

Ron Paul fights back against anti-Israel claims

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JERUSALEM, Dec 29 — Republican presidential candidate Ron Paul, battling allegations he is anti-Israel, praised it as one of the United States' most important allies in an Israeli newspaper interview published today.

Paul's emailed comments appeared in the left-wing Haaretz daily after a former aide said the Texas congressman favoured abolishing the Jewish state and a leading US Jewish group urged him to clarify his position.

"I believe that Israel is one of our most important friends in the world. And the views that I hold have many adherents in Israel today," Paul was quoted as saying by Haaretz.

Although a longshot to win the Republican presidential race, Paul is a leading contender for next Tuesday's Republican caucus vote in Iowa — the first nominating contest in the nation.

But his record on Israel has raised concerns among US Jewish organisations. The Republican Jewish Coalition declined to invite him to its December 7 candidates forum, citing what it called his extreme views after a November debate in which Paul said Washington should be less involved in Israeli affairs.

"They can take care of themselves," Paul, who has called for reduced US foreign aid generally, said at the time. "Why do we have this automatic commitment that we're going to send our kids and send our money endlessly to Israel?"

Commenting on that issue in the Haaretz interview, Paul said: Two of the tenets of a true Zionist are 'self-determination' and 'self-reliance'.

"We give US\$3 billion (RM15.3 billion) to Israel and US\$12 billion to her avowed enemies. How does that help Israel? And in return, we act like her master and demand veto power over her foreign policy," he said.

Earlier this week, in a lengthy statement posted on the blog site RightWingNews.com, former congressional aide Eric Dondero said Paul, his one-time boss, had long harboured stridently anti-Israel opinions.

"He wishes the Israeli state did not exist at all. He expressed this to me numerous times in our private conversations," Dondero wrote.

Rabbi Marvin Hier, founder and dean of the Los Angeles-based Simon Wiesenthal Center, told Reuters yesterday he hoped that Paul would confront the matter.

In an emailed statement yesterday, Paul's campaign spokesman, Gary Howard, said the congressman "is the most pro-Israel candidate in this race".

As president, Howard said, Paul would "allow Israel to defend herself as she sees fit, without the permission and interference of the US or the United Nations".

Paul previously drew fire for anti-Israeli and racist, anti-gay messages contained in newsletters published under his name two decades ago.

Last Friday, a spokesman for Paul said the congressman apologised for not paying enough attention to “ghost writers” he said were responsible for the remarks in question and repeated the congressman’s disavowal of those views.

In the Haaretz interview, Paul said he had always made clear that his message was based on “the rights of all people” to be treated equally.

“Any type of racism or anti-Semitism is incompatible with my philosophy,” he said. — Reuters

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