

March 20, 1992

THE BIG LIE ON US AID

IN a recent interview, adapted for publication by The Jerusalem Post (March 12), Professor Zbigniew Brzezinski, an American political scientist who served in president Carter's administration as national security adviser, made this statement: "Aid to Israel alone since 1970 comes to about \$77 billion, \$15,000 to \$20,000 per head for each man, woman and child in Israel." It is a pity that the Post did not hold over this nonsense for inclusion in its annual Purim spoof. Explicitly and implicitly it is completely untrue. Israel has not received \$77b. in "aid" from the US.

It has received in what is called "aid" approximately one-half of that sum. Brzezinski has cutely included loans on which Israel pays interest, like every other honest borrower. The lie, however, goes much deeper.

The essence of the charge against Israel, after all, is that the "aid" is a handout, an act of charity. It is incredible that Brzezinski does not know that as against the so-called annual aid of \$3b., Israel has provided the US with assistance and services worth probably many times the money received. Indeed the most succinct refutation of Brzezinski's story comes from the lips of Joseph Sisco, a former assistant secretary of state.

During a symposium of the International Security Council in February 1989, he said: "I want to assure you, Mr Katz, that if we were not getting full value for our money, you would not get a cent from us." This statement, coming from an American policy-shaper, makes political sense. It also makes sense to say that it is probably a considerable understatement. It is not easy to put price labels on Israel's contributions to American security, but whatever research has been done has confirmed that Israel has given more than "full value" for every cent received from the US.

Professor Stephen L. Spiegel of the University of California, who for many years has studied this issue and followed its development, calculated already in 1983 that on a conservative estimate, Israel's contribution to US security was worth at least 2 percent of the US defense budget - that is, today, about \$6b. He was quantifying specific items.

But how far could one quantify, for example, the value of the information on Soviet weapons systems transmitted by Israel to Washington? Estimates by American military personalities, prominently by Gen. George Keegan, former director of US Air Force Intelligence, and by Ariel Sharon, vary from \$50b to \$80b. Such analyses and transmissions by Israel forced the Soviets to change at least one weapons system.

The Israeli Air Force took over for years the main burden of "taking care" of Soviet navy in the Mediterranean. The list is a long one. Technological innovations, technical knowhow, the lessons of Israel's battle experience - the list of Israel's specific contributions, read into the Senate minutes several years ago by then-senator Rudy Boschwitz, occupied many pages of close print.

All, all, "handouts" by Israel. But who was counting? Israel handed over automatically every piece of information gathered - and too often paid for in lives of Israeli soldiers - because "we are allies, aren't we?" Illustrative of how Israel's contribution has become an inevitable component in the military profile of the US is the

varied elements of Israeli accomplishments applied in the Gulf war. Again Professor Spiegel has rendered a prime service in categorizing those elements.

Special techniques and tactics in air-to-ground warfare developed by Israel's air force were shared with the US and used effectively by allied combat pilots to locate and destroy Scud launches, Israeli-developed conformal fuel tanks provided substantially enhanced range for the F-15 with minimal performance degradation. Israeli-provided mine plows were used to clear paths for allied forces through Iraqi-placed mine fields. Mobile bridges provided by Israel were employed by the US Marine Corps.

An Israeli-produced night targeting system increased the Cobra helicopter's night fighting capabilities, and a low-altitude warning system produced and developed in Israel was utilized on Blackhawk helicopters. Israel Military Industries produced the canister for the highly successful Tomahawk missile. There was more

Exchange of Letters

May 3, 1992

Sir, - My attention has been drawn to Shmuel Katz's commentary of March 20, "The Big Lie on US aid," regarding the amounts of American aid to Israel. Your commentary accuses me of "parroting the conventional 'wisdom' of Israel's enemies." That assertion is false. My quoted statement to the effect that American aid to Israel comes to about \$15,000 to \$20,000 per head is based on two sources, neither of which can be fairly described as "Israel's enemies": The New York Times article of September 22, 1991; and The Wall Street Journal article of September 19, 1991.

The opening paragraph of The New York Times article explicitly says that the amount of aid comes to about "\$16,500 for each Israeli citizen." Both articles make the point that most of the aid consists of grants, and that the so-called loans are in fact not only refinanced at a lower interest rate, but often forgiven. That Israel is the beneficiary of the largest economic aid extended by the United States to any country is indisputable, both in terms of absolute figures and on a per-capita basis. Your commentary's unsubstantiated assertion that the value of the intelligence that Israel transfers to the US exceeds the above figures is literally laughable.

For one thing, Israel is also the beneficiary of American intelligence information. As a consumer of top-level US intelligence for more than four years, and as a person familiar with what was being transferred to Israel, I can assert categorically that the value of the intelligence that the US transfers to Israel (not counting that provided by Mr Pollard) exceeds what the US obtains from Israel. I think it is a disservice to the American-Israel relationship to minimize the extraordinary scope of the aid that Israel has been receiving from the United States.

You would do better to inform your readers that already more Americans support economic aid to Russia than to Israel, and that only a minority of the American population is in favor of continued economic aid to Israel. This is a serious development and articles such as yours, slighting past American aid to Israel, are not helpful.

ZBIGNIEW BRZEZINSKI, Washington, D.C.

Shmuel Katz replies:

In my article, I charged Professor Brzezinski with having fiddled with figures so as to make US aid to Israel appear fatter than it is.

Now he admits that the money received by Israel was composed not only of grants, but also of interest-bearing loans. He talks of refinancing, of a low interest rate - as though this would make his offense kosher. In fact, Israel has received few, if any, favors in the interest rate.

Now Israel pays the US every year \$800 million in interest and \$400m. in repayment of loans - which together eat up 40 per cent of the \$3b. aid package. Of the remaining \$1.8 billion, it receives \$400m. in cash, while \$1.4b. must be spent in the US. Mr Brzezinski wisely does not try to reply to what I wrote on the data sources on Israel's contribution to American security.

I would advise him to consult those sources, or, better still, study the full official reports and statistics of the US government - he knows the address - instead of choosing to flourish precisely a stray article picked up from a notably Israel-bashing newspaper like The New York Times.

Schlomo Riemer

Letter missing.

Shmuel Katz responds:

Sir, - Schlomo Riemer writes (Letters, April 6) that in my article of March 20, "The big lie on US aid," I "disallow government loans in American aid data on the ground that they bear interest." This is not so. What I objected to was Professor Brzezinski's describing loans on which the borrower pays interest as "aid" - that is, charity. Mr Riemer evidently finds it difficult to believe, but yes, there has been an ongoing Israeli aid package to the US.

That is why former US Under-Secretary of State Joseph Sisco found it appropriate to declare: "If we weren't getting full value for our money, you wouldn't get a cent from us." A few days after my article, US Senator Arlen Specter added more light to this truth. What I have pressed for is that Israel's contribution to US security (which has taken many forms) should be quantified, and indeed to have both sides of the "aid" relationship recorded in dollars. I am convinced that, if that is done and a balance struck, it will be possible to tell Brzezinski what he, an American taxpayer, has received as a hand-out from Israel.