

# Crystal Rhoades for Congress (NE-02)

## Israel Position Paper

### Overview

When I'm sworn into Congress, let me be clear: **no one will fight harder as a champion for the U.S.-Israel relationship than I will. Period.**

I know some voices (often the loudest ones) disagree with me. That's fine. I didn't get into public service to play it safe or cater to the extremes. I got into this to stand up for what I believe is right, even when it's hard.

My support for Israel isn't political, it's personal. It's moral. It's grounded in my values. Israel is the **only democracy in the Middle East**. It's the only place in the region where women, LGBT+ people, and religious minorities can live with rights, dignity, and freedom. That matters. That should matter to all of us.

These principles: democracy, equality, and freedom from persecution, **are supposed to be the foundation of our core values as Democrats**. So why are so many ignoring them when it comes to Israel?

I won't bend my values to appease a social media mob. I won't apologize for standing up for our ally. And I won't stop calling out double standards when I see them. That's not weakness...it's leadership.

### Background

When I was 15, I worked as a housekeeper in a nursing home, cleaning rooms, including those of Holocaust survivors. I was a working-class Christian kid from Omaha. I don't think I'd even met a Jew before.

One man at the nursing home would hoard uneaten food, hiding it under the bed, in closets, even in the bathroom...anywhere it might go untouched. One day, he showed me the number tattooed on his arm and explained how the Nazi's had branded and starved him and many other horrors done to him and so many other Jews. He explained why: it was how he coped with the trauma he still carried decades later. He simply couldn't stand the idea of throwing away food, even if it had started to turn a little. Slightly spoiled food was better than no food.

**That moment changed me.** I started bringing him chips, candy, soda, things that wouldn't spoil, and we'd trade. He asked me to "never forget."

I never did.

I used the money I earned from that job to pay for a trip to Europe, where I visited a concentration camp, an experience that deepened my understanding of the history he had lived through and cemented my belief in the importance of memory, dignity, and justice.

I consider myself lucky to have held that job, and appreciated the perspective it gave me.

My husband and I have not yet been to Israel; it is the first trip I hope to take as a Member of Congress. I want to send a message to my colleagues and my constituents that these issues are of moral importance to me, and going to Israel is a crucial component of that.

### **October 7th Attacks:**

I wrote my Master's thesis on terrorism. Those studies helped deepen my understanding of the life-cycle and operating procedures of groups like Hamas, Hezbollah, Houthis, and even the Iranian theocratic government.

When innocent Israelis, including Jews, Muslims, and Christians, were the victims of unspeakable terrorist violence by a group that is fully dedicated to the erasure of Zionism and all Jews, it was immediately clear that there was only ONE response: **eradication of Hamas.**

In 2001, when the US was the victim of a large-scale terrorist attack on our soil, we embarked on a two-decade multinational operation to root out terrorism. We rallied much of the Western world to our side. Why should we hold Israel to a different standard?

### **This isn't even a close call.**

While compassion for Gazan civilians is well-intentioned, it too often misses the point that they are oppressed by the same terrorist regime that insists on harming their own civilians to try to turn public opinion globally against Israel.

All leaders, but particularly Democratic leaders, should be calling that out as a betrayal of our core values.

### **Antisemitism and Anti-Zionism**

I intentionally group these two key issues together. In my mind, the debate about whether one can be anti-Zionist but NOT antisemitic is the wrong debate. And even if someone well-intentioned believes that is possible, too often we see anti-Zionist rhetoric veer into antisemitic rhetoric almost instantly.

### **I won't tolerate it.**

Of course, Israel has the right to exist...and exist safely...and exist in the promised land.

It is insane that in 2025, this is something that is controversial. As the only place in the world where any Jew can find safe haven after millennia of being the victims of violence across the globe (and less than two generations removed from the Holocaust), this is non-negotiable.

In Congress, I want to lead on what America's role can be in restoring Israel's reputation both at home and abroad. While I disagree with certain tactics employed by the Israeli government in their efforts to secure the release of the hostages, I am, nevertheless, focused on restoring the strength of our country's relationship with Israel. The US should continue its advocacy for Israel around the globe.

I must emphasize that there is room to be critical of Israel's government, and there is room to be critical of policies by certain leaders. But to conflate those critiques with Israel's existential rights is unacceptable.

That said, we must stop giving lip service to the horrifying rise of antisemitism domestically. Leaders who refuse to call out the usage of 'Globalize the Intifada' or 'From the River to the Sea' must be held accountable in a meaningful way. **We must stand strong against BDS movements** that take root from college campuses to City Halls.

I fully support the State Department's **adoption of the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance's (IHRA) definition of antisemitism as American policy**. Had I been in Congress at the time, I would have co-sponsored Rep. Lawler and Rep. Gottheimer's legislation to implement this policy across the federal government, including with the Department of Education.

To give anything but a full-throated denunciation of antisemitism, no matter how it manifests, is a collective failure of us all.

## **Strengthening the US/Israel Relationship**

The United States should honor its security assistance commitments to Israel in the 2016 memorandum of understanding, which are both vital to Israel's defense and also benefit the United States, and continue a bipartisan history of continuing these commitments across both Republican and Democratic Administrations.

We must continue to authorize the necessary assistance to replenish Iron Dome, David's Sling, and Arrow 3, along with other forms of defense. Israel's enemies have taken the step of using ballistic weapons in their unprovoked attacks on Israelis of all ethnicities. **I will be a strong YES vote for supplemental appropriations to ensure Israel has the resources necessary to defend itself.**

I also believe that our friendship with Israel is not conditional. US military aid is already subject to a host of conditions that aid to all countries are subject to. As a result, **I will strongly oppose any conditions to aid on Israel and will vote NO on any legislation that**

**includes conditions.** To impose additional conditions is simply singling out the Jewish state in US policy, and that is unacceptable.

In addition to strengthening our security partnership, I firmly support expanding economic cooperation between the United States and Israel. Joint ventures between our countries have delivered significant returns, creating jobs and generating wealth on both sides.

By sharing talent, resources, and expertise, particularly in research and development, we continue to fuel innovation across critical sectors. American consumers and businesses benefit every day from Israeli advances in fields like healthcare, technology, communications, water conservation, desalination, and clean energy.

I dream of a world where US and Israeli technology finally crack the code on large-scale water desalination so that thirst becomes a thing of the past. I believe this is within our grasp. But only if Israeli/US collaboration continues and increases.

Beyond our deep friendship and shared democratic values, the U.S.-Israel relationship brings tangible geopolitical benefits. A strong and secure America contributes to Israel's safety, and vice versa. Our cooperation on intelligence, missile defense systems, and military logistics is essential to the national security of both nations.

The United States must **uphold its commitments under the current 10-year memorandum of understanding.** These security investments are not only vital to Israel's defense, but they also serve American interests, strengthening our global position and reinforcing a long-standing bipartisan consensus that spans Republican and Democratic administrations.

Moreover, the billions of dollars we dedicate to Israel's security support American jobs and industries. From manufacturing to technology development, our investments in this partnership help power local economies here at home while promoting stability in a volatile region.

### **Ending Iran's Nuclear Capabilities and Sponsorship of Terrorism**

There must be no daylight in the US and Israeli approach to Iran. **Iran is a threat to the whole world, and their march to nuclearization cannot be tolerated.**

Israel has taken a global leadership position in the last several years in standing up to Iran, and doing material harm to its nuclear capabilities and advancement. I applaud the United States' efforts in using 'bunker buster' munitions to deter the continued advancement of Iran's nuclear program.

It must be the ongoing and unequivocal position of the United States that Iran cannot under any circumstances have a nuclear weapon, or even a pathway to enrich uranium that can be commandeered for military purposes. This goes beyond even a security issue for Israel; it is a security issue for the entire globe.

Additionally, Iran is the world's leading sponsor of terrorism and is actively working to destabilize Israel and many of its Arab neighbors alike. Their support of Hezbollah, Hamas, Houthis, and others cannot be tolerated, and the US must work with NATO and other regional powers to snuff out these proxy arms of Iran.

## **What Comes Next In Gaza**

When Hamas is finally rooted out, the US must play an active role in securing a safe future for Israel and the region.

The absence of leadership from Arab neighbors must end, and the US must play a role in ensuring Egypt, Jordan, Qatar, and others have skin in the game and are committed to a peaceful and sustainable solution for Palestinians.

As for recognition of a Palestinian state, **I have no interest in seeing the global community legitimize Hamas.** I support many of the past efforts made by the Israeli government to ensure a two-state solution, even though Hamas has rejected them out of hand. Regrettably, they have never proposed a counteroffer in any of the negotiations.

**I also believe building the future in Gaza is an opportunity to reaffirm and build upon the Abraham Accords.**

Everyone in the Middle East is less safe with a militarized and nuclear-curious Iran, but very few are willing to actively support Israel in its role as the counterbalance to a more dangerous Iran. I would hope to push the US administration to be more aggressive in brokering deals in which countries like Saudi Arabia recognize and establish diplomatic relations with Israel.

Of course, I want the war to end. **I want the hostages to come home. I want Israel to stop being portrayed as the villain. But I do not believe in an unbalanced ceasefire where hostages are returned for scores of dangerous combatants.** I support ensuring humanitarian aid is not stolen and that it gets to the people who need it most.

The US, the UN, and Arab neighbors must take a leadership role in funding not only the rebuilding of Gaza, but also ensuring security and preventing the resurgence of Hamas or an offshoot. The failures of the Palestinian Authority cannot be ignored. Their weakness and corruption facilitated Hamas's ascension.

I believe in the right of Palestinians to have self-determination. But before we can discuss a sustained two-state solution, there must be security guarantees made by the UN and Arab partners, along with the US, to ensure that Israeli existence is not threatened during a transition. Additionally, there must be an international agreement on the demilitarization of a future Palestinian state and further agreement on permanent enforcement of the Taylor Force Act to end the slaughter of Israelis and others.

## **Conclusion**

Public service is not the art of pissing the fewest people off. It is the art of leading with core values, even when it might be unpopular.

**I will be a champion for Israel in Congress.**

I'm not interested in couching that language or trying to hedge.

We must embrace democracy, pluralism, and equality. We must embrace the only place in the region where innovation and creativity are put ahead of fear and terrorism.

Israel has been one of our strongest allies for over 75 years. Not only must that never change, but it's more important than ever right now that we reaffirm that commitment and help restore Israel's global standing.

There is a place for criticisms of the actions of the current Israeli government. But there will one day be different leaders, just as there will be in the US.

**The strength of our alliance with Israel cannot be dependent upon who is in power at any given moment. American support cannot be conditioned.**

That will be my vocal and clear position in Congress.