



Congressional Update

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I. Israel

US-Israel Economic Relationship: On March 1, Senators David Perdue (R-Georgia), Jon Tester (D-Montana) and Chris Coons (D-Delaware) introduced **SRes 383, a resolution recognizing the importance of the United States-Israel economic relationship and encouraging new areas of cooperation.** The non-binding resolution was referred to the Senate Foreign Relations Committee (SFRC) and approved by the Committee on Thursday, March 10. The resolution is now pending on the Senate calendar.

SRes383 is the Senate version of **HRes551** which was introduced on December 3, 2015 with 92 co-sponsors. On February 23, 2016 **HRes551** was approved by the House Foreign Affairs Committee (HFAC). A vote by the full House has not yet been scheduled.

Jewish Refugees from Arab Countries: On March 2 Representatives Jerrold Nadler (D-New York), Ileana Ros-Lehtinen (R-Florida), Eliot Engel (D-New York), Ted Poe (R-Texas), Janice Schakowsky (D-Illinois), Debbie Wasserman Schultz (D-Florida), Alan Grayson (D-Florida), Nydia Velazquez (D-New York), Alan Lowenthal (D-California), Ted Lieu (D-California), Grace Meng (D-New York), Beto O'Rourke (D-Texas), Steve Chabot (R-Ohio), Brendan Boyle D-(Pennsylvania), and Peter King (R-New York), and Daniel Donovan (R-New York) introduced **HR 4664, a bill to direct the President to submit to Congress a report on actions the Department of State and other relevant Federal departments and agencies have taken regarding steps to ensure that a just, comprehensive Arab-Israeli peace accord also finds resolution of the issue of Jewish refugees from Arab countries and Iran.** The bill has been referred to the HFAC.

The bill is a new version of **HRes185**, a non-binding Sense of the House resolution, which does not have the force of law, passed by the House in 2008. The new binding language now includes Jews from Iran, with some binding language included. The text of **HR 4664** is [here](#).

While other efforts in Congress have sought to make resolution of claims of Jews from Arab countries a condition for Israeli-Palestinian peace, this bill ties resolution of these claims to comprehensive Israeli-Arab peace efforts. The new legislation also appears to hand Iran veto power over any comprehensive Israeli-Arab peace. Representative Nadler's press release on the bill is available [here](#).

US Funding for Ethiopian Citizens of Israel: On March 1, Representatives Alcee Hastings (D-Florida) and Patrick Murphy (D-Florida) circulated a Dear [Colleague](#) letter seeking cosigners on a letter to the Appropriations Subcommittee on State, Foreign Operations Chairman Kay Granger (R-Texas) and Ranking member Nita Lowey (D-New York). The letter asks that report language be included in the FY 2017 State, Foreign Operations Appropriations



bill recommending that the State Department provide \$12 million in ESF funding “for the Ethiopian National Project (ENP) and its mission of advancing the integration of Ethiopian-Israelis into Israeli society. The US does not provide ESF to Israel (which ranks 33rd on the list of wealthiest countries), so these funds would come out of the small amount of un-earmarked ESF funding available in the annual State, Foreign Operations Appropriations bill. The deadline for congressional signatures is March 18.

II. Syria

War Crimes Tribunal Against Syria: On March 1, Representatives Chris Smith (R-New Jersey), Ed Royce (R-California), Joe Pitts (R-Pennsylvania) and Eliot Engel (D-New York) introduced **HConRes 121, a resolution expressing the sense of the Congress condemning the gross violations of international law amounting to war crimes and crimes against humanity by the Government of Syria, its allies, and other parties to the conflict in Syria, and asking the President to direct his Ambassador at the United Nations to promote the establishment of a war crimes tribunal where these crimes could be addressed.** The resolution was referred to the HFAC and approved by the Committee on March 2. On Monday, March 14 the House passed the resolution by a vote of 393-3.

Syrian Crimes Against Humanity: On Monday, March 14 the full House passed **HConRes75, expressing the sense of Congress that the atrocities perpetrated by ISIL against religious and ethnic minorities in Iraq and Syria in lude war crimes, crimes against humanity, and genocide** by a vote of . The resolution was introduced on September 2, 2015 by Representative Jeff Fortenberry (R-Nebraska) and five co-sponsors. The resolution was referred to the HFAC which approved the measure on March 2. On March 14, the House passed the resolution by a vote of 393-0.

III. Authorization for the Use of Force against Hamas and Hizballah

Hamas/Hizballah: On March 3 Representatives Scott Perry (R-Pennsylvania) and Matt Salmon (R-Arizona) introduced **HJRes84, To authorize the use of United States Armed Forces against organizations that support Islamist extremism, and for other purposes.** The resolution explicitly equates Hamas and Hizballah with ISIS and other groups. The list of organizations described are the Islamic State, Al-Qaeda, Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula, Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb, Al Shabab, Boko Haram, Al-Nusrah Front, the Haqqani-Network, the Taliban, Houthi’s, Khorasan Group, Hamas, Hizballah, and any substantial supporters, associated forces, or closely related successor entities to any of these organizations. The resolution has been referred to the HFAC.

IV. Lebanon

On Thursday, March 10, the SFRC held a hearing on the nomination of **Ms. Elizabeth Holzhall Richard** to be US Ambassador to the Republic of Lebanon. Richard’s testimony is



available [here](#). After the Committee approves Richard's nomination, the full Senate will vote on confirmation.

Richard's told the panel that if confirmed she would work to help Lebanon address the enormous humanitarian challenges. In addition, she pledged to work with moderate voices in Lebanon to support Lebanon's quest for full sovereignty and independence. She asserted that Hizballah's ongoing intervention in Syria to prop up the Asad regime – undertaken without the consent of the Lebanese people – contradicts the 2012 Baabda Declaration, which clearly states Lebanon's policy of dissociation from foreign entanglements. Moreover, she added that Hizballah's activities in Syria create serious security challenges for Lebanon. If confirmed, she pledged to do everything she can to support Lebanon to exercise full sovereignty throughout the country and to help build up the Lebanese military. She also noted the Administration's strong support for the Hizballah International Financing Prevention Act passed by Congress in December 2015. The Administration has made it clear that the US goal is to dismantle Hizballah's international financial network while supporting Lebanese institutions and the Lebanese people.

V. Libya

On March 3, the SFRC held a hearing to examine the path forward in Libya, after receiving testimony from Frederic [Wehrey](#), Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, Middle East Program, and Claudia [Gazzini](#), International Crisis Group.

Wehrey's testimony focused heavily on political unity and local military coordination counterterrorism assistance. He emphasized that any assistance must reinforce the building of inclusive political and security institutions with the key priority being the establishment of integrated structures and units in the security sector. Intensive engagement at the political level will be necessary to overcome the standoff over the army leadership and promote cooperation between representatives of rival camps in the Presidency Council, its government, and the military command. On the ground, the West must tie assistance for the fight against the Islamic State to a process of integration of armed groups. He explained that to be eligible to receive counterterrorism support, for example, armed groups should accept the unity government and subordinate themselves to its national command structure. Efforts also must be made to avoid destabilizing the country and Western military assistance must also include the establishment of coordinating mechanisms between Libyan military forces on the ground. These could include command centers between militias on a regional basis, with the aim of gradually creating centralized command structures and, eventually, dissolving local militias into consolidated army units. He also advocated that Western advisers should encourage militias from Misrata, Ajdabiya, and southern Libya, for example, to cooperate with army officers from Sirte to lead the offensive against the Islamic State in the city.

Gazzini warned that any intervention should be discreet, measured and linked to a political strategy aimed at bringing Libyan factions together into a single government. That must remain the overarching goal. A large-scale air and ground campaign would likely create more



problems than it would resolve, particularly if it is perceived to take the side of one mainstream camp against the other. She stressed that is especially important that any unity government, if formed, or the Presidency Council that exists today but lacks broad support, not be pushed to issue a formal invitation for any type of military intervention. Due to the fragility of the ongoing political process, such action would enable spoilers to accuse their pro-peace rivals that they are enabling a foreign occupation of Libya, which would almost certainly provoke a nationalist backlash.

VI. Hearings

Fiscal Year 2017 State, US Agency for Development Budget: On March 1, the SFRC's Subcommittee on State Department and USAID Management, International Operations, and Bilateral International Development, concluded a hearing to examine the President's proposed budget request for fiscal year 2017 for the Department of State and the United States Agency for International Development. Testimony was received from Douglas Pitkin, Director, Bureau of Budget and Planning, and Hari Sastry, Director, Office of Foreign Assistance Resources, both of the Department of State; and Roman Napoli, Acting Director, Office of Budget and Resource Management, United States Agency for International Development. Witnesses' testimonies are available [here](#).

State Department Authorization: An Opportunity to Strengthen and Streamline U.S. Diplomacy: On March 8, the SFRC held a hearing to examine ways for improving the oversight, accountability and effectiveness of US diplomacy abroad. Testimony was heard from Heather Higginbottom, Deputy Secretary Of State for Management and Resources. Secretary Higginbottom's testimony is [here](#).

SFRC Chairman Bob Corker (R-Tennessee) announced that one of his priorities has been to revive the State Department Authorization bill, which traditionally has contained policy language on issues ranging from the Palestinians to greater financial burden sharing among countries that contribute to peacekeeping missions. Corker hopes to pass a State Department Authorization bill this year, but given the demands of the legislative schedule and the early adjournment due to an election year, prospects for enactment into law appear slim.