

On March 5, AIPAC CEO Howard Kohr submitted the following written testimony for the record to the U.S. House of Representatives Appropriations Subcommittee on State, Foreign Operations and Related Programs to make the case for U.S. security assistance to Israel and robust funding for foreign aid.

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As America's closest ally in the Middle East, Israel is an anchor of stability in an ever more dangerous and unpredictable region. The two allies have formed an unbreakable partnership, based on an unshakable dedication to common values and interests. The United States and Israel have developed deep strategic ties to confront common threats and ensure the security of the Jewish state. This strategic relationship is a key pillar of America's Middle East security framework, and this partnership is constantly growing and expanding into new areas. Today, Israel faces an unprecedented array of evolving threats stemming from the growing regional turmoil fueled by Iran's unceasing aggression. These challenges require Israel to significantly increase its defense budget. Accordingly, AIPAC strongly urges the Subcommittee to approve \$3.3 billion to Israel in security assistance for fiscal year 2020, as called for in the 2016 U.S.-Israel Memorandum of Understanding. By providing security assistance to Israel, the United States safeguards the Jewish state's qualitative military edge (QME) over its adversaries and enhances the safety and security of both nations. In addition, AIPAC urges support for a robust and bipartisan foreign aid program that ensures America's strong leadership position in the world. At just one percent of the federal budget, foreign aid is a cost-effective and relatively small investment that saves U.S. taxpayer money by helping prevent more costly wars, crises and disasters. Foreign aid enables the United States to support key allies like Israel, spur our job-creating exports, and help prevent unstable areas from becoming breeding grounds for terrorism. AIPAC also strongly supports the expansion of U.S.-Israel non-defense cooperative programs. These programs have made America stronger through the development and introduction of technologies relating to energy efficiency, cybersecurity, and water scarcity. Israel has in recent years brought some of these technologies to the developing world – furthering sustainability, helping lift millions out of poverty and creating enormous possibilities of cooperation between Israel and our development agencies.

Iran Taking Advantage of a Region in Turmoil

Israel faces unprecedented turmoil on its doorstep. Lebanon, Syria, Libya, and Yemen have all been transformed by the chaos in the region. Sub-state actors often dominate the landscape, and one dangerous state actor, Iran, is taking full advantage of the changing realities. In this new environment, Israel must confront countless new and difficult challenges. On the Jewish state's northeast border, Iran is working to establish a permanent military presence in Syria from which it could easily attack Israel. Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guards (IRGC) has made no secret of the fact it seeks Israel's destruction. Three times over the last 14 months – in February and May 2018 and in January 2019 – Iran directly attacked Israel with drones and missiles. All of these attacks were directed at civilian population centers. Iran is also openly seeking a "land bridge" from Teheran to Beirut to provide sophisticated military equipment to its close ally Hezbollah. According to the U.S. Department of State, Iran remains the leading

state sponsor of terrorism—financing, arming, and training terrorist groups in the Middle East and around the world. Its regional aggression directly challenges U.S. interests and allies. While increasingly violating human rights at home, Iran seeks to export its revolutionary ideology abroad by supporting terrorist proxy groups—including Hezbollah in Lebanon, Hamas in the Gaza Strip, and the Houthis in Yemen. Iran continues to provide arms, funding and personnel to the brutal Assad regime in Syria, which has repeatedly used chemical weapons against its own citizens. Iran has demonstrated its continued nuclear ambitions by conducting approximately 20 ballistic missile tests in defiance of U.N. prohibitions, including long-range missiles inherently capable of delivering a nuclear warhead. An extensive archive of Iranian nuclear documents smuggled out of Iran in an Israeli covert operation last year shed light on the advanced nature of the regime’s nuclear ambitions. The fact that Iran secretly retained information on how to build nuclear weapons—and refused to disclose it to inspectors as required by the 2015 Iran nuclear deal—raises questions about Iran’s long-term objectives. With an estimated 150,000 rockets and missiles – more sophisticated and accurate than ever – Hezbollah poses an important challenge to Israel. Designated as a Foreign Terrorist Organization by the United States since 1995, Hezbollah has killed more Americans than any terrorist group other than al-Qaeda. The group has gained significant experience fighting on Iran’s behalf in the Syria war and will bring that experience to a future conflict with Israel. Today, Hezbollah and its allies exert decisive influence over the newly-formed Lebanese government.

In the Gaza Strip, Hamas—a designated terrorist organization by the United States and the European Union—poses both an immediate and a longer-term threat to Israeli citizens. Rather than help its own citizens, the group has used its resources to construct an elaborate military infrastructure — including a broad network of terror tunnels — with which it can attack Israeli communities. Moreover, six million Israelis live within range of Hamas’s increasingly-accurate rocket arsenal. Over the past year, Hamas has used Palestinian civilians as human shields to storm the security fence separating Israel from Gaza. Hamas has launched explosive-laden kites to destroy thousands of acres of Israeli forests and farmland. These threats illustrate one simple truth: Israel faces unprecedented strategic challenges. These stem from states and terrorist organizations, from both conventional and unconventional weaponry. It is in America’s vital interest for Israel — our sole reliable democratic ally in the region — to have and develop the military equipment it needs to decisively thwart those challenges.

U.S. Assistance Helps Maintain Israel’s Qualitative Military Edge

U.S. support for Israel through annual security aid has helped the Jewish state maintain its 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 historically prevented war by deterring regional adversaries from attacking Israel. Due to U.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—both American and Israeli. U.S. support for Israel’s security assistance has also 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. We believe that continued U.S. aid to Egypt and Jordan is also important to helping ensure stability in the region.

Increased Israeli Defense Spending

Spiraling defense costs are forcing Israel to spend more on security as a percentage of GDP than any other nation in the industrialized world. Israel officially allocates about 5 percent of its GDP for defense. However, the actual costs to the Israeli economy are much higher when taking into account lost productivity and the need for reserve duty, internal security and anti-terrorism spending. The weapons systems Israel needs to meet the growing threats it faces are becoming far more expensive than in the past. For example, a single F-35 Joint Strike Fighter will cost Israel just less than \$100 million, before accounting for the costs of supporting infrastructure and maintenance, over twice the cost of an F-16 fighter jet purchased under the first U.S.-Israel agreement in 1998. Even as Israelis face substantial budgetary pressures, Israel will have to dramatically increase its defense spending over the next decade.

Israel: A Vital Strategic Partner

As a key pillar of America's Middle East security framework, the U.S.-Israel strategic partnership plays a vital role in combating common threats and furthering U.S. regional and global policy objectives. These threats include terrorism, conventional and non-conventional weapons proliferation, counterfeiting, cyber warfare, and the spread of radical ideologies. In this context, Israel's military strength and geo-strategic location provide a strong deterrent to regional actors opposed to the United States. Indeed, Israel's stable, democratic, and reliably pro-American orientation remains unquestioned and ensures that America can consistently rely on its alliance with the Jewish state. The close strategic relationship 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 U.S.-Israel 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. The U.S.-Israel Strategic Partnership Act of 2014 designated Israel as a "major strategic partner."

Over the last 30 years, the U.S.-Israel defense relationship has benefitted both countries through, among other programs, joint military training exercises and joint research and development. Facing common threats—from high-end weapons and cyber-tech to improvised explosive device (IEDs) and terrorist tunnels—the two allies optimize responses to these threats by working closely together. Twice each year, U.S. Marines conduct desert warfare training with their Israel Defense Forces (IDF) counterparts, and American soldiers and security officials have regularly visited Israel to study Israel's approach to urban combat. U.S. pilots hold simulated combat training with the Israeli Air Force, including aerial combat tactics and inflight refueling. In addition, Israel and the United States have cooperated on a wide range of intelligence-sharing programs, including monitoring Iran, Syria, al-Qaeda, and other terrorist groups and sponsors. In the biennial Juniper Cobra exercise, U.S. and Israeli forces practice cooperative tactics to counter the growing threat from ballistic missiles and long-range rockets.

Cooperation Produces Critical New Military and Defense Technologies

With America's support, Israel has developed and deployed an advanced, multi-layered missile defense shield. These systems—which directly benefit both U.S. and Israel security—require ongoing investment to remain effective against evolving threats.

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 has a proven track record of intercepting incoming rockets and mortars midair, saving lives and avoiding broader conflict. In February 2019, the U.S. Army announced its intention to purchase two Iron Dome systems to protect American soldiers overseas.

David's Sling: David's Sling was designed to close the current operational gap between Israel's short-range Iron Dome and higher-altitude Arrow ballistic missile interceptor. Declared operational in 2017, the system provides the IDF and the U.S. military with protection against long-range artillery rockets, short- to medium-range ballistic missiles, aircraft, and low-flying cruise missiles. Jointly developed by Israel's Rafael Advanced Defense Systems and U.S. defense company Raytheon, David's Sling uses Raytheon's Stunner missile for interception, and each launcher can hold up to 16 missiles. In July 2018, the IDF was forced to use David's Sling to intercept two large Syrian surface-to-surface ballistic missiles. The United States and Israel are increasing their serial co-production of David's Sling as Israel steps up its procurement of the system.

Arrow 2 and 3: The Arrow program is the centerpiece of the U.S.-Israel cooperative defense relationship. Jointly developed by the two allies, Arrow-2 is among the world's most sophisticated missile shields. Operational since 2000, Arrow-2 has consistently proven that one missile can shoot down another at high altitudes and supersonic speeds. Arrow-3, an upper-tier, exo-atmospheric defense system, is designed to counter long-range conventional and unconventional strategic threats to Israel. In January 2017, the Israel Air Force declared the Arrow-3 missile defense system officially operational. In February 2018, Israel carried out a successful test of its Arrow-3 missile defense system alongside the U.S. Missile Defense Agency. In 2019, the Arrow-3 system is scheduled to be tested in the United States.

Patriot: Since 1991, Israel has used the U.S.-made Patriot missile system to help defend its citizens. Recently, the IDF fired two U.S.-made Patriot missiles to intercept a Syrian fighter jet that penetrated roughly 1.25 miles into Israeli airspace. According to the IDF, the Russian-made Syrian fighter jet took off from the T-4 airbase in Syria, which has been used by Iranian forces and was the target of at least two Israeli airstrikes in the past.

Beyond the threat of missiles, terrorist organizations on Israel's borders are continuing to construct subterranean passages to attack and kidnap Israeli soldiers and civilians. The United States and Israel work together to fund and develop counter-tunneling technologies. Israel shares its counter-tunnel technologies and advancements with the United States, enhancing our own ability to deal with this growing threat around the world. Our joint work with Israel has yielded positive results over the past two years, with Israel discovering and destroying a number of Hamas tunnels from Gaza and well as Hezbollah tunnels emanating from Lebanon.

Saving American Lives on the Battlefield

Israel has developed an array of innovative technologies that have played a key role in saving the lives of Americans service members. To cite just a few of these innovations:

F-35 Helmet: An Israeli defense contractor partnered with an American firm to produce the Helmet Mounted Display System (HMDS) for F-35 fighter pilots. The helmet displays flight and weapons data for the pilot, providing full situational awareness and the ability to rotate the missiles' seeker by turning one's head.

Distance Door-Breaching System: U.S. forces must often apprehend enemy combatants and terrorists who are holed up in urban safe houses. The Israeli SIMON door-breaching system can blast down steel or wooden doors from a distance of up to 130 feet.

Advanced Detection of Explosives: Remote-controlled explosive devices (IEDs) have caused thousands of U.S. casualties in recent years. The U.S. military uses various Israeli technologies that can detect remote-controlled explosive devices and other weapons.

Emergency Bandage: Carried in every U.S. soldier's first-aid kit, this Israeli-designed bandage stems blood loss, prevents infection and allows non-medically trained soldiers to stabilize the wounded. This bandage was instrumental in saving the life of former congresswoman Gabrielle Giffords and several others in the aftermath of a 2011 shooting in Tucson, Arizona.

Trophy: Designed to detect and neutralize incoming projectiles, Israel's Trophy active-protection system (APS) is the only fully operational and combat-proven APS in the world. In June 2018, the U.S. Army awarded a contract worth \$193 million to purchase Trophy. The U.S. Army plans to equip 261 of its M1 Abrams tanks with the Israeli-made system.

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, is an essential component of America's national security strategy. Over 75 percent of our assistance to Israel comes back to the United States through the purchase of U.S.-made aircraft and other equipment. Beyond aid to Israel, overall U.S. foreign aid also helps American companies develop foreign markets, build stable business environments in developing countries, and thereby 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.

Conclusion

Few can predict what the coming year will bring in the Middle East, but one thing remains certain: Israeli security and U.S.-Israel cooperation are deeply in the American interest. This Subcommittee—headed so ably by Chairwoman Lowey and Ranking Member Rogers—deserves great credit for its stalwart advocacy for the U.S.-Israel relationship and the overall foreign aid budget over the years. That includes not only providing the funding that is so vital to keeping Israel secure and strong, but also in codifying the equally important policy provisions dealing with so many aspects of U.S. policy in the Middle East. This bipartisan support will remain even more critical as America and Israel continue to work together to meet the challenges that lie ahead and to advance the goals of a peaceful, stable, and pro-Western Middle East