

## Op-Ed: U.S.'s Valuable, Strategic Relationship with Israel

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By Rep. Steve Rothman (D-N.J.)

American foreign policy is front and center in the 2008 presidential election. Eight years of deadly and disastrous blunders by the Bush administration have seriously damaged our national readiness and our allegiances throughout the world. Bush's errors range from recklessly launching a war in Iraq on false pretenses to disgracing the 60th anniversary of the state of Israel with a polarizing and political speech before the Israeli Knesset.

The American people recognize that the next president of the United States must do a better job of working with and strengthening our allies, especially those in the Middle East. And it must be understood that in this region, one strategic ally in particular has always stood out from all others: the state of Israel.

In the 60 years since America and the United Nations recognized Israel as a sovereign and independent nation, the U.S. has been rewarded tenfold for this gesture by Israel's help in providing America with vital security assistance in the Middle East and around the world.

I remember my first trip to Israel in 1968. I still recall standing amid the rubble of war and burned out Soviet tanks on the Golan Heights, recognizing that this tiny country - nearly the same size as my home state of New Jersey - had accomplished the impossible in defeating the armies of Egypt, Syria and Jordan, as well as forces from Saudi Arabia, Iraq, Lebanon, Kuwait and Algeria.

Today, Israel Defense Forces (IDF) continue to demonstrate great strength and acumen as they protect their people and provide valuable assistance to the U.S. There are literally hundreds of examples of how Israel has helped the United States with our national security goals: intelligence, improving American military technology, capturing Soviet and Iranian equipment, destroying the Iraqi nuclear reactor, eradicating a Syrian nuclear facility, and many more unclassified and classified instances.

Currently, the United States spends \$150 billion a year to have 165,000 U.S. combat troops in Iraq.

Many people know that. What they may not realize is that without our partnership with the IDF, the United States might need to have 100,000 or more additional troops stationed permanently in that part of the world to make up for the protection of U.S. interests and vital intelligence provided by Israel to the United States.

With the ongoing efforts of Iran to acquire nuclear weapons technology, it is more critical than ever that the U.S. continue to fund defense programs with Israel to deter common enemies. The Arrow Weapons System is a notable example. Arrow, a joint U.S.-Israel defense project, is one of the most advanced missile defense systems in existence and has been proven effective in tests against real and surrogate targets.

For Israel, Arrow provides essential protection against ballistic missiles for its civilian population, as well as U.S. troops, ships, and aircraft in the Middle East. Specifically, Arrow directly counters the threat posed by hostile Iranian Shahab-3 missiles by intercepting them at high altitudes so that any weapons of mass destruction that they carry will not detonate or be dispersed over Israel or U.S. forces.

The system can detect and track missiles at distances as far as 300 miles away, while also destroying an incoming warhead a safe distance from the target. Arrow's newest component, known as Arrow-3, will improve the Arrow System and give it the capability to handle more sophisticated ballistic missile threats from Iran, such as multiple warheads and faster reentry vehicles.

In addition, U.S. participation in the Arrow development effort ensures interoperability of the Arrow and Israeli Missile Defense System with deployed U.S. missile defense assets. To grasp the magnitude of that benefit, think about how important it is for our first responders - fire, police and emergency medical services - to be on the same page when responding to a crisis. Their response times are increased, effectiveness is magnified, and the likelihood of miscommunication errors is decreased.

Arrow technology, along with other American and Israeli defensive and offensive systems, coupled with robust diplomacy, will protect American interests and allies against threats in the Middle East and help us avert another deadly and costly war.

I will fight for ongoing strong support of an enhanced Arrow System and expect that, as in the past, my colleagues - Democrats and Republicans alike - will join me. Those of us on the Defense Appropriations Subcommittee recognize that our national security interests extend beyond partisan politics.

Our own national security is closely linked to that of Israel, and the American people understand that. I look forward to working with our next president to assure that our long and successful strategic alliance and defense technology partnership with Israel continue and prosper.

Rothman is a member of the House Appropriations Committee's subcommittees on Defense; State, Foreign Operations; and Agriculture. He also sits on the House Science and Technology Committee.