

Committee on Foreign Affairs
Subcommittee on Europe
Statement of Rep. Elton Gallegly
July 9, 2008

I would like to start by thanking both Chairman Wexler and Chairman Ackerman for holding this hearing on the relationship between Europe and Israel and how this relationship will impact our policies with respect to the Middle East.

Over the past several days, I have carefully read the testimony of our distinguished witnesses. Although the panelists have differing viewpoints on the closeness of the relationship, they all agree that stronger Israel – Europe ties not only benefit Israel and Europe, but also serve the national interests of the United States in the Middle East.

Just in the past several years, Europe and Israel have strengthened their economic, political and military cooperation, including much deeper ties between Israel and NATO. This has already led to important intelligence cooperation between NATO and Israeli forces in the area of counterterrorism and the prevention the weapons smuggling in the Mediterranean.

After the terrorist attacks in Madrid in 2003 and London in 2005, which combined claimed over 240 lives, as well as the major terrorist attacks that have been foiled in Germany, at Heathrow Airport and elsewhere in Europe, I believe that Europeans understand that their safety is directly linked in working with Israel and the U.S. to defeat radical Islamic terrorist groups.

Despite this cooperation, not all is well in the Israel – Europe relationship. The major countries of Europe and Israel differ on how best to deal with Iran's attempt to acquire a nuclear weapons capability.

In addition, European Union has refused to place Hezbollah on its list of terrorist organizations. This puts the EU at odds not only with Israel and the U.S., but also with some of its own members, such as Britain and the Netherlands, which have placed Hezbollah on their own terrorist lists. I have worked closely with Congressman Wexler on this issue and I continue to urge the EU to add Hezbollah, which by any standard is one of the most dangerous terrorist organizations in the world, to its terrorist list.

While we can be critical of the EU's position on Hezbollah or the unwillingness to apply real pressure on Tehran, it is also important to recognize the positive role played by individual European countries.

For example, Cyprus should be commended for providing humanitarian aid to 15,000 American citizens who were evacuated from Lebanon during the conflict in the summer of 2006. Italy is playing an important role in maintaining peace by commanding the EU force at the Rafah border post on the Gaza – Egyptian border and the UNIFIL force in southern Lebanon. And European leaders such as President Sarkozy, Chancellor Merkel, and Prime Minister Berlusconi have all sought to improve their country's relationship with Israel.

Mr. Chairman, thank you again for holding this timely hearing and I look forward to listening to our experts.