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Introduction

Since the establishment of the Jewish State in 1948, the United States and Israel have been engaged in a strategic dialogue carried out with different levels of intensity. Over time, this exchange has gradually been transformed into a strategic relationship, which has intensified dramatically in recent decades. Key events leading to closer military ties between the two nations include:

- the 1984 US–Israeli agreement to conduct joint naval and air military operations and to construct facilities to stockpile military equipment in Israel;
- the 1986 co-development of the Arrow ballistic missile defense system;
- the United States' 1987 decision to designate Israel a “major non-NATO ally;” and, most recently,
- the 2014 designation of Israel as a “major strategic partner.”¹

On September 14, 2016, the US and Israel signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) regarding US security assistance from 2019–28. The total value of the MOU is \$38 billion, meaning Israel would receive roughly \$3.8 billion per annum. A White House statement emphasized that the MOU:

- reflects an unprecedented closeness in military relations between the United States and Israel;
- constitutes the single largest pledge of military assistance in United States history;

- enables Israel to update its fighter aircraft fleet, increase its missile defense, and acquire other necessary defense capabilities;
- facilitates long-term planning so that Israel no longer needs to re-appropriate missile defense assistance levels every year;
- reflects the fact that Israel remains the leading recipient worldwide of US Foreign Military Financing, FMF. Since President Barack Obama took office, the United States has provided Israel with over \$23.5 billion in FMF assistance (from 2009–16); and
- provides Israel with unparalleled access to some of the most advanced military equipment in the world, including the F-35 Joint Strike Fighter.²

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's office released a statement emphasizing that the MOU:

- reflects an historic agreement between the US and Israel by ensuring Israel receives an unprecedented level of security assistance over the coming decade;
- signifies the largest military assistance package the US has ever granted to any country;
- assists Israel in continuing to build up military strength and improve missile defense;
- reveals that the US understands that investment in Israel's security is an investment in Middle Eastern security;
- underscores the strength and stability of US–Israel relations; and
- suggests that although the US and Israel disagree on security matters from time to time, these are disagreements “within the family.” They have no effect on the great friendship between Israel and the US.³

In his meeting with President Obama in New York on September 21, 2016, Netanyahu stated that Israel was grateful to him for his efforts to conclude the agreement. He also stated that the agreement “fortifies the principle that you [President Obama] enunciated many times that Israel should be able to defend itself, by itself, against any threat.”⁴ In his speech at the United Nations General Assembly in September 2016, Netanyahu reaffirmed his gratitude to the Americans for their assistance to Israel:

We never forget that our most cherished alliance, our deepest friendship, is with the United States of America, the most powerful and the most generous nation on earth. Our unbreakable bond with the United States of America transcends parties and politics. It reflects, above all else, the overwhelming support for Israel among the American people, support which is at record highs and for which we are deeply grateful.⁵