

The New World Order: Implications for Israel

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The liberal world order faces a dual challenge: The risk of high-intensity interstate war has increased, while the US security umbrella over its allies has been undermined. For Israel, the implications of these changes are particularly evident, as they intensify the threats facing it. At the same time, they could also potentially reduce these threats. The same logic applies to capabilities: Transformations in the world order challenge Israel's capabilities, but some could also strengthen them. Increased threats are reflected in the tightening authoritarian axis of China, Russia, North Korea, and Iran, which is hostile to Israel. Another potential threat to Israel is the "Muslim Brotherhood" axis, whose regional standing has recently grown stronger. Despite serious questions about whether the US administration will be able to implement its stated intent to mitigate conflicts, it is also possible that threats to Israel could decline as a result of President Trump's commitment to promote peace agreements and prevent wars.

In recent years, the world order has undergone highly significant changes. After some three decades of a liberal world order following the collapse of the Soviet Union at the end of 1991, it is giving way to an international order characterized by nationalism, populism, and revisionism. The liberal order rested largely on US hegemony as the sole superpower, which enjoyed considerable freedom of action in the international system and sought to shape the world in its liberal image by promoting democracy, free markets, globalization, and international institutions. The liberalization strategy achieved notable successes in advancing liberal actors, institutions, and values but ultimately faced strong resistance outside the West and growing challenges from illiberal forces within the West itself, particularly the United States, as reflected by Donald Trump's rise to the presidency.

Outside the Western world, the rise of the authoritarian-revisionist axis of China–Russia–North Korea–Iran stands out. This axis seeks to weaken US hegemony and the liberal West as a whole and poses, albeit in different ways and to varying degrees, the most prominent international challenge to the liberal order. Russia's invasion of Ukraine in 2022 challenged a core liberal belief about territorial integrity, which had already been eroded with Russia's invasion of the Crimean Peninsula in 2014, namely that states would respect international borders and no longer invade their neighbors in order to annex territory.

This belief was particularly strong in Europe, which, under the liberal conception, had become a continent of peace after its impressive recovery from the devastation caused by the two world wars. Liberals argued that a world of economic interdependence (for example, large-scale purchases of oil and gas from Russia) and of international institutions and norms made

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interstate wars increasingly unlikely, especially in Europe. This stood in contrast to the occurrence of low-intensity ethnic wars in the developing world.

The shock of Russian aggression prompted the Western states to rally, ostensibly in a unified manner and under US leadership, behind Ukraine, mainly through NATO, providing financial assistance and large quantities of weapons, even if they did not send troops to defend it.

However, the West is also confronting an internal rift between liberals and a growing current of illiberal, right-wing nationalist populism. This current is far less committed to international institutions and, in some cases, even to military alliances, reflecting its emphasis on the particularistic interests of the nation-state and its distancing from universal liberal values.

The most significant recent development in this context was Trump's election to the presidency at the end of 2024. The nationalist approach, captured by the slogan "America First" and advanced by President Trump, signals a reduced commitment to allies and raises questions about whether the United States would automatically come to their defense in the event of an attack. This uncertainty is relevant regarding the possibility of additional Russian aggression against European states, but it also extends to US partners in Asia threatened by China—notably Japan, as well as Taiwan, which is not a formal ally but toward which the United States has, in practice, a longstanding commitment to prevent forcible unification with China. Similar questions have also been raised about whether the United States would defend South Korea in a contingency involving North Korea.

Thus, a dual challenge to the liberal world order has emerged. On the one hand, the risk of high-intensity interstate war has increased—and not only ethnic and tribal civil wars that were the dominant form of conflict before Russia's invasion of Ukraine. On the other hand, the US security umbrella over allies has been undermined. As a result, an accelerating arms race has emerged. More broadly, national security issues have moved further to the center of the political agenda, with rising defense budgets, rearmament, considerations of nuclearization, and discussions about expanding armed forces—including, in some cases, a return to conscription in European countries such as Germany, despite its problematic past regarding the use of military force.

In general, a state's national security is shaped by the interaction of two factors: the state's capabilities and the threats it faces. The greater a state's military, economic, and technological capacity to defend its core values, and the lower the threats to those values, the stronger its national security. Conversely, the more limited the capabilities are, combined with severe threats, the more precarious national security becomes.

For Israel, the implications of these shifts in the international order are particularly salient, affecting both the threats Israel faces and its ability to cope with them. Interestingly, the recent changes in the world order can both intensify these threats and potentially reduce them. The same applies to capabilities: The global transformations can challenge Israel's capabilities, but some of the changes may also strengthen them.

In terms of capabilities, growing instability and the resulting arms race may confer advantages on Israel because of its advanced defense industry, whose products are increasingly sought out even by countries critical of Israel, particularly in Europe. Israel also has extensive combat experience, as well as considerable experience with conscription and a reserve army. The new

world order may compel states—including developed and affluent countries in Europe and East Asia, which until now have relied on the US security umbrella—to draw on Israeli knowledge and experience in these areas. Given Israel's profound military and political dependence on the United States, however, close attention should be given to the inclinations of the Trump administration and its supporters in the MAGA movement, as well as to the Democratic Party, which may return to power in the coming years, and to the broader trends among the American public in general and particularly the younger generation.

The Trump administration directly affects Israel's national security in several dimensions, some of which have contradictory implications for Israel's security. In contrast to Trump's clearly unsympathetic position toward Ukraine (shaped in part by his high regard for Ukraine's adversary, Russian President Vladimir Putin), his basic attitude toward Israel is sympathetic. Trump's stance on Israel is driven in part by his own personal and family considerations, but also by the most loyal component of the MAGA coalition he leads—the Evangelical Christians—who have traditionally and enthusiastically supported Israel (although, since the war in the Gaza Strip, critical voices within that community have increased). For many evangelicals, support for Israel is rooted in a “clash of civilizations” worldview, in which Islam, in its various radical movements, threatens the “Judeo-Christian tradition.” Within this framework, Israel is perceived as a vanguard directly confronting radical Islam and thus effectively defending the Christian world. Therefore, from this perspective, Israel is seen as deserving of all possible support from the United States. Whether or not Trump fully shares this perspective, the resolute stance of his most loyal supporters clearly influences his considerations regarding military support for Israel—a support that reached its peak in US intervention alongside Israel during the 12-day war with Iran in June 2025.

At the same time, another segment of the Trump camp could, under certain conditions, negatively affect Israel's capabilities. This refers to the large isolationist “America First” camp, which fears that Israel will drag the United States into wars in the Middle East that do not serve the American national interests. The Middle East is a region already associated, according to the US public, with endless and unsuccessful wars such as those in Afghanistan and Iraq following 9/11. The isolationists seek to reduce US support for Israel as much as possible. They also opposed US intervention alongside Israel in the war with Iran, out of fear of becoming embroiled in an unnecessary conflict. Beyond the isolationists, support for Israel has noticeably declined among the general American public, particularly within the Democratic Party and among younger Americans. This could have extremely dramatic negative effects on Israel's capabilities in the future.

Beyond material interests, the uniqueness of Israel's status in the Middle East for the United States has also stemmed from “shared values,” namely that Israel is the only democracy in the region. This Israeli asset has been lost in the current world order not only due to the weakening of democratic characteristics in Israel but also as a result of the current US administration, which has deemed democratic values irrelevant and prioritized “strong,” authoritarian leaders, especially when they rule wealthy states such as the Gulf countries. Under President Trump, relations between these states and the US administration have been upgraded. Thus, for example, the administration has been willing to sell advanced aircraft to Saudi Arabia despite the potential threat to Israel's qualitative military edge. Such a sale could, of course, cause significant harm to Israel's military capabilities and its freedom of action.

In terms of threats, their increase is reflected in the tightening of the authoritarian axis of China, Russia, North Korea, and Iran, which is hostile to Israel. This would be particularly consequential if its members strengthen Iran's armament with advanced systems of aircraft, missiles, and air defense, making it more difficult for Israel to maintain the freedom of action that was demonstrated in the 12-day war with Iran. Another axis that could increase threats to Israel is that of the "Muslim Brotherhood," whose standing in the region has recently strengthened following its extensive involvement in moves toward ending the war in the Gaza Strip and in shaping Trump's peace plan. This axis includes Qatar, which hosts Hamas leaders and sponsors the Al Jazeera network that reports on Israel in an adversarial manner. It also includes Turkey, which is highly hostile to Israel under Erdoğan's rule but is interested in sending forces to be stationed on Israel's border as part of the emerging multinational force intended to stabilize the situation in the Gaza Strip. Turkey is linked to Hamas as well as to the new regime in Syria—another point of friction with Israel—whose rise to power at the end of 2024 was strongly supported by Turkey.

At the same time, there is a possibility that threats to Israel could be reduced due to President Trump's commitment to promoting peace agreements and preventing wars. His involvement was critical in ending the war in Gaza, securing the release of all the living hostages and most of the deceased ones from Hamas, and advancing an ambitious peace plan that was also approved by the UN Security Council. Substantial question marks remain regarding the plan's implementation, but its very achievement—at least ostensibly with the consent of all parties—is a significant accomplishment that, if implemented, could reduce threats to Israel's security.

No fewer, and perhaps even greater, question marks surround the reduction of threats as a result of the November 2024 ceasefire agreement in Lebanon and the Lebanese government's commitment to disarm Hezbollah, as well as the rapprochement between Trump and the new regime in Syria. However, against this backdrop, there is also some likelihood that the promotion of a security agreement between Israel and Syria could further reduce threats on this front.

A degree of uncertainty also characterizes normalization with Saudi Arabia, which could advance Israel's regional integration and thereby significantly reduce threats against it. Saudi Arabia's de facto ruler, Mohammed bin Salman, has linked normalization to tangible progress toward a two-state solution to the Israeli–Palestinian conflict. If such progress is achieved, the level of threats to Israel could indeed decline significantly.

Although these issues remain unclear, Israel's very high dependence on the United States and the Trump administration, together with the close relations the president has forged with many regional actors and his strong desire to promote peace agreements, provides some hope that it may be possible to mitigate and perhaps even resolve conflicts in the region (or at least some of them) through peaceful means. This, in turn, could reduce security threats to Israel and strengthen its national security.

Editors of the series: Anat Kurz, Eldad Shavit and Ela Greenberg