

*JINSA's Gemunder Center for Defense and Strategy*

## Israel Officially Moves to CENTCOM

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*On September 1, the U.S. Department of Defense officially reorganized Israel within the area of responsibility (AOR) of U.S. Central Command (CENTCOM) alongside the other Middle Eastern nations. Amid U.S. retrenchment, the move could facilitate enhancement of Israeli capabilities and enhance coordination among American forces in the region, its Arab partners and Israel as they focus on combatting an increasingly aggressive Iran. With the unofficial transition expected to take several more years to complete, the United States must ensure Israel does not lose any capacity in the process, particularly in the realm of joint air and missile defense.*

### What Happened?

- On September 1, 2021, Israel officially became part of the CENTCOM AOR. It previously was in U.S. European Command's (EUCOM) AOR due to longstanding friction with many of its Arab neighbors.
  - Building on the Abraham Accords, [President Trump ordered](#) that Israel be relocated to CENTCOM's AOR on January 15, 2021.
- JINSA [initially proposed](#) such a move in 2018, which it expanded upon in a [detailed report](#) two months before Trump's decision.
- Also on September 1, CENTCOM's Fifth Fleet [conducted joint security patrols](#) and drills for the first time with three Israeli Navy ships in the Red Sea.
- On August 11, Israeli Air Force (IAF) pilots flew a [first-of-its-kind exercise](#) with CENTCOM F-15 fighter jets during a drill named Desert Eagle.

### Why Is It Important?

- Israel's transfer to CENTCOM acknowledges the changing relationships between Israel and its Arab neighbors embodied in the Abraham Accords, and it sends a strong deterrent signal to Iran. By strengthening regional security cooperation, it also mitigates America's military drawdown from the Middle East by improving the Department of Defense's operational posture in the region.
- Amid this drawdown, Iran and its proxies have significantly escalated their attacks on U.S. servicemembers, partners, and interests in the Middle East during 2021 – particularly through [drone attacks](#) – as detailed in [JINSA's Iran Projectile Tracker](#).

- Tehran also has significantly [escalated its aggression at sea](#).
  - On July 29, [Iran launched drones](#) against the *MT Mercer Street* cargo ship offshore of Oman, killing two crew members.
  - On August 3, [Iranian gunmen captured the MV Asphalt Princess](#) tanker off the coast of the United Arab Emirates.
- Because the U.S. military divides its global presence into geographic combatant commands, it makes strategic, operational, and logistical sense for Israel to be located within CENTCOM alongside other Middle Eastern states.
  - Israel's inclusion in EUCOM has had its benefits, including cooperation with NATO, and with the United States on joint air and missile defense.
- Positioning Israel in CENTCOM could expand new diplomatic ties from the Abraham Accords by promoting closer, mutually beneficial cooperation regionwide, under U.S. auspices, in terms of joint military training, exercising and developing a regional air defense and early-warning system architecture.
- Despite Israel's official transfer to CENTCOM, it remains crucial to ensure Israel's [missile defense ties](#) with the United States remain robust and effective, including through continued cooperation and exercising with EUCOM.

## What Can the United States Do Next?

- Congress should convene regular oversight hearings with Pentagon and CENTCOM officials to ensure Israel's smooth transition in the coming months and years, particularly amid an expected continued rise in Iranian provocations for the foreseeable future.
- Through CENTCOM, the United States should establish a regionwide multi-layered air defense and early-warning architecture against Iran and its proxies.
  - In tandem with Israel's world-class air defense network, Arab Gulf states are well-positioned to provide early warning as well as intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance (ISR) of Iranian and proxy capabilities, as [JINSA has proposed since 2018](#).
- As part of upgrading America's [currently obsolete](#) prepositioned weapons stockpile in Israel (WRSA-I) with precision guided munitions, the Pentagon should regionalize this stockpile for use by Israel, U.S. forces in the region and possibly Arab partner nations.
- The U.S. Department of Defense should increase the frequency and scope of joint military training with Israeli and Arab partners.
- CENTCOM should increase its coordination with regional partners to conduct freedom of navigation operations in the Gulf and intercept Iranian weapons proliferation.

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