

Op-Ed: Obama's Pro-Israel Record

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Obama's Pro-Israel Record

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Former Minnesota Gov. Tim Pawlenty, recently declared, "President Obama treats Israel as a problem, rather than as an ally." The Republican presidential candidate emphasized that Obama has an "anti-Israel attitude."

Though these words came from Pawlenty, this charge could have just as easily been made by any of the leading GOP presidential contenders.

Yet Obama and his administration have overseen the largest-ever increase of military cooperation and aid to Israel; used his first U.N. Security Council veto to stop an anti-Israel resolution criticizing Israel's settlement policies, and, reportedly, worked with the Israelis to create the Stuxnet computer virus to attack Iran's nuclear program. Republicans, however, still label the president as anti-Israel.

Let there be no mistake, since Obama became our commander in chief, U.S.-Israel military and intelligence cooperation has never been stronger.

The former Defense Secretary Robert Gates attested to this. "In terms of concrete steps to improve the security relationship between [the U.S. and Israel]," Gates testified before Congress on March 2, "more has been done in the last two years than in any comparable period in my entire career."

Remember, Gates's government career began when he joined the CIA in 1966.

Despite the president's impressive pro-Israel record, there have been moments when I have disagreed with the administration's approach — including its early emphasis on Israeli settlements as an obstacle to peace. It is important to keep in mind, however, that differences in diplomatic strategies between Israel and the U.S. have existed with numerous U.S. administrations — both Democratic and Republican.

President George W. Bush, for example, urged that elections be held in Gaza, over the objections of Israel. This resulted in a victory for Hamas.

His father, President George H.W. Bush, opposed loan guarantees to Israel because of settlement activity. Perhaps most overlooked, is President Ronald Reagan's support of a U.N. Security Council resolution condemning Israel and suspending the delivery of F-16s after its successful strike on Iraq's nuclear reactor. Not to mention Reagan's call for a settlement freeze in 1982. But do Obama's critics dare to call Reagan or George W. Bush anti-Israel?

Those who label Obama anti-Israel are ignoring the president's demonstrated support for Israel and her security. For example, under Obama, U.S. armed forces are now fully prepared to respond to one of the greatest threats to Israel (and the U.S.) — a nuclear-armed Iran.

As part of "Operation Juniper Stallion," a joint military exercise between the U.S. and Israel in 2010, dozens of U.S. and Israeli F-16s reportedly engaged in joint aerial drills and simulated bombing runs over the Red Sea and the Mediterranean. This exercise followed "Operation Juniper Cobra" in 2009, said to have been the largest missile defense exercise between our two countries, involving more than 1,000 members of the U.S. military's European Command.

Obama announced, in a speech before the American Israel Public Affairs Committee in May, "We remain committed to preventing Iran from acquiring nuclear weapons." Gates had already testified before Congress that the U.S. military has "the capability to take action" to back up that rhetoric with military action.

In addition, the administration has given historically high levels of funding to joint U.S.-Israel missile defense development programs, hundreds of millions of dollars for Arrow 2, Arrow 3, and David's Sling, and, for the first time, \$205 million toward Israel's Iron Dome anti-rocket system. Since Obama took office, despite significant budget challenges here at home, Israel has received more than \$6 billion in foreign aid.

Even if the U.S. public and Israeli public are not well-informed about this cooperation, one fact is certain: The military and intelligence agencies of the enemies of our nations are fully aware of what the U.S.-Israeli military alliance means. Our enemies know they cannot prevail against the combined might of the world's sole military superpower and the Middle East's greatest military power.

We in the pro-Israel community continue to work, hope and pray for peace between the Israelis and the Palestinians. I believe that the Palestinians should recognize the Jewish State, end incitement and join Israel at the peace negotiating table without preconditions.

A secure two-state solution, negotiated in good faith, is in both nations' long-term interests. But in the meantime, where issues speaking to Israel's existence hang in the balance, the Obama administration has given — and continues to provide — unprecedented support for the defense and security of Israel.

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