

Rothman Meets With Israeli Ambassador Ayalon

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Questions Ambassador on Threat to Israel From Hezbollah, Lebanon, Syria, and Iran

Washington, DC - Congressman Steve Rothman (D-NJ9) met on Capitol Hill with Israeli Ambassador Danny Ayalon during a breakfast meeting last week for various Members of Congress. In addition to the commencement of U.S. military engagement in Iraq and the danger that Saddam Hussein continues to pose to the State of Israel, Rothman discussed with Ayalon the present threat level to Israel from Hezbollah in Southern Lebanon, along with the growing threat of a nuclear-armed Iran.

"I was pleased to have the opportunity to speak with Ambassador Ayalon regarding issues of critical importance to Israel. Israel is our number one friend and ally in a very dangerous and important part of our world, the only democracy in the Middle East, and I believe that we must continue to monitor all issues that affect her security," said Rothman. "As the dangers of Saddam Hussein are being addressed by the U.S. military and the coalition of the willing, we are reminded of the continuing threats faced by the State of Israel on a daily basis from Iraq and several of its other neighbors in the region. After Iraq, at the forefront must be the present threats from Hezbollah and the support it receives from Lebanon, Syria, and Iran. Following closely behind are the extremely dangerous and accelerating efforts of Iran to acquire the means to manufacture its own nuclear weapons."

Ayalon assured Congressman Rothman and the Members of Congress gathered for the meeting that Israel and the U.S. government continue to send very strong signals to Hezbollah, Lebanon, Syria and Iran that there will be zero tolerance for attacks into Israel. Additionally, Ayalon discussed other important issues, such as the new aid package for Israel expected to be included in a spending bill this spring, the realities of President Bush's "roadmap" and Iran's growing nuclear capability.

"I believe that the current situation in the Middle East demands our increased support for the State of Israel, America's vital ally and strategic partner in the region. We must make certain that she receives the assistance needed to respond to the threat posed by terrorism, including protecting herself from any Iraqi attacks," Rothman stated. "Also, it is imperative that we monitor very closely the developments related to President Bush's roadmap for a secure and just peace between the Israelis and Palestinians, the authority granted to the Palestinian's new Prime Minister and what he accomplishes with that authority."

Rothman, a member of the House Appropriations Subcommittee on Foreign Operations, which allocates all U.S. foreign aid, was pleased to use his position on that Subcommittee to help secure over \$2.7 billion in foreign assistance for the State of Israel in Fiscal Year 2003. He will be continuing his efforts in support of the 2004 budget for Israel, as well as for Israel's special request for emergency military assistance, economic aid, and loan guarantees.

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