

Why a Defense Agreement with Israel Would be a Disaster for Americans. Lindsey Graham's Blank Check

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Two world wars began because of unconditional pledges made by one country to come to assistance of another. On July 5, 1914, [Kaiser Wilhelm II](#) of Germany pledged his country's complete support for whatever response Austria-Hungary would choose to make against Serbia after the June 28th assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand of Austria by a Serbian nationalist during an official visit to Sarajevo, Bosnia. This fatal error went down in history as Germany's carte blanche or "blank check," assurance to Austria that led directly to WW I.

In September 1939, World War II began when Great Britain and France came to the assistance of Poland after the German Army invaded, fulfilling a "guarantee" made in March of that year. What was a regional war, and one that might have been resolved through diplomacy, became global.

One would think that after such commitments were assessed by historians as the immediate causes of two world wars, no one would ever consider going down that road again. But that would be reckoning without Republican Senator Lindsey Graham who has been calling for a ["defense treaty" with Israel](#) since last April. In his most recent foray, Graham announced late in July that [he is seeking](#) bipartisan support for providing "blank check" assurances to Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and is hoping to be able to push a complete defense treaty through the Senate by next year.

In making his several announcements on the subject, Graham has been [acting as a front man](#) for both Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and also for The [Jewish Institute for the National Security of America](#) (JINSA), which wrote the basic document that is being used to promote the treaty and then enlisted Graham to obtain congressional support.

Speaking to the press on a JINSA conference call, Graham said the proposed agreement would be a treaty that would protect Israel in case of an attack that constituted an "existential threat". Citing Iran as an example, Graham said the pact would be an attempt to deter hostile neighbors like the Iranians who might use weapons of mass destruction against Israel. JINSA President Michael Makovsky elaborated on this, saying,

"A mutual defense pact has a value in not only deterring but might also mitigate a retaliatory strike by an adversary of Israel, so it might mitigate an Iranian response (to an attack on its nuclear facilities)."

JINSA director of foreign policy Jonathan Ruhe added that

“An Israeli strike on Iran’s nuclear program would not activate this pact, but a major Iranian retaliation might. – An Israeli unilateral attack is not what the treaty covers, but rather massive Iranian retaliation is what we are addressing.”

Israel has long been reluctant to enter into any actual treaty arrangement with the United States because it might limit its options and restrain its aggressive pattern of military incursions. In that regard, the Graham-JINSA proposal is particularly dangerous as it effectively permits Israel to be interventionist with a guarantee that Washington will not seek to limit Netanyahu’s “options.” And, even though the treaty is reciprocal, there is no chance that Israel will ever be called upon to do anything to defend the United States, so it is as one-sided as most arrangements with the Jewish state tend to be.

As the agreement between the two countries would be a treaty ratified by the Senate, it would be much more difficult to scrap by subsequent administrations than was the Iran nuclear deal, which was an executive action by President Obama. And clearly the statements by Graham, Makovsky and Ruhe reveal this treaty would serve as a green light for an Israeli attack on Iran, should they opt to do so, while also serving as a red light to Tehran vis-à-vis an ironclad US commitment to “defend” Israel that would serve to discourage any serious Iranian retaliation. Given that dynamic, the treaty would be little more than a one-way security guarantee from Washington to Jerusalem.

Furthermore, in outlining what circumstances would trigger US intervention on Israel’s behalf, the JINSA/Graham document cites, *inter alia*, “the threat or use of weapons of mass destruction.” It also allows Netanyahu to call for assistance after defining as threatening any incident or development “that gives rise to an urgent request from the Government of Israel.” It appears then that Netanyahu could demand that the US attack Iran should he only perceive a threat, however vague that threat might in reality be.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has been claiming Iran is “[three to five years](#)” and “possibly weeks” away from a nuclear weapons capability since 1992 and pushing Washington to attack Iran so he obviously would welcome such a treaty for strategic reasons as well as to shore up his upcoming re-election bid. President Trump, with whom Graham has discussed how the agreement would work, has a similar interest in appearing strong for Israel to help his own campaign in 2020.

It is worth noting that in 2010 Netanyahu ordered the Israel Defense Force (IDF) to prepare to strike Iran but ‘Israel’s security chiefs refused: Gabi Ashkenazi, the head of the IDF, and Meir Dagan, the head of the Mossad at the time, believed that Netanyahu and the Defense Minister Ehud Barak were trying to “steal a war” and the order was not carried out. The attacks were also rejected by two ministers, Moshe Yaalon and Yuval Steinitz, which left Netanyahu without the necessary majority to proceed.

Ashkenazi claimed in a 2012 interview about the episode that he was convinced that an attack would be have been a major strategic mistake. Meir Dagan said in 2012, after leaving his role as Mossad chief, that a strike [would be “a stupid thing”](#) as the entire region would undoubtedly be destabilized, requiring repeated Israeli and American interventions.

And there are other issues arising from a “defense treaty.” Defense means just that and

treaties are generally designed to protect a country within its own borders. Israel has no defined borders as it is both expansionistic and illegally occupying Palestinian land, so the United States would in effect be obligated to defend space that Israel defines as its own. That could mean almost anything. Israel is currently bombing Syria almost daily even though it is not at war with Damascus. If Syria were to strike back and Graham's treaty were in place, Washington would technically be obligated to come to Israel's assistance. A similar situation prevails with Lebanon and there are [also reports](#) that Israel is bombing alleged Iranian supply lines in Iraq, where the US has 5,000 troops stationed.

The real problem is that the Trump administration is obsessed with regime change in Iran, but it has so far been unable to provoke Iran into starting a conflict. Graham's proposed treaty just might be part of a White House plan to end-run Congress and public opinion by enabling Israel to start the desired war, whereupon the US would quickly follow in to "defend Israel," obliged by treaty to do so. What could possibly go wrong? The correct answer is "everything."

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