



ISRAEL MATTERS!

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Pelosi: Congress Stands by Israel

Britain Reconsiders Arms Sales to Israel

The British government is reconsidering its policy of selling weapons to the State of Israel. A report published this week by the House of Commons Committee on Arms Export Controls said it was "almost certainly" the case that British weapons were used during the Gaza fighting, "Operation Cast Lead," the counterterrorism operation that was launched to quell the thousands of ceaseless rocket attacks fired at civilians in Israel's southern communities, most intensively following Israel's unilateral withdrawal from Gaza.

The issues at stake, according to the Campaign Against Arms Trade (CAAT), a nonprofit organization, and the Defense Analysis newsletter, relate to the general arms sales to Israel, which is being reviewed on a case-by-case basis. Five out of 182 export licenses were revoked following Operation Cast Lead. All five related to the exports of systems for the Sa'ar 4.5 class Israel Navy missiles boats.

Also at issue are parts made in the U.K. that are exported to the United States and are then incorporated into systems that are sold to Israel. This includes the U.S.-built Lockheed Martin F-16 fighter jet.

General elections are coming up shortly in Britain, and politicians are mindful of how such economic and political impacts will play at home and abroad.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu received a warmer public reception from Congress than from the Obama administration, with a top Democrat and Republican welcoming the leader who has refused to back down in a disagreement with the White House over Israeli housing expansion in a disputed part of Jerusalem. "We in Congress stand by Israel," the leader of the House, Speaker Nancy Pelosi, assured Netanyahu at an all-smiles appearance before the cameras. "In Congress we speak with one voice on the subject of Israel."



In his meeting with Pelosi, Netanyahu asserted that Israel had been building in east Jerusalem since the 1967 Mideast war, when it captured the West Bank from Jordan, and that the matter had "never been a subject of argument among us or in the U.S.," according to Netanyahu's office. The Jewish neighborhoods built in east Jerusalem will remain part of Israel in any final status deal with the Palestinians, he told Pelosi, so building there doesn't harm the chances for peace.

The Palestinian demand for a halt to building in Jerusalem as a precondition for peace talks, Netanyahu said, will serve only to delay peace talks further. Netanyahu said the sides "must not be trapped by an unreasonable and illogical demand."

"We have no stronger ally anywhere in the world than Israel," said House Republican Leader John Boehner. "We all know we're in a difficult moment. I'm glad the prime minister is here so we can have an open dialogue." Other Republicans have weighed in on Israel's side, criticizing the Obama administration for its handling of the crisis. "I never thought I'd live to see the day that an American administration would denounce the state of Israel for rebuilding Jerusalem," Rep. Mike Pence of Indiana said on the House floor Tuesday after meeting Netanyahu. "I urge the president to stop all this talk about settlements in Jerusalem and start focusing on isolating a threatening and menacing and rising nuclear Iran," he said.

Pelosi and Boehner both pointed to the threat of Iran as a top concern in which the United States will cooperate with Israel. Netanyahu thanked his congressional hosts for what he called warm, bipartisan support. "We face two great challenges", Netanyahu said, a "quest for peace with our Palestinian neighbors" and stopping Iran from developing atomic weapons.

See Pages 2 & 3 to read the Senate letter in support of Israel.

United States Senate
WASHINGTON, DC 20510

March 29, 2010

The Honorable Hillary Rodham Clinton
Secretary of State
United States Department of State
Washington, DC 20520

Dear Secretary Clinton:

We write to urge you to do everything possible to ensure that the recent tensions between the U.S. and Israeli administrations over the untimely announcement of future housing construction in East Jerusalem do not derail Israeli-Palestinian peace negotiations or harm U.S.-Israel relations. In fact, we strongly believe that it is more important than ever for Israel and the Palestinians to enter into direct, face-to-face negotiations without preconditions on either side.

Despite your best efforts, Israeli-Palestinian negotiations have been frozen for over a year. Indeed, in a reversal of 16 years of policy, Palestinian leaders are refusing to enter into direct negotiations with Israel. Instead, they have put forward a growing list of unprecedented preconditions. By contrast, Israel's prime minister has stated categorically that he is eager to begin unconditional peace negotiations with the Palestinians. Direct negotiations are in the interest of all parties involved – including the United States.

We also urge you to reaffirm the unbreakable bonds that tie the United States and Israel together and to diligently work to defuse current tensions. The Israeli and U.S. governments will undoubtedly, at times, disagree over policy decisions. But disagreements should not adversely affect our mutual interests – including restarting the peace process between Israel and her neighbors and preventing Iran from acquiring nuclear weapons.

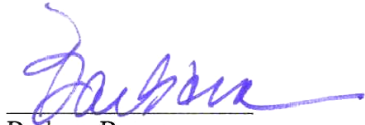
From the moment of Israel's creation, successive U.S. administrations have appreciated the special relationship between our two nations. Israel continues to be the one true democracy in the Middle East that brings stability to a region where it is in short supply. Whether fighting Soviet expansionism or the current threats from regional aggression and terrorism, Israel has been a consistent, reliable ally and friend and has helped to advance American interests. Similarly, by helping keep Israel strong, the United States has helped to reduce threats to Israel's security and advance the peace which successive Israeli governments have so avidly sought.

It is the very strength of our relationship that has made Arab-Israeli peace agreements possible, both because it convinced those who desired Israel's destruction to abandon any such hope and because it gave successive Israeli governments the confidence to take calculated risks for peace. As the Vice President said during his recent visit to Israel: "Progress occurs in the Middle East when everyone knows there is simply no space between the U.S. and Israel." Steadfast American backing has helped lead to peace treaties with Egypt and Jordan.

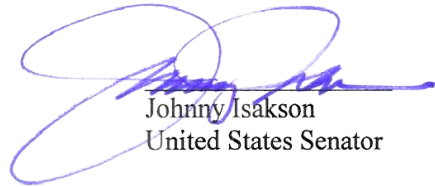
We recognize that our government and the Government of Israel will not always agree on particular issues in the peace process. But such differences are best resolved amicably and in a manner that befits longstanding strategic allies. We must never forget the depth and breadth of our alliance and always do our utmost to reinforce a relationship that has benefited both nations for more than six decades.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,



Barbara Boxer
United States Senator



Johnny Isakson
United States Senator

What they are saying about Israel:

The Wall Street Journal— “J Street”: At least one Jewish-American organization is lining up behind the Obama administration in its intensifying feud with the Israeli government of Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu. J Street, the newest Israel-focused lobby in Washington, broke with more established Jewish-American bodies and publicly backed the White House's sharp criticism of Netanyahu and Israel's plans to continue building in contested east Jerusalem.

J Street went further in its statement, calling on the Obama administration essentially to impose the terms for new negotiations with the Palestinians on Netanyahu. The lobbying group said the U.S. must make Israel's 1967 borders as the base-line for the creation of a new Palestinian state, factoring in the potential for land-swaps between Israeli and Palestinian negotiators. “We urge the United States to take this opportunity to suggest parameters to the parties for resuming negotiations,” J Street said in its statement.

The White House believes Israel's government sought to humiliate Vice President Joe Biden during his [recent] visit to Jerusalem by announcing the building of 1,600 new Israeli homes in east Jerusalem. In response, Secretary of State Hillary Clinton and other U.S. officials publicly upbraided Netanyahu and suggested the future of the U.S.-Israeli alliance could be imperiled. Netanyahu appeared unfazed. “The building of those Jewish neighborhoods did not hurt in any way the Arabs of east Jerusalem and did not come at their expense,” he said.

J Street said that its criticism was warranted. “The Obama administration's reaction to the treatment of the Vice President last week and to the timing and substance of the Israeli government's announcement was both understandable and appropriate,” it said. Other leading Jewish American organizations, such as the American Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC) and the Anti-Defamation League, have squarely backed Netanyahu in the squabble.

AIPAC called for the White House to defuse the battle with Netanyahu. “The Administration should make a conscious effort to move away from public demands and unilateral deadlines directed at Israel,” it said in a statement.

J Street says it will continue its campaign to back the administration. Jeremy Ben-Ami, its executive director, said that J Street had already gathered 20,000 signatures from its members and delivered a petition of support to the White House. The lobbying group also said that it was intensifying its dialogue with key U.S. lawmakers about their need to back the White House's stance on Arab-Israeli peace talks. “Our supporters are calling Congress and making it clear to the political establishment that there are two sides to this story,” Ben-Ami said.

Ed Koch “The Trust is Gone”: I consider the Obama administration's recent actions against the Israeli government to be outrageous and a breach of trust. I refer to the denunciations by Vice President Joe Biden, Secretary of State Hillary Clinton and other administration officials. The world knows what happened; nevertheless, I will try to put it into context.

Vice President Joe Biden was in Jerusalem to convey to the Israelis and the world that the United States government is committed to protecting and assuring the security of Israel from attack. While he was there, an Israeli government minister announced that the Israeli government had authorized the construction of 1,600 apartments in East Jerusalem to be occupied by Jews. Currently, 280,000 Jews live in East Jerusalem, and these apartments were to be added to an existing complex, built on land owned by Jews; about 250,000 Jews live on the West Bank outside of Jerusalem.

The timing of the Israeli government's announcement was unfortunate and Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu apologized for it, but it did not mark any change in the Israeli government's policy. That policy is and has long been to allow construction of homes for Jews in East Jerusalem.

Now a little history. In 1947, the United Nations passed a resolution authorizing the creation of a Jewish state within the British Mandate of Palestine. After it declared independence in 1948, Israel was immediately attacked by the combined armies of Egypt, Jordan, Syria, Lebanon, Saudi Arabia and Iraq. Although Israel repelled the attack, Jordan conquered East Jerusalem, separating it from its Western half. Ultimately, a cease fire was arranged by the U.N. and for the next 19 years until 1967, Jordan occupied East Jerusalem, including the old city, which historically had been the capital of King David's ancient kingdom.

In 1967, the Arab armies of Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon and Syria again sought to destroy the State of Israel, but Israel prevailed in six days and conquered the Jordanian-held East Jerusalem, the West Bank, the Sinai Peninsula and the Gaza Strip. During the 19 years that Jordan occupied East Jerusalem, it expelled all of the Jews living in what was historically the Jewish Quarter, and literally destroyed every synagogue and the homes of the Jews. When Israel reunited all of Jerusalem, Jews were, of course, allowed to live in any part of the city, and today, more than a quarter of a million Jews live in East Jerusalem. Numerous Arabs live there as well.

For quite some time and certainly since the Gaza War, the Palestinian Authority has broken off direct nego-

tiations with Israel which had been ongoing since about 1993, in an effort to create two states, one Jewish and one Palestinian, living side-by-side in peace. This so-called two-state solution always seemed out of reach, notwithstanding the efforts of Presidents Jimmy Carter, George H. W. Bush, Bill Clinton and George W. Bush to jumpstart negotiations.

President Obama has sought to revive the negotiations between the Israeli government and the Palestinian Authority. He called on Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu to assist by committing Israel to stop building new apartments in East Jerusalem and new settlements on the West Bank. In a move that Hillary Clinton, according to The New York Times, praised as "unprecedented," Netanyahu agreed to a ten-month settlement moratorium on the West Bank. However, he refused to stop Jews from living in any part of East Jerusalem, which is considered by Israelis to be an inseparable part of their capital. Both the Palestinian Authority and the U.S. government, ultimately accepted Netanyahu's offer, albeit grudgingly, and the Palestinian Authority agreed to engage in indirect talks through the American mediator George Mitchell.

Given this history, it was a shock to the Israeli and American supporters of Israel to have Joe Biden, a great friend of Israel, make the extraordinary harsh statement he made denouncing the future construction of 1,600 apartments in East Jerusalem. The Vice President's condemnation was even more baffling because, as The Times of March 12th reported, "he spent most [of the previous day] expressing his personal devotion to Israel, as well as the Obama administration's 'iron-clad commitment to Israel's security.'" As someone high in political life once said to me after I mentioned to him the violation of his iron-clad commitment to me on a subject involving the mass transit fares in New York City, "Next time, get it in steel. Iron breaks."

But even more disturbing than the Vice President's reaction were the comments and implicit threats voiced by Hillary Clinton in a telephone conversation she had with Prime Minister Netanyahu, described in The Times of March 12th. "In a tense, 43-minute phone call on Friday morning, Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton told Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu that Israel's plan for new housing units for Jews in East Jerusalem sent a 'deeply negative signal' about Israeli-American relations."

Under President Clinton and George W. Bush, Israeli Prime Ministers have offered the Palestinians a state of their own on virtually the entire West Bank and Gaza, with land swaps to compensate for any portion of the West Bank that would remain in Israel, but those offers were rejected by the Palestinians.

What is most disturbing about the truly harsh and inflammatory rhetoric of both Joe Biden and Hillary Clinton directed at the government of Israel, is that it is speculated President Obama himself may have ordered Biden and Clinton to make the statements they made.

The Times of March 16th reported, "...the President was outraged by the announcement of 1,600 housing units in an ultra-Orthodox neighborhood in East Jerusalem during Mr. Biden's visit, administration officials said. Mr. Obama was deeply involved in the strategy and planning for Mr. Biden's visit and orchestrated the response from Mr. Biden and Mrs. Clinton after it went awry, these officials said." President Obama and his administration's overly harsh public reaction to the construction in East Jerusalem appears to have emboldened Israel's enemies and provided a cover for their extremist views. It has also created a serious crisis of confidence among the Israeli public that it can depend on this administration for its security.

There will be an effort this week when Prime Minister Netanyahu meets with President Obama to mend fences. There will be huggy-kissy pictures with Hillary and handshakes by Bibi Netanyahu with Joe Biden and the President, but the relations will never be the same again. Humpty Dumpty has been broken and the absolute trust needed between allies is no longer there. How sad it is for the supporters of Israel who put their trust in President Obama.