

A Celebration of Independence, Friendship and Shared Purpose

As America celebrates its Independence Day this month, I am reminded of how grateful I am for the strong partnership.

While I live in Israel today, I spent my childhood in the U.S., and I am proud to say that I am a citizen of both countries. I will never forget how welcoming and excited my new friends and neighbors in Israel were when they realized I'd immigrated to Israel from America.

This was almost two decades ago. I was brand new to the country, and I'd taken a leap of faith with my husband—we were newlyweds—to live and start our family in our biblical homeland. But even though it was an exciting time, any new immigrant will tell you it can also be a time of anxiety and insecurity. I wasn't quite sure of myself or the cultural expectations. Everything was new—the language, the people, even the desert landscape.

Everyone spoke Hebrew around me. But I remember as soon as I started speaking English, instead of feeling out of place, I was met with appreciation. People would say things, like “Wow, you're American and you moved to Israel! The U.S. is our greatest ally and greatest friend,” and “America is our example of how to build a land of freedom and diversity.”

I had many feelings at once: though I was uncertain in my new surroundings, I was grateful and happy to be in Israel. At the same time, I felt so proud of the country I left and the values it embodies, and was proud to say that I was from the U.S. I realized how strong the bond of shared values is between the U.S. and Israel and how much Israel looks to the U.S. as an example of freedom and democratic and biblical

values.

Today, I'm no longer a new immigrant. I've lived in Israel for 18 years, so I've seen for myself what my new Israeli friends described to me in those early days of living in the Holy Land: America truly is one of Israel's greatest allies.

One moment that I feel privileged to have witnessed was the U.S.'s historic decision in 2017 to move the U.S. embassy to Jerusalem. The following year, during the official embassy opening ceremony, the streets of Jerusalem buzzed with excitement, and Israeli and American flags were flying everywhere. Israel had always looked at Jerusalem as its capital, but it was the U.S. that became the first to officially recognize this fact (just as the U.S. was the first to recognize the newly formed state of Israel when it declared independence in 1948)—a strong message of solidarity with the Israeli people.

I now better understand why so many Israelis value America's commitment to freedom. I remember when my children were much younger, and we returned to the U.S. to visit relatives. My 3-year-old daughter asked me, "Why aren't there security guards everywhere?" and it reminded me of the frightening reality we face here in Israel.

But it also reminded me that freedom isn't free. The U.S., like Israel, has gone through many years of war, upheaval and hardships, and paid a great cost to retain the freedoms its citizens enjoy. But after 247 years, America has gotten to a place where the people can be together without a security guard standing watch at the entrance to every shop, every business, every place of worship. It's a nation where people from diverse backgrounds, different faiths and different generations come together to live in freedom.

This is a goal Israel is constantly working toward as well, a goal that it has gone a long way toward achieving. All the

while, Israelis are on the frontlines defending our freedom, and acting as a beacon of democracy in the Middle East, hoping that one day, our country will know true peace.

And so, even though I live in Israel—maybe because I live in Israel—I am so grateful to be able to celebrate America's Independence Day. For me, this day reminds me of our partnership, the true friendship and support America has shown Israel, and the foundational values that we share. And it also reminds me of how valuable freedom is and how important it is to protect it.

In 1960, John F. Kennedy, who was then running for U.S. president, gave a speech at the Zionists of America convention. "Israel was not created in order to disappear—Israel will endure and flourish," he told the crowd. "It is the child of hope and home of the brave. It can neither be broken by adversity nor demoralized by success. It carries the shield of democracy and it honors the sword of freedom."

I can assure my American friends that Israelis feel the same way about the U.S. So, we all wish you happy birthday, America! May you endure and flourish, and continue to embody the values of democracy and freedom that we all hold dear. As we celebrate the 4th of July, I also celebrate how thankful I am for the partnership. I am hopeful, and I firmly believe, that with God's guidance, our friendship will remain strong for many years to come.

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