of Trump’s global policy, particularly in economic and technological aspects. However, unlike his first term—when there was relatively broad consensus on the approach toward China—this time, additional considerations are expected to come into play: a desire for political isolation on one hand and economic interests that encourage coordination on the other. Tensions over Taiwan will continue to threaten regional stability in East Asia, but the extent of Trump’s commitment to Taiwan remains unclear. It is likely that Trump does not want to be perceived as abandoning Taiwan and US commitments to the island, but at the same time, he does not want Taiwan to drag the United States into a military conflict. Trump may push for additional sanctions against China and seek to strengthen regional alliances in Asia, such as with Japan and India.

Russia: Trump has pledged to bring an end to the war between Russia and Ukraine. However, it is currently unclear what steps his administration would take to achieve this goal. His statements suggest that he is not necessarily committed to preserving Ukrainian sovereignty within its internationally recognized borders and may be open to a deal that allows Russia to maintain its presence in occupied Ukrainian territories and compromises—meaning to forgo—the admission of Ukraine to NATO. In any case, US policy toward Russia will likely be influenced by the administration’s assessment of Russia’s “weakness” and the determination demonstrated by its leadership.

Relations in the Middle East

A tougher stance on Iran: Trump is expected to intensify the “maximum pressure” policy on Iran, including imposing additional severe sanctions and making a

concentrated effort to ensure their enforcement. So far, Trump and key figures in his administration have not clarified the ultimate goal of increasing pressure, although Trump himself has frequently expressed his intention to reach a new agreement with Iran. In addition, Trump is likely to seek to strengthen the regional front against Iran, including close cooperation with Israel and the Gulf states. However, his position on a military operation against Iran—and the intention to carry one out—remains unclear. That said, if Iran continues advancing its uranium enrichment program, Trump may be more willing than before to confront Iran with a military threat or even take military action, particularly with the help of Israel, and attempt to leverage the setbacks suffered by the Iranian-led “Axis of Resistance” following the multi-front war with Israel. At the same time, Trump has frequently repeated that he is returning to office with the goal of “ending wars” and not “starting new ones,” and there is little enthusiasm among his political base for direct US involvement in military operations.

Normalization between Israel and Saudi Arabia and other states: Trump is expected to push for additional normalization agreements between Israel and Arab states, particularly Saudi Arabia. The success of this initiative would enhance his legacy (and could even earn him a Nobel Prize). However, it is unclear how the administration plans to advance this goal. A version of the “Deal of the Century” may return to the agenda, but Trump himself has stated after his election that there are other models that could lead to progress in this context.

Policy toward the Palestinians: It is likely that Trump will continue to sideline the two-state solution and instead promote economic models similar to the “Deal of the Century,” emphasizing infrastructure and economic development in the Palestinian arena rather than a comprehensive Israeli–Palestinian settlement. This approach could provoke the Palestinians and heighten tensions in the Palestinian territories and even within Israel, particularly if Trump insists on the demands he made of Israel as outlined in the plan presented during his first term. It is highly likely that the Trump administration will continue to oppose any acceleration of Israel’s annexation of Judea and Samaria, particularly in Gaza, as such moves could be detrimental to his ability to advance a vision of regional peace. However, if his administration’s diplomatic efforts fail, he may withdraw from involvement in advancing a political process, which could also mean ignoring Israel’s steps toward annexation. This could, in turn, harm Israel’s international standing and its values as a democratic state.

Iraq: Trump may continue reducing the US military presence in the country (as well as in Syria), but he is likely to maintain a focused force in the region, preferably in Iraq, to combat ISIS and counter Iran’s efforts to expand its regional influence.

Lebanon: If Hezbollah resumes its attacks on Israel, and especially if a large-scale conflict breaks out between Hezbollah and Israel, Trump may support a broad Israeli military operation. However, the Trump administration is generally expected to continue its efforts to stabilize the Lebanese arena, particularly following the election of its preferred candidate, Joseph Aoun, as Lebanon’s president. The Trump

administration will likely work to prevent the situation in Lebanon from escalating into a regional conflict.

The future of Syria: Trump has repeatedly stated that, in his view, the United States “has no interest in what is happening in Syria.” His clear inclination would be to minimize American involvement, especially military engagement, including the possibility he sought to advance during his first term but later retracted—the complete withdrawal of all American forces in northeastern Syria that are working with Kurdish forces, which, among other things, control the prisons holding ISIS operatives. The United States could attempt, through economic incentives and with the help of its regional allies, to influence the new Syrian regime, which seeks to consolidate its power and present itself as striving for a more Western-oriented approach.

Turkey: Relations may continue to fluctuate between selective cooperation and conflict driven by Erdoğan’s policies—particularly regarding the Kurds in northern Syria, as well as toward Greece and Cyprus in the eastern Mediterranean, its hostility toward Israel, support for Hamas, and Ankara’s growing closeness in recent years to Russia and China.

Israel’s Policy Objectives

Preserving and strengthening the special relationship between Israel and the United States: This involves ensuring American strategic backing while continuing security cooperation and military assistance. This should be achieved through careful management of relations via strategic dialogue while discreetly addressing any tensions and disagreements. The United States should also play a significant role in efforts to restore Israel’s international standing.

Maintaining bipartisan support in the United States: Israel should continue to enjoy bipartisan support in the United States while preserving close ties with American Jewry.

Advancing Israeli interests in the region: Improving Israel’s regional status, promoting normalization with Arab and Muslim countries through the expansion of the Abraham Accords, and solidifying Israel’s role as a leading partner for moderate Sunni states in the Middle East.

Iran and the so-called “axis of resistance”: Preventing Iran from obtaining nuclear capabilities and continuing efforts to weaken the Iran-led “axis of resistance.”

Palestinians: Creating the conditions for resolving the conflict that address Israel’s security needs while preserving its Jewish and democratic character.

Economic and technological cooperation: Leveraging Israel’s technological capabilities for collaboration in various fields, including defense, cybersecurity, AI, clean energy, the environment, and health.

Key Challenges and Opportunities for Israel

US–Israel relations: Relations are expected to strengthen under the Trump administration and a Republican-led government, aided by the appointment of pro-Israel officials and a Republican majority in Congress and the Senate. During his first term in office, Trump already adopted policies that were deemed friendly to Israel; however, new policy shifts and geopolitical developments could introduce a different dynamic. If steps are taken to promote a two-state solution, tensions between Jerusalem and Washington could arise. Since the new administration will reassess the priorities of US foreign policy, Israel has an opportunity to influence the administration's priorities and strategic direction. A key challenge for Israel is to identify shared interests while understanding the new administration's goals and determining where it must adapt its own policies and objectives accordingly. However, unlike the Biden administration, the new administration is unlikely to strictly adhere to "shared values" as a central component of its policy. Consequently, given its approach of non-interference in Israel's internal affairs—again, in contrast to the Biden administration—it is unlikely to oppose moves that some in the Israeli public may perceive as anti-democratic. In this context:

Given Israel's perception that a Republican administration under Trump is more favorable to Israel than a Democratic one, the Israeli government may find it harder to challenge or reject US demands—even if they contradict Israeli preferences.

Israel's relationship with a Republican administration could further strain its ties with the Democratic Party and its relations with the predominantly liberal American Jewish community, which opposes Trump. Maintaining bipartisan support for Israel is a critical strategic interest, requiring close attention to changes within the Democratic Party—especially since its future leadership may be more critical of Israel.

Israel's status in the international arena: Trump adopted a unilateral pro-Israel policy on key issues such as Jerusalem, the Golan Heights, and the Abraham Accords—policies that were widely supported in Israel but also sparked international opposition. In his second term of office, the polarization between Israel's supporters and opponents on the global stage could intensify, making it more challenging to maintain broad international support, particularly in Europe and Asia. However, unlike the Biden administration, the new administration is expected to firmly back Israel, including fulfilling its pledge to impose sanctions on officials of the International Court of Justice in The Hague in response to their legal proceedings against Israel. These proceedings have included charges of genocide, accusations of war crimes and crimes against humanity, and the issuing of arrest warrants for the prime minister and former minister of defense by the International Criminal Court. While this backing is significant, it remains unclear whether the US position will have any substantial impact on the decisions of the international courts in The Hague.

Defense aid: The ongoing military campaign in Gaza, alongside additional security challenges—including conflicts in the north with Syria and Lebanon, as well as threats from Iran and its proxies in Yemen and Iraq—necessitates a continuous flow of US military aid to Israel. The Trump administration is expected to adopt a supportive

position and refrain from placing obstacles in Israel's way. However, this issue could create tension within the administration between its desire to support Israel and its broader goal of reducing foreign aid. At the same time, it is likely that the administration will expect a "political price" in exchange for its increased support, potentially requiring Israel to align with US positions on China and possibly even Europe. On the Palestinian issue, the administration could push Israel to demonstrate a willingness to advance a political agreement, particularly if there is an opportunity to promote a regional settlement and expand the Abraham Accords. The administration's favorable approach presents an opportunity for Israel before the expected start of discussions on renewing the Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) on US security aid for Israel, which is set to expire in 2028. However, it should be noted that Trump is likely to view negotiations on the next MoU as part of a broader dialogue with Israel, encompassing various agreements and disputes on key policy issues.

Pressure on Israel to take a stand on global conflicts: Trump may increase pressure on US allies, including Israel, to openly support his policies against global rivals, particularly China and Russia. This pressure could place Israel in diplomatically sensitive situations that might harm its economic and security interests. The expectation for Israel (as well as other allies) to align itself with US policies on key issues—especially regarding what is "permissible and impermissible" in relations with China—is likely to persist, as seen in Trump's previous term when he pressured allies to limit their dealings with the Chinese technology giant Huawei.

US policy on Iran: The Trump administration is expected to adopt a tough stance on Iran, reinforcing sanctions to pressure Tehran into abandoning its confrontational policy. The likely goal would be to negotiate an agreement centered on Iran's nuclear program. The prospect that the administration will formulate a new policy on Iran early in its term presents an opportunity for Israel to influence its framework and objectives. However, Israel's main challenge will be ensuring that any potential agreement aligns with its strategic requirements.

At the same time, there are concerns that, in the long term, the United States may reduce its involvement in the region—especially if it concludes that facilitating a regional solution is not feasible—reflecting its isolationist tendencies. This could grant Israel greater US legitimacy for broader military action or efforts to push for regime change in Iran. However, the administration is unlikely to seek direct involvement in a military conflict, whether initiated by the United States or triggered by Israeli actions. Conversely, the Trump administration could pursue a deal with Iran that does not fully meet Israel's expectations. In such a scenario, it might refrain from giving Israel a "green light" for any military action against Iran.

Strong political and economic pressure to end the war in Gaza: Even before his inauguration, Trump actively pushed for a deal to secure the release of the hostages held by Hamas. His administration is expected to work intensively in the coming weeks to ensure that the agreement does not collapse. The administration will back Israel if Hamas violates the deal, but from Trump's perspective, the agreement should serve

as a lever for ending the war—facilitating a broader regional vision primarily based on expanding the Abraham Accords by including Saudi Arabia in its framework. Regardless, Israel may be pressured to allow reconstruction efforts in the Gaza Strip, primarily to help the administration advance a regional de-escalation strategy, in addition to agreeing to international monitoring mechanisms for the reconstruction process, which Israel is unlikely to view favorably.

Recommendations

In its first few months, the new administration will be reassessing US foreign policy and shaping its strategic direction, giving Israel an opportunity to ensure early coordination on key issues. Israel should engage in discreet and strategic dialogue, particularly on the following issues: (1) shaping a new reality in the Middle East, focusing on advancing the normalization process between Israel and Saudi Arabia, including agreements on steps to achieve Israel’s objectives in Gaza and approaches to the Palestinian issue; (2) policy on Iran, with the aim of curbing its nuclear program and weakening its regional influence; and (3) ensuring that potential regional shifts in Syria and Lebanon do not conflict with Israel’s interests.

In the context of Iran, Israel should pay close attention to the administration’s red lines and be prepared to influence them to minimize potential friction with the United States. This should involve discussions that include Israel’s perspectives on elements of any agreement that the new administration may seek with Iran. It is important to emphasize to the administration that for its strategy on Iran to succeed, it must pair expanded sanctions with a credible military threat. The combination of economic pressure and a credible military deterrent will increase the likelihood of Iran complying with US demands or, alternatively, create conditions for undermining the Iranian regime. Additionally, Israel could explore with the US administration the possibility of receiving a “green light” for independent action against Iran. However, US backing for such an approach carries risks, particularly if no prior agreement is reached on how the United States would respond in the event of escalation.

Israel must prepare for negotiations on the renewal of the MoU on US security assistance to Israel, which is set to begin in 2025. It is important to leverage this dialogue to pursue the formation of a **defense treaty** with the United States. Reaching agreements on these issues in parallel would strengthen Israel’s security position and deterrence capabilities. Securing agreements during the first half of the new administration’s term—before the **November 2026 midterm elections**—would help institutionalize the security relationship between the two countries, making it more difficult for future US presidents to alter ties with Israel, even if they oppose its policies.

Maintaining **bipartisan support** for Israel in the American public and political spheres is critical. Israel should seek to expand ties **with Democratic minority leadership** in both houses of Congress and avoid actions that could be perceived as aligning with the Republican Party in US domestic disputes, which are expected to intensify in the

coming months. Of **utmost importance** is preserving relations with **American Jewry**, ensuring continued engagement and support.

Israel should lead an international public diplomacy effort through media campaigns that highlight the complex security challenges it faces. This should include a focused effort to improve Israel's image among the American public and in the political arenas.

It is important to maintain a balanced approach in the international arena; while relying on the Trump administration, Israel must also preserve strong ties with European and Asian countries.

Partnerships with the United States should be enhanced and anchored across various national security areas, with a particular focus on supply chains, emerging technologies, energy, and semiconductors. The composition of Congress in the next two years may facilitate this goal.