

**TESTIMONY OF HOWARD A. KOHR
CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER, AMERICAN ISRAEL PUBLIC AFFAIRS
COMMITTEE (AIPAC), TO THE HOUSE APPROPRIATIONS SUBCOMMITTEE ON
STATE, FOREIGN OPERATIONS AND RELATED PROGRAMS**

April 2015

As the Middle East faces its most dramatic upheavals in decades, U.S. security assistance to Israel plays a key role in advancing American strategic interests in the region and ensuring the Jewish state's ability to defend itself. Iran's ongoing effort to achieve a nuclear weapons capability and dominate the region, instability in Lebanon, Iraq, Yemen, Libya and elsewhere, the territorial successes of radical Islamic groups and an ongoing, destabilizing and bloody civil war in Syria constitute just some of the potential threats that Israel – and the United States – must prepare to confront in the year to come. In this context, AIPAC strongly urges the Subcommittee to approve the president's request of \$3.1 billion in security assistance for Israel in fiscal year 2016 in accordance with the 2007 Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) signed between the United States and Israel. The approval of this assistance should include the legislatively-mandated terms under which it has historically been provided, particularly provisions mandating the level of assistance, offshore procurement and early disbursement. In addition, we support a robust and bipartisan foreign aid program that ensures America's strong leadership position in the world.

A Region in Turmoil

Recent years have witnessed unprecedented turmoil in the Middle East – a phenomenon that has only continued, and in many ways intensified, in the past 12 months. Iran has continued its quest to acquire a nuclear weapons capability despite ongoing negotiations. An Iranian general has boasted that Iran now controls four Arab capitals—Baghdad, Damascus, Beirut and Sanaa. Indeed, Iranian forces are operating in Iraq and running proxy Iraqi militias; Syrian President Assad acts like a mere puppet of Tehran; Iranian proxy Hezbollah is in effect the master of Lebanon; and the Iranian-backed Houthis have captured Sanaa and control much of Yemen. Iran is also continuing to smuggle sophisticated weaponry to Hamas and Hezbollah, including an effort – foiled by the Jewish state – to send a ship to Gaza that contained rockets capable of reaching all of Israel. Hezbollah, Hamas, Iran and Syria now have an unprecedented combined total of 170,000 rockets pointed at Israel.

In the north, the brutal civil war in Syria continues unabated. It has now attracted an estimated 40,000 jihadists fighting dangerously close to Israel's border. ISIL has established an "Islamic Caliphate" in Syria and Iraq, occupying major cities such as Mosul in Iraq and Raqqa in Syria. ISIL has instituted a reign of terror in the areas under its control, beheading Americans and other Westerners. ISIL has threatened to attack Israel and Jordan, and its franchises have sprung up in various Arab countries. Hezbollah continues to dominate Lebanon and has extended its reach to Syria and even Iraq. Jordan continues to face growing challenges, including extraordinary

refugee flows from Syria. Israel has taken rocket fire from terrorist groups in Gaza, Sinai, Lebanon, and Syria. During last summer's war in Gaza, which was precipitated by Hamas' rocket fire, the terrorist group launched no fewer than 4,500 rockets into Israeli civilian population centers. Fortunately, Israel experienced relatively few casualties because of the Iron Dome rocket defense system -- made possible thanks to the generous funds approved by this committee.

Amidst all this, Israel continues to seek peace with its Palestinian neighbors. The Government of Israel was deeply engaged in the peace talks led by Secretary Kerry. According to U.S. officials engaged in the talks, Israel reached an understanding with our government involving far-reaching compromises. Unfortunately, the Palestinian leadership declined to even respond to President Obama's proposal, abandoned the peace talks, and reached a pact with Hamas. Thereafter, the Palestinians have conducted the equivalent of diplomatic warfare against Israel. They sought to isolate and delegitimize Israel through a one-sided Security Council resolution and a request that the International Criminal Court act against alleged war crimes by Israeli military officers. Despite these Palestinian actions, Israel has permitted tens of thousands of Palestinian workers from the West Bank and Gaza to work in Israel. And despite deep security concerns, Israel has allowed cement and other dual-use materials to enter Gaza for reconstruction of houses damaged during last year's war. We applaud the Subcommittee for including restrictions and conditions on aid to the Palestinian Authority and urge that they be continued.

These developments point to a simple truth: the Jewish state remains America's one stable ally in an increasingly tumultuous region. U.S. security assistance is our most tangible expression of support. It remains critical to ensuring Israel's security and the advancement of U.S. interests in this unstable region.

Israel: A Vital Strategic Partner

As a key pillar of America's Middle East security framework, the U.S.-Israel strategic partnership plays an indispensable role in combating common threats and realizing America's regional and global policy objectives. These threats include terrorism, proliferation, counterfeiting, cyber warfare, and the spread of radical Islamist ideology, among others. In this context, Israel's military strength and central geo-strategic location provide a strong deterrent to regional actors opposed to the United States. Indeed, Israel's stable, democratic and reliably pro-U.S. orientation remains unquestioned and ensures that America can rely on its alliance with the Jewish state. Put differently, the historic U.S.-Israel alliance is among the only stabilizing features of a very unstable and unpredictable region.

The close strategic relationship between the United States and Israel originated with the two allies sharing key intelligence around the time of the 1967 Six-Day War. This partnership was later broadened and formalized in the early 1980s, when President Ronald Reagan and Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Shamir announced the establishment of the Joint Political Military Group to coordinate planning, exercises, and prepositioning against threats faced by both nations in the Middle East. Later in the decade, the United States designated Israel as a major non-

NATO ally. Israel is now also a Major Strategic Partner of the United States after enactment of the United States-Israel Strategic Partnership Act of 2014.

Over the last 30 years, the United States has prepositioned in Israel U.S. military equipment such as ammunition and armor. The two allies also engage in joint military exercises involving American and Israeli land, sea and air forces. Twice each year, U.S. Marines conduct desert warfare training with their Israel Defense Forces (IDF) counterparts, and American soldiers and security officials have visited Israel to study Israel's approach to urban combat. U.S. pilots hold mock dogfights with the Israeli Air Force and have tested aerial combat tactics and practiced refueling. In addition, Israel and the United States have cooperated on a wide range of intelligence-sharing programs, including monitoring Iran, al-Qaeda and other terrorist groups.

An additional centerpiece of the interaction between the two militaries has been combined missile defense training, including the biannual Juniper Cobra exercise. In this maneuver, U.S. and Israeli forces practice cooperative tactics to counter the growing threat from ballistic missiles and long-range rockets. During 2012, this drill was combined with Austere Challenge, the largest joint bilateral military exercise ever conducted between the two forces. In November 2013, the United States, Italy and Greece joined Israel for the Juniper Stallion exercise – the largest military air exercise in Israel's history.

U.S. Assistance Helps Maintain Israel's Qualitative Military Edge (QME)

U.S. support for Israel through annual security aid has helped the Jewish state maintain its qualitative military edge (QME), which Congress has defined in legislation as Israel's "ability to counter and defeat any credible conventional military threat from any individual state or possible coalition of states or from non-state actors." This military superiority has prevented war by deterring Arab states from considering attacks on Israel. Because of America's support for Israel's QME, prospective aggressors know they would face a U.S.-backed ally armed with the world's most advanced weapon systems. U.S. security assistance has encouraged Israel's neighbors to come to the negotiating table, thus playing a key role in securing Israel's peace treaties with Jordan and Egypt. Today, both the United States and Israel share a commitment to advancing a two-state solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

Cooperation Produces Critical New Military and Defense Technologies

The close partnership between the United States and Israel has yielded critically important military technologies that will enhance the security of both nations.

Iron Dome: Since 2005, terrorists in Gaza have fired more than 10,000 rockets indiscriminately into Israel, prompting the Jewish state to develop the Iron Dome rocket defense system. This defensive platform can intercept incoming Katyusha-style rockets in mid-air, saving lives and avoiding broader conflict. Recognizing its value, America has already provided \$1.1 billion to help Israel purchase the system.

Arrow: Among the world's most sophisticated missile shields, the Arrow is the only operational system that has consistently proven that one missile can shoot down another at high altitudes and supersonic speeds.

David's Sling: America and Israel are collaborating on this quick-reaction defense system that addresses the threats posed by short- and medium-range missiles and rockets rapidly spreading throughout the eastern Mediterranean.

Saving American Lives on the Battlefield

Israel has also developed dramatic new technologies that have played a key role in saving U.S. lives during military conflicts. To cite just a few of the more important innovations:

Litening Pod: The Israeli-developed Litening Pod for strike aircraft identifies targets with laser precision from high altitudes, placing the pilot in less danger while reducing collateral damage on the ground. The United States Air Force, Marine Corps, and Air National Guard have all adopted the Litening Pod. The U.S. Navy is currently assessing the added value of this system to some of its deployed fleet of strike aircraft.

Bradley Reactive Armor Tiles: Created by the Israeli military, the tiles overlay the Bradley Fighting Vehicle's armor with embedded explosives that blast outward to suppress incoming fire. The tiles have protected thousands of U.S. troops in armed conflict. Israel is also proposing combat-proven active systems such as Trophy for front-line U.S. armored vehicles.

Emergency Bandage: Carried in every first-aid kit in the U.S. military, the Israeli bandage stems blood loss, prevents infection and allows non-medically trained soldiers to stabilize the wounded quickly following an attack.

Counter-IED cooperation: Has saved many American lives in Iraq and Afghanistan.

Increased Israeli Defense Spending

Israel has always fought its own battles and has never asked American troops to fight on its behalf. Instead, it has requested U.S. assistance to supplement the tremendous resources Israel already invests in its defense budget. Unfortunately, spiraling defense costs are forcing Israel to spend more on defense as a percentage of gross domestic product (GDP) than any other nation in the industrialized world – about 6 percent, or nearly one-and-a-half times 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 as Israel faces its own substantial budgetary pressures, during the next decade, Israel may well have to spend \$160 billion on defense. This would represent a significant increase over the past years.

Israel's spending coincides with accelerated military investment fueled by the oil revenues of Israel's Arab and Iranian neighbors. Saudi Arabia's military budget doubled over the last decade, while Iran's rate of military spending has grown at a similar pace despite economic pressures. This is reflected in the major purchases and development of new arms that may put Israel at risk. Other Arab nations have also made large-scale purchases of weapons and military technology. Iran continues funding Hezbollah's military expansion. The military hardware – including American-built advanced fighter aircraft, vertical-takeoff aircraft, naval vessels and armored troop carriers – that Israel must acquire over the next decade to maintain its QME is far more sophisticated, complex and expensive than previous Israeli purchases from the United States.

The most recent U.S.-produced front-line fighter aircraft deployed by Israel in the 2000s, the F-16I, costs \$45 million each. By comparison, the U.S. F-35 Joint Strike Fighter, which Israel plans to purchase later in this decade, will cost at least \$150 million per plane. Israel is also investing more than \$2 billion to develop cutting-edge systems to combat short-range rockets and long-range missiles, and Israel is building hundreds of upgraded tanks and armored vehicles to better protect troops from advanced anti-tank missiles in the hands of Hamas and Hezbollah.

The new realities of the rapidly changing Middle East have also led to many unexpected costs for Israel. To cite just one example, after terrorists repeatedly blew up the Sinai natural gas pipeline, which provided a large percentage of Israel's gas, Israel had to incur \$4 billion in additional expenses to fund imports of alternative, more expensive energy supplies. Given the increasing terrorist threats on its border with Egypt, the Jewish state was forced to build a fence on the southern border between Egypt and Israel at a cost of an estimated \$360 million. Now, in view of the spiraling chaos in Syria, Israel has been constructing a similar modern barrier on the Golan Heights.

A Robust Foreign Aid Budget Is Critical to U.S. National Security

AIPAC strongly believes that the broader U.S. foreign aid budget, which includes security assistance to Israel—nearly 75 percent of which comes right back to the United States through the purchase of U.S.-made aircraft and other equipment—is an essential component of America's national security strategy. Today, the U.S. foreign aid budget helps strengthen civil society and build institutional and economic capacity in the very places where thousands of American soldiers are risking their lives. As U.S. military leaders have repeatedly and readily acknowledged, a powerful military is inadequate unless it is backed by a strong civilian diplomatic presence and sufficient financial resources to help friends and undermine adversaries around the globe.

In today's globalized economy, U.S. foreign aid also helps American companies develop foreign markets, build stable business environments in developing countries, and thereby help create jobs at home. Foreign aid programs also help bring education, health care and transportation to hundreds of millions of potential new customers. Today, one in five American jobs is linked to U.S. exports. Foreign markets offer the best opportunities to expand the American economy.

At little more than one percent of the federal budget, foreign aid is a cost-effective and relatively small investment that saves U.S. taxpayers money. Using foreign aid dollars wisely today helps prevent the more costly wars and crises that might otherwise occur. Prevention – whether of terror attacks, weapons proliferation, pandemic disease, economic meltdown, societal collapse or the spread of radical ideology – is always cheaper and easier.

Conclusion

Few can predict what the coming year will bring in the Middle East, but one thing remains certain: The United States is strong when Israel is strong. This Subcommittee – headed so ably by Chairwoman Granger and Ranking Member Lowey – deserves great credit for its stalwart advocacy for the U.S.-Israel relationship and the foreign aid budget over the years. This support will remain critical as America and Israel continue to work together to advance a more peaceful, stable and pro-Western Middle East.