

THE U.S. CONGRESS

Have you noticed that Congress often seems to be on a somewhat different course than the Administration, with respect to Israel and the Middle East? There's a reason, and it says something about the nature of Congress.

Take several recent examples: economic and military aid to Israel; the built-up "conflict" between American and Israeli military forces; and the announced suspension of the delivery of F16s to Israel. And look at the behavior of our representatives in San Francisco, Marin, the Peninsula and Sonoma.

The Administration proposal for 1984 aid to Israel called for about two and a half billion dollars worth, the largest single slice of our total foreign aid. But it was the same in 1983, and did call for a higher proportion of loans to grant than last year. There was a Congressional impulse to be *more* friendly to Israel, an ally which proved its worth to the U.S. at great expense last year. So there was a successful counter-proposal in the House sub-committee, calling for an overall increase, and a reduction of the proportion of loan to grant. Two Congressmen from this area were on that sub-committee.

Congressman Tom Lantos of the North Peninsula was one of the authors of that counter-proposal and a diligent, able leader for its passage, as he has been for similar measures since he has been in Congress.

Congressman Ed Zschau of the South Peninsula was also part of the sub-committee consensus which passed the increased-aid proposal. (Incidentally, it had been reported that Zschau had formally proposed a link between this aid and Israel's West Bank behavior, but that report was in error.)

Congresswoman Barbara Boxer of Marin took sharp public issue with the Defense Department on the matter of the over-publicized "conflict" between American and Israeli

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military forces, pointing out that "it is the partisans of Syria and the PLO who are serving the anti-American cause, not Israel."

And *Congressman Doug Bosco* of Sonoma put himself on record against the suspension of the delivery of F16s to Israel.

We may have a particularly good Congressional delegation -- and they all deserve some positive reactions from their constituents -- but their behavior also exemplifies a general Congressional tendency to appreciate Israel's role more consistently than does the Executive branch. Why? One reason is that Congress is that branch of our democratic machinery which is most responsive to the desires and needs of the people.

Last week, the *New York Times* reported a national survey showing that Americans, by a three and a half to one margin, believe Israel to be "very important" to American national interest. Put simply, the Executive branch is always more subject than Congress as a whole to special large pressure groups which may have short-term interests abroad. That can cloud an Administration's judgement of national interest in certain foreign affairs, such as the Middle East.

Phil Burton was a special case. His devotion to the public good cannot be explained institutionally. The unmatched personal relationship between Phil Burton and the needs of the people was simply a result of his bone-deep compassion for other human beings -- although some were blinded by the political brilliance which he put to the service of that compassion. But the exceptional quality of this man epitomized the nature of the U.S. House of Representatives as that body which is designed to be closest to the people.