

## Op-Ed: Firmly behind Israel

The following op-ed appeared in The Jerusalem Post on June 28, 2010. A version of this piece also ran in The New Jersey Jewish Standard and Roll Call.

The Washington-Jerusalem relationship is not perfect, but military and intel cooperation have never been stronger.

By Rep. Steve Rothman (D-NJ)

Today, Israel faces some of the toughest challenges in its 62-year history. Chief among them is Iran's threat to its very existence. But, especially in the past several months, progress in preventing Iran from fulfilling that evil objective has been achieved.

On the continuing threat side, Iran-funded and -directed Hizbullah and Hamas still have more than 50,000 rockets on Israel's borders, and continue to seek even more sophisticated weaponry, as evidenced by the recent transfer of Scud missiles to Hizbullah by Syria and Iran. But the most terrifying threat is the possibility that Iran's deranged President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad will succeed in acquiring a nuclear weapon and use it to realize his long-stated objective of wiping Israel off the map.

All of this underscores the importance of what has now been achieved: the strongest military and intelligence alliance between the US and Israel in recent history.

There is no question that the relationship between Washington and Jerusalem is not perfect — but when has it ever been? (See Ariel Sharon's comment that "Israel will not be Czechoslovakia"; and Ari Fleisher's rebuke that "president [George W. Bush] believes that these remarks are unacceptable"; in 2001.) However, concerning military and intelligence cooperation — where the rubber meets the road; where issues speaking to Israel's very existence hang in the balance — the relationship has never been stronger.

I feel comfortable making this statement as a member of the House Appropriations Subcommittees on Defense, and State and Foreign Operations, which appropriate all spending for the US military, and all foreign aid, respectively. My position on these subcommittees affords me the opportunity to be in regular contact with the highest levels of all US and Israeli diplomatic, military and intelligence personnel. The weekly and sometimes daily classified and unclassified briefings I receive inform my views about the true status of US-Israel relations.

AMERICA'S BOYCOTT of Durban II, its dismissal of the Goldstone Report as "unbalanced, one-sided and basically unacceptable"; and its support of an Israeli-run investigation of the recent Gaza flotilla incident have helped shield Israel on the international stage. And over the past 18 months, America's own improved international standing has helped secure a broad consensus to confront the world's greatest threat: Iran's pursuit of nuclear weapons.

Israel's qualitative military edge, which eroded under previous administrations, has been restored and improved. The Obama administration's outreach to Russia has resulted in an agreement that Russia will not deliver its S-300 anti-aircraft system to Iran — a game-changer in Iran's balance of power with Israel.

Also, months of aggressive US-led negotiations in the UN have yielded a new sanctions regime that will allow for even greater sanctions against Iran's financial, military and energy sectors by the Europeans, the US and other nations.

There is more. Last month, President Barack Obama allocated an additional \$205 million to permit Israel to position additional short-range Iron Dome antimissile batteries throughout the Jewish state. This is on top of the more than \$3 billion in US military aid that it will already receive from the US this year, plus more than \$200 million in additional money for the US-Israel joint missile defense systems, including the longrange Arrow and the medium-range David Sling. In allocating these additional funds, the president is building on my efforts to enhance the US's support for Israel's missile defense system against Hamas, Hizbullah, Syria and Iran.

NOT ONLY that, but there is an unprecedented, high level of military and intelligence cooperation. A powerful show of the strength of the relationship was demonstrated in October 2009, with Operation Juniper Cobra in Herzliya. At that time 1,400 US servicemen and women were sent to Israel with 10 warships, bringing the highest military and intelligence command officers with them to coordinate with their Israeli counterparts in conducting live-fire testing of virtually every missile defense capability in the US and Israeli arsenals.

The Obama administration and Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu have declared that a nuclear-capable Iran is unacceptable, and that they will work to prevent it. In fact, on June 23, Uzi Arad, Netanyahu's national security adviser, acknowledged that "the United States is determined to prevent Iran from becoming nuclear." There is determination there. There is activism.

Both countries also hold that containment is not an option.

In that regard, there have been recent reports that Saudi Arabia will let Israel overfly its territory should it feel it necessary to undertake military action against Iran. This follows in the footsteps of Egypt, which has allowed Israeli submarines and missile ships, as well as US aircraft carrier battle groups, through the Suez Canal into the Red Sea.

These vessels can launch cruise missiles armed with both nuclear and nonnuclear warheads.

And several months ago, the US delivered advanced anti-missile batteries, operated by American crews, to four Persian Gulf states.

Ahmadinejad should now understand that Israel's new relationships with the US, Egypt, Saudi Arabia and the other Sunni nations, and its more effective missile defenses will make it difficult, if not impossible, to exercise his sick and deranged calculus whereby Iran would be willing to trade the lives of a million Iranians for even a few thousand Israelis. If he takes that gamble without effect, he will pay a terrible, one-sided price.

While it would thus require a suicidal Iranian leader to consider attacking Israel, unfortunately, Ahmadinejad may be such

a leader.

And so, clearly, there remains a long way to go before the Jewish state's security is assured.

We therefore must continue keeping its security at the forefront of US foreign policy.

But genuine progress has occurred in recent months. It is important it not be overlooked, ignored or underestimated.

The writer is a Democratic congressman from New Jersey who serves on the House committees responsible for US military and foreign aid.

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