

# AIPAC Gears for Changes in U.S. Israel Ties

**ED. NOTE:** The following article on AIPAC is the first in a three part series by Wolf Blitzer, 'Horizon' Washington correspondent.

BY WOLF BLITZER

WASHINGTON—The pro-Israeli lobby in Washington is expanding its traditional agenda as the nature of the American-Israeli relationship continues to change.

Tom Dine, Executive Director of the American Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC), described how his organization was currently gearing up to the new challenges posed by what he called a "revolution" in ties between Washington and Jerusalem.

"In the old days," he said in an interview, "there were two issues: aid and arms. Now, the agenda between the two countries is real broad."

AIPAC is still, of course, very much involved in promoting U.S. economic and military assistance to Israel. That is the group's bread and butter issue. It also opposes — if not always actively fights — U.S. arms sales to Arab states.

## STRATEGIC COOPERATION

But the organization is now clearly moving beyond those issues as U.S.-Israeli strategic cooperation expands.

"Israel, more and more, is being considered an equal to the NATO countries," Dine said. AIPAC, as a result, is exploring the possibility of supporting legislation in Congress which would formally make Israel — along with Japan, Australia, and South Korea — America's "equal partners," just like the NATO allies. The economic, military and diplomatic benefits for Israel would be very significant.

"We're working closely with both the House and Senate Armed Services Committees," Dine said. "That's a change right there — working with those two committees." He was referring to the fact that AIPAC has

historically always focused most of its attention on four other committees: House Foreign Affairs; Senate Foreign Relations; and House and Senate Appropriations. Those are the panels which must approve all foreign aid legislation.

But because of the Gramm-Rudman budget-cutting mood in Washington, Dine said, "the future is not aid." He said the aid levels were not going to increase "unless there were a Syrian-Israeli war and Israel was just flattened economically, after so many weeks or months of fighting. That would be horrible, tragic, and I'm sure America would be there to help Israel out economically."

But short of that scenario, the real future for Israel is "making sure that the economy is led by high-tech exports. And that includes defense and non-defense items."

There is much the United States can do to help. This is especially true in the Executive Branch of the government. "Imagine a guy who knows the basement and the bowels of all the bureaucracies in Washington, the revelant ones — Commerce, Special Trade Representative, State, Treasury, Agriculture and Defense," Dine said. "If we know of opportunities, we can take advantage of them, and get the Hill involved as well."

## PROMPTING ISRAELI EXPORTS

Thus, AIPAC has become an active supporter of the many direct and indirect efforts to promote Israeli exports, including Operation Independence, a private initiative of several prominent American Jewish businessmen "I want AIPAC to help make sure that that's a successful operation," he said.

AIPAC was earlier very much involved in lobbying the Congress to support the establishment of the U.S.-Israeli Free Trade Area.

"We are obviously pushing the U.S.-Israeli relationship closer and closer," Dine said. "What's my

dream? It's a full-fledged alliance."

But the Jonathan Jay Pollard spy scandal has hurt, at least in the short term. "I'm wary," Dine said. "I'm concerned that the Israelis have not come to terms with its meaning here."

Still, he believes the strains can be overcome. "I think it has caused a pause," he said. "I think it has caused some apprehension. But I do not see it shaking the American-Israeli relationship."

Dine, a former State Department foreign service officer and Senate aide who has spent five years at AIPAC, was quite critical of Israel's involvement in the Pollard affair. "Who needed it?" he asked. "Why were they so stupid? If they wanted these things, why didn't they ask? Isn't the U.S.-Israeli relationship close enough? You could have gotten it."

Dine was also personally angered by the Pollard affair. "A criminal act was committed — treason against my own government," he said. "And in this case it's a Jew." He expressed hope that the final unresolved aspects of the case would be settled quickly so that the U.S.-Israeli relationship could bounce back to normal and then continue to expand.

## TURNING POINT

In looking back over the past few years, Dine suggested that a turning point in the American-Israeli relationship occurred in December 1982 when Congress, on its own, appropriated an extra \$200 million in assistance for Israel, despite the active opposition of the Reagan Administration. That Congressional action, which followed the acrimony of the 1981 Saudi AWACS surveillance aircraft battle and the subsequent strains of the Lebanese war, sent a powerful signal to the Administration. Israel's standing on Capitol Hill was seen as very solid. And as a result, the Administration moved to

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(AIPAC)

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strengthen ties with Israel in the military/strategic arena.

"I think the future is the 'NATOization' stuff and enhancing Israel's economic opportunities," Dine said.

AIPAC, in the coming months, can also be expected to promote efforts in Congress to revise the law on blocking foreign arms sales. As it currently stands, the President can push through controversial sales to Saudi Arabia and other Arab states by simply winning over only a third of the Senate.

This was dramatically underlined earlier this summer when the Saudi missile sale was allowed to go forward even though a clear majority of Senators and Representatives had opposed it. But changing the existing law will not be easy.

## REDUCE INTEREST RATES

AIPAC is also quietly exploring ways to reduce the

interest rates on America's outstanding military loans to Israel. An earlier effort by Democratic Senator Daniel Inouye of Hawaii and Bob Kasten of Wisconsin was scrubbed after Pollard's arrest last November. That initiative, which was well on its way toward passage, would have saved Israel an immediate \$531 million. But as the "Wall Street Journal" noted on July 14, there was an "unstated discomfort" among members of the Senate Appropriations Committee in the aftermath of the Pollard affair.

AIPAC, however, is now again testing the waters to see if it might be revived in a revised form. That also will not be easy.

## AFRICAN AID

Another fresh item on the AIPAC agenda, Dine said, involves a two-year-old amendment by Democratic Representative Howard Berman of California to transfer some \$5 million a year to Israel for development aid

projects in Africa. "I think the Berman Amendment is quite small," Dine said. "But it has so many ramifications about the dramatically changed relationship. The idea that Israel would not be asked to do our bidding in Africa like they did in the early 1960s — secretly — but openly, with America's helping Israel to help the Africans with Israeli technology and expertise. It's more positive, cleaner. It shows that the relationship has gone from rhetoric and sentiment and pity to real cooperation. And that's so exciting."

Dine also insisted that a closer American-Israeli connection will actually promote the Arab-Israeli peace process. "I accept that thesis," he said. "If the relationship is dangling, if it's not close — filled with contention and contempt — no Arab is going to say it's worth it to make peace with Israel. They'll say, 'Let's get back to the salami tactics.'"

But in the process of expanding its traditional agenda, AIPAC has rankled some influential people in the United States and Israel. There has recently been criticism of its style, growth and policies — a subject which will be addressed in the next article.

**NEXT WEEK: The second in the series of AIPAC articles**



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**WHY IS** Israel like a dove? Other birds, when tired, rest on a branch; but when the dove tires, she rests one wing and flies with the other.