

Israel Connection

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Purim's Message: Help Those in Danger

THOUGH WE are commanded to celebrate on Purim, Midrash (Esther Rabbah 9:4) tells us that, the night before Haman was to carry out his plot against the Jews of Shushan, God heard the weeping of the Jewish children and wondered aloud about the noise that sounded like the bleating of animals. Moses, standing before God, replied, "Sovereign of the universe, they are neither goats nor sheep, but the little ones of Your people...and tomorrow, the enemy means to slaughter them like goats and sheep."

Purim is, first and foremost, a time for us to revel in our safety and freedom. It is a time for joy. But, in our revelry, we cannot forget that some of our brothers and sisters still do not live in safety. Nowhere is such desperation more evident than the little southern-Israeli town of Sderot.

Since Israel withdrew from the Gaza Strip in the summer of 2005, more than

the story of Raziel Sasson, a 13-year-old resident of Sderot. Razi was only nine when a Qassam rocket fired from Gaza landed near the tree he was climbing. Four years later, his physical wounds are mostly healed, but Razi will only sleep in a concrete-reinforced closet and wakes his father three times a night because he is afraid to walk alone to the bathroom.

Israelis in Sderot continually listen for the sound of air-raid sirens—which give them only 15-20 seconds to find cover. People sleep with their windows open on even the coldest nights to ensure they hear the siren's warning. There is no music in the grocery stores. People keep their radios and televisions on low volume, even in the town's few remaining restaurants. They even take quick showers for fear of failing to hear the sirens. As *The Times* noted, the people of Sderot live in a "most un-Israeli hush."



4,000 rockets have fallen on towns in southern Israel. None has been harder hit than Sderot, a town whose population has fallen from 24,000 to around 17,000. Israelis have been injured and killed in the daily barrages from Gaza's Hamas terrorists, backed by Iran.

An article in *The New York Times* told

We must continue to work with our elected officials to strengthen measures which will stop Hamas and Iran. During this festive time, let us work to ensure that the sounds of children crying and sirens blaring are replaced with the sounds of Israelis rejoicing in the most sacred of celebrations—life.

U.S. Support Critical to Israel's Future Strength, Security



U.S. SUPPORT for the Jewish state is more important than ever as Israel continues to take risks to reach a peace agreement with the Palestinians.

Israel has carried out a series of goodwill gestures to demonstrate its commitment to peace, including releasing Palestinian prisoners, easing checkpoints in the West Bank and providing abundant humanitarian aid.

But Israel cannot continue its push for peace without the backing of the United States, its closest ally. Israel needs America's ongoing support to help ensure its strength and security, and to encourage Arab states to play a constructive role in facilitating the peace process.

That's why the foreign aid package that Congress passed last December is so central to Israel's future. The funds provide Israel with \$2.42 billion in military aid and refugee assistance and will help enable Israel to counter emerging threats.

It is also why the pro-Israel community needs to continue working closely with Congress and candidates for office to sustain and build a strong U.S.-Israel friendship. No one can predict with certainty what these next months will bring, but our activism can ensure that America's support for Israel remains unwavering.

Two Democracies Stand Together

United States and Israel: Ties that Bind

By Dennis Ross

Democrats and Republicans in Congress and successive White House administrations have stood by America's ally and friend in times of war and in the search for peace. Recent congressional actions illustrate just how broad and deep the relationship continues to be.

SECURING FOREIGN AID TO ISRAEL

U.S. assistance has long played an indispensable role in ensuring that Israel maintains its qualitative military edge over potential adversaries. The foreign aid package totals \$2.42 billion in 2008 and provides military aid and refugee assistance.

BUILDING HOMELAND SECURITY COOPERATION

Congress passed landmark legislation creating an office within the Department of Homeland Security to support joint research and development projects between the United States and key allies such as Israel.

SANCTIONING IRAN

Over the last decade, Congress has consistently passed sanctions legislation designed to cut off the funds Iran needs to pursue nuclear weapons. The recent National Intelligence Estimate (NIE) confirms that Iran is susceptible to economic sanctions and that its policies are guided by a cost-benefit calculus.

STRENGTHENING ENERGY COOPERATION

The U.S.-Israel Energy Cooperation Act, signed into law in December, encourages cooperation in the field of alternative energy by establishing a grant program that will fund joint projects between U.S. and Israeli entities.

To read more about how AIPAC works with Congress to strengthen the U.S.-Israel relationship and how you can help, visit www.aipac.org.



IF THERE is one relationship with another country that most Americans take as a given, it is the U.S. relationship with Israel. Why? Maybe because most Americans know that Israel is a

democracy—the only truly functioning one in the Middle East—and is therefore tied to us by basic values. Or maybe because most Americans think of Israel as an ally, a country in a very volatile, unstable part of the world that nonetheless can be counted on to support U.S. policies—not exactly the norm for America's posture in the world these days. Or maybe because most Americans know that when it comes to Israel's battles, Israel will fight them on its own, not expecting or seeking U.S. troops to deal with Israel's security.



STRATEGIC ASSET

All these factors (and probably some others as well) come into play when the American public thinks about Israel. It is ironic that while Israel doesn't ask the United States to fight its battles for it, every American president, regardless of party, has consistently committed the United States to preserving Israel's security—indeed, to maintaining its qualitative military edge over its neighbors. No

doubt, this commitment has stemmed in part from the American desire to see peace between Israel and all its Arab neighbors. American presidents, including those I worked for, have believed that an Israel that did not fear for its security and did not doubt the character of America's commitment to it, would feel safe enough to take risks for peace. And peace-making certainly involved risks for Israel.

Throughout its history, Israel faced denial and rejection from its neighbors. While many of Israel's Arab and Palestinian neighbors have now come to recognize Israel, they have done so more because they accept it as a fact that cannot be undone and less because they accept its moral legitimacy. That is why accepting that compromise should be mutual—meaning that all the compromise should not be Israel's alone—remains difficult for many in the Arab world. But that is also why American

presidents have understood that Israel's Arab neighbors were more likely to make peace if they appreciated that the U.S. would never walk away from Israel or allow a wedge to be driven between the two of them.

To be sure, American presidents have had other considerations in mind for preserving both our close ties and Israel's military strength.

Competition with the Soviet Union during the

Cold War made Israel's military strength a major strategic asset for us in the Middle East. Some even suggested that Israel, with its potent air force, provided the equivalent of several additional U.S. aircraft carriers for the projection of U.S. power in the area and for containing the Soviet Union. Interestingly, recent scholarship based on Soviet era archives and accounts by former Soviet officers indicates that the Soviet military was partic-

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ularly preoccupied with Israel's forces and how they would figure in any contingency in the region.

But the demise of the Soviet Union has not altered the basic strategic benefit of Israel to the United States. That benefit is measured not only in technical and military terms, which include the repositioning of American arms and ammunition at Israeli bases; the Israeli refining of armor and aircraft to reflect the lessons of combat; and the shared research and development for creating certain military capabilities ranging from anti-missile defenses to unpiloted drones that Israel pioneered. The benefit is certainly also felt in the areas of intelligence for anticipating and combating terror as well as learning the lessons in counter-insurgency that U.S. forces are applying in Iraq and Afghanistan.

And yet there is another reason that Israel remains a strategic asset to the United States: Its strength is a factor that friends and foes in the area take into



account. While Arab governments certainly have their problems with Israel and often feel that Israel's policies toward the Palestinians put them on the defensive, they also count on Israel's military strength as a factor in limiting the ambitions and aggressive designs of Iran, Hizballah, Hamas and Syria. The Saudis, Egyptians, Jordanians, and others were not happy in the summer of 2006 when Hizballah, by simply surviving, emerged stronger from the war with Israel. The Arab governments wanted Israel to defeat Hizballah and inflict a set-back on Iran in the region. Isn't it interesting that when Israel reportedly bombed a nuclear reactor that Syria was building with North Korean help in September of 2007, there was not a single word of condemnation of the Israeli attack coming out of the Arab world? Some concluded that Syria—being unable to disguise its isolation in the Arab world after the Israeli strike—decided to come to the Annapolis conference as a result.

IMPORTANT ALLY

Whatever the criticisms of Israel in the Arab world, there is very little desire to see Israel weakened; Arab regimes know well that a weakened Israel would only add to the impression that Iran is on a roll and more capable of pursuing its desire to achieve regional dominance.

Like any ally, the United States and Israel won't agree on every issue. But on the basics, their policies are aligned, and one thing is certain: Israel remains on the front lines of fighting the radical Islamists. Sometimes alliances are defined not only by all the positive factors that bind them but also by their enemies. And, there can be no doubt that in the early 21st century, the same forces that threaten Israel, also threaten the United States. They never forget that and neither should we.

Dennis Ross is counselor and Ziegler distinguished fellow at the Washington Institute for Near East Policy. He served as U.S. point man on the peace process in both the George H.W. Bush and Bill Clinton administrations. He is the author, most recently, of Statecraft: And How to Restore America's Standing in the World. He wrote this article exclusively for Israel Connection.

Historic Connection, Shared Goals Continue to Build Vital Alliance



President Harry Truman, who recognized Israel minutes after its establishment, received a Torah scroll from Chaim Weizmann, the Jewish state's first president.

President Lyndon Johnson, who nearly doubled U.S. aid to Israel, enjoyed a close relationship with Yitzhak Rabin, then Israel's U.S. ambassador.



President Richard Nixon, shown with Prime Minister Golda Meir, provided Israel with arms vital to its survival during the Yom Kippur War.

President Ronald Reagan, shown here with Israeli Prime Minister Menachem Begin, reiterated America's commitment to maintain Israel's qualitative edge and worked to build strategic cooperation.



With President Bill Clinton's support, Prime Minister Ehud Barak made an unprecedented bid for peace with the Palestinians.

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Iran Update: The Clock is Ticking on Tehran's Nuclear Program

AS IRAN REITERATES its calls for the destruction of Israel, the Islamic Republic's nuclear program continues unabated.

The radical regime recently achieved a key technical milestone at its Natanz enrichment facility when it completed constructing 3,000 centrifuges, sufficient to produce enough material for a nuclear warhead in a year.



As the National Intelligence Estimate (NIE) has confirmed, Iran has run a clandestine nuclear program which can quickly and easily be restarted and yield a nuclear weapon.

In these dangerous times, the United States is leading international efforts to urge the Arab world and the other key nations to place further economic, diplomatic and political pressure on Iran. Congress continues to work on key legislation that would impose tougher sanctions on the regime. Now is the time to contact your leaders in Congress and urge them to support these critical efforts and also to thank members for their past support.

What is at stake is nothing less than the very existence of the state of Israel...

Sanctions have begun to have an impact on Iran, but the clock is ticking. We must continue to rally our communities and alert them to the grave threat posed by Tehran's radical regime. What is at stake is nothing less than the very existence of the state of Israel and the long-term stability of the entire Middle East.

TO LEARN MORE ABOUT HOW YOU CAN WORK WITH CONGRESS TO STOP IRAN, PLEASE VISIT WWW.AIPAC.ORG.