

US Lawmakers Plan to Challenge President Obama on Israel Limits

Democratic and Republican lawmakers are vowing to challenge a limit on U.S. defense aid for Israel that President Barack Obama included in the recently signed Memorandum of Understanding between the two nations.

The agreement—reached in September—guarantees Israel \$38 billion in aid over 10 years, but it also states that if Congress increases the aid, Israel is obliged to return the extra funds. U.S. Reps. Paul Gosar (R-Texas), Randy Weber (R-Ariz.), and Eliot Engel (D-N.Y.) said Tuesday at Agudath Israel of America's annual legislative luncheon in New York City that the restriction is "unconstitutional" because it would interfere with the ability of Congress to fulfill its mandate as a co-equal branch of the federal government. Engel vowed to "fight every step of the way" to bring about the revocation of the aid limit.

U.S. Rep. Hakeem Jeffries (D-N.Y.), speaking at the same event, said that the aid restriction "conflicts with the Constitution in spirit if not in letter" because Congress "has a right to respond to emergency situations, and we will not give up that right." As an example, Jeffries said that if Israel is attacked, it might require extra aid to defend itself. Congress, he said, should be able to take action in such circumstances.

More Jewish Democrats oppose Ellison

Another topic addressed by several of the speakers at the luncheon was the bid by Minnesota's U.S. Rep. Keith Ellison for the chairmanship of the Democratic National Committee (DNC). A number of Jewish leaders have expressed concern that

Ellison would turn the Democratic Party away from Israel. Speaking with at the Agudath Israel event, two more Jewish Democratic officeholders stated their opposition to Ellison's candidacy.

The Minnesota lawmaker has come under fire for his past association with Nation of Islam movement leader Louis Farrakhan, publicly claiming in 1995 that Farrakhan "is not an anti-Semite." Additionally, Ellison has urged increased U.S. pressure on Israel and has voted against funding Israel's Iron Dome missile defense system.

New York's Rep. Engel, the ranking Democratic member of the House Foreign Affairs Committee, told that he opposes Ellison's candidacy because "we need a full-time chairman for the DNC, not a member of Congress who would only be able to devote part of his time to the job." Asked whether his opposition to Ellison is also based on Ellison's record concerning Israel, Engel replied, "My positions on Israel are well-known; my focus is on having a full-time chair for the party."

New York State Assemblyman David Weprin (D-Queens) said that he too opposes Ellison's bid "because of the importance of having someone who can devote himself full-time to rebuilding the Democratic Party." Weprin said he is "aware of the statements about Israel that have been attributed to Ellison, and if they are accurate, that would be a cause for concern."

Weprin added that he is "troubled by the positions that [2016 presidential candidate] Sen. Bernie Sanders took on Israel, and I know that Sanders nominated Congressman Ellison to the Democratic convention resolutions committee in order to try to get those positions in the platform."

The statements by Engel and Weprin against Ellison's possible party chairmanship echo the sentiments of New York State Assemblyman Dov Hikind (D-Brooklyn), who told earlier this

month that “if Israel has to depend on support from the Ellisons of the world, it would be in serious trouble.”

FBI Official: Palestinian Terror Tactics Adopted in U.S. Attacks

William Sweeney Jr., assistant director of the FBI’s New York Division, said at the luncheon that the Palestinian terrorist tactic of “grabbing whatever you can to carry out an attack, whether a bulldozer or a kitchen knife” is being adopted by terrorists within the U.S.

Citing the attack at the Ohio State University campus this week by a Somali Muslim, Sweeney said that attacks by “homegrown violent extremists” are “simpler, aimed at more diverse targets, and carried out by younger attackers.”

Sweeney said that the threat of terrorism on American soil “has become more serious in the past year, with some of the attacks being carried out by teenagers, who often are not in contact with terrorists overseas, unlike during previous periods.” {eoa}

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