



POSITION PAPER ON THE UNITED STATES - ISRAEL ALLIANCE BY DAVID TRONE

I am a strong supporter of the State of Israel, the only liberal democracy in the Middle East. Israel is our most important ally in the region, and its safety and security are critical to the interests of the United States. In Congress, I will place a very high priority on nurturing and deepening ties with Israel because our nations share common values with a strong and unwavering commitment to democracy and freedom. In a region consumed by volatility and intractable conflict, Israel remains firmly anchored in freedom and justice. I will be a reliable champion for a strong and enduring US-Israel relationship.

The Jewish Homeland & Vibrant Democracy. Israel is the homeland of the Jewish People, one to which my family and I are deeply committed. I visited Israel in 1999 and again in February 2018. On both trips, I was deeply impressed with Israel's dynamism, its unique history, and especially with its robust democratic institutions and civil society. The establishment of the modern State of Israel in 1948 – in the ancient land of the Jewish People – fulfilled a 2,000-year-old dream for Jews who fled persecution over the centuries in Spain, Western and Central Europe, Poland, Russia, and throughout the Pale of Settlement. Though that age-old dream was realized, we must always remember that millions of Jewish lives could have been saved had there been a sovereign Jewish nation during the darkest chapter in Jewish history, the Holocaust. That is a stark lesson I will never forget.

Today, Israel continues to be not only a safe-haven for the Jewish People, but it is the world's "Start Up Nation" – a remarkable oasis of economic, medical, and high-tech innovation and entrepreneurship, something I witnessed first-hand on my recent trip last February. My wife, children, and I also have an emotional tie to Israel. As *b'nai mitzvot*, my children read from the Torah in the ancient Hebrew language of their fore-fathers and fore-mothers, and two of them have taken part in Birthright Israel trips. My wife prays to Jerusalem whenever she attends services at our synagogue in Rockville, Maryland. Our family's ties to Israel are deep and enduring.

The Iranian Threat to Middle East Stability & Israel's Security. The chief concern in the Middle East today is Iran, an autocratic regime that refers to America as the "Great Satan" and repeatedly threatens to "wipe Israel off the map." Despite support among many Iranians for needed reform, the clerics who seized power in 1979 remain in place and maintain an iron grip on the nation, even while there are signs of growing unrest among the populace. Iran remains the world's leading state sponsor of terrorism. It supports both Hamas and Hezbollah, which threaten Israel on its southwestern and northern borders, respectively. In Syria, Iran's persistent meddling and arming of Syrian President Assad's ruthless army and allies, including its shipment of deadly missiles, continue to destabilize that war-torn nation neighboring Israel. Further, the Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) Quds Force has been sowing instability in Lebanon, Syria, Yemen, and elsewhere – all contrary to American and Israeli security interests.

Like virtually all Democratic leaders in the House and Senate – including Sens. Ben Cardin and

Charles Schumer – I was disappointed that the President decided to unilaterally withdraw from the nuclear deal with Iran. It is imperative now, more than ever, that Iran must never acquire a nuclear weapon. If Iran takes any steps in that direction, the consequences must be swift and severe. All options must be on the table to prevent Iran from acquiring a nuclear bomb that threatens not only Israel, but also other allies in the Middle East and beyond. Iran has tested ballistic missiles, giving rise to action by the UN Security Council, which I support. Further, the IAEA needs to make robust inspections of Iranian military sites, and we should increase sanctions for Iran’s non-nuclear activities in supporting Hezbollah with weapons, shooting ballistic missiles, and funding terrorist activities throughout the Middle East. In Congress, I will support legislation that clarifies that Iran must be sanctioned for any resumption of its missile program, as well as its nefarious actions that undermine US interests in the region.

US Military Assistance to Israel. American military assistance to Israel has historically served as Israel’s lifeline, bolstering its defense capabilities and enabling Israel to purchase state-of-the-art systems to defend itself in a very hostile neighborhood. I whole-heartedly support foreign military assistance to Israel, now at \$3.1 billion per year, consistent with the current Memorandum of Understanding between the US and Israel. In Congress, I commit to supporting the overall foreign assistance package, including early disbursement of the portion for Israel, as has been the case for many years. Most foreign assistance to Israel is spent in the United States, creating jobs here at home, including in Maryland. Not only is foreign assistance vitally important for Israel, it is a smart investment that will continue to pay dividends into the future.

I also strongly support America’s continued assistance for Israel’s missile defense systems. Given the array of very real threats against Israel – from Iran’s ballistic missiles, to Hezbollah missiles in Lebanon and Hamas’ rockets in Gaza, numbering well over 120,000 according to many experts – it is in America’s interest to support programs like Iron Dome, David’s Sling, and the Arrow missile program. I witnessed this threat to Israel on my recent trip when I stood on Israel’s northern border and looked at the hills in Lebanon where Hezbollah has installed thousands of rockets, all aimed at Israeli civilians and infrastructure; many of those rockets are embedded in schools, private homes, and other private facilities, which is a common, yet demented, Hezbollah tactic.

Iron Dome helped protect innocent Israeli lives when Hamas rockets attacked Israeli civilian areas in 2012 and again in 2014 – and this defense system helped prevent a wider war. More recently, on August 9 of this year alone, Hamas launched 180 missiles from the Gaza Strip into southern Israel, part of an ongoing and very troubling pattern of terror that includes incendiary kites and balloons that have inflicted severe damage to Israeli farms and communities. This is simply not acceptable, and Israel has the duty to defend its citizens against such attacks. Last February, I visited the southern Israeli community of Sderot, whose citizens live in daily fear of rocket attacks from Hamas, and was shocked to see how they only have a few minutes to find shelter when Hamas rockets are launched from the Gaza Strip. I am therefore proud that key components of its radar system are made by a company that has its North American headquarters in Maryland, ELTA Industries – and I’ll do what I can in Congress to attract other Israeli companies to Maryland.

Israel’s Qualitative Military Edge & Fighting Against Extremism. By law, all sales of defense technologies to the Middle East must ensure that Israel maintains a qualitative military edge (QME) – a law I will be proud to vigorously uphold. Meanwhile, we should bring more capabilities to our allies and partners across the Middle East, such as Jordan and Egypt – two

countries that courageously struck peace deals with Israel; they, too, deserve our support.

The Wider Middle East. The United States cannot solve every problem in the world, and certainly not in the Middle East. We must work together with Israel and our allies to resolve the conditions that have given rise to terrorism, civil wars, and instability in the region. These threats require vigilance, US leadership, close coordination with our allies, strong intelligence-gathering, aggressive counter-proliferation and counter-terrorism strategies, and when required, a military response.

Some Gulf countries also share our (and Israel's) grave concerns about terrorism, Iran, and ISIS; they have been reliable partners in Afghanistan, Iraq, and elsewhere. Emerging signs of dialogue and cooperation between some Arab states and Israel are a sign that we collectively face many common threats.

Two-State Solution & Secure Borders. While assisting Israel with the necessary and required means to protect itself, the United States must support and encourage a negotiated two-state solution through bilateral talks directly between willing Israeli and Palestinian leaders who seek a sustainable peace. But any peace deal must protect Israel's territorial integrity and ensure Israel's security as a sovereign democratic state and a homeland for the Jewish People without threat of terrorism and invasion. The only solution is secure and recognizable borders for Israel, alongside a state for the Palestinians – but not one that may become a haven for terrorists. America must support Israel in its historic quest for peace and security.

Meanwhile, I oppose attempts by the Palestinians to pursue unilateral action for statehood at the United Nations and other international bodies. Those efforts will fail, as negotiations for peace must be conducted directly between the parties. In Congress, I will speak out against any efforts to undermine negotiations and harm the peace process.

Delegitimization of Israel & BDS. I will support all efforts to safeguard Israel's rightful place at the United Nations and in other international organizations – and I will strongly oppose actions in world forums that delegitimize Israel and that are clearly anti-Israel and anti-Semitic.

Further, we must also speak out against the Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions (BDS) movement, which is rooted in anti-Semitic sentiment – and we need to fight back against it. I am deeply troubled by the BDS movement on college campuses across the country and around the world. I am proud that our Total Wines & More stores nationwide carry a wide variety of fine wines imported directly from the Golan Heights and other areas in Israel. Indeed, I was very happy to visit a number of our Israeli wine suppliers on my recent trip to Israel this past February. I will always personally stand firmly against any group or individual that tries to delegitimize Israel or denies its right to exist.

As a businessman, I do not want American companies coerced by the BDS movement into boycotting Israel. Sens. Cardin and Portman's proposed Israel Anti-Boycott Act works to address this nefarious effort among international bodies. Under the proposed legislation, companies and individuals would be barred from refusing to conduct business with Israel to satisfy a request from the United Nations or European Union; it bars politically-motivated commercial actions aimed at delegitimizing Israel and pressuring Israel into unilateral concessions outside the bounds of direct Israeli-Palestinian negotiations. I have been using my position as a benefactor of the ACLU

to work with Congressional staff to address some concerns that have arisen. As your Representative, I will work with Sens. Cardin and Portman, as well as Reps. Roskam and Engel (who have introduced a similar anti-BDS bill in the House), and other members of Congress and Israel advocates to make sure that US businesses are never forced into boycotting Israel.

Conclusion. As a member of Congress, I will proudly support the State of Israel. In so doing, I will protect US national security interests in the Middle East and around the world. I look forward to being a champion for Israel on Capitol Hill.