



## Congressional Update

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### I. Palestine

***PLO Office*** – On February 10 Representative Ileana Ros-Lehtinen (R-Florida), Chairman of the House Foreign Affairs Committee (HFAC) Subcommittee on the Middle East and North Africa, along with 13 Republican cosponsors, introduced **HR 4522, to Amend the Anti-Terrorism Act of 1987 with Respect to Certain Prohibitions Regarding the Palestine Liberation Organization under that Act.** Senator Ted Cruz (R-Texas), introduced the Senate version, **S 2537** on the same day. His bill had no cosponsors upon introduction. In December, 2015 Senator Cruz and 31 House members, including Ros-Lehtinen sent a letter to Secretary of State Kerry calling for the closure of the PLO office in Washington DC. For the Cruz and Ros-Lehtinen joint statement introducing the bills, click [here](https://ros-lehtinen.house.gov/press-release/rep-ros-lehtinen-and-sen-cruz-introduce-plo-accountability-act): (<https://ros-lehtinen.house.gov/press-release/rep-ros-lehtinen-and-sen-cruz-introduce-plo-accountability-act>)

Prospects for the bill's enactment into law are unlikely. No House Democrat has co-sponsored the bill and at present, there are no co-sponsors to the Senate bill. The bill would prevent the President from waiving the ban on the PLO operation in the US. The ban dates back to the time when the PLO was designated a Foreign Terrorist Organization (FTO), a designation it has not had since 1994.

### II. Jordan

***(1) United States-Jordan Defense Cooperation Act of 2015 (HR 907)*** – On February 3, the Senate passed legislation with an amendment sponsored by Senator Marco Rubio (R-Florida) designed to strengthen the US-Jordanian relationship. The bill was originally introduced in February, 2015 by Representative Ros-Lehtinen and passed the House on July 7, 2015 by voice vote.

In offering his amendment, Rubio said “Given the President’s failure to put together a serious strategy to destroy ISIS, our allies and partners need our assistance as they deal with millions of refugees from the conflict. I hope this bill moves quickly through the House and to the President’s desk so Jordan knows America stands with them during this difficult time.” The House is expected to consider the legislation in the coming weeks. Because the House bill was amended in the Senate, it was sent back to the House for its agreement to the Senate substitute.

The **US-Jordan Defense Cooperation Act of 2015**, as amended, would:

-- Express the sense of Congress that expeditious consideration of certifications of letters of offer to sell defense articles, defense services, design and construction services, and major defense equipment to Jordan is fully consistent with US security and foreign policy interests and the objectives of peace and security;

-- Include Jordan for three years among the countries eligible for certain streamlined defense sales, licensing agreements, and technical assistance under the Arms Export Control Act (AECA); and

-- Authorize the State Department to enter into a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with Jordan to increase military cooperation, including joint military exercises, personnel exchanges, and support for international peacekeeping missions, and enhanced strategic dialogue.

**(2) Jordan – A Key US Partner** – On February 11, the House Foreign Affairs Committee’s (HFAC) Subcommittee on the Middle East and South Asia, chaired by Representative Ros-Lehtinen held a hearing on the US-Jordanian relationship. Testimonies were received from the following individuals:

- Gerald Feierstein, Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for Near Eastern Affairs. For the testimony, click [here](http://docs.house.gov/meetings/FA/FA13/20160211/104369/HHRG-114-FA13-Wstate-FeiersteinG-20160211.pdf): (<http://docs.house.gov/meetings/FA/FA13/20160211/104369/HHRG-114-FA13-Wstate-FeiersteinG-20160211.pdf>)

- Paige Alexander, US Agency for International Development (USAID) Assistant Administrator for the Middle East. For the testimony, click [here](http://docs.house.gov/meetings/FA/FA13/20160211/104369/HHRG-114-FA13-Wstate-AlexanderP-20160211.pdf): (<http://docs.house.gov/meetings/FA/FA13/20160211/104369/HHRG-114-FA13-Wstate-AlexanderP-20160211.pdf>)

- Fatema Sumar, Regional Deputy Vice President at the Millennium Challenge Corporation. For the testimony, click [here](http://docs.house.gov/meetings/FA/FA13/20160211/104369/HHRG-114-FA13-Wstate-SumarF-20160211.pdf): (<http://docs.house.gov/meetings/FA/FA13/20160211/104369/HHRG-114-FA13-Wstate-SumarF-20160211.pdf>)

Witnesses and HFAC committee members praised Jordan for its vital partnership with the US. Feierstein stressed that US-Jordanian military coordination and assistance has “...never been closer.” The US also remains “deeply appreciative” of Jordan’s crucial efforts to achieve a lasting Israeli-Palestinian peace. With the passage of the **US-Jordan Defense Cooperation Act**, the US will be able to offer Jordan additional sales of US defense equipment. Jordan received \$385 Foreign Military Financing (FMF) in FY 2015 making it the third recipient in the world and the US will continue this “robust” support this year.

Alexander focused on Jordan’s economic growth, noting that Jordan continues to struggle with low economic growth rates and insufficient job creation due largely to the refugee influx which has put an incredible strain on Jordan’s economic resources. She outlined USAID projects designed to encourage long-term economic growth for Jordan. Both Feierstein and Alexander discussed the need to help Jordan address the refugee issue, which was an urgent

topic of conversation during King Abdullah's recent visit. Sumar detailed projects the Millennium Challenge Corporation (MCC) is undertaking in Jordan, particularly Water projects for the country, which is one of the driest in the region. Those projects include As-Samra Wastewater Treatment Plant Expansion; The Wastewater Network Project; and water network restructuring.

### III. Syria

**(1) Urging Robust Funding for Humanitarian Relief for Syria (SRes 361)** – On February 3, Senator Bob Corker (R-Tennessee), Chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee (SFRC), and 10 cosponsors, introduced a non-binding resolution urging humanitarian relief for Syria. The resolution has been referred to the SFRC. Cosponsors of the resolution are: Senators Barbara Boxer (D-California), Benjamin Cardin (D-Maryland), Christopher Coons (D-Delaware), Tim Kaine (D-Virginia), Edward Markey (D-Massachusetts), Robert Menendez (D-New Jersey), Christopher Murphy (D-Connecticut), David Purdue (R-Georgia), Jeanne Shaheen (D-New Hampshire), and Tom Udall (D-New Mexico).

**(2) Administration Update on the Way Forward in Syria and Iraq** – On February 9, the SFRC held a classified briefing on Syria and Iraq with Brett McGurk, Special Presidential Envoy for the Global Coalition to Counter ISIL.

### IV. Iran

**(1) Iran Terror Finance Transparency Act (HR 3662)** – On February 2, the House, by a vote of 246-181, passed the **Iran Terror Finance Transparency Act**. All Republican members voted for the bill while all Democrats (except for four Democratic members) voted against it. The bill would restrict the President's ability to lift sanctions on Iranian and other financial institutions, as called for in the 2015 Iran Nuclear Agreement Act, by requiring various certifications to Congress. Specifically, the bill would prohibit the President from removing the foreign financial institutions from the Treasury Department's Office of Foreign Asset Control's list of blocked nationals and persons until the President submits to Congress a certification that the institutions have not knowingly facilitated a significant transaction for Iran's Revolutionary Guard Corps, a foreign terrorist organization or anyone sanctioned in connection with Iran's weapons of mass destruction and ballistic missile programs. All this means is that the Republican effort to undermine the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) likely will never become law, since most sanctions have been lifted following the implementation of the JCPOA on January 16, 2016. The next step in the legislative process is referral to the Senate where passage is unlikely.

**(2) Undermining the JCPOA (HR 4448)** -- On February 3, Representative Ron DeSantis (R-Florida) introduced a bill, **State Sanctions Against Iranian Terrorism**, that would amend the **Comprehensive Iran Sanctions, Accountability, and Divestment Act of 2010 (CISADA)**. The purpose of the bill is to secure the authority of state and local governments to adopt and enforce measures restricting investment in business enterprises in Iran. The bill has been referred to the House Financial Services Committee. For the DeSantis press release on the bill, click [here](http://desantis.house.gov/media-center/press-releases/desantis-introduces-bill-to-protect-state-sanctions-against-iran): (<http://desantis.house.gov/media-center/press-releases/desantis-introduces-bill-to-protect-state-sanctions-against-iran>) DeSantis also appeared before the Heritage Foundation on Wednesday, February 10 to discuss his legislation and other issues regarding the JCPOA.

**(3) More Sanctions Against Iran (S 2485)** -- On February 3 Senator John Thune (R-South Dakota) and three Republican cosponsors introduced a bill, **The North Korea and Iran Sanctions Act**, that would provide for the immediate reinstatement of sanctions against Iran if Iran attempts to acquire nuclear weapons technology from North Korea. The bill has been referred to the Senate Foreign Relations Committee (SFRC). For the text of Thune's press release, click [here](http://www.thune.senate.gov/public/index.cfm/2016/2/thune-leads-colleagues-in-introducing-bill-to-prevent-iran-from-acquiring-nuclear-weapons-technology-from-north-korea): (<http://www.thune.senate.gov/public/index.cfm/2016/2/thune-leads-colleagues-in-introducing-bill-to-prevent-iran-from-acquiring-nuclear-weapons-technology-from-north-korea>)

Passage of the bill is unlikely, as Congress last week passed the North Korea Sanctions Act, which does not include language on Iran.

**(4) Preventing Iran from Acquiring Nuclear Weapons (HRes 600)** – On February 3 Representative Seth Moulton (D-Massachusetts) and four cosponsors introduced a non-binding, sense of the House resolution, **Reaffirming the right of the United States to use all Available Options, Including the Use of Military Force to Prevent Iran from Acquiring a Nuclear Weapon**. The resolution has been referred to the House Foreign Affairs Committee (HFAC).

**(5) Visa Restrictions - Protecting Americans and Dual National Americans Traveling to Iran** – On February 4 Representative Jared Huffman (D-California) and 25 co-signors sent a letter to Secretary of State John Kerry and Homeland Security Secretary Jeh Johnson urging them to protect dual national Americans and Americans traveling to Iran from visa restrictions and ensure that they are not are not unjustly targeted. For a copy of the press release containing the text of the letter and the 25 co-signers, click [here](http://huffman.house.gov/media-center/press-releases/rep-huffman-25-members-of-congress-urge-secretaries-kerry-and-johnson-to): (<http://huffman.house.gov/media-center/press-releases/rep-huffman-25-members-of-congress-urge-secretaries-kerry-and-johnson-to>)

**(6) US Payment to Iran to Settle Dispute** -- On February 3, House Foreign Affairs Committee (HFAC) Chairman Ed Royce (R-California) sent a letter to Secretary of State Kerry, requesting detailed information regarding the Obama Administration's January 17, 2016 announcement that the US will pay Iran \$1.7 billion to settle a longstanding bilateral dispute. The funds are repayment under a settlement reached to a lawsuit that had been pending under the Iran-US Claims Tribunal, and includes \$400 million that the Shah of Iran paid for US military equipment, plus \$1.3 billion in interest accrued since that time. Royce's letter concludes with a long list of information from the Department of State, to be provided

no later than February 17, 2016, related to this settlement, to the release of the five American hostages; and to the JCPOA itself – including separate lists of all US officials who participated in the negotiations with Iran over each of these issues. For a copy of the Royce letter, click [here](https://foreignaffairs.house.gov/press-release/chairman-royce-seeks-answers-obama-administration-s-surprise-17-billion-payment-iran): (<https://foreignaffairs.house.gov/press-release/chairman-royce-seeks-answers-obama-administration-s-surprise-17-billion-payment-iran>)

**(7) Robert Levinson** – On February 11, the Senate passed **SRes 99**, “**A resolution calling on the Government of Iran to fulfill its promises of assistance in the case of Robert Levinson, the longest held United States civilian in our Nation's history**” by voice vote.

## V. Bahrain

***Reinstating the Arms Ban on Bahrain*** – In August 2015 Senator Ron Wyden (D-Oregon) introduced **S2009, the Bahrain Independent Commission of Inquiry (BICI) Accountability Act of 2015**. In September Representative Jim McGovern (D-Massachusetts) and co-Chair of the Tom Lantos Commission on Human Rights, introduced **HR 3445**, the House companion bill. Both bills would reinstate the prohibition on arms sales to Bahrain and are pending before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee (SFRC) and the House Foreign Affairs Committee (HFAC).

The Obama Administration put a hold on arms sales to Bahrain’s military after the Bahrain government cracked down on protestors in 2011 during the Arab Spring uprisings. In June 2015 the Administration lifted the hold despite ongoing human rights. In lifting the hold, the Administration said the decision was taken in recognition of the steps Bahrain’s government has taken to improve its rights record and acknowledge its importance as an ally in the fight against Islamic State extremists. Human rights activists, including the group Americans for Democracy and Human Rights in Bahrain (ADHRB) objected to the Administration’s action and have been lobbying for passage of the legislation.

By reinstating the ban, the legislation seeks to hold the Government of Bahrain accountable to its international commitment to implement all 26 of the Bahrain Independent Commission of Inquiry (BICI) recommendations, which King Hamad publicly accepted following the release of the Commission’s report. McGovern, Wyden and the ADHRB believe the Government of Bahrain has only implemented five of the BICI recommendations, while the most recent 2014 Department of State Human Rights Country Report on Bahrain found that the government had failed to address many of the subjects covered by the BICI, including issues relating to torture and the criminalization of speech.

ADHRB has renewed its lobbying effort on Capitol Hill trying to convince members of Congress to support the legislation. Despite their efforts the House bill has only ten cosponsors and the Senate bill has only three. While a number of members of Congress may have concerns over Bahrain’s human rights abuses, they also recognize that Bahrain is a

valuable ally in the fight against ISIL and are reluctant to risk damaging relation with Bahrain a “major non-NATO ally”. More important the Administration opposes the legislation; thus prospects for passage into law are highly unlikely.

## VI. Israel

***Boycott, Divest, Sanction*** – On February 1, Senator Tom Cotton (R-Arkansas) introduced **S 2474 the Fair Treatment of Israel in Product Labeling Act of 2016** that would allow the mislabeling of the point of origin of goods made in Israeli settlements. The bill is pending before the Senate Finance Committee.

This bill requires that, for goods produced or originating in the areas known as the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, proper markings for country of origin include: (1) Israel, (2) Product of Israel, (3) Made in Israel, (4) West Bank, (5) Gaza, (6) Gaza Strip, (7) West Bank/Gaza, or (8) West Bank/Gaza Strip. The bill goes on to state that neither the Department of the Treasury, the Department of State, the Department of Homeland Security, nor any competent official of another federal department or agency shall prohibit the use of any such markings for purposes of country of origin marking requirements.

The bill is at odds with US policy. Since 1995 US policy has mandated that products made in the West Bank and Gaza cannot be mislabeled to show their point of origin as Israel.

As of February 9 the bill had only 5 cosponsors (all Republicans): Senators Ted Cruz (R-Texas), Cory Gardner (R-Colorado), James Inhofe (R-Oklahoma), Mark Kirk (R-Illinois), Marco Rubio (R-Florida) and Pat Toomey (R-Pennsylvania), indicating that for now, there may not be much Senate support for the bill. Of course, this could change if a bipartisan bill were to be introduced with the backing of AIPAC and other Jewish organizations opposed to the BDS movement.

***More Boycott, Divest, Sanction*** – On February 9 Representative Ted Poe (R-Texas) introduced **HR 4503, to Allow for Additional Markings, Including the Word ‘Israel’ to be used for Country of Origin Marking Requirement for Goods Made in the Geographical Areas Known as the West Bank and Gaza Strip**”. The bill has been referred to the House Ways and Means Committee.

Poe’s bill is the House version of **S 2475** introduced by Senator Cotton. The Zionist Organization of America (ZOA) has endorsed the Cotton bill and is likely to also endorse the Poe bill.