Shared Values, A Shared Bond

In pro-Israel circles, we often hear that Israel is a unique sanctuary of democracy, freedom and pluralism in the Middle East, protecting its citizens' rights while upholding the progressive values it shares with America. When Israelis went to the polls in late January, they proved that this is indeed the case.

The newly elected parliament, Israel's 19th Knesset, consists of 120 members who reflect a wide range of points of view and includes Israelis from all walks of life: Jews, Christians and Muslim Arabs and Druze. The vote was universal, countrywide, secret, and proportional.

Such open and free elections are a hallmark of the Jewish state and one of the many common features that the United States and Israel share. Commitment to democracy, the rule of law, freedom of religion and speech and human rights are all core values of both countries.

Both nations were founded by refugees seeking political and religious freedom. Both were forced to fight for independence against foreign powers. Both have absorbed waves of immigrants seeking political freedom and economic well-being. And both have evolved into democracies that respect the rule of law, the will of voters and the rights of minorities. Like the United States, Israel has an independent judicial system, which protects the rights of individuals and operates under the principle of "innocent until proven guilty."

At a time when our country faces historic challenges, including increasing global threats and turmoil in the Middle East, the unique bond between the United States and Israel is more essential than ever. Close strategic, economic, political and diplomatic ties between the countries further U.S. interests, promote regional peace and enhance the security of both nations.

Moreover, bilateral ties in trade and technology launched in the 1970s and cemented in the U.S.-Israel Free Trade Agreement of 1985 have yielded groundbreaking advances and joint economic growth for the two allies. The American and Israeli governments, as well as private business ventures in both countries, are partnering to promote new energy solutions and ensure our long-term energy security.

The military partnership between the United States and Israel has also helped both countries keep its soldiers safe, strengthen its military and protect its homeland. And Israel is working with U.S. government and private entities to develop technologies and equipment aimed at thwarting terrorism and safeguarding citizens from both nations.

Rooted in these shared values is the bond between two nations that are working together to make the world a better, cleaner, and more secure place.