

Trends in Israel's Regional Foreign Policies

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This report sums up the key developments in Israel's regional foreign policy and foreign relations from July-December 2025. Foreign relations during this period were shaped by the Trump presidency, which undermined the liberal world order, influenced major developments in the Middle East and led to the ceasefire in Gaza. During this time, as Israel's foreign service continued to suffer from years of neglect, it emerged that the Prime Minister's Office also acted on behalf of Qatar, and that domestic political interests shaped foreign policy. Israel continued to refrain from presenting a vision for the "day after" the war in Gaza and instead focused on military activity aimed at projecting power and removing immediate threats. The Trump administration's orchestration of an end to the war and implementation of its 20-Point Gaza Peace Plan have violated and curtailed Israeli sovereignty, reflecting the erosion of its unique standing in Washington and the significant Turkish and Gulf influence on Trump's policy in the region, much to Israel's chagrin. At the same time, the government continued to sabotage the two-state solution, promoting accelerated de facto annexation processes in the West Bank, on the background of growing international support for the establishment of a Palestinian state. Along with other authoritarian forces in the world, Israel has engaged in undermining the rule of law and the democratic-liberal international order, seeking instead to shape its strategic environment by force. Its conduct, coupled with the images of death and destruction from Gaza, have painted Israel as a growing threat to regional stability, prompted precedent-setting European sanctions against it, and significantly damaged Israel's branding and international and civil communities willingness to cooperate with it. Alongside the continued rivalry with Iran, the deepening crisis with Turkey, and failure to reach a de-escalation agreement with Syria, Israel's responsible conduct and cooperation with the political process in Lebanon and the return to the stage of its trilateral partnership with Greece and Cyprus give rise to a measure of cautious optimism.

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1. ***The US administration's move assuming responsibility for shaping the post-war reality in the region, undermined Israeli sovereignty and replaced the "special relationship" between the countries with instrumental ties. The administration compensates for this unpalatable development with an ongoing positive discourse with Israel and cooperation with it in the international arena*** - President Trump blocked Israel's plan to occupy the Gaza Strip, announced an Israeli ceasefire with Hamas and the release of hostages, and launched a plan for Gaza's post-war governance and reconstruction. He not only steamrolled Israel into accepting these moves, he also orchestrated a public apology by Prime Minister Netanyahu to the Emir of Qatar over Israel's attack on Hamas leadership in Doha. Trump visited Israel and Egypt to promote his moves, sent senior members of his administration to Israel to re-inforce his message, and set up a command center in the Israeli town of Kiryat Gat to monitor the IDF's actions and ascertain Israeli compliance with his plan. Trump also intervened in domestic Israeli affairs by requesting President Herzog grant Netanyahu a pardon, voiding his trial on charges of corruption. The influence wielded by Qatar, Turkey and Saudi Arabia on Trump's moves in the Middle East underscored the decline of Israel's unique standing in Washington, as well as Netanyahu's limited room for maneuver vis-à-vis Trump. Nonetheless, the administration maintained a positive dialogue with Israel, with many meetings and mutual visits held by senior officials of the two countries. The United States also continued to provide Israel with an umbrella in international institutions for its actions, imposing sanctions on institutions and individuals whom it deemed hostile to Israel.
2. ***Israel seeks to prolong the war in Gaza and continue to refrain from presenting a plan for Gaza's post-war reality. At the same time, the international community moves to recognize Palestinian statehood and urge the implementation of the two-state solution*** - The Israeli government tried to prevent the end of the war with a hostage release deal, prepared to reconquer the entire Gaza Strip, sabotaged internationally mediated negotiations by attacking the Hamas delegation in Doha, and avoided formulating its position on Gaza's post-war governance. The international community pushed for change to improve the humanitarian aid mechanism in Gaza and promoted the New York Declaration on the basis of the Franco-Saudi initiative, calling for the establishment of a Palestinian state. Major Western countries announced their recognition of the state of Palestine. Trump presented his 20-point Gaza Peace Plan, which was adopted by the UN Security Council in Resolution 2803. Together with the countries of the region and the international community, the US forced Israel to comply with the plan and agree to a ceasefire and hostage deal. Israel's continued opposition to the replacement of Hamas control in Gaza by the Palestinian Authority delayed the establishment of the International Stabilization Force, and the transition to the second phase of Trump's plan, pushing away potential post-war partners and allowing Hamas to regroup and remain a significant force in Gaza.
3. ***Israel's global standing is deteriorating, while international boycotts expand and increasingly affect tourism, culture, sports, business, research, and other sectors. Simultaneously, arms sales and high-tech innovation provide Israel***

with diplomatic assets in a destabilizing world - The images emerging from Gaza of the death and destruction, resulting from the two-year war, intensified criticism of Israel around the world, and increased pressure on governments to take action against Israeli activities in Gaza. Performances by Israeli artists on world stages were canceled, international artists refused to collaborate with Israel, and sports teams refrained from playing against Israeli ones. Funding for Israeli researchers declined, and research institutions suspended their ties with Israeli counterparts. Despite the ceasefire, anti-Israel demonstrations continued, with increasing violence against Israeli tourists abroad and anti-Semitism directed at Jewish communities. However, Israeli arms sales, which were slowed during the Gaza war, rebounded with the announcement of a ceasefire, especially against the backdrop of Russia's war in Ukraine.

4. ***Israel continues its accelerated de facto annexation of the West Bank with declarations, legislation, planning, budgeting, and institutional backing for settler violence. All against US opposition to formal annexation, regional resistance, growing recognition of the State of Palestine, and sweeping condemnation by the international community*** - Despite American declarations against annexation, condemnation by the international community and state in the region of Israel's actions in the West Bank, Israel continued to advance the de facto annexation of the Occupied Palestinian Territories. The government, occasionally with the IDF's complicity, provided a tailwind for record-breaking settler terrorism and violence against Palestinian communities designed to expel them and take over their lands. The Higher Planning Council promoted a record number of construction approvals in the settlements, including in Area E-1, in the Atarot area, and on land evacuated during Israel's unilateral 2005 disengagement from northern West Bank. Finance Minister Smotrich continued to undermine the Palestinian economy and avoided transferring customs and tax funds collected on behalf of the Palestinian Authority. Additionally, the Knesset promoted the application of its laws on the Occupied Palestinian Territories in fields such as archaeological research.
5. ***Israel repudiates international law and joins in undermining the liberal democratic order*** - The International Criminal Court in The Hague reaffirmed its arrest warrants against Netanyahu and former Defense Minister Gallant, and the International Court of Justice rejected Israel's interpretation of UNRWA's mandate and conduct. Criminal complaints were filed against Israeli soldiers around the world, and a complaint was filed with the Security Council against Israel for its attack in Doha. A UN commission of inquiry determined that Israel was committing genocide in Gaza, and the Committee Against Torture criticized Israel for its treatment of Palestinian prisoners. Israel moved to withdraw from international organizations, and rejected the authority and decisions of international courts.
6. ***As Israel projects military strength and pursues an independent and increasingly assertive regional posture, states across the region view it as a growing threat, organize with the United States to advance regional stabilization without Israel's involvement, and intensify their support for the two-state solution*** - Israel adopted the view that a show of force and offensive action against Iran and its proxies will encourage normalization with regional countries. However, regional countries condemned Israel for prolonging the war in

Gaza, for the escalating humanitarian crisis there and for advancing annexation and enabling settler violence in the West Bank. The Israeli attack on Hamas leadership in Qatar bolstered the regional perception of Israel as a security threat and prompted joint action by regional countries with the United States (and Europe) to end the war in Gaza. Regional countries accepted the Trump plan, Egypt hosted a summit to launch its implementation, without Israel's participation, while Turkey and Qatar were given a prominent seat at the table, over strenuous Israeli objections. Dismayed by Israel's actions in Gaza, the West Bank, and the region, regional countries made it clear they would not enable Israel integration to the region without addressing the Palestinian issue and mobilized to support the growing global recognition of a Palestinian state.

- 7. Israel employs military force in Syria and Lebanon to address immediate threats and to prevent Iran's renewed entrenchment there. At the same time, it conducts, under American auspice, constructive cooperation with the political process in Lebanon, and criticises the developments in Syria** - Israel continued to attack Hezbollah targets throughout Lebanon, and even assassinated Hezbollah's newly appointed military chief in Beirut. It supported curbs on UNIFIL's mandate, took action to thwart Iranian support for Hezbollah, urged the Lebanese government to complete the disarmament of Hezbollah, and cooperated with the Israel-Lebanon Ceasefire Monitoring Committee under American auspices. In Syria, Israel continued its deployment within the buffer zone it carved out along the border, attacked targets throughout Syria, and used force to defend the Druze minority in the al-Sweida region. At the same time, Israel unsuccessfully tried to prevent the US administration from lifting sanctions on the al-Sharaa regime and to curtail the Turkish presence in Syria through military operations, while continuing direct US-sponsored talks with the Syrian government regarding a security agreement.
- 8. Israel's relations with Europe plummets to an all time low. Despite disagreement over policy on Israel among EU member states and between the public and its governments, Europe adopts sanctions and precedent-setting moves in an attempt to bring about an end to the war and promote the two-state solution** - As a result of developments in the Gaza Strip, the European Union discussed suspending its Association Agreement with Israel and imposed on it limited sanctions. These measures were eased after the announcement of a ceasefire in Gaza, but Europe continued to discuss curbs on its cooperation with Israel. Public pressure on European governments translated into activity to promote the two-state solution, the adoption of the Trump plan, and the recognition of the state of Palestine by a number of key countries, including France and the UK. These actions were accompanied by the imposition of an arms embargo on Israel, a ban on visits by Israeli government ministers, and economic sanctions. Tensions increased with France, which led the Franco-Saudi initiative, while relations with Spain, Ireland, and Norway deteriorated due to additional sanctions on their part. Germany remained ever careful to avoid damaging relations with Israel, preventing more drastic EU steps and refraining from recognizing Palestinian statehood, but nonetheless imposed a partial arms embargo on Israel until the ceasefire. Israel, for its part, continued to appeal to Eastern European countries and far-right parties across the continent in search of uncritical support.

9. ***The Hellenic Alliance reasserted itself with the governments of Israel, Greece, and Cyprus promoting security cooperation in the eastern Mediterranean in the face of growing Israeli-Turkish tensions*** - The crisis in bilateral relations with Turkey deepened further, manifesting itself *inter alia* in competition for influence in Syria, with each side seeking to curb the other's impact. Turkey teamed up with Qatar in effectively mediating an end to the Gaza war, positioning itself as part of the regional coalition and a US partner in shaping the day after the war, despite Israeli opposition to provide Turkey with a significant role. Against the backdrop of growing Ankara-Jerusalem tensions, following anti-Israel demonstrations in Greece and Cyprus and lowering the profile of diplomatic relations, the end of the war in Gaza enabled the leaderships of these two countries to resume top-level meetings with Israeli officials, including a summit with Netanyahu, seeking to promote security cooperation.