

**TESTIMONY OF
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PUBLIC AFFAIRS COMMITTEE (AIPAC)
TO THE
HOUSE APPROPRIATIONS STATE, FOREIGN OPERATIONS AND RELATED
PROGRAMS SUBCOMMITTEE
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AIPAC believes in the critical importance of the U.S. relationship with Israel, and recognizes the prominent role that foreign aid plays in accomplishing America's foreign policy objectives – not only in Israel but also around the world. We strongly support a vibrant and bipartisan foreign assistance program.

I submit this testimony in strong support for providing Israel with the necessary resources to meet its current and growing challenges. Towards that end, we request that the Subcommittee approve the president's request of aid to Israel in the amount of \$2.4 billion. We support approval of this aid in accordance with the legislatively mandated terms under which it has historically been provided, particularly provisions concerning earmarks, offshore procurement, and early disbursal.

We strongly believe American assistance to Israel serves vital U.S. national security interests and advances critical U.S. foreign policy goals. Aid to Israel has helped it tackle and deter the serious military threats it has faced throughout its existence. Aid has helped convince Israel's neighbors to come to the negotiating table and has provided necessary backing to enable Israel to take serious risks for peace. Furthermore, most Israeli aid comes right back to our country through procurement from U.S. defense contractors or repayment of military debt.

The aid requested for Israel totals \$2.4 billion – down from \$3 billion per year from 1986-1998. The proposed aid for Israel represents the last year of a 10-year plan between Israel and the United States to phase out economic aid while gradually increasing the amount of military aid. In 1997, when the current plan was formulated, the Oslo peace process was at its high watermark and the aid plan was based on a set of assumptions accordingly. Today, the challenges and threats that Israel faces have grown exponentially. The dangers it will likely face in the decade to come have intensified dramatically.

In preparing for these threats, Israel will certainly do its part in terms of increased military service by its citizens, greater defense spending and intensified development of new defense technologies. But without question, Israel will not be able to do it alone. The only reliable partner in responding to this challenge is the United States of America. We look forward to working with this Subcommittee over the coming years to ensure continued support for our ally, Israel.

Congress has been the bulwark of American support for Israel. America is strengthened when Israel is strong. And Israel is strong because the actions of Congress have helped make it strong. This Subcommittee, in particular, and you, Chairwoman Lowey and Ranking Member Wolf, have been critically important in helping solidify the U.S.-Israel partnership. We are confident that in the trying years ahead, you will continue to uphold this vital endeavor, which is so very much in the interests of both countries.

Shared Threats Facing Israel and America

The United States and Israel face common and growing threats in the Middle East—terrorism, Islamic fundamentalism, the spread of sophisticated weaponry and a belligerent Iran seeking greater influence in the region and actively pursuing nuclear weapons. U.S. aid signals to Israel’s adversaries that the U.S. commitment to the Jewish state remains unshakeable, strengthens our ally’s deterrent capability and sends a strong message to those who wish to harm or destroy Israel that there is no military option.

The past year has been a challenging one for Israel. Iran continues to pursue an indigenous nuclear weapons capability it can use to achieve its goal of erasing Israel from the map. Hizballah, backed by Syria and Iran, launched a war against Israel, striking 4,000 times in 33 days. Hamas, a terrorist group committed to Israel’s destruction, took control of the Palestinian government. Three Israeli soldiers were taken captive and Qassam rockets, fired by Hamas and other Palestinian terrorists struck Israel more than 1,500 times.

Six months after the end of its war with Israel, Hizballah, backed by Iran and Syria, is rapidly rearming and preparing for its next battle with Israel; Syria and Iran continue to ship rockets to Hizballah. As last summer’s war demonstrated, Israel faces threats from an unconventional army receiving sophisticated weaponry against which Israel has yet to develop an adequate means of defense. Hizballah also has longer-range rocket systems such as the Iranian “Zelzal,” capable of reaching Tel Aviv and Jerusalem.

Hizballah and Palestinian terrorist groups have acquired advanced anti-tank weapons. Russian-made guided weapons were used with deadly effect against the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) in Lebanon during the war with Hizballah, and these same arms are now being smuggled into Gaza. Hizballah and Syria, with Iranian backing, are also working to undermine the democratically elected government of Lebanese Prime Minister Fouad Siniora.

Syria recently test-fired a Scud-D missile armed with a chemical warhead, while Iran continues to improve its Shihab-3 ballistic missile, which is capable of hitting Israel and U.S. troops in the region.

Despite international efforts, the passage of two Security Council resolutions and increased financial pressure from the United States, Iran continues to develop weapons of mass-destruction and the means to deliver them. Time is running out to stop Iran—the leading state sponsor of terrorism—from going nuclear. If Iran’s nuclear program is not stopped, the regime by the end of the year may be able to produce on an industrial scale enough highly enriched uranium for atomic weapons, according to the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA). To change Iran’s course, the United States and the international community must exhaust every economic, diplomatic and political tool to further isolate the regime and increase the economic pressure to persuade the government to end its nuclear program.

Israel must also maintain its qualitative superiority in the conventional arena, as neighboring states—flush with oil revenues—have begun to modernize their arsenals with sophisticated weaponry. Syria is seeking a range of new air and ground military systems to upgrade its 1980s-era armed forces.

U.S. security aid is vital in helping Israel with its defense modernization needs as it balances the ongoing threat of terror from the Palestinians, the risk of renewed conflict with Hizballah and the looming danger of a nuclear Iran.

Partnership with Israel

The United States and Israel have forged a unique partnership, which has grown ever stronger following September 11. This relationship is based on shared values, a shared commitment to democracy and freedom, shared enemies and comparable histories of providing safe haven to oppressed people. The U.S.-Israel partnership is also based on a staunch commitment to defending the mutual interests of both countries against ever more ominous threats. Together, the two nations are combating the growth of Islamic extremism and maintaining the strongest military forces in the region to prevent aggression, while pursuing all avenues for a negotiated resolution of conflict.

In the fight against terrorism and proliferation of mass-destruction weapons, U.S.-Israeli cooperation is perhaps without parallel. On a daily basis, the two allies exchange information on rogue nations' nuclear and missile programs, the whereabouts, organization and plans of terrorist groups in the Middle East, and the political and military activities of the region's hostile states.

Strategic cooperation – including joint military exercises, military exchanges, the pre-positioning of U.S. military equipment in Israel, and the joint development of advanced weapons systems, including in the critical missile defense arena – helps deter aggression in the Middle East. Israel is our most active international partner in researching and developing critical defense technologies. Recently, various Israeli-designed weapon systems have been used in Afghanistan and Iraq to aid U.S. forces and save American lives.

The American military routinely deploys Israeli-developed unmanned aerial vehicles, which have logged thousands of hours in Iraq and Afghanistan. U.S. planes in both countries have been equipped with Litening, an Israeli-origin system with infrared sensors that identify ground targets and enable pilots to employ the new, precision guided weapons that have increased our military's effectiveness, all the while decreasing collateral damage. The Litening targeting pod made it possible for American fighter pilots to deliver the munitions that eliminated al-Qaeda's leader in Iraq, Abu Musab al-Zarqawi.

Israeli-developed reactive armor tiles, which explode outward upon impact, have been used to protect American armored personnel carriers, so far saving hundreds of U.S. servicemen from potential death or injury in Iraq. Israel and America have also collaborated on ways to reduce the threat posed by improvised explosive devices, which have been responsible for the majority of American casualties in Iraq.

Israel is living proof that the strongest allies of the United States are those that share our basic values. In a region dominated by authoritarian regimes, Israel stands out as the *only* country with regular competitive elections, free press and free speech.

Benefits of Assistance to Israel

The \$2.4 billion in aid to Israel requested for FY 2008 is highly cost-effective, especially compared to the costs of deploying U.S. troops around the world. Aid to Israel supports American ideals by helping the only democracy in the Middle East to defend itself and prosper. Aid to Israel also supports American diplomatic efforts in promoting a peaceful resolution of the Arab-Israeli conflict. By ensuring that Israel can defend itself on the battlefield, U.S. aid helps encourage potential enemies to come to the negotiating table and deter potential aggressors. The unwavering commitment and continuity of U.S. aid sends a powerful signal to these adversaries that a negotiated settlement with Israel is the only option. As in the past, U.S. assistance will enable Israel to negotiate with confidence and take historic steps for peace once a Palestinian government committed to peace and non-violence emerges.

Israeli Prime Minister Olmert has accepted America's vision of peace laid out by President Bush in his historic June 24, 2002 speech – including Palestinian statehood. In a major policy address late last year, Prime Minister Olmert laid out a political vision for the Palestinian people, declaring that Israel is willing to offer the Palestinians an independent state with territorial contiguity in the West Bank if they recognize Israel and end terrorism.

Unfortunately, the Palestinian government, controlled by a U.S. designated terrorist group, has refused to meet the three fundamental conditions of the international community that form the very foundation of any peace process: recognize Israel, renounce violence and accept previous agreements with Israel. Israel still has no Palestinian partner with whom to negotiate an agreement. Even more discouraging, the two areas from which Israel withdrew all its forces and populations – southern Lebanon and Gaza- have become terrorist havens and launching pads for attacks against the Jewish state. As a result, Prime Minister Olmert has been unable to implement the political platform on which he ran for office – disengagement from parts of the West Bank as well.

Aid to Israel also gives Israel the means to defend itself from escalating threats in the world's most dangerous region. U.S. support helps counterbalance the 10 to 1 disparity in military spending over Israel by the Arab states and helps reduce the risk of war. As other countries in the region enlarge and modernize their arsenals, Foreign Military Financing (FMF) assistance allows Israel to obtain the increasingly expensive, advanced American weaponry that it needs to defend itself. In receiving its assistance early in the year, Israel is able to stretch the value of its U.S. aid package. And by being allowed to spend a portion of its military aid on its own soil, under the offshore procurement program, Israel is able to develop technological innovations to U.S. weapons systems that help Israel maintain its qualitative edge in the region.

The extreme nature of the threats forces the Jewish state to spend 10 percent of its gross domestic product on defense requirements, the highest percentage of any country in the industrialized world. While Israelis are bearing the burden of increased defense spending, Israel still requires American assistance to help it acquire the equipment it needs to defend the country and maintain its qualitative edge.

The IDF today faces new challenges that have generated a wide range of modernization requirements. These include the need for defenses against Palestinian and Hizballah rocket attacks, replenishing munitions stockpiles with the latest precision weapons, and securing the southern border against smuggling.

The FMF program has enabled Israel to build a cutting-edge air force equipped with the latest U.S.-made jet fighters and combat helicopters, and to supplement its powerful ground forces and modern navy. American assistance has likewise contributed to Israel's emerging defense against ballistic missiles and its ability to counter the menace of terrorism.

U.S. assistance will continue to be essential for Israel in the coming decade as it prepares to face the new security challenges of the 21st century. The ongoing burden of thwarting Palestinian attacks, defending against the asymmetric threat posed by Iranian proxies such as Hizballah, deterring neighboring states from turning to regional conflict, and meeting the threats from unconventional weaponry further underlines the importance of U.S. aid to Israel.

Israel stands shoulder-to-shoulder with the United States in the global war on terror and in countering the most dangerous threats the U.S. faces in the region, including terrorism, proliferation of weapons of mass destruction and the spread of radical Islam.

The special history of the U.S.-Israel relationship – and the proven strength of Israel’s democracy – mean that the United States knows it can depend on Israel in a crisis.

Conclusion

The events of this summer underscore the fact that the threats to Israel are more severe than they have been in many years. Many of these threats emanate from extremist elements in the Middle East. The continued existence of authoritarian regimes and groups, pursuing virulently anti-U.S. objectives and using means antithetical to Western values, is nowhere more pronounced than in this region. And the United States has few friends like Israel with whom it shares basic values and interests, and who is willing to help us to combat extremism and stabilize the region. It is a friendship and an alliance that continues to benefit both countries. It is one that has always been of existential significance to Israel – and will become even more so as Israel confronts the tremendous military and political challenges it faces this year.

By keeping Israel strong politically and militarily, by keeping the United States firmly by Israel’s side, by steadfastly rooting out extremism, we hope to eventually see a way forward to peace with security.

This Subcommittee, through its continued support for Israel and the U.S. assistance package, has played a key role throughout the years in ensuring a strong U.S.-Israel partnership and a vibrant U.S. foreign policy. We look forward to continuing our work with you this year in deepening and strengthening this partnership and thereby advancing critical U.S. national security objectives.