

**TESTIMONY OF
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AMERICAN ISRAEL PUBLIC AFFAIRS COMMITTEE (AIPAC)
TO THE
HOUSE APPROPRIATIONS STATE, FOREIGN OPERATIONS AND RELATED
AGENCIES SUBCOMMITTEE**

April 2011

At this time of great turmoil and uncertainty in the Middle East, AIPAC believes U.S. security assistance to Israel is more vital than ever in promoting American strategic interests in the region. Aid strengthens our closest ally and ensures that Israel has the resources to meet increasing threats to its security. We strongly urge the Subcommittee to approve the president's request for fiscal year 2012 security assistance to Israel in the amount of \$3.075 billion as called for in the 2007 Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between the United States and Israel. We support approval of this aid in accordance with the legislatively mandated terms under which it has historically been provided, particularly provisions mandating the level of assistance, offshore procurement and early disbursement. We also support an overall vibrant, robust and bipartisan foreign assistance program as a critical tool to advance U.S. national security interests.

Israel: An Unwavering U.S. Ally

The changes taking place in the Middle East today are unprecedented. Every day it seems another country is facing the wrath of its people over grievances that have been ignored for decades. No one knows what the final outcome of these popular stirrings will be, but certain constants are clear.

There is only one country in this critically important region that the United States does not have to worry about with respect to its pro-American outlook or its reliability as a strategic U.S. partner. Because Israel and America share both common values and common threats, the U.S.-Israel partnership has been and will remain a constant in a region in turmoil. Together, these two democracies will continue to share intelligence and resources in the fight against terrorism and Islamic extremism. The two allies will also continue to work together to prevent aggression and pursue peace.

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, especially in the vital missile defense arena—helps deter aggression. Israel is our most active international partner in researching and developing certain critical defense technologies. Numerous Israeli-designed weapon systems used in Afghanistan and Iraq have significantly helped U.S. forces fight insurgents and have saved many American lives.

Increased Threats in the Region

Even before the current unrest, both the United States and Israel were facing a changing strategic landscape in the Middle East. A more aggressive Iran bent on acquiring nuclear weapons and vying with the United States for regional dominance helped to bring down the Lebanese government and has armed Hizballah with more than 55,000 rockets and missiles in southern Lebanon. Tehran also is funding and training Hamas operatives in Gaza and arming these terrorists with increasingly sophisticated and longer-range rockets.

For Israel, this has meant dealing with a far more threatening environment. Today, these destructive Iranian-backed actions have translated into a daily barrage of rocket fire against civilian populations from Gaza, the threat of accurate rockets striking any point of Israel from Lebanon and a renewed terrorist threat both in Jerusalem and the West Bank. At the same time, Iran continues to close in on acquiring a nuclear weapons capability.

Furthermore, Israel's entire security architecture of the last 30 years is now in question. No one knows what type of regime will emerge in Egypt or what will happen in Jordan—the two nations that have signed peace agreements with Israel and have maintained close strategic ties with the Jewish state. A change in either country's policies toward Israel or toward those agreements would mean a dramatic—and expensive—change in Israel's current defense posture.

Israel Increasing Its Own Defense Spending

To secure its defense, Israel has never asked for help from U.S. troops. It has merely requested U.S. assistance to supplement the tremendous resources Israel already invests in its defense budget. Israel spends more on defense as a percentage of gross domestic product (GDP) than any other nation in the industrialized world—roughly 8 percent, or nearly double that of the United States. However, the actual costs to the Israeli economy are much higher, taking into account lost productivity and the need for reserve duty, internal security and anti-terrorism spending. Even before the recent turmoil, Israel had committed to a 10-year plan of sustained increases in its own defense spending in addition to the expected growth in U.S. aid. During the next decade, Israel planned to spend \$150 billion on defense, a 50

percent increase over the previous 10-year period. That amount may well need to increase even more in light of recent events.

Unlike almost any other country in the world, Israel faces existential threats from countries and groups using both conventional and unconventional means. Israel faces symmetrical and asymmetrical threats, and weaponry ranging from the very shortest ranges (e.g. car bombs and mortars) to long-range missiles. The military hardware—including American-built advanced fighter aircraft and naval vessels—that the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) needs during the next decade to maintain its Qualitative Military Edge is far more sophisticated, complex and expensive than in the past. The most recent U.S.-produced front-line fighter aircraft deployed by Israel, the F-16I, cost \$45 million apiece. By comparison, the U.S. F-35 Joint Strike Fighter, which Israel is seeking to purchase during the next decade, will cost more than \$100 million each. Israel is also investing more than \$2 billion to develop cutting-edge systems to combat short-range rockets and long-range missiles and building dozens of upgraded tanks and armored vehicles to protect troops from advanced anti-tank missiles in the hands of Hamas and Hizballah. Even with this additional spending, there are many important weapons purchases the IDF will have to delay because of insufficient funds.

U.S. Aid Vital to Israel's Survival

In this difficult budget environment, we are mindful of the daunting fiscal challenges facing the United States. Nevertheless, we believe U.S. security assistance to Israel has been and remains a highly cost-effective program that strengthens U.S. interests for a relatively modest cost. It ensures the continued strength and survival of our most reliable and effective ally in

this vital region of the world. It sends a strong message to enemies of both the United States and Israel of the continued U.S. commitment to Israel's security. It reinforces the principle that the United States will live up to commitments made to our friends. And it tells the government and people of Israel that even in a time of enormous upheaval, the United States will ensure Israel has the means it needs to defend itself.

Conclusion

The United States and Israel are facing many years of uncertainty, opportunity and danger in one of the most important regions of the world. As we face these challenges, there is little doubt that the United States is stronger when Israel is strong. I want to commend this Subcommittee and especially Chairwoman Granger and Ranking Member Lowey for all you have done throughout the years to ensure that Israel and the U.S.-Israel relationship remain strong. That support will be more important than ever before as our two nations work together to ensure a democratic, stable and pro-western Middle East.