



# US Policies towards Israel and the Middle East

A monthly report of the Mitvim Institute

Edited by Rebecca Bornstein\*

*Volume 4, Issue 7, July 2016*

## A. US-Israel Relations

- **Security cooperation and aid** - Protracted negotiations over a new memorandum of understanding (MOU) governing US aid to Israel continue. In a recent [letter to Congress](#), U.S. National Security Adviser Susan E. Rice and Office of Management and Budget Director Shaun Donovan said that the administration recently proposed a significant increase in funding; in exchange, it is pushing for Israel to use a higher percentage of that money to buy United States-made goods and services, rather than spend a sizable percentage in Israel. The US offer includes a 10-year pledge to fund missile defense systems that are currently subject to annual appropriations processes. Speaking before the [AJC Global Forum](#), Rice emphasized the non-partisan nature of America's interest in Israel's security; this reflects the perception that concluding an agreement with the Obama administration will help counter increasingly partisan attitudes towards Israel. In the meantime, security cooperation continues to expand: this month, Secretary of Defense Ash Carter met with Defense Minister Lieberman about [strengthening cooperation](#), the US and Israel signed a new joint declaration on [operative cyber defense](#) cooperation, and Under Secretary Rose Gottemoeller led the U.S. delegation in the 45<sup>th</sup> meeting of the [Joint Political Military Group](#), hosted by Israeli Ministry of Defense Director General Udi Adam in Tel Aviv.
- **Election campaign** - Hillary Clinton and Donald Trump have each gained the delegates required to secure their party's nomination during the upcoming July conventions. Attention is now focused on each party's platform. The Sanders campaign has successfully elevated the debate over Israel-Palestine policy on the national stage, and many believe that within the Democratic party there is no longer an obvious consensus on the issue. This is reflected in the [party platform drafting process](#). It is notable that Sanders' positions on settlements and the two-state solution are in line with standard US government policy. The changes he proposes include addressing the occupation as such, considering Jerusalem as a potential Palestinian capital, and treating the Palestinians with greater dignity. Many analysts believe that

\* Rebecca Bornstein is a researcher at the Mitvim Institute. Her email is: [rbornstein@mitvim.org.il](mailto:rbornstein@mitvim.org.il).  
Previous issues of this monthly report can be [read here](#).

Hillary Clinton's long-standing support for Israel will [prevent major changes](#) to the Democratic platform, but Sanders' ability to focus media exposure on this issue remains significant. On the Republican side, even [within his own party](#) Trump is seen as impulsive and often contradictory. His stance on Israel has recently pivoted from ["neutrality"](#) to [sharply right-wing positions](#) on settlements and Palestinian statehood.

- **Anti-BDS legislation** - Anti-BDS legislative efforts continue to grow on the state level, and the resulting resolutions increasingly "have teeth" in the way they address the allocation of public funds. This month, Rhode Island passed the [Anti-Discrimination in State Contracts Act](#), which prohibits states from contracting companies that [do not expressly promise](#) that they will not boycott public or private trading partners. It is widely acknowledged that the bill, although "nation neutral," [is geared towards Israel](#). A similar bill in California passed the State Assembly and now heads to the State Senate. In New York, Governor Andrew Cuomo released an [executive order](#) affirming that the State of New York "will not permit its own investment activity to further the BDS campaign... directly or indirectly." The order requires all affected state entities to "divest their money and assets" from any institution or company that participates in BDS or "promotes others to engage" in boycott activities. While the bill does not specifically address settlements, Cuomo's [subsequent op-ed](#) criticizes the closure of a SodaStream plant in the West Bank. The Anti-Defamation League is [opposed](#) to anti-BDS legislation, and former director Abraham Foxman said that it "strikes at the heart of First Amendment-protected free speech, will be challenged in the courts, and is likely to be struck down."

## B. The Israeli-Palestinian Peace Process/Conflict

- **The French initiative** - Kerry's eventual decision to attend the [ministerial meeting](#) in Paris does not reflect American enthusiasm over its prospects. The Center for a New American Security's Ilan Goldenberg described Kerry's attendance as a strategic decision that it is "better to be in the room than out of the room," and said that the most productive use of the French initiative is to lay out [incentives and practical steps for the parties](#) that are immediately actionable. The meeting led to a [joint communiqué](#), and the possible [next steps](#) include working groups, a meeting in September on the sidelines of the UN General Assembly, and a Paris peace conference in late 2016. State Department representatives said that "we found [the ministerial meeting] to be an opportunity to demonstrate that the international community still is very much committed to the goal of achieving a [two-state solution](#)... [but] I don't know that there's any follow-up role that we immediately see for ourselves."
- **Quartet report** - The Quartet's latest [report](#) focuses on major [threats to a negotiated peace](#) and recommended steps for Israelis and Palestinians. The Quartet's deep concerns over protecting the viability of the two-state solution are not, however, met with strong recommendations or new policies towards the conflict. The document is consistent with the longstanding American emphasis on direct Israeli-Palestinian progress, and it does not include any reference to legally binding UN Security Council

action. According to a [senior administration official](#), a primary driver of the report is the White House's concern over the risk of the status quo entrenching a one-state reality. Woodrow Wilson Center scholar and former government advisor [Aaron David Miller](#) said that the report "is designed to signal, but with very low expectations that it is going to change behavior by the Israelis or the Palestinians... what I think it could be a prelude to is an American effort after November."

### C. The Changing Middle East

- **Syria** - In an [interview with CBS](#), Vice President Joe Biden addressed a [letter](#) sent by 51 career diplomats to the State Department's Director of Policy Planning on the need for a new, "more militarily assertive" Syria policy. Biden supported the right of the diplomats to dissent, via an official Department channel, but challenged the lack of actionable alternative recommendations. In Syria, the fragile ceasefire has endured numerous violations, largely due to the difficulty of enforcing it without [people on the ground](#) (the US-Russian Geneva-based coordination cell is inadequate for this task). Secretary Kerry faced criticism for committing to [help the UN conduct airdrops](#) of humanitarian supplies on June 1 if the Assad regime continued to obstruct convoys, and then not following through. The US is now heavily reliant on Moscow's leverage with Damascus to prevent military escalation and assist with the ground delivery of needed [humanitarian aid](#). In spite of some [progress](#) against the Islamic State and the terrorist group's [heavy territorial losses](#), the idea of a peaceful political transition is distant. It is extremely unlikely that the parties have any chance of meeting the August 1 deadline for agreement on a full transition framework in accordance with [UNSCR 2254](#), the resolution calling for a ceasefire and political settlement to the war.
- **Turkey** - The restoration of [diplomatic relations](#) between Turkey and Israel was warmly received by the White House. President Obama [applauded](#) the agreement and its potential to "open up new opportunities for cooperation" in the eastern Mediterranean. This includes [energy deals](#), and rapprochement has the potential to help Ankara [decrease its dependency](#) on Russian gas. The US was quick to [condemn the recent terrorist attack](#) that struck Istanbul's Ataturk International Airport, and reaffirmed its commitment to [counterterrorism cooperation](#) with Turkey.

### D. The Iran Deal and its Aftermath

- **Post-JCPOA business deals** - The Boeing Company's proposed [passenger aircraft deal](#) with Iran has emerged as one of the first examples of elevated post-deal business ties between Western countries and Iran. There has been some Congressional opposition, but the State Department has [welcomed the deal](#). Nonetheless, while JCPOA compliance is linked to the development of business ties, the US still enforces a variety of other sanctions on Iran. Amid [tensions over Iran's support for Hezbollah](#), State Department Spokesperson John Kirby reaffirmed that JCPOA compliance alone will not guarantee deals for Iran, as [international financial actors](#) will want to avoid business with a country that supports terrorism.

## E. Further reading

<b>Israel/Peace Process</b>	Foreign Affairs, <a href="#">"The Struggle for Israel."</a> July/August 2016 Issue
	Matthew Duss, <a href="#">"Presidential Race Shifts Discourse on Israel-Palestine."</a> The Middle East Institute, June 1, 2016
	PRI and WNYC: <a href="#">"Sanders Pushes for Democratic Shift on Israel and Palestine."</a> June 2016
<b>Middle East</b>	Charles W. Dunne, <a href="#">"Middle East Democracy: Recommendations for the Next President."</a> The Middle East Institute, June 2, 2016
	Peter Feaver, <a href="#">"The Bloody Toll of Non-Intervention,"</a> Foreign Policy, June 3, 2016
	Shibley Telhami, <a href="#">"America's Puzzling Moral Ambivalence about Middle East Refugees."</a> The Brookings Institute, June 28, 2016
	Richard N. Haas, <a href="#">"US Diplomats Speak Unrestrained Truth to Power on Syria."</a> Council on Foreign Relations, June 20, 2016
<b>Iran</b>	Leore Ben Chorin and James Tyson, <a href="#">"The Iran Deal and Regional Nuclear Proliferation Risks, Explained,"</a> The Brookings Institute, June 6, 2016
	Dan de Luce and Henry Johnson, <a href="#">"Can the US Control Iran's Militias in the Fight for Fallujah?"</a> Foreign Policy, June 9, 2016

## F. Monthly Timeline

Date	Event
June 3	Secretary Kerry attends the ministerial meeting in Paris as part of the French initiative.
June 6-8	Under Secretary Gottemoeller meets Israeli MFA and NSC officials; leads US delegation of the 45th meeting of the Joint Political Military Group, in Tel Aviv.
June 8	Secretary Kerry meets with UAE Crown Prince Mohammed bin Zayed in Abu Dhabi
June 10	Plenary Meeting of the Global Coalition to Counter the Islamic State
June 15-17	Deputy Secretary of State Blinken travels to Tel Aviv, Jerusalem, Ramallah, and Ankara
June 17	President Obama meets with Mohammed bin Salman bin Abdulaziz Al Saud, Deputy Crown Prince and Minister of Defense of Saudi Arabia
June 20	Secretary of Defense Carter and Defense Minister Lieberman meet in Washington
June 19-23	The US and Israel sign a joint declaration on operative cyber defense cooperation during a cybersecurity conference in Tel Aviv
June 27	Secretary Kerry and Prime Minister Netanyahu meet in Rome to discuss regional issues
June 29	President Obama holds a call with President Erdoğan of Turkey