

New Bill to Boost Missile Defense for Israel & Arab Partners, Citing Alleged Iran Threat

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Lawmakers with the bipartisan Abraham Accords Caucus have introduced a bill in the House and Senate that will require the Pentagon to coordinate missile defense upgrades for Israel and several newfound Arab allies, pointing to potential “attacks from Iran.”

Unveiled on Thursday, the [Deterring Enemy Forces and Enabling National Defenses \(DEFEND\) Act](#) would instruct the secretary of defense to “develop an acquisition approach” to improve anti-air weapons for a number of Middle Eastern states, among them Israel, Iraq, Jordan, Egypt and the six-member [Gulf Cooperation Council](#).

The legislation will aim to “implement an integrated and missile defense capability to protect the people, infrastructure and territory of such countries from cruise and ballistic missiles, manned and unmanned aerial systems and rocket attacks from Iran and groups linked to Iran.”

If passed, **Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin** will be required to submit a report to Congress within 180 days on the current defense capabilities of the states in question and how they could be improved.

[Announced](#) by Republican **Senator Joni Ernst**, the bill marks the first piece of legislation brought by the Abraham Accords Caucus, a bipartisan bloc within the House and Senate [created](#) to “build on the success” of a series of agreements struck between Israel and Arab nations starting in 2020. The senator claimed the law would help to contain Iranian proxy groups, which she said were targeting innocent civilians and “pose a persistent threat to our homeland.”

Though Ernst acknowledged most Americans are fed up with decades of armed intervention in the Middle East, she argued that “radical Islamic terror” continues to menace the United States, saying terrorism “can only be deterred and denied if American allies and partners in

the Middle East step up and take on the threat posed by Iran.”

According to Democratic **Senator Jacky Rosen**, the bill has the [endorsement](#) of several pro-Israel groups and hawkish think tanks, including the Anti-Defamation League, AIPAC, the American Jewish Committee, CUFI Action, the Foundation for Defense of Democracies (FDD), the American Jewish Congress, the Atlantic Council and the Jewish Institute for National Security of America (JINSA).

In backing the legislation, the neoconservative-leaning FDD [said](#) Washington should “continue to initiate, develop and enhance military to military relationships between the US, Israel and other US allies and partners in the region” as an “extension” of the Abraham Accords.

Kicked off with a US-brokered normalization deal between Israel and the United Arab Emirates in 2020, the Accords have since been joined by Bahrain, Egypt, Morocco and Sudan, each agreeing to establish diplomatic and economic ties with Tel Aviv after decades of enmity.

Though the new bill is largely concerned with Iran, some countries slated to receive increased US military assistance have been accused of [backing jihadist militant groups](#) in the past, chief among them Saudi Arabia. Few of the 10 states named in the law could [qualify as democracies](#), moreover, putting it at odds with President Joe Biden’s frequent lip service to the importance of ‘democratic values.’

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Kyle Anzalone and Will Porter host Conflicts of Interest along with Connor Freeman.

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