

EVALUATION OF THE THE U.S.-ISRAELI STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIP IN INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

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Abstract

This paper examines the evolution of the strategic relationship between the United States and Israel from its inception in 1948 to 2025. Adopting a comprehensive approach, the study integrates historical analysis with contemporary perspectives and employs a multi-theoretical framework that includes Realism (Neorealism and Offensive Realism), Constructivism, and Liberal Institutionalism. These theoretical lenses are used to analyze the formation and evolution of the bilateral alliance in terms of military and security cooperation, political and diplomatic dynamics, economic and technological interdependence, and intelligence and counterterrorism collaboration. The study adopted qualitative research methodology, drawing insights from secondary sources such as books, journals, periodicals, articles, press releases, official documents, and internet materials. The study tries to understand the strategic relationship by taking a look at America's foreign policy towards Israel following successive administrations after the Cold War, starting from George W. Bush, Israel's sweetheart, to Obama, Trump, and Biden. Economic and technological collaboration is shown to have bolstered bilateral relations, with trade agreements and joint high-tech ventures fostering mutual dependency. The paper also critically discusses points of contention, including controversial settlement policies and allegations of disproportionate lobbying influence, which highlight the inherent tensions between strategic interests and normative values. Concluding with an exploration of recent developments and future prospects, the study argues that the resilience of the U.S.-Israel relationship will continue to depend on harmonizing evolving security challenges with shared democratic values and economic imperatives. It concludes with actionable recommendations stating that through deft diplomacy, compromise, and capitalizing on its relative advantage, Israel can avoid potential friction and diplomatic crisis with the U.S. following the United States' involvement in trade/technological war with China. The paper also recommends that Israel deepen and widen its relationship with Arab States like Saudi Arabia, and interactions between the U.S., Israel, and other regional actors should be tilted to positively affect general stability, prevent arms proliferation, counter terrorism, and enhance global commerce in the Middle East.

Keywords: *Strategic Partnership, Middle-East, shared Interests, Palestinian-Israeli conflicts, shared values.*

Introduction

The United States was the first country to recognize the newly declared State of Israel, doing so just 11 minutes after David Ben-Gurion proclaimed its independence on May 14, 1948. This recognition, issued by President Harry S. Truman, was more than a symbolic gesture; it signaled the beginning of a complex

and enduring relationship. However, early U.S. policy toward Israel was not immediately characterized by strategic depth. Instead, it reflected a balancing act between moral obligations—especially in the wake of the Holocaust—and pragmatic geopolitical considerations in the emerging Cold War order (Quandt, 2005).

However, the United States' relationship with Israel has been one of the closest and most controversial relationships the country has experienced since the end of World War II. Since 1948, the relationship has developed and grown over time to become arguably America's most intimate bilateral relationship. Apart from rocky periods under Dwight Eisenhower (Allin & Simon, 2009) in Marsden (2009) and the first George Bush, where American national interests in securing oil supplies and Arab support in the Cold and Gulf Wars took precedence, Israel has been supported and sustained by successive administrations. This support has often come at great cost to the United States in terms of economic, military, and political support as they have sought to protect and promote the interests of Israel in the face of widespread opposition throughout the Middle East. The relationship deepened significantly under the younger Bush administrations, and it is unthinkable for any future prospective presidential candidate to contemplate running for office without declaring unconditional support for the State of Israel (Marsden, 2009).

In December 1962, President John F. Kennedy told Israeli Foreign Minister Gilda Meir: *'The United States has a special relationship with Israel in the Middle East, comparable only to that which it has with Britain over a wide range of world affairs'* (Gilboa, 1987). The relationship rests on a unique combination of 'hard elements', such as strategic interests, and 'soft elements', such as values (Safran, 1978, cited in Gilboa, 2023). President George W. Bush, in his remarks to the American Jewish Committee in May 2001, unequivocally said, *"We will speak up for our principles and we will stand up for our friends in the world. And one of our most important friends is the State of Israel."*

Anchored in a recurring 10-year foreign military financing memorandum of understanding (MOU) established under President Ronald Reagan and including other critical elements of the alliance, shared democratic values, and common threats, the U.S.–Israel relationship is one of America's most strategically vital partnerships. The MOU has helped Israel to acquire the necessary capabilities to defend itself while providing the United States with a key regional military, security, and intelligence partnership, as areas such as technological cooperation, trade, and shared values have become increasingly important to the engagement between the two countries. This paper seeks to explain the relationship between the US and Israel following successive administrations seeking to understand the nature and practice of the strategic relationship. It traces the mutual benefits enjoyed by both parties in this bromance through George W. Bush's, Obama's, Trump's, and the Biden administrations, as well as takes a cursory look at the future of the strategic relationship.

Theoretical Framework

The Realist and Neorealist theories of international relations provide the most compelling frameworks for understanding the U.S.-Israel strategic relationship. These theories emphasize state-level interests, particularly security and power, and how these interests drive interactions between states. While other theories like Liberalism and Constructivism also offer insights, Realism and Neorealism offer the most comprehensive explanations for the close alliance and deep support the U.S. provides to Israel.

Leading proponents such as Hobbes, Morgenthau, Machiavelli, and Thucydides view the international system as anarchic, with states primarily motivated by self-interest and a concern for survival. Realism suggests that states form alliances based on shared, perceived threats and interests, and that these alliances are driven by a desire for security and power. Neorealism, being a more structured approach to Realism, emphasizes the impact of the international system's structure on state behavior. It suggests that the distribution of power and the nature of the international system influence how states interact, including forming alliances (Piccoli, 1999). Both the U.S. and Israel view the Middle East region as crucial for their security and economic interests, and they share concerns about regional instability and the perceived threats from other actors. This shared perception of threats and the need for regional stability drives their close relationship.

Research Methodology

This study adopted the qualitative research methodology. Secondary data was collected through books, journals, official documents, internet resources, and periodicals.

Literature Review

The United States became the first country to recognize Israel as an independent state on May 14, 1948, when President Harry Truman issued a statement of recognition following Israel's proclamation of independence on the same date. Diplomatic Relations were established when U.S. Ambassador James Grover McDonald presented his credentials on March 28, 1949. Since then, Israel has become, and remains, America's most reliable partner in the Middle East. Israel and the United States are bound closely by historic and cultural ties as well as by mutual interests (US Embassy, 2025). Apart from rocky periods under Dwight Eisenhower and the first George Bush, where American national interests in securing oil supplies and Arab support in the Cold and Gulf Wars took precedence, Israel has been supported and sustained by successive administrations (Marsden, 2009). The U.S.-Israel bilateral relationship is strong, anchored by over \$3 billion in Foreign Military Financing, economic, and political support annually, as they have sought to protect and promote the interests of Israel in the face of widespread opposition throughout the Middle East.

In addition to financial support, the U.S. participates in a high level of exchanges with Israel, including joint military exercises, military research, and weapons development. Through the Joint Counterterrorism Group and a semi-annual Strategic Dialogue, the U.S. and Israel have also enhanced their cooperation in fighting terrorism (US Embassy, 2025). The Cold War fostered strategic American interests in Israel when revolutionary Arab states like Egypt, Iraq, and Syria joined the Soviet Bloc, and Israel aligned with the U.S.-led Western bloc (Mart, 2006). This interest decreased after the collapse of the Soviet Union and the end of the Cold War in 1989, but within a decade other joint strategic interests developed in the face of a new global threat: radical Islam and terrorist Islamic organizations such as al-Qaeda and the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) (Gilboa & Infar, 2009).

Soft elements in the strategic relationship, which several scholars have termed "special," have included similar features in the history of the two nations. These range from the Judeo-Christian roots of American society, to nation building through immigration waves, to the pioneering spirit that beat in the hearts of the American and Israeli founding fathers, to conquest of frontiers and wilderness, to shared values such as liberal democracy, to significant support of the American

Jewish community and Evangelical Christians, to supportive public opinion. While Israel's military might and strategic interests have changed over the years, these soft elements have remained fairly constant. The shared ideals of freedom, liberty, democracy, and ultimately prevailing through adversity to a peaceful future are a narrative that has become a mantra for US and Israeli leaders as they stand together against autocratic and despotic forces in the Middle East (Marsden, 2009). In this narrative, the United States is able to identify and become one with a pioneer nation, making the desert blossom and bringing civilization or democracy at least to a lawless region. In practice, the 'special' relationship between US and Israel meant American military and economic aid, trade benefits, supply of modern and advanced weapons, joint development of sophisticated weapons, intelligence sharing, deterrence against superior powers, defense at hostile international organizations such as the United Nations and its agencies, and mediation to end the Arab-Israeli conflict. The special relationship has mostly preserved the closeness between the two states but has not prevented occasional disagreements and confrontations over issues such as Israeli communities in the West Bank and Gaza (Ben-Zvi, 1993), or the nuclear deal that Washington and its European allies signed with Iran in 2015 (Gilboa, 2023).

While America provides Military and economic aid to Israel, Israel, in the partnership, helps to protect the American homeland and keeps it safe. Israeli technology and expertise help protect American airports, cities, cyberspace, and other critical infrastructure from terrorist threats. *"Israel is our eyes and ears on the ground in an extremely dangerous region, and its military strength and geostrategic location help deter regional actors opposed to the United States"*. Invaluable bilateral intelligence cooperation helps secure Americans at home and prevent attacks against Americans abroad (American Israel Public Affairs Committee, 2025). Israel promotes America's values of democracy, pluralism, and the rule of law as well as protects its interests in deterring war, promoting stability, and creating lasting peace in the volatile region of the Middle East. Israel's determination to defend itself limits the number of U.S. personnel needed in the dangerous zone. Through cooperative defense programs, the U.S.-Israel partnership has improved America's military technology, helping it to counter missiles, tunnels, and unmanned aerial systems, enhanced U.S. attack capabilities, and improved systems defending U.S. personnel. A world leader in combating Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), Israel is also working with the United States to help prevent and treat PTSD in American troops. The Jewish state also partners with the U.S. in pioneering cutting-edge solutions to challenges like cybersecurity, healthcare, artificial intelligence, water scarcity, food security, climate change, and renewable energy. A strong U.S.-Israel relationship helps both countries confront emerging and mutual challenges (AIPAC, 2025).

The United States and Israel face many common threats, including the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, the growth of state-sponsored terrorism, and the spread of Islamic radicalism. Israel is on the front lines in the Middle East, confronting shared enemies and serving as a capable and strong American ally. Lastly, the combination of U.S. exports to Israel and direct Israeli investments in the U.S. is responsible for nearly 100,000 American jobs. And America is the largest investor in Israel. Israel provides a place to do business for more than 2,500 U.S. firms. Israeli firms represent the second-largest source of foreign listings on the National Association of Securities Dealers Automated Quotations (NASDAQ) after China, more than Indian, Japanese, and South Korean firms combined (AIPAC, 2025). The U.S. is Israel's largest single trading partner. The top five U.S. exports to Israel are: diamonds, machinery, agricultural products, aircraft, and optic and medical instruments. The top five U.S. imports from Israel are: diamonds, pharmaceutical products, machinery, optic and medical instruments, and agricultural products.

U.S. direct investment in Israel is primarily in the manufacturing sector, as is Israeli investment in the United States. The United States and Israel have had a free trade agreement since 1985, serving as the foundation for expanding trade and investment between the two countries by reducing barriers and promoting regulatory transparency. To facilitate economic cooperation, the two countries convene a Joint Economic Development Group each year to discuss economic conditions in both countries and possible economic reforms for the coming year.

The U.S. and Israel also coordinate scientific and cultural exchanges through the Binational Science Foundation, the Binational Agricultural Research and Development Foundation, and the U.S.-Israeli Education Foundation. As Israel's economy and technological prowess continue to grow, both America and Israel will benefit further from their wide-ranging economic partnership. The U.S. and Israel have, over the years, built a formidable alliance predicated on shared interests, values, and common history. Maintaining and strengthening the U.S.-Israeli alliance is in both countries' national interests. The United States is Israel's most important ally, and Israel is America's essential security partner in the Middle East, hence, successive U.S. administrations have worked relentlessly to uphold and promote the alliance, oftentimes influenced by lobbyist organizations like AIPAC (American Israel Public Action Committee) and CUFI (Christians unite for Israel), amongst others. Below is how successive administrations have upheld and fostered the strategic relationship between America and Israel.

US-Israel Strategic Relations Following Successive Administrations over the Last Two Decades

George Walker Bush's Administration: from January 2001 to January 2009

During President George W. Bush's 8 years in office, the relationship between Israel and the United States grew stronger than at any other time in the history of both countries. Writing in 2003, David Frum, Bush's speechwriter and the inventor of the phrase 'Axis of Evil', described Bush as one of the staunchest friends of Israel ever to occupy the Oval Office. Since its formation in 1948, the United States has diverted about one-fifth of its foreign assistance to Israel, approximately \$3 billion per annum. In July 2007, the State Department announced a further military aid package of \$30 billion over 10 years. Over the first 7 years, US grant assistance to Israel totaled nearly \$20 billion (BBC, 2007). Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert, commenting after President Bush's first visit to Israel in the final year of his presidency, said that he had proved a great friend of Israel in the White House. Olmert confirmed that Bush had neither pressured Israel nor required any commitments from them (Jewish Virtual Library). Indeed, Bush's policy towards Israel during his tenure was unfailingly supportive based upon his identification of Israel as being on the right side of the line he drew metaphorically after 9/11 between those for America, freedom, and liberty, and those against.

In many ways, Bush sought to deliver what Christian Zionists, neoconservatives, and Jewish supporters of Israel had wanted, and to a large extent, they pushed at an open door. Early difficulties in the relationship between the executive and the pro-Israel triumvirate were resolved with greater consultation of Christian Zionists on decisions about Israel.

Under the Oslo Accords, Israel was to withdraw from areas of the West Bank, which were to be controlled by the Palestinian Authority. In April 2002, however, Israel launched a military offensive in the West Bank, which the Bush administration immediately denounced with demands for an Israeli withdrawal. Bush was subject to the full might of the Christian Zionist lobby as Jerry

Falwell organized supporters to overwhelm the White House with over 100,000 emails. Complaining about his withdrawal demands and calling for Israel to be allowed to carry out whatever security measures it considered appropriate. Tom DeLay, Richard Armey, and Trent Lott admonished Bush in person, and Congress overwhelmingly adopted a resolution supporting Israeli actions and condemning the Palestinians. The White House ceased further objections to Israeli military actions (Marsden, 2009).

In the build-up to the Iraq War, Bush announced a Roadmap for Peace in the Middle East to shore up support for an alliance to topple Saddam Hussein. The roadmap was a time-delineated process for achieving peace in the Middle East based on trading land for security. Bush became the first U.S. president to commit his administration to seeking a two-state solution. Christian Zionists balked at the idea of Israel conceding any land, but the removal of Yasser Arafat, the *bête noir* of the lobby, as interlocutor largely assuaged their concerns. Nonetheless, 50,000 postcards were sent to the White House to note their objections. After this, no attempts were made to stick to deadlines, and no pressure was applied to Israel to keep to the Roadmap. When Israel pursued a series of targeted assassinations against Palestinian leaders in 2003, the initial objections of the administration were muted following the rapid response emails, telegrams, letters, postcards, and phone calls sent to the White House. Thereafter, such assassinations were overlooked by Bush and the State Department. The administration learnt from these experiences and thereafter consulted Christian Zionists on strategy in the Middle East. Ariel Sharon's unilateral decision to withdraw from Gaza while consolidating and increasing settlements in the West Bank in contravention of the Roadmap was discussed before the announcement at a special meeting with Christian Zionist leaders convened by Elliott Abrams and Tim Goeglein. The meeting was designed to reassure them that Gaza was not part of biblical Israel and that the move would strengthen Israeli security (Perlstein, 2004, in Marsden, 2009). Neoconservatives, Jewish supporters of Israel, and Christian Zionists supported the administration's replacement of Yasser Arafat with Mahmoud Abbas as chief Palestinian negotiator, as he was rightly perceived as a weaker negotiator and more amenable to agreeing to a peace settlement on Israeli terms. Although the latter was easily elected as Palestinian president following the death of Arafat, the Palestinian Liberation Organization failed to win parliamentary elections, losing to Hamas in January 2006. The Bush administration, despite pressure from Christian Zionists, AIPAC, and Congressional resolutions, neglected to insist on the exclusion of Hamas from the elections. However, Bush subsequently succeeded in building an international coalition to place sanctions on the Hamas government and secure its removal from power until the movement established *de facto* control of Gaza in 2007.

The refusal to negotiate with Hamas met with approval across the triumvirate, as did the disproportionate use of pressure on the Palestinians to abide by the roadmap while allowing Israel to change facts on the ground by continuing to build and increase the size of settlements in the West Bank and East Jerusalem. UN special envoy to the Middle East peace process Alvaro de Soto revealed US manipulation of the quartet involved in the peace process, which prevented improvements on access and movement in the Palestinian Territories (The Guardian, 2007).

Former British Prime Minister Tony Blair's appointment as special envoy ensured continuity in a policy that excluded Hamas and failed to make demands of Israel to achieve peace. The Bush administration's policy of reminding Israel of its obligation under international law not to build more settlements in occupied territory while not penalizing such actions struck the right chord with Christian Zionists, neo-conservatives, and Jewish pro-Israeli supporters. Similarly, the

administration's veto of nine UN Security Council resolutions critical of Israel's actions in the Occupied Territories met with widespread approval. Equally well received was the administration's abstention on a Security Council resolution calling on Israel and Hamas to implement an immediate ceasefire, enabling Israel the time it wanted in its attempt to crush Hamas, in the dying weeks of the Bush presidency. However, the refusal of the administration to relocate the US embassy in Israel from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem, which was passed by Congress and yet was vetoed every 6 months by President Bush, has been less popular. Despite the last-minute attempts to revive the peace process at Annapolis and subsequent visits to Israel by President Bush, a peace settlement was further away by the end of the Bush years than it was at the end of the previous administration (Marsden, 2009).

In dealing with Israel's neighbors, Bush's administration carried out measures that coincided with Israel's and the pro-Israel supporters' strategic interests. The naming of an Axis of Evil in the aftermath of September 11th targeted two opponents of Israel in Iraq and Iran, whilst simultaneously sending a warning message to Syria. The decision to attack Afghanistan and announce a War on Terror was taken in direct response to the New York and Washington attacks, rather than because of Israel. However, Al-Qaeda is one of Israel's enemies, and the War on Terror automatically placed Israel on America's side in any conflict against Islamic extremism, including Hamas and Hezbollah. The war against Iraq, inspired by neoconservatives and given just war legitimacy by the Christian Right (Marsden, 2008), was not primarily for Israel's defense, yet the removal of Saddam Hussein, who had launched attacks on it during the first Gulf War, benefited Israel.

In 2005, after international pressure orchestrated by the United States, the Syrian army and security services withdrew from Israel's northern neighbor, Lebanon. This provided Israel with the opportunity to launch a retaliatory attack against Hezbollah in July 2006 following the abduction of three of its soldiers. Israel launched a ferocious attack, destroying much of southern Lebanon and killing over 1000 Lebanese, but was unable to defeat Hezbollah, which continued to fire rockets into northern Israel. At the time, there was international pressure on Israel to cease its disproportionate offensive. CUFI and AIPAC lobbied the administration and Congress, calling for the Israelis to be allowed more time to destroy Hezbollah. CUFI claims success for the administration's delay in calling on Israel to end the conflict, even though Hezbollah emerged politically much stronger (Brog, 2006, in Marsden, 2009).

Iran's nuclear programme was viewed by the triumvirate and the Bush administration as a major security threat to Israel's and America's security. The administration coordinated international sanctions against Iran, but despite bellicose rhetoric, adopted diplomatic measures rather than military confrontation to combat the perceived threat. Indeed, The Guardian newspaper reported that Bush had expressly forbidden an Israeli strike against Iran's nuclear installations (Steele, 2008). While Bush's approach reflected the chastening experience of protracted conflicts in Afghanistan and Iraq, his presidency marked one of the closest periods in U.S.-Israel relations, characterized by mutual strategic interests, especially around counterterrorism. While he formally supported a two-state solution, many saw his policies as heavily tilted in favour of Israel, particularly in the context of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

Barack Obama's Administration (from 20th January 2009 to 20th January 2017)

In the 2008 U.S presidential race, both Democrat and Republican candidates stressed their pro-Israel credentials at the American Israel Public Action Committee (AIPAC) annual policy conference. Barack Obama categorically declared that his commitment to Israel was to make sure that *“the bond between the United States and Israel is unbreakable today, unbreakable tomorrow, and unbreakable forever;”* stating that the bond between Israel and the United States is rooted not only in their shared interests but also in the shared values and stories of the American and Israeli people (AIPAC, 2008). In a similar vein, John McCain sought to explain what he claimed critics of the alliance between both countries are unable to understand:

...they do not fully understand the love of liberty and the pursuit of justice. But they should know those ties cannot be broken. We were brought together by shared ideals and by shared adversity. We have been comrades in struggle and trusted partners in the quest for peace. We are the most natural of allies. And, like Israel itself, that alliance is forever (CNN, 2008).

The presidential legacy of George W. Bush’s Middle East policy was marked by unyielding unilateralism and military interventionism that matched Israel’s interests (Daalder and Lindsay, 2003, in Saltzman, 2016). In contrast, Obama saw this period as disastrous for US foreign policy. Thus, to reinvigorate American global leadership through robust multilateralism and implement the president’s campaign promise to end US military campaigns in Afghanistan and Iraq, the Obama administration identified several interrelated objectives and policy measures that starkly diverged from Israel’s and partially undermined the strategic foundation of the relationship. First, the Obama administration wanted to placate the Arab and Muslim world to enable Washington to establish an orderly withdrawal from Iraq and Afghanistan and reduce the US regional footprint across the Middle East due to the political and economic costs it accrued (Layne, 2009).

Rejecting the previous administration’s dichotomous distinction between “us” and “them” that fueled Bush’s “Global War on Terror”, the Obama administration pursued engagement with rather than estrangement from the Arab and Muslim world. Shortly after taking office, Obama delivered a historic speech in the Turkish parliament in April 2009, where he declared that:

America’s relationship with the Muslim community, the Muslim world, cannot, and will not, just be based upon opposition to terrorism. We seek broader engagement based on mutual interest and mutual respect. We will listen carefully, we will bridge misunderstandings, and we will seek common ground. We will be respectful, even when we do not agree. We will convey our deep appreciation for the Islamic faith, which has done so much over the centuries to shape the world, including in my own country (The White House, 2009).

From the Obama administration’s vantage point, the greatest threats to the White House’s détente with the Arab and Muslim world were the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and the Iranian nuclear program. Given the record of the U.S.-Israel special relationship in general and particularly in the context of these two key issues, and considering the zero-sum nature of Israeli-Arab relations, the administration believed it needed to distance Washington from Jerusalem. According to former ambassador Oren, *“From the moment he entered office, Mr. Obama promoted an agenda of championing the Palestinian cause and achieving a nuclear accord with Iran. Such policies would have put him at odds with any Israeli leader”* (Wall Street Journal, 2015). While addressing the Turkish Parliament, Obama said:

In the Middle East, we share the goal of a lasting peace between Israel and its neighbors. Let me be clear: The United States strongly supports the goal of two states, Israel and Palestine, living side by side in peace and security. That is a goal shared by Palestinians, Israelis, and people of goodwill around the world. That is a goal that the parties agreed to in the Roadmap and at Annapolis. That is a goal that I will actively pursue as President of the United States (The White House, 2009).

Former Special Assistant to the President at the time, Dennis Ross, confirmed that “The Obama administration’s national security priorities almost guaranteed that Israel would be a problem.” Thus, the Obama administration’s first key objective was to vigorously push for an Israeli-Palestinian Peace Agreement. Already, as a presidential candidate, Obama stated that “*If we can solve the Israeli-Palestinian process, then that will make it easier for Arab states and the Gulf states to support us when it comes to Iraq and Afghanistan.*” In March 2010, Commander of U.S. Central Command, General David Petraeus articulated this rationale in a Senate Armed Services Committee hearing:

Enduring hostilities between Israel and some of its neighbors present distinct challenges to our ability to advance our interests in the area of responsibility. Arab anger over the Palestinian question limits the strength and depth of US partnerships with governments and peoples in the region.

In the eyes of the new administration, Israel was the predominant actor in the conflict, holding most of the territorial and political bargaining chips. Hence, Obama’s policies primarily revolved around presenting a more even-handed approach and extracting Israeli concessions, especially stopping settlement construction in the West Bank and Eastern Jerusalem, to entice the Palestinians to resume negotiations (Saltzman, 2016). After President Barack H. Obama took office in January 2009, the U.S.-Israeli relationship was challenged, and this culminated in noticeable discord and diplomatic friction, but even so, the relationship was neither transformed nor affected in any way that changed its status from special to normal (Ruebner, 2014).

President Obama made achieving a peace deal between Israel and Palestine his top priority in Middle Eastern affairs. He instantly placed insurmountable pressure on Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu to ponder the existence of an independent Palestinian state via mutual negotiation. Following U.S. demands, Prime Minister Netanyahu imposed a ten-month freeze on settlement construction within the West Bank. Due to the continuous building operations that occurred in East Jerusalem, 3,000 pre-approved housing units that were already under construction, and failure to dismantle previously built Israeli outposts, Palestine considered this outcome to be inadequate. President Obama immediately began to develop a strong resentment toward Israel (Fawcett, 2009; Freedman, 2013; Peleg & Waxman, 2011).

Donald J. Trump’s Administration (from 20th January 2017 to January 2021)

In August 2019, President Donald J. Trump declared himself “*history’s most pro-Israel U.S. president*” and called Democrats radicals seeking to destroy the special relationship between the U.S. and Israel, argues Gilboa (2020). In January 2020, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu described Trump as “*the best friend Israel has ever had in the White House*” and on a

number of critical security, diplomatic, and political issues, Trump reversed longstanding US policy in favour of Israel. For instance, Iran's nuclear agreement, the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, Israel's treatment at the UN, and Jerusalem's and the Golan Heights' status, to mention a few (ibid). There was little daylight between Washington and Jerusalem during the four years of Donald Trump's presidency from 2017 to 2021. Trump viewed close relations with Israel as a means to differentiate himself from his predecessor, President Barack Obama, who oversaw a period of considerable tension in the bilateral relationship. This is not to say that during Obama's tenure, cooperation between security and intelligence agencies of the two countries was suspended or disrupted. Coordination and information sharing between the U.S. and Israel were as close, if not closer, than it had ever been until that point. Rather, the major issue was an erosion of trust and goodwill on the personal and political levels between the two countries' top decision-makers, making conversations about sensitive and important bilateral issues even more difficult. In addition, the crisis between the two leaders caused concern that, over the long term, continued frictions could trickle down and poison even the durable-seeming institutional partnerships (Heinstein and Shavit, 2021).

The U.S.-Israel relationship was especially salient for Trump in the lead-up to the 2020 U.S. presidential elections, given the weight assigned to bilateral ties in the American political arena, and in particular within the Republican Party. The desire for a close bilateral relationship translated into a very warm and public friendship between Trump and Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu. Ties were likely reinforced by key White House advisers on Middle East issues who assumed their roles in the Trump administration, holding views on Israel that were reasonably well-aligned with the positions of Netanyahu's Likud government (ibid). Despite Trump's disdain for many traditional alliances like NATO, he was almost unconditionally supportive of Israel. The Trump administration moved the U.S. embassy to Jerusalem, recognized Israeli sovereignty over the Golan Heights, and published an Israeli-Palestinian peace plan that was far more favorable for Israel than any U.S. initiative that preceded it. Beyond their direct consequences, these gestures of support also had important follow-on effects, as many other countries around the world followed America's lead and adopted more favorable approaches to Israel. The 2020 Abraham Accords, which formalized the normalization of relations between Israel and the United Arab Emirates (UAE), Bahrain, and Sudan, is a case in point.

Joe Biden's Administration (from 20th January 2021 to 20th January 2025)

The U.S. administration under President Joe Biden appeared poised, based on staffing decisions and declared policies, to revert to a U.S. policy in the Middle East that more closely resembles that of Obama. Meanwhile, Netanyahu, who fought bitterly and publicly against Obama's policies regarding the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and the Iranian nuclear issue, remains at the helm in Israel. The month that it took Biden after settling into the Oval Office to call Netanyahu fed speculations that the Israeli Prime Minister was being snubbed.

Biden was undoubtedly pro-Israel, too. Throughout his four-decade-long career in government, he expressed strong support for Israel's right to defend itself and declared himself a Zionist. His closest advisors, including Secretary of State Antony Blinken, sought to promote America's Ironclad commitment to Israel's future as a secure, democratic, prosperous, Jewish state. These aims are in line with what Israeli security experts believe should be the overarching goals of an Israeli grand strategy (Heinstein and Shavit, 2021).

For Israel, the number one, two, and three most important issues are the threats from Iran. Biden was unequivocal throughout his campaign, saying that he intended to return to the Iran nuclear deal (JCPOA), signed while he was vice president and which he has vigorously defended. He said, for example:

I have no illusions about the challenges the regime in Iran poses to America's security interests, to our friends and partners, and to its own people. But there is a smart way to be tough on Iran. I will make an unshakeable commitment to prevent Iran from acquiring a nuclear weapon. If Iran returns to strict compliance with the nuclear deal, the United States would rejoin the agreement as a starting point for follow-on negotiations. With our allies, we will work to strengthen and extend the nuclear deal's provisions, while also addressing other issues of concern. We will continue to push back against Iran's destabilizing activities, which threaten our friends and partners in the region.... America will also work closely with Israel to ensure it can defend itself against Iran and its proxies. We will continue to use targeted sanctions against Iran's human rights abuses, its support for terrorism, and its ballistic missile program. If Iran chooses confrontation, I am prepared to defend our vital interests and our troops. But I am ready to walk the path of diplomacy if Iran takes steps to show it is ready too (Jewish Virtual Library, 2025).

Supporters of the deal, especially progressive Democrats, urged him to quickly ease sanctions on Iran and rejoin the JCPOA. Critics, including the Israeli government, cautioned against concessions to Iran. Instead of returning to what they consider a loophole-filled agreement Iran never complied with, they insisted Biden retain sanctions until Iran agrees to a tougher deal that would include restrictions on Iran's sponsorship of terror, ballistic missile development, and malign regional activities. In July 2022, Biden and Israeli Prime Minister Yair Lapid signed the Jerusalem U.S.-Israel Strategic Partnership Joint Declaration, emphasizing shared democratic values and a commitment to preventing Iran from acquiring nuclear weapons (AIPAC, 2022). Biden upheld the 2016 Memorandum of Understanding (MOU), committing \$38 billion in military aid to Israel over ten years. In 2021, the U.S. approved a \$735 million weapons sale to Israel, including precision-guided munitions (The Guardian, 2021). Biden also supported the expansion of the Abraham Accords, aiming to normalize relations between Israel and Arab nations. The administration referred to this as the "normalization process," focusing on regional stability and economic collaboration.

Throughout his presidency, Biden reiterated support for a two-state solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. He emphasized the importance of a negotiated peace, recognizing Israel as a democratic Jewish state and advocating for Palestinian self-determination. Following the October 2023 Hamas-led attack on Israel, the U.S. provided military support. However, as the conflict escalated, Biden faced criticism over rising Palestinian civilian casualties. In response, the administration issued a national security directive requiring assurances from Israel that U.S.-supplied weapons were used in compliance with international law (Reuters, 2024).

Finally, Biden's unwavering support for Israel, including continued arms shipments, drew criticism from within his party. Some Democrats and human rights groups called for a re-evaluation of U.S. assistance, citing concerns over human rights violations in Gaza (The Guardian, 2024). As Biden's term concluded, the Middle East remained a region of strategic importance. While the administration achieved some diplomatic successes, such as a U.N.-brokered ceasefire in Yemen,

challenges persisted, including stalled Israeli-Saudi normalization talks and an advancing Iranian nuclear program. The incoming administration, under President Donald Trump, inherited a complex and volatile Middle East landscape, with high expectations for stronger policies (Reuters, 2025).

Discussion of Findings

Findings from the study have highlighted key aspects that nurtured the U.S.-Israel strategic relationship. From a realist point of view, the United States is Israel's most important ally, and Israel is America's essential security partner in the Middle East. Thus, the U.S.-Israel relationship is a mutually beneficial partnership that reinforces America's moral values and strategic interests and promotes peace and stability. The Bush, Obama, Trump, and Biden administrations' relationships with Israel are not different from their predecessors. However, each had its uniqueness based on priorities in the strategic interests of both states. For Bush, the 9/11 attack shaped his administration's alliance with Israel to advance the war on terror agenda in the Middle East. Unlike the common trajectory in the relationship, Obama took another route concerning the U.S.-Israel relationship. His administration chose the route of balancing out the relationship with the Middle East and not having favorites. In Obama's eyes, a more balanced relationship from the United States, Israel, and Palestine would be able to produce a peace settlement. Under Donald J. Trump, the relationship was reinforced compared to the Bush and Obama administrations. This was reflected in Trump's policies including recognition of Jerusalem as Israel's capital and moving America's embassy from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem, defunding NGO's funding such as UNRWA and USAID which undermined their operations in Palestinian territory, withdrawal from UN bodies that accused hostile towards Israel and recognizing Israel's sovereignty over Golan Height. The Biden administration reiterated support for a two-state solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. He emphasized the importance of a negotiated peace, recognizing Israel as a democratic Jewish state and advocating for Palestinian self-determination.

Despite the different policy trajectories of the above-listed administrations, the strategic partnership between both countries remained sacrosanct and remains deeply rooted in shared interests, shared values, shared history, and anchored on military and economic aid.

Conclusion and Recommendations

From its creation, Israel, being surrounded by autocratic and oppressive regimes, amplified its appeal in the eyes of both the American political leadership and the general public. Israel's inclination towards democracy and Western values forged an Israeli-American partnership that had historically positioned Israel as the spearhead of the US vision of Middle Eastern democratization. The reference to the bond of democracies between Israel and the US was particularly evident throughout the presidency of George W. Bush, who was consumed with his post-9/11 Freedom Agenda that distinguished between democratic and non-democratic countries. Israel perfectly fit Bush's dichotomous worldview as American political conservatives, both in the administration and the general public, and emphasized the relative superiority of Israel's adherence to democracy and Western values over the surrounding Arab and Muslim regimes.

The summary of the U.S.-Israel relationship indicates a complex mixture of causal factors and incorporates historical memory, religious values, societal ties, considerations of regional stability, and American national interest. Domestic politics within the United States have been a significant contributory factor, and the choices of individual leaders in Washington or Jerusalem can and do

impact this relationship. Personal relationships do matter, for example, in the exceptional rapport that developed between President Clinton and the late Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin, or the lack of confidence and barely suppressed antagonism between President George Bush and Prime Minister Yitzhak Shamir, or President Clinton and Prime Minister Netanyahu. But, over the last 50 years, it is long-term causes that have come to matter most in shaping the relationship and the course of American policy toward Israel.

According to Mearsheimer & Walt (2007) cited in Peterson (2022), the United States has, over the years, played an increasingly important and steadily growing role in Middle East security issues, first due to oil and then due to anti-communism, and later due to its growing relationship with Israel. Moreover, Hudson (1996) also asserts that there is no doubt that American policy toward the Middle East has been based primarily on maintaining economic, political, and strategic objectives and, in particular, securing Israel and the region's energy resources.

While the Biden administration achieved some diplomatic successes, such as a U.N.-brokered ceasefire in Yemen, challenges persist, including stalled Israeli-Saudi normalization talks and an advancing Iranian nuclear program. President Donald Trump inherited a complex and volatile Middle East landscape, with high expectations for stronger policies. Over the next four years, the expected points of contention in the U.S.-Israeli relationship are the Iran nuclear issue, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, and the technological competition with China. While the first two are particular to Israel, the third will likely be a complicating feature of U.S. relations with many other countries, including European allies. Through deft diplomacy, compromise, and capitalizing on its relative advantages, Jerusalem can avoid frictions or even a potential diplomatic crisis with the United States. Navigating this successfully will be critical to buttress Israel's bipartisan standing in Washington.

U.S. officials and lawmakers might consider using aid, arms sales, sanctions, and other trade policy options, military force, and diplomacy to address various aspects of relations with Israel, including future long-term military aid arrangements.

The Administration and Congress could approach security and governance in Gaza and the West Bank to find a possible and feasible solution to the conflict, look at the potential for Israeli settlement, expansion, or annexation in the West Bank, and possibly negotiations aimed at resolving aspects of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

Finally, Israel should widen and deepen its regional relationships with Arab states, including Saudi Arabia, and U.S. interactions with Israel and other regional actors should be tilted to positively affect general stability, prevent arms proliferation, enhance counterterrorism, and global commerce in the Middle East.

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