

## Op-Ed: Israel Aid Pays U.S. Dividends That Exceed Cost

The following op-ed appeared in Bloomberg on April 6, 2010. A version of this piece also ran in The Record, The Star-Ledger, The Jerusalem Post, The Hill, New Jersey News Room, JTA, Business Week, and The San Francisco Chronicle, among others.

By Rep. Steve Rothman (D-NJ)

The argument that American military aid to Israel is damaging to the U.S. 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 the U.S. gets for helping its oldest, most trusted ally in the strategically important Middle East -- the most powerful military force in that region, the pro-U.S., 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 U.S. 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.

### Research Cooperation

Second, the U.S. 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. The knowledge the U.S. gains from these efforts also has a positive multiplier effect on applications to other U.S. military and non-military uses and U.S. jobs.

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 U.S. that Israel continues to serve as a port of call for our troops, ships, aircraft and intelligence operations.

#### Forward Base

Israel also has permitted the U.S. 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 the U.S. 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-Qaeda, Hezbollah, Iran and Hamas, among others, 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.

#### Foiling Iran

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. 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 U.S. 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-Qaeda and other anti-U.S. terrorists everywhere -- the U.S. is safer and made more secure because of the mutually dependent and beneficial relationship between the U.S. and Israel.

(Steve Rothman is a Democratic congressman from New Jersey who serves on the House committees responsible for U.S. military and foreign aid. The opinions expressed are his own.)

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