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U.S. House of Representatives passes bill declaring Israel 'major strategic partner'

A bill declaring Israel a “major strategic partner” of the U.S. passed the U.S. House of Representatives unanimously on Wednesday and now goes to President Barack Obama for his signature. The bill enhances Israel’s trade status to expedite export licensing; increases cooperation on energy, water engineering, research and development; and expands authority for forward-deployed U.S. weapons stockpiles in the Jewish state. “Israel is a bright light in a very, very dark region,” Democrat Eliot Engel said in the House shortly before the vote on Wednesday. “We must always be working to ensure that our support for Israel keeps pace with the threats proliferating against the country—from Iran to Hamas,” House Foreign Affairs Committee chairman Ed Royce said in a statement. The declaration of Israel as a major strategic partner is an elevation from “major non-NATO ally,” Israel’s legal status as a U.S. ally since 1988, and further binds the U.S. executive to ensure Israel’s qualitative military edge in the region. The bill seeks expeditious approval from the White House of long-term security guarantees to Israel over a decade, and increases its crisis stockpile of weaponry by a value of \$200 million to a total of \$1.8 billion, in addition to billions more toward other military projects.