

Congressman Rothman: The Dividends of U.S. Support for Israel

The Record

By Congressman Steve Rothman

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THE ARGUMENT that American military aid to Israel is damaging to the United States is not only erroneous, it hurts the national security interests of this country and threatens the survival of Israel.

U.S. support for Israel is essential, not only for Israel's national security, but for America's. Every bit of that support — and more — withstands all reasonable scrutiny.

Under the 2010 U.S. budget, about \$75 billion, \$65 billion and \$3.25 billion will be spent on military operations and aid in Afghanistan, Iraq and Pakistan during this fiscal year, respectively. Israel will receive \$3 billion, in military aid only. There is no economic aid to Israel, other than loan guarantees that continue to be repaid in full and on time.

There isn't enough space here to discuss the relative merits of the expenditures in these other countries, but we already know the critically important return we get for helping our oldest, most trusted ally in the strategically important Middle East — the most powerful military force in that region, the pro-United States, pro-West and democratic Jewish state of Israel.

Here's how:

First, it's important to remember that about 70 percent of the \$3 billion aid must be used by Israel to purchase American military equipment. This provides real support for U.S. high-tech defense jobs and contributes to maintaining our industrial base. This helps the United States stay at the very top in the manufacturing of our own cutting-edge military munitions, aircraft, vehicles, missiles and virtually every defensive and offensive weapon in the U.S. arsenal — with the added contribution of Israel's renowned technical know-how.

Second, the United States and Israel are jointly developing state-of-the-art missile defense capabilities in the David's Sling and Arrow 3 systems. These two technologies build on the already successful Arrow 2, jointly developed by our two countries, which is already providing missile defense security to Israel and U.S. civilians and ground troops throughout the region.

A multiplier effect

The knowledge we gain from these efforts also has a positive multiplier effect on applications to other U.S. military and non-military uses and jobs here.

Third, given Israel's strategic location on the Mediterranean, with access to the Red Sea and other vital

international shipping and military lanes of commerce and traffic, it is critically important to the United States that Israel continue to serve as a port of call for our troops, ships, aircraft and intelligence operations.

Israel also has permitted the United States to stockpile arms, fuel, munitions and other supplies on its soil to be accessed whenever America needs them in the region.

Fourth, America's special relationship with Israel provides us with real-time, minute-to-minute access to one of the best intelligence services in the world: Israel's. With Israeli agents gathering intelligence and taking action throughout the Middle East and, literally, around the world, regarding al-Qaida, Hezbollah, Iran and Hamas, the U.S. receives invaluable information about anti-U.S. and terrorist organizations and regimes.

Fifth, imagine the additional terrible cost in U.S. blood, and the hundreds of billions more of American taxpayer dollars, if Saddam Hussein had developed nuclear weapons, or if Syria possessed them.

Then remember that it was Israel that destroyed the almost-completed nuclear reactor at Osirak, Iraq, in 1981 and Syria's nuclear facility under construction at Deir-ez-Zor in 2007.

And think about the many operations that Israel's Defense Forces and intelligence agents have undertaken to foil, slow and disrupt Iran's efforts to develop a nuclear weapons capability. A nuclear-armed Iran would threaten the lives of hundreds of thousands of Americans in the region, all of Iran's Arab neighbors, the world's largest oil supplies and those who rely on that oil.

Access to lethal Iranian technology

It also would provide anti-U.S. terrorists with access to the most lethal Iranian technology and probably set off a nuclear arms race in the region.

For about 2 percent of what the United States spends in Afghanistan, Iraq and Pakistan this year, Americans can take pride in the return on our investment in aid to Israel.

And with Israel's truly invaluable assistance to America's vital national security, we can take comfort that — in actions seen in Tehran and Damascus and noticed by al-Qaida and other anti-U.S. terrorists everywhere — the United States is safer and made more secure because of the mutually dependent and beneficial relationship between us and Israel.

Congressman Steve Rothman (D-NJ) is in his seventh term in the U.S. House of Representatives. He serves on the House Appropriations Subcommittees of Defense; and State and Foreign Operations, which appropriate all spending for the United States military, and all foreign aid, respectively.