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Today

US boosts Israeli missile funding

By: HILARY LEILA KRIEGER on: 02.08.2010 [09:11] (81 reads)

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US boosts Israeli missile funding

By HILARY LEILA KRIEGER

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House c'tee pushes defense program money to highest level ever

WASHINGTON – US House appropriators have pushed funding for Israeli missile defense programs to its highest level ever, with \$422.7 million now slated for 2011.

Last week, the House Appropriations Subcommittee on Defense added \$95.7m. to the original White House funding request for the long-range Arrow programs and medium-range David's Sling, according to sources close to the panel. The lion's share – \$108.8m. – will go to the Arrow 3 system, which the US signed off on after some initial hesitation.

In addition, the monies include \$205m. pledged this spring by US President Barack Obama to the short-range Iron Dome project.

The package is more than twice as much as last year's total, and adds up to nearly \$1 billion in aid to joint US-Israel missile defense programs in the past four years.

"Chairman Norm Dicks, myself and all the members of the Defense Subcommittee understand how important it is to be at the cutting edge of anti-missile technology, both to safeguard our own citizens and troops, but also those citizens and troops of our allies and friends such as the people of the Jewish state of Israel," Rep. Steve Rothman (D-New Jersey) told The Jerusalem Post on Friday.

Rothman has pushed for greater funding of joint US-Israel missile defense programs during his tenure on the committee.

"It would be political suicide for the Senate to come in with a lower number"

The funding will need to be voted on by the full House when it reconvenes in the fall, as well as approved by the Senate in its own defense appropriations bill.

That bill could be "marked up" next week but is more likely to be reviewed after the August recess. In the "mark-up session," amendments may be offered to the bill, and the committee members would vote to accept or reject those changes.

"It would be political suicide for the Senate to come in with a lower number," said one source close to the issue of his expectation that the Senate will agree to the totals set by the House last week. "There's virtually zero chance that these projects don't get funded at these levels."

The funding comes at a time when the US has been under pressure to tighten its belt given the recession, with the defense budget no exception.

"Given the concern and attention that we are focusing now on every dollar we are expending on behalf of the US taxpayer for all purposes, including the defense of the United States and its allies, it is a mark of the importance of these projects that they were all funded so robustly and fully by our subcommittee," Rothman said.

There were also concerns among some elements of the pro-Israel community that the new money for the Iron Dome project announced by Obama would come at the expense of the funding for the Arrow and David's Sling projects, so that overall missile defense aid would not significantly increase.

The Israeli government is among those pleased by the outcome.

"The embassy of Israel deeply appreciates this latest expression of the congressional commitment to Israel's security and to the development of systems that will enhance the defense of both Israel and the United States," Ambassador to the US Michael Oren said.

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