

U.S. Foreign Policy and Israel's Qualitative Military Edge: The Need for a Common Vision

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In-Depth Reports

The U.S. commitment to maintain Israel's qualitative military edge (QME) -- that is, the technological, tactical, and other advantages that allow it to deter numerically superior adversaries -- is a longstanding tradition that every president since Lyndon Johnson has reiterated. Today, however, Israel's relations with Arab countries are more complicated, and some moderate Arab states have even become strategically aligned with Israel due to Iran's growing regional ambitions and nuclear activities. How does this new regional calculus affect American military aid to both Israel and Arab states? And how can Washington advance U.S. strategic needs in the Middle East while still supporting its diverse allies?

In this Policy Focus, U.S. military planners William Wunderle and Andre Briere argue that a clearer definition of, and approach to, Israel's QME is needed. After outlining the historical evolution of U.S. and Israeli attitudes, they discuss how the QME strategy has been fundamentally altered by Iran's emergence as a wider regional threat. Based on this shift, and looking through the lens of U.S. defense strategy, they offer practical guidelines for the day-to-day U.S. decisions -- such as high-profile arms sales -- that could potentially alter the military footing and strategic thinking of Israel and its Arab neighbors. At a time when traditional assumptions about the regional strategic environment are in need of updating, decisionmakers require new guidelines to help them enhance burgeoning partnerships with Arab allies and deter Iranian ambitions -- all without endangering the security needs of its chief ally in the region.

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