

Perry Gershon for Congress

Position Paper on the United States Relationship with the State of Israel

June 2020

Introduction: As a committed US Jew, born and raised in the State of New York, I have developed a lifelong bond with the State of Israel. As a Congressman, I would be dedicated to strengthening her unique and deep relationship with the United States and ensuring her security to the benefit of Israel and the US alike. I have personally made nine trips to Israel, and have observed its evolution from underdog to the significant military force it is today. Its primary security threats have changed from neighbors like Egypt and Jordan, to terrorism from within the West Bank and Gaza and more distant enemies such as Iran and from groups operating within Syria, but the commitment of the United States to Israel's security has been and must remain unwavering. I have seen Israel before the first intifada and after, so I recall the hopeful days that that followed the 1978 Camp David Accords in comparison to the more recent period of despair about the prospects for peace. In 1995, I drove through the West Bank highway with my wife, completely unarmed and unprepared for the hostile environment we passed through, not understanding the deterioration in relations with the Arabs that had transpired over the years since my visit 15 years earlier (although the height of violence from the first intifada ended in 1993, the area was nowhere near the calm place I remembered from the late 1970s), and this helped me understand the importance of the West Bank security wall (as a barrier for defensive purposes and not as an indicator of a final border) begun in 2003, three years after the start of the second intifada. I have seen first-hand the damage of Gaza rockets fired into border communities such as Sderot, and so I have a direct understanding of the value of defense systems such as Iron Dome. And I have toured West Bank cities such as Ramallah and Hebron, and I have seen projects such as Rawabi, which represent the potential development of a Palestinian middle class, a necessary step on a path to solving the Arab-Israeli dispute. Through these visits, I have a deep appreciation of both the value of the Israeli friendship with the United States, and Israel's need for continued US support.

Israel is the only democracy in the Middle East, and the United States (per the US Department of State website) seeks to "Promote democracy as a means to achieve security, stability, and prosperity for the entire world." Its progressive values are strong, as Israel has been a long-time model for civil rights, women's rights, religious rights for non-Jews and LGBT rights. That alone is justification for US support for Israel. But the relationship is far deeper. Israel is a scientific and intellectual powerhouse whose developments contribute to worldwide progress in such areas as medicine, agriculture and technology. Finally, the US-Israeli strategic partnership is symbiotic, as it plays a key role in fighting mutual threats such as terrorism and radical Islamic ideology. At this moment of upheaval in the region, Israel's presence as an essential US ally is critical. As a Congressman, I would be dedicated to preserving and growing the US-Israeli alliance.

Key Issues and Goals:

1) Security

- a. The United States has been and should remain committed to protecting Israeli security. This includes both the sale of advanced weapons systems to Israel (such as Iron Dome and any improvements in the technology that may become available), as well as all other parts of the \$38 billion, 10-year military aid memorandum of understanding (MOU) agreed upon in 2018.
- b. The United States has and should continue to be committed to Israel's undeniable right to have secure borders. This should be the central tenet of any peace plan (see below).
- c. Israel's regional Qualitative Military Edge (QME) must be preserved both so that its survival cannot be threatened, and so that it can be a key US ally in the ongoing war on terrorist organizations such as Hamas, Hezbollah, Al-Queda, and ISIS.

2) Peace

- a. The United States has been and must remain committed to a two-state solution to the conflict with the Palestinians. Israel must remain both a Zionist/Jewish State and a democratic one. Absorption or annexation of all of the occupied territories is a non-starter because Israel would lose its Jewish majority and be forced to give up either its Jewish identity or democratic values.
- b. Paramount to any proposed solution must be Israel's defensible borders. I have seen first-hand the value of the high ground in both the Golan and the West Bank. Israel must maintain these and other strategic areas so its citizens will not be under threat of future missile attack.
- c. There have been failures in leadership on both the Israeli and Palestinian sides, making achievement of the desired two-state solution difficult until viable discussion partners emerge. In the interim, Israel should continue to control the territories but the US should discourage the building of new settlements in heavily Arab populated and non-strategic areas.
- d. The Palestinian Authority should also be promoted with US aid as it is the better alternative to Hamas, or rule by any other terrorist organization. However, the Palestinian Authority ("PA") should cease its policy of paying stipends to the families of terrorists. The Trump policy of cutting all aid to the PA, including funds for development and for refugees, only serves to promote terrorist groups over those more willing to work with Israel.

3) Foreign Aid

- a. It is critical that Congress appropriate, on an annual basis and without cuts, the money specified in the 10-year MOU signed by the US and Israel in 2016.
- b. Foreign aid is essential to ensure that Israel can play its role against threats such as Iran, Syria, ISIS and militants in Egypt and Jordan. Foreign aid to Israel is a critical part of the overall defense of the United States and national security for Americans.

4) Iran

- a. Iran has become the primary threat to American interests in the Middle East. Iran is an exporter of terrorism, a proponent of theocracy and anti-democratic values generally, and a proponent of the destabilization of Arab regimes friendly to the US.
- b. Iran should not be permitted to obtain and/or build nuclear weapons. Preventing Iran's nuclear development should be a priority policy for the United States.
- c. Whether the Iran Nuclear Deal signed by President Obama was a good or bad idea at the time of execution is no longer a relevant question. The Iran Nuclear Deal put constraints on Iranian nuclear development, even if it fails to prevent it permanently. While the constraints sunset over 13 years, it is better to have these limits today than nothing. Right now we are in limbo, and negotiating a new agreement with Iran should be a high priority. COVID and other concerns seem to have slowed Iranian aggression and ambition, but that will not last forever.
- d. The US was wrong to withdraw its support from the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) and the period since has highlighted the need for a replacement. Parts of the JCPOA have been rendered moot by the Iranian enrichment, but what is needed is renewed diplomacy between the US, Iran and our European partners so that a JCPOA 2.0 can be achieved. Neither of the alternatives, a nuclear Iran or war with Iran, are acceptable.

5) BDS

- a. The domestic BDS movement is a threat to the US-Israeli alliance. BDS is little more than a new manifestation of antisemitism and it seeks to delegitimize Israel. It is a lie to suggest that BDS seeks peace in the region or is founded on legitimate principals.
- b. BDS is particularly threatening at the college level, as the movement tries to brainwash our youth to turn against Israel at a young age. Congress should take steps to discourage BDS's growth and proliferation, such as passing a form of the Israel Anti-Boycott Act as introduced in the Senate by Senator Ben Cardin. That being said, it is equally critical that we distinguish our efforts to fight BDS from any efforts to justify or condone Israeli settlement policy.