Regional Cooperation between Israel and Egypt
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Congressional Record

By Rep. Lee Hamilton

Mr. Hamilton: Mr. Speaker, I would like to bring to the attention of my colleagues remarks made my our colleague, Henry Waxman, of California, on regional cooperation programs in the Middle East.

Congressman Waxman has provided sustained leadership in the Congress over the last several years in support of the Middle East Regional Cooperation program which seeks to bring Israelis and Arabs together on scientific and technological cooperative efforts. This small program has generated much support in Israel, Egypt, and the United States. The annual expenditures have averaged less than $5 million but members should be aware of the scope and promise of this activity and the key role played by the Congress in fostering and promoting it. Congressman Waxman is to be commended for his continuing leadership on it. His suggestions for the future of this program and its future expansion deserve consideration

Regional Cooperation, a Look to the Future
Brandeis University, February 6, 1987

By Henry A. Waxman

(Introduction by Susan Miller, Brandeis)

Thank you very much, Susan. It is a tremendous pleasure, and gives me great personal pride, to be here. I have already talked quite a bit with some of you here, and a warm welcome to those who have just joined us.

I'd like to begin by thanking Joe Califano, Baruch Levy, Leonard Houseman, Susan Miller, and all the people at the Center for Social Policy in the Middle East at Brandeis who are responsible for putting this conference together. You have worked for years in support of regional cooperation, through good times and bad, and your dedication is an inspiration to all of us.

For the last four days this conference has worked to outline new areas for trilateral projects in the health field. I understand you have identified four specific ones -- hospital and community health management, information systems, water quality, and intervention in several specific diseases. As you may know, I have specialized in public policy relating to health throughout my career, so it is particularly gratifying for me personally to envision such new projects.

But now I want to step back from the health area and address the whole of regional cooperation -- where it has come from, and where it should go next.

Most of you know that the Middle East Regional Cooperation program began in the dace of much skepticism. Many people simply did not believe that governments would be interested in having their scientists come together for joint projects.

You also know -- if you didn't before this conference -- that the program is working. It has established long-term joint projects in several fields, including health, agriculture, and marine science. Most of you have heard about the tangible results it has produced -- the strains of salt-tolerant fruits and vegetables, livestock better suited to the desert, controlling shoreline erosion, protecting lakes, and of course, the brilliant work in epidemiology.

Just as important as these science gains have been the remarkable personal ties built between these two nations. We see further evidence of that at this conference.

But now that regional cooperation has proven itself, we mist become more ambitious. For the fact is that the present program is tiny. It has reached only a few hundred scientists. Its budget of $5 million a year represents only one one-thousandth of the $6 billion the U.S. gives annually to Egypt and Israel.

Regional cooperation must begin to behave in a more activist way -- not simply channeling money to the same projects year after year, but reaching out to new participants, new fields. It must begin to act more like the Brandeis Center, with a vision of what should happen and the commitment to move it forward, and less like a routinized bureaucracy.

Such a change is not likely to happen while the program remains in its current form. The AID structure which now houses it has been crucial in choosing solid projects to begin the program and in overseeing their success. But as a large bureaucracy, AID simply does not offer the active, entrepreneurial approach needed to break through the many barriers regional cooperation faces.

Furthermore, AID us unable -- through no fault of its own -- the out the additional funds into this program that it is going to need in order to expand. Like all agencies of the federal government, AID's budget is under attack because of our massive budget deficit. Indeed, AID's budget will be cut far more than most agencies. In a time when the allotments for many of our other strongest allies are slashed by as much as 50%, it is simply not realistic to seek to expand this program through more U.S. government finds.

So we must leek for other ways to do it. I believe several ideas deserve serious study. One of these would be to create a small, U.S. government foundation to take over the running of these programs. Based in Washington, it would be empowered to manage the current programs and launch new ones, bring in new participants and beef up the program's budget.

The Foundation would be a U.S. government entity in that its Board of Directors would be chosen by the President and approved by the Senate, and part of its budget provided annually by Congress. Several of its board members would be U.S. government officials with operational responsibility for policy in the Middle East, such as the Assistant Secretary of State for Near East and perhaps the AID Administrator.

But it would differ from the standard government agency in that a majority of the Board would be private individuals. These would be people with the stature to create new constituencies of support, and raise funds from private, foundation and corporate sources.

Such an arrangement would cost the U.S. Treasury no more than it currently spends for Middle East Regional Cooperation -- about $5 million year. This would guarantee the continued U.S. role as an equal partner in the program, while ensuring it is led by people with a vision of how regional cooperation should expand, and the wherewithal to make that happen.

I would hope such an entity would not limit itself to scientific exchange, but would eventually aim to stimulate a variety of joint projects. There are many areas of health, agriculture, rural and economic development in which Egypt and Israel have complementary resources, where joint work can bring great benefits to both nations.

As its reputation grew, such a Foundation could become a magnet for practical bridge-building projects of all kinds, and for donors who want to help build them. If an initiative as grandiose as the "Marshall Plan" proposed by Shimon Peres and others ever comes about, the Foundation would perhaps have provided a testing ground for some of its ideas.

Let me assure those of you with a strong interest in this program, and strong opinions about how it is organized, that I propose nothing as a fait accompli. I lay this out to stimulate discussion, and invite your comment on it. I welcome any other ideas you may have for expanding the program at a time of shrinking U.S. budgets.

Whatever the final outcome, the keystone of this activity is, and must remain, the recognition that peace is not, by itself, a program. The program is development. Raising productivity; improving infrastructure, managing natural resources; improving health; advancing the general welfare -- these are your mandates. These goals transcend religion and nationality; they are shared by all people everywhere. It is in pursuing these fundamentally practical aims that we advance the loftier objective of peace.

Let me close on a personal note. I deeply believe that what we are doing in this endeavor, in the dreams we share and the reality we have already forged is, in a small but critical way, affirming the values of peace, of cooperation, of mutual respect, and of friendship.

Throughout the Regional Cooperation program, we have, together, rejected the awful legacy of war and moved toward a better future for ourselves and our children.

Today we reaffirm our inalienable commitment to humanity, knowing that if we are deterred, or if we fail, we will have handed a victory to the enemies of peace more precious than any on a battlefield.

It is precisely because of the terror in Lebanon, the carnage in Iran and Iraq, and the daily tensions of the region that we must go forward. If we do, others will follow us.

I am sincerely grateful for your personal commitment, dedication, perseverance, and friendship.