

Testimony before the House Foreign Affairs Committee
Sub-Committee on the Middle East and South Asia
on

"Safeguarding Israel's Security in a Volatile Environment"

by

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Mr. Chairman, distinguished members of the House Foreign Affairs Committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify before you on a subject of great importance to the United States.

For much of the last century, the Middle East was known for its volatility. Unfortunately, the first decade of the 21st Century is reinforcing this tradition. Protecting U.S. vital interests in Israel's security, the security of our Arab allies, and the free flow of energy resources from this region to the global economy remains a daunting challenge in the face of Arab revolutions, Jihadist terrorism, sectarian warfare, and Iran's bid for a nuclear weapons capability that threatens to trigger a nuclear arms race in the Middle East.

You have chosen to focus this hearing on how to safeguard Israel's security in the current environment. To answer that question we should start with a net assessment of Israel's security situation. While the very volatility of the situation necessarily makes judgements risky, it nevertheless seems to me to be very much a glass half empty/glass half full situation.

Undoubtedly, Israel's neighborhood has become far more uncertain as a consequence of the Arab revolutions sweeping the region:

- The rise of a democratically-elected Muslim Brotherhood president in Egypt has raised understandable concerns in Israel about the future of the Israel-Egypt peace treaty which is the cornerstone of Israel's strategic posture in the region.
- This uncertainty combines with a deteriorating security situation in the Sinai Peninsula on Israel's southern border, the result of a decade of neglect by the Mubarak regime.
- In Gaza, Israel has established an uneasy informal truce with Hamas but the continued smuggling of offensive weapons into Gaza, the rise there of Jihadist groups,

the influence of Iran through its proxy Palestine Islamic Jihad, and Hamas' own ideology that seeks the destruction of Israel, makes for a dangerous brew.

- The rise of Islamist political leaders and parties across the region compounds Israel's heightened concern given their historical hostility toward the Jewish state.
- On Israel's north-eastern border, the Assad regime's brutal effort to suppress the aspirations of the Syrian people is generating a descent into chaos and a sectarian war that threatens to spread to Lebanon and Iraq. Nobody can determine today what the future of Syria portends but the view from Jerusalem cannot be sanguine given the potential for another Islamist government rising on its borders, this time with a considerable arsenal of chemical weapons.
- On Israel's northern border with Lebanon, Hezbollah has been placed on the defensive because of the troubles of its Syrian sponsor but it continues to maintain an arsenal of some 50,000 rockets and missiles that are capable of blanket attacks on Israel's main centers of population.
- In the West Bank, the Palestinian Authority of Abu Mazen and Salam Fayyad have been doing a very credible job of maintaining order and preventing terrorist attacks against Israelis but as economic circumstances deteriorate there and progress toward a two-state solution remains a distant prospect, demonstrations have broken out.
- On Israel's long eastern border, the King of Jordan is struggling to maintain order and pursue promised political reforms in dire economic circumstances. The regional volatility threatens his throne even more than it threatens Israel's security but the net effect for Israel is to begin to place a question mark over the stability of the Israel-Jordan Peace Treaty.
- And then there is Iran, which reminds Israel on what has now become a weekly basis that it seeks to "wipe it off the map." Iran's steady advance toward the nuclear weapons threshold is reaching a point where Israel's leaders fear that they will no longer be able to eliminate its capabilities and will therefore have to rely on the commitment of the United States to prevent Iran from acquiring nuclear weapons. Given the troubled history of the Jewish people over many centuries, placing the fate of the Jewish state in the hands of foreign leaders -- no matter how reliable -- necessarily heightens their sense of insecurity.

Just to list these developments is to make one want to exclaim: Oy Vey! But it's important to put them into a broader perspective:

- Israel today has the strongest, most technologically advanced armed forces in the Middle East. The Congress has good reason to be proud of this reality because it has done so much -- on a bipartisan basis -- to make this possible. Together with Congress, and following in the footsteps of previous Democratic and Republican administrations, the Obama Administration has done much to reinforce this development with its support for the deployment of the Iron Dome anti-rocket defense system, enhancement of Israel's Qualitative Military Edge, and strengthening of intelligence cooperation.
- Israel has a close and strong alliance with the most powerful country in the world -- a strategic relationship that began during Republican administrations but has been reinforced by Democratic administrations, none more so than the Obama

Administration which has taken the strategic relationship to new levels. As Israel's Defense Minister declared last year: "I can hardly remember a better period of American support and backing...than what we have right now."

- Egyptian President Morsi has pledged to uphold the Israel-Egypt Peace Treaty and is beginning to devote attention and resources to the security situation in Sinai, in close coordination with Israel. Indeed, according to Israeli defense officials, military-to-military relations with Egypt have actually grown stronger since the revolution last year. Morsi has also signaled Hamas that it should keep things quiet in Gaza since he has no interest in developments there sparking a crisis with Israel that could severely complicate his efforts to secure American support for Egypt's economic recovery.
- Hamas' calculations are also affected by the fact that it has lost its external headquarters in Damascus because of the sectarian strife there, forcing it to move out of the Iranian/Syrian-led "rejectionist" camp, into the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood camp that has pledged to uphold the peace treaty with Israel.
- Hezbollah's strategic circumstances have also taken a dramatic turn for the worse because the likely demise of its Syrian sponsor threatens to cut its supply lines from Iran and strengthen its Sunni rivals in Lebanon.
- The Syrian army is consumed with a debilitating civil war that is destroying its conventional capabilities and steadily eliminating its ability to make war on Israel.
- And again, thanks to the Congress and the Obama Administration, Iran is facing what its leaders admit are "crippling" sanctions, including oil sanctions that have cut its exports by 40 percent, and financial sanctions that are severely complicating its ability to conduct international commerce. Iran today faces international isolation, UN Security Council sanctions, and a bipartisan U.S. commitment to prevent it from acquiring nuclear weapons.

Of course, Israel has very good reasons to be concerned about the volatility of its strategic environment and the threats of destruction emanating from Tehran. And even though the Arab world today is preoccupied with its own troubles and challenges, the failure to put the Israeli-Palestinian conflict on a positive path toward achieving a two-state solution leaves Israel vulnerable to a sudden, unpredictable development that could bring the Palestinian issue back to the top of the Arab agenda and dramatically worsen Israel's strategic circumstances.

Nevertheless, today Israel is no longer a weak and isolated state incapable of defending itself. And with wise leadership and the steadfast support of the United States, it has every reason to be confident that it will be able to effectively navigate the treacherous waters in which it now finds itself.