

Heard on the Hill

Senators urge Bush to hold Russia accountable. Thirty-two senators signed a letter to President Bush expressing concern that America's nuclear cooperation agreement with Russia would undermine U.S. policy toward Iran. The letter, authored by Sens. NORM COLEMAN (R-MN) and EVAN BAYH (D-IN), urges the president to refrain from sending the agreement to Congress until Russia ends its support for Iran's illicit nuclear program. Once the agreement is sent to Capitol Hill, Congress would have 90 days to reject it.

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Senate panel backs U.S.-Israel missile defense cooperation. The Senate Armed Services Committee approved its version of the National Defense Authorization Act for fiscal year 2009, authorizing \$162 million for Israel's Arrow and short-range missile defense programs as part of the Department of Defense's overall budget. The bill authorizes a \$30 million increase from the president's original budget request in order to enhance the missile shield. It also adds \$28 million for the short-range "David's Sling" program—which aims to intercept missiles traveling more than 25 miles—and funds for other joint U.S.-Israel programs. The bill heads to the Senate floor in late May.

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House committee endorses security assistance to Israel. The House Foreign Affairs Committee has approved legislation that authorizes \$2.55 billion in security assistance to Israel for fiscal year 2009. The bill endorses the implementation of a 10-year U.S.-Israel agreement that pledges \$30 billion in security assistance to Israel over the next decade. Passed by voice vote, the legislation requires the president to evaluate on an ongoing basis and report to Congress the extent to which Israel has a qualitative military edge over all possible military threats, and to assess all future U.S. military sales in that context. •NER•

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NEAR EAST

Report

MAY 16-31, 2008

**AIPAC'S BIWEEKLY ON AMERICAN
MIDDLE EAST POLICY**

EDITOR'S COMMENTS

Still Searching

Israel is a country rife with contradictions. Surrounded by enemies, yet emerging victorious in war time after time; arid and lacking natural resources, yet making the desert bloom; rejected by its neighbors, yet still searching for peace.

The Jewish state's regional isolation is not for lack of effort to integrate. Israel has been willing to make painful sacrifices for peace even before the state was officially established. This history must never be omitted from any conversation about the Arab-Israeli conflict.

When, in 1947, the United Nations proposed to divide British-controlled Palestine into two states, Arab and Jewish, the Jews rejoiced and accepted the plan, despite its flaws. The Arabs were slated to receive not only all of Gaza and what later became known as the West Bank but also large parts of the Galilee and the Negev Desert.

Nevertheless, the Palestinian leadership and the Arab nations rejected the Partition Plan and went to war with the stated objective of destroying the Jewish state. When the dust settled ...see *Editor's Comments cont'd on pg. 28*

Hamas Heist

**TERROR GROUP ATTACKS AID CROSSINGS,
STEALS FUEL SUPPLIES FROM PALESTINIANS**

In an effort to create a humanitarian crisis in the Gaza Strip—and thus manipulate world opinion against Israel—the terrorist group Hamas has been attacking vital crossing points and energy supply lines along the Gaza-Israel border.

In mid-April, suicide bombers drove three explosives-laden vehicles into the Kerem Shalom border crossing, where approximately 200 trucks of essential food and medical supplies pass through each week. Thirteen Israeli soldiers were wounded in the attack.

Two weeks earlier, Palestinian terrorists attacked the Nahal Oz fuel terminal,



Photo by the Associated Press

Palestinians in Gaza are faced with a fuel shortage due to Hamas' attacks on supply depots.

which delivers nearly 800,000 gallons of fuel each week to Gaza hospitals and to the Gaza City power station. Two Israeli workers were killed in the attack—civilians whose job it was to ensure that Palestinians receive the fuel they need.

On May 4, the Israel Defense Forces was forced to halt food and fuel shipments as delivery vehicles came under heavy mortar fire. About 50 trucks were forced to turn back as a result of the barrage.

On multiple occasions over the past month, Hamas terrorists have confiscated fuel trucks departing from Nahal Oz, hoarding fuel for its own use and driving up the price of gasoline. And in yet another publicity stunt, Hamas has started using its own police cars to ferry around ...see *Hamas Heist cont'd on pg. 28*

Praising Israel

AS ISRAEL CELEBRATES ITS 60TH ANNIVERSARY, MEMBERS OF CONGRESS DELIVER FLOOR SPEECHES HONORING THE JEWISH STATE'S ACCOMPLISHMENTS AND REAFFIRMING THE STRENGTH OF THE U.S.-ISRAEL ALLIANCE

In a landmark display of support for America's friendship with Israel, the House and Senate overwhelmingly passed resolutions recognizing the 60th anniversary of Israel's birth and reaffirming the close bond between the two democracies. In the Senate, the resolution was cosponsored by the entire chamber and passed by unanimous consent. The House approved its version by a resounding vote of 417-0.

Leading up to the vote, the Democratic Israel Working Group and the House Republican Israel Caucus encouraged members of Congress to give floor speeches praising Israel. More than 70 lawmakers have delivered statements. Excerpts from key Congressional leaders' remarks can be found below:

Rep. Nancy Pelosi (D-CA)

Speaker of the House

"The creation of Israel stands out as one of the greatest achievements of the 20th century, and as a beacon of hope to the world. In America's partnership with Israel, we have both given support and we have drawn strength. We share a common history—nations founded to be beacons of democracy, forged by pioneers, and fulfilled by immigrants in search of a better tomorrow. We also share a common cause—a safe and secure Israel, living in peace with her neighbors."



Photo by AIPAC

Rep. John Boehner (R-OH)

House Republican Leader

"After 60 years, Israel may not be our oldest ally, but there is no doubt that it's among our most treasured. Since its establishment six decades ago, Israel has been a pillar of strength, integrity, freedom and, above all else, friendship. They're not simply allies by chance. Our friendship has flourished over the last 60 years because we share the same values. The



Photo by AIPAC



BIPARTISAN LEADERS IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

• EXCERPTS FROM HOUSE FLOOR STATEMENTS PRAISING ISRAEL •
APRIL 2008

bonds of trust between Israel and America have never been stronger or more important than they are right now."

Rep. Steny Hoyer (D-MD)

House Majority Leader

"As our allies in Israel celebrate their 60th anniversary of independence, let us honor their determination to fulfill the vision of Zionism's founding father, Theodor Herzl, who observed, 'If you will it, it is no dream.' Through courage and will, Israel was born and the dream of generations was made real—and it will endure. I want to congratulate the citizens of Israel and the entire Jewish community on this important anniversary of Israel's founding."



Photo by AIPAC

Rep. Eric Cantor (R-VA)

Chief Deputy Republican Whip

"60 years ago, outnumbered and under-equipped, the Jews of Palestine beat back five invading Arab armies to win a miraculous victory. Thus, the 2,000-year-old dream of reestablishing a state in the Jewish ancestral homeland was realized.

"Since then, Israel has wrought out of barren desert and swamp a vibrant and flourishing state. It has harnessed its ingenuity to join the world's ranks of leaders in science, technology and cancer research. Israel remains a vital ally in the globe's most dangerous region."



Photo by the Associated Press

Rep. Howard Berman (D-CA)

Chairman, House Foreign Affairs Committee

"Now it is time to reaffirm our nation's pledge to Israel: that we will stand in solidarity with Israel against all violent assaults on its security and well-being.



Photo by the Associated Press

And, most of all, it is the time to say to our friend and ally, Israel: Congratulations on your incredible social, political, economic, and technological achievements in the face of the most stupefying odds. We in the United States could not be prouder of our special relationship with you."

Rep. Ileana Ros-Lehtinen (R-FL)

Ranking Member, House Foreign Affairs Committee

"Israel's existence is indispensable to advancing America's most basic interests and values. For decades, our two nations have successfully collaborated on everything from science and business to defense and homeland security. As America goes forward, fighting for a free and prosperous world and against violent extremist groups who seek our ruin, Israel once again stands with us. And America will and must continue to stand with Israel for the next 60 years and beyond."



Photo by the Associated Press

Visit www.aipac.org to view more floor speeches from members of Congress. •NER•

Intelligence Revealed

U.S. OFFICIALS PRESENT A DETAILED BRIEFING ON SYRIA'S NOW-DEFUNCT CLANDESTINE EFFORT TO BUILD A NUCLEAR REACTOR AND GIVE A NOD TO ISRAEL'S DECISION TO DESTROY THE THREAT

In a stunning disclosure, the Bush administration has revealed that Syria was in the final stages of building a North Korean-designed nuclear reactor capable of producing weapons-grade plutonium before the Israeli Air Force destroyed it last September. The Israeli government has remained silent over the matter.

Syrian Reactor Could Have Produced Fuel for Nuclear Bombs

After briefing members of Congress, top administration and intelligence officials released a video presentation with photographs of the Syrian nuclear facility, noting its many similarities to North Korea's reactor in Pyongyang. One photo showed the manager of North Korea's Yongbyon nuclear plant with the director of Syria's nuclear agency.

"The reactor would have been capable of producing plutonium for nuclear weapons," the video narrator said. "It was not configured to produce electricity and was ill-suited for research."

After the Israeli airstrike, Syria tried to remove all evidence of the reactor's existence, according to the video. "These actions probably were intended to forestall identification of reactor debris by international inspectors and are inconsistent with peaceful nuclear intentions," the video concluded.

CIA Director Michael Hayden later added that the secret Syrian reactor would have been able to produce enough plutonium for making one or two atomic bombs within one year of becoming operational.

United States Sympathizes With Israel's Decision to Attack Reactor

In a display of the close relationship between the United States and Israel, the two allies discussed policy options for how to deal with the Syrian site. Israel decided on its own that it needed to eliminate the nuclear threat before it was too late.

"We understand the Israeli action," a senior administration official said. "We believe this clandestine reactor was a threat to regional peace and security, and we have stated before that we cannot allow the world's most dangerous regimes to acquire the world's most dangerous weapons."

When asked if the United States would have considered taking action if the Israelis had not, the official answered that Washington had examined all options, but "Israel felt that this reactor posed such an existential threat that a different approach was required. And as a sovereign country, Israel had to make its own evaluation of the threat and the immediacy of the threat, and what actions it should take. And it did so."

The fact that Israel decided to destroy

the almost-complete Syrian nuclear facility—just as it did with the Iraqi Osirak reactor in 1981—indicates the seriousness with which the Jewish state viewed the possible emergence of a nuclear-armed enemy.

White House Worries About Iran

The United States has long worried about the prospect of a terror-sponsoring state becoming a nuclear power. "The Syrian regime must come clean before the world regarding its illicit nuclear activities," said a White House statement. "The Syrian regime supports terrorism, takes action that destabilizes Lebanon, allows the transit of some foreign fighters into Iraq and represses its own people."

The White House noted that the advanced and undetected stage of Syria's covert nuclear program "underscores that the international community is right to be very concerned about the nuclear activities of Iran and the risks those activities pose to the stability of the Middle East."

At a time when Iran is accelerating its illicit nuclear program, President Bush said that "we have an interest in sending a message to Iran, and the world for that matter, about just how destabilizing nuclear proliferation would be in the Middle East." In September of last year, Israel unambiguously reinforced that message. •NER•

DEADLY MIX

IF SYRIA HAD ACQUIRED NUCLEAR WEAPONS, THE ASSAD REGIME WOULD HAVE BEEN ABLE TO CONFIDENTLY CONTINUE ITS DESTRUCTIVE BEHAVIOR WITH IMPUNITY



Alliance With Iran

Syrian President Bashar Assad has a close relationship with his counterpart in Iran, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad.

Repressive Rule

The authoritarian regime in Damascus arrests dissidents, such as Riad Seif (pictured), who challenge Assad's rule.

Assassinations in Lebanon

Syria is suspected of assassinating many anti-Syrian Lebanese politicians, including former PM Rafik Hariri in 2005.

Haven for Hamas

One of the world's leading state sponsors of terrorism, Syria hosts Hamas chief Khaled Mashaal in Damascus.

in 1949, the Arabs controlled all of the West Bank, Gaza and Jerusalem's Old City. Israel again reached out for peace, offering to sign treaties that would have made the new borders permanent. The Arab states rejected Israel's offer, as recognizing borders would have meant recognizing Israel.

It would be 30 difficult years before an Arab state finally reached out for peace with Israel. When Egyptian President Anwar Sadat abandoned the path of war, Israel returned the entire Sinai Peninsula to Egypt in exchange for peace. Israel again made territorial concessions to Jordan in the 1994 peace treaty, and agreed to cede virtually the entire Golan Heights to Syria in 2000. Syrian insistence on access to the Sea of Galilee, and its refusal to stop supporting terrorist groups, scuttled the deal.

On top of all this, Israel had by the end of the 1990s given the Palestinian Authority (PA) control of nearly all Palestinian civilian areas. In 2000, Prime Minister Ehud Barak was ready to withdraw from almost all disputed territories in exchange for a final peace deal, but Yasir Arafat rejected the offer and initiated a horrific campaign of violence. (Israel withdrew from Gaza anyway in 2005.)

Under U.S. auspices, Israel is now conducting intensive peace talks with PA President Abbas. In doing so, Israel is continuing its 60-year tradition of leaving no stone unturned in the search for peace. •NER•

Lessons Learned

AMERICAN HOMELAND SECURITY OFFICIALS VISIT ISRAEL TO STUDY FIRST-HAND HOW THE JEWISH STATE FIGHTS TERRORISM

Looking to Israel for expertise, 13 state-level homeland security officials recently traveled to the Jewish state to learn how it keeps its citizens safe.

The trip was sponsored by the American Israel Education Foundation (AIEF), the charitable organization affiliated with AIPAC. The tour was the third of its kind for AIEF, which has co-sponsored trips in the past with the National Sheriffs' Association and the International Association of Fire Chiefs. Such missions represent just one component of AIPAC's homeland security initiative, which aims to ensure that the United States benefits from Israel's vast expertise in fighting terrorism.

Since the 9/11 attacks, state and local governments have turned to Israel for advice on how to better protect their own communities. AIEF has sought to build those relationships by fostering ties between homeland security professionals and their Israeli counterparts.

The trip participants enjoyed high-level

briefings with Israeli national security experts. Public Security Minister Avi Dichter was the group's guide in Sderot, where he explained what Israel is doing to protect its citizens from rocket attacks.

Later on, the American homeland security officials traveled to Ben-Gurion International Airport and learned why Israel has the reputation for having the world's best airport security. The delegation was briefed on how Israeli security personnel screen passengers using a combination of technology and human intelligence.

This effort has also reached Capitol Hill, where AIPAC has worked with lawmakers to facilitate close U.S.-Israel cooperation. Recently, Congress created an office for homeland security research, where the United States and its closest allies, including Israel, discuss security strategies.

The cooperative spirit struck a cord on the AIEF mission. As one participant remarked: "Sharing best practices is what our trip is all about." •NER•

Hamas Heist....cont'd from pg. 25

Palestinians who cannot afford fuel.


Not every Palestinian was willing to see Hamas as heroic. "They want to fool the people," one Gazan told the Associated Press. "They are trying to make the people forget who is behind our suffering."

Meanwhile, as Egypt attempts to mediate a cease-fire between Hamas and Israel, Hamas chief Khaled Mashaal told Al

Jazeera that his terrorist group would only accept a cease-fire as a temporary "tactic" in its long-term war against the Jewish state.

"It is normal for any resistance... to sometimes escalate, other times retreat a bit... Hamas is known for that," Mashaal said. "In 2003, there was a cease-fire and then the operations were resumed." He warned of more violence if Israel rejected his ultimatum. •NER•

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