

Trump’s fallout with Netanyahu

Strategic shift in US-Israel relations

OPINION

News, analyses, and various speculations about the ties between Tel Aviv and Donald Trump’s second administration have recently caught on with many news circles and media audiences. In one of the latest developments, the refusal of Trump’s deputy to visit the occupied territories stood out. Amid escalating tensions between Trump’s government and Benjamin Netanyahu, prime minister of the Israeli regime, it was announced recently that US Vice President J.D. Vance will not travel to the occupied territories. On Monday local time, he stated that after his trip to Rome, he had the option to visit the occupied lands but pulled out citing logistical and security obstacles as the reasons. Trump’s first presidential term (2017–2021) is known as a period of unprecedented US support for the Israeli regime. Actions such as relocating the US embassy to Jerusalem, recognizing Israeli sovereignty over the Golan Heights, and cutting financial aid to the UN Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA) for Palestinian refugees highlighted the depth of this backing. Alongside bolstering American support for the regime, Netanyahu became one of Trump’s staunchest global allies. However, with Trump’s return to the White House in 2025, signs of a turnaround in the previous situation have come to light. This piece examines the reasons and points of contention between Trump and Netanyahu, the factors shaping this transformation, and its consequences for the Israeli regime and the Middle East.

Trump’s deep discontent with Gaza war

A key factor driving a wedge between Trump and Netanyahu is their differing approaches to the ongoing Gaza war. During his first term, Trump firmly backed Israel’s military operations and even justified actions like the assassination of Iranian General Qassem Soleimani as part of a maximum pressure policy on the Resistance Axis. However, in 2025, Trump has made it clear he is dissatisfied with the continuation of the Gaza conflict, which began in October 2023. On May 12, The Guardian reported that the White House is deeply fed up with the human toll, infrastructure destruction, and international pressure caused by the conflict. Trump has even leveraged the \$4 billion annual US aid to Israel as a bargaining chip to pressure Netanyahu, stating that Israel’s ongoing wars do not serve Washington’s interests. He is calling for a political solution to end the war and rebuild Gaza. Trump believes the ongoing fighting not only fails to advance US strategic goals in the region but also gets in the way of diplomatic priorities like freeing captives and reaching economic deals with Arab countries. US Special Envoy Steve Witkoff, in a meeting with families of Israeli captives in Gaza, bluntly said, “Israel is prolonging it — despite the fact that we don’t see where else we can go and that an agreement must be reached.” These remarks underline a deep rift between Washington and Tel Aviv. In contrast, Netanyahu, under pressure from his right-wing coalition, especially ministers like Bezalel Smotrich and Itamar Ben-Gvir, insists on continuing military operations aimed at the “complete destruction of Hamas”. Politically, Netanyahu appears to need the war to keep his fragile coalition intact and shield himself from domestic judicial and political pressures. Thus, the clash in priorities is one of the main sticking points between Tel Aviv and Washington.

Washington’s strategic pivot toward Arab states

In his second term, Trump has redefined



US President Donald Trump (L) and Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu
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his foreign policy around the “America First” slogan and economic interests. Unlike before, when Israel was the centerpiece of US Middle East policy, Trump now seeks to shore up ties with Arab countries, especially Saudi Arabia, Qatar, and the UAE. During his recent Middle East trip, Trump skipped over Israel and instead met regional leaders in Riyadh. This trip resulted in defense and technology deals worth around \$600 billion with Saudi Arabia, including AI technology transfer and advanced military equipment. Moreover, the lifting of sanctions on Damascus and Trump’s meeting with Ahmed al-Sharaa, head of Syria’s transitional government, have raised concerns in Israel. According to Dennis Citrinowicz, former head of the Iran Branch for Israel’s military intelligence, Netanyahu’s stubbornness against US diplomacy, especially on Iran, has led to the US granting concessions to Saudi Arabia, not considering Israeli interests. This strategic pivot has pushed Israel to the sidelines. For instance, Trump removed the condition for civilian nuclear cooperation with Riyadh that Saudi Arabia must normalize relations with Israel, unlike the Biden administration’s policy tying cooperation to a diplomatic agreement with Israel. This decision shows Trump no longer puts Israel front and center in regional decision-making. Kim Ghattas wrote in the Financial Times that Trump is no longer interested in unconditional support for Israel but rather in major economic

contracts that benefit the US and himself.

Negotiations with Iran

One of Netanyahu’s most sensitive issues is Washington’s indirect talks with Tehran over Iran’s nuclear program, conducted without coordinating with Israel. Tel Aviv has always viewed any US-Iran dialogue as a security threat. Netanyahu has repeatedly opposed the nuclear deal (JCPOA) in past years. Yet Trump, who withdrew from the JCPOA in his first term, is now seeking diplomatic solutions to ease tensions with Iran.

Trump family’s economic interests

A less highlighted but influential factor is the Trump family’s economic interests in Arab countries. Media reports, including from The Washington Post, reveal that Arab partners, especially in Saudi Arabia, UAE, and Qatar, have given the Trump family significant economic perks like private jets and investments in family businesses. These interests have steered Trump’s decisions toward closer ties with Gulf countries, sidelining Israel. This raises questions about Trump’s true foreign policy motives, with some analysts believing personal gain increasingly weighs in on his policies.

Personal grudges, strains

Trump and Netanyahu’s personal relations have been rocky. In 2020, Netanyahu’s premature congratulations to Joe Biden after the US election set off Trump’s anger. The failure of the Middle

East peace plan (Deal of the Century) and disputes over West Bank annexation during Trump’s first term further cooled relations. In 2025, Netanyahu’s reaction to the release of Edan Alexander, an American-Israeli captive in Gaza, who credited Israeli military pressure rather than Trump’s diplomatic efforts, fired up the White House again. This behavior highlights the lack of coordination between Netanyahu and Trump, fueling existing tensions.

Dual domestic pressures on Netanyahu

Netanyahu faces multiple domestic challenges, intensified by his rift with Trump. On one side, families of Israeli captives push for an immediate end to the war and the start of negotiations with Hamas. Meanwhile, right-wing allies like Smotrich and Ben-Gvir view any retreat or cease-fire as a betrayal of Israel’s goals. This puts Netanyahu in a tight spot politically. Discontent within the Likud party also adds to Netanyahu’s pressure. Senior Likud members like Yuli Edelstein criticize Netanyahu’s overreliance on Trump’s personal support. They argue that neglecting multilateral diplomacy has left Israel vulnerable to shifts in US policy. This dissatisfaction could spark leadership challenges within Likud. Opposition leaders Yair Lapid and Benny Gantz exploit this divide to attack Netanyahu, blaming him for failing to maintain US support and causing Israel’s dip-



US President Donald Trump (L) talks with Vice President JD Vance after a White House event.
● REUTERS

lomatic isolation. These criticisms could set the stage for early elections.

Regional, int’l consequences of US-Israel rift

The cooling of US-Israel relations will have multiple regional and international repercussions. For Israel, consequences include diplomatic isolation, strategic shifts, and increased self-reliance. Reduced US backing will leave Israel exposed to international pressures such as UN resolutions and International Court of Justice rulings. Israel may be forced to pivot from military policies toward regional diplomacy, engaging with non-Western powers like India and Asian countries as part of this strategy. Moreover, cuts in US military and political aid will compel Israel to lean on its internal defense and diplomatic capabilities. Regionally, this could boost Arab countries’ standing, ease pressure on Iran, and exclude Israel from diplomatic processes. Major US deals with Saudi Arabia and rapprochement with Syria will raise these countries’ diplomatic weight, potentially shifting the balance of power against Israel.

Nuclear negotiations and easing tensions with the Resistance Axis will give more wiggle room to Iran and its allies. Regional cease-fires (e.g., Gaza and Yemen) might bring about relative stability, but without Israel’s involvement, the regime risks being left out of diplomatic developments. For the US, consequences include optimized economic interests but intensified diplomatic challenges. Large contracts with Arab states will strengthen America’s economic position but may spark domestic criticism, such as corruption allegations against the Trump family. Distancing from Israel could also complicate relations with Congress and pro-Israel lobbies, though traditional Republican support for Israel remains strong.

Way forward

It appears that US-Israel relations have entered a new chapter no longer based on unconditional support. For now, Netanyahu is facing pressure to accept an end to the Gaza war and align with Trump’s diplomacy, but his right-wing coalition’s resistance is throwing a wrench in this process. In the long run, Israel must reassess its foreign policy, embrace multilateral diplomacy, and reduce dependence on the US. Netanyahu’s agreement with ending the war and embracing diplomacy could patch up relations with the US but weaken his domestic standing, potentially leading to the victory of the opposition in Israeli elections. Analysts suggest more moderate leaders like Gantz or Naftali Bennett could mend fences with the US and strengthen regional diplomacy. Some foresee the war continuing, believing insistence on military policies could isolate Israel and minimize US financial and military support. The core issue between Trump and Netanyahu is the clash between America’s economic and diplomatic priorities and Israel’s militaristic policies in Gaza. Trump, no longer interested in endless wars, has written off Netanyahu for resisting diplomacy (such as talks with Hamas and Iran) and focused on signing major contracts in Arab countries. This split has left Netanyahu in a bind, losing US support while facing intense domestic pressures. For Israel, these developments are a warning to rethink its foreign policy. The year 2025 will be pivotal for Netanyahu and Israel, shaping not only US relations but the political future of the region.

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