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United States Looks to Israel for Homeland Security Expertise

In the wake of Sept. 11, cooperative homeland security initiatives with Israel at the state and local level began to take hold as American security professionals turned to their Israeli counterparts to glean the expertise the Jewish state has gained from its decades of defending against terrorism.

During the last five years, law enforcement personnel and first responders from more than 30 states have traveled to Israel to learn counter-terrorism techniques as well as homeland security preparedness and response practices. In addition, two state governments, Maryland and Illinois, have solidified their partnerships with Israel by signing formal agreements to expand homeland security cooperation.

Maryland and Israel Strike Partnership on Homeland Security

The governments of Maryland and Israel announced the Maryland-Israel Partnership in Homeland Security during Governor Robert Ehrlich's trade mission to Israel in November 2003, paving the way for homeland security and emergency management professionals from both sides to share "best practices" in fighting terrorism. In signing the agreement, Maryland became the first state to officially recognize the contribution cutting edge Israeli methods and technologies can make toward enhancing U.S. homeland security. Through the partnership, Maryland and Israeli security professionals are able to convene conferences to exchange views and examine issues, strive to improve preparedness capabilities, and jointly research and develop new technologies.

A year after establishing the partnership, both sides agreed to further commit to developing new technologies by creating the first of its kind Maryland-Israel Development Fund, a \$1 million fund to support joint product development projects between high-tech companies in Maryland and Israel. The fund is managed by the Maryland-Israel Development Center, a non-profit organization established in 1992, along with Maryland's Department of Business and Economic Development and Israel's Ministry of Industry, Trade and Labor.

Illinois and Israel Sign Memorandum of Understanding to Expand Ties

The governments of Illinois and Israel signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) in June 2006 committing both sides to enhancing homeland security cooperation. The MOU builds upon the already strong economic relationship between Illinois and Israel by creating a framework for the two sides to advance dialogue, trade, investment, and joint technology research and development in the homeland security sector.

The agreement was signed at the beginning of a week-long Illinois trade mission to Israel during which representatives from Illinois-based homeland security companies met with Israeli security industry leaders to explore future business opportunities. During the mission, the two governments also announced a business oriented exchange program to bring entrepreneurs from Illinois and Israel

together to commercialize research and develop new technologies. These initiatives were launched by the Illinois Homeland Security Market Development Bureau, a government organization charged with attracting homeland security companies to the state, and the Israeli Ministry of Industry, Trade and Labor.

Having already established relationships with the State of Israel, Illinois and Maryland quickly recognized the significant contribution Israel can make toward helping them improve both their ability to combat terrorism and their positions as leaders in the homeland security business sector. As other states look to improve their homeland security capabilities, they will undoubtedly also look toward Israel as a global leader in this important field.