



Congress Makes Sure Israel Gets Its Aid

Since partisan gridlock prevented Congress from approving a single appropriations bill for fiscal year 2011, in October the House and Senate passed what is known as a Continuing Resolution, or CR, before departing Washington for the pre-election recess. The CR, which passed on Sep. 30, funded most government programs at fiscal year 2010 levels until Dec. 3.

In the heated political atmosphere of recent years, it has become increasingly common for Congress to pass either a CR or an omnibus (which combines all spending bills) rather than debate and enact new spending legislation. The passage of a CR is the minimum action that is needed to prevent the federal government from shutting down.

A few months ago, when it became clear that Congress would need to pass a CR to keep the government operating, the Obama administration, members of Congress and interest groups all sought funding adjustments to dozens of programs. But in the final CR, Congress agreed to only a few changes—and aid to Israel was one of them. Because Congress appropriated Israel's aid last year in two separate bills, the CR needed to be adjusted to reflect the full amount of \$2.775 billion for fiscal year 2010.

After Congress returned from its election recess, it began work to approve funding for government programs for the remainder of fiscal year 2011. Israel is slated to receive \$3 billion in military aid, an amount that President Obama requested and is included in spending bills approved by House and Senate subcommittees.

This aid request reflects the third year of a 10-year security agreement reached by the United States and Israel in 2007. Subject to congressional approval, the plan pledges \$30 billion in security assistance to Israel over a 10-year period.

President Obama's budget views foreign aid, such as security assistance to Israel, as part of overall "security spending," on par with defense and homeland security programs. For this reason, the president has said that these vital programs should be exempt from his planned three-year freeze on discretionary spending.

Secretary of Defense Robert Gates has repeatedly emphasized the increasingly important role of the international affairs budget. "There is a need for a dramatic increase in spending on the civilian instruments of national security," Gates has argued, noting that what the U.S. spends in this area is "disproportionately small" compared to the defense budget.

Aid to Israel is the most tangible expression of U.S. support for the Jewish state. Congress deserves praise for ensuring that Israel received its vital security assistance.