



Congressional Update April 22, 2016

I. Israeli/Palestinian

Israeli Security/Two State Solution. On April 18, Representatives John Yarmuth (D-Kentucky), David Price (D-North Carolina), Lloyd Doggett (D-Texas), Barbara Lee (D-California), Peter Welch (D-Vermont), Steve Cohen (D-Tennessee) and Jan Schakowsky (D-Illinois), introduced **HRes686, a resolution expressing support for efforts to enhance Israeli security and increase the conditions for progress toward a negotiated two-state solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.** The resolution has been referred to the HFAC.

The sponsors of the resolution referenced a March 23 letter to President Obama sent by Representatives Nita Lowey (D-New York) and Kay Granger (R-Texas), the ranking Democrat and Chairman of the House Appropriations State, Foreign Operations Subcommittee. In that letter, Lowey and Granger laid out six non-controversial tenets for US policy regarding Israeli-Palestinian peace efforts. Lowey quickly fired off a Dear Colleague **letter** stating that she **does not intend to cosponsor the resolution** and listed the reasons why. She also discouraged her colleagues from cosponsoring the resolution.

UN Security Council Resolutions. On April 19, Senators Marco Rubio (R-Florida) and Joe Manchin (D-West Virginia), introduced **SConRes35, a concurrent resolution expressing the sense of Congress that the United States should continue to exercise its veto in the United Nations Security Council on resolution regarding the Israeli-Palestinian peace process.** The resolution has been referred to the Senate Foreign Relations Committee (SFRC). The bill is the Senate companion bill to HConRes128 introduced on April 15 by Representatives Doug Lamborn (R-Colorado) and Gwendolyn Graham (D-Florida). The basis for these resolutions is inaccurate. Since 1967, the US has voted in favor of or abstained on numerous UN Security Council resolutions concerning Israeli-controlled territories, including under Presidents Reagan, Bush 41 and Bush 43. Lara Friedman of Americans for Peace Now points this out in her recent **op-ed** in the *New York Times*.

Israel in the National Defense Authorization Act. During a markup of HR4909, the National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) for FY 2017, House Armed Services' Subcommittee on Strategic Forces Chairman Mike Rogers (R-Alabama) announced his funding priorities in the bill, including a recommendation to fully fund Israel's request for \$600.7 million for the co-development co-production of Iron Dome, David's Sling and Arrow 3. The funding in the NDAA is separate from the \$3.1 billion Israel receives in the annual Foreign Operations Appropriations bill.

House and Senate Members Request Increased Military Assistance to Israel. On April 20, Representatives David Jolly (R-Florida) and Gwendolyn Graham (D-Florida) sent a bipartisan **letter** signed by 51 members of Congress, to President Obama urging him to increase military assistance to Israel from the current level of \$3.1 billion to \$5 billion a year (\$50 billion over ten years). Reportedly, Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu has requested this amount, which is more than the total amount of funding for the Foreign Military Finance (FMF) program in FY 2016! The US and Israel are currently negotiating a new MOU which would increase Israel's FMF assistance, to \$4 billion, or \$40 billion over 10 years.

Not to be outdone by the House, on April 25, Senators Chris Coons (D-Delaware) and Lindsey Graham (R-South), along with 81 senators sent a **letter** to President Obama urging him to quickly



conclude negotiations with Israel for a new memorandum of understanding (MOU) on security assistance to Israel to replace the current MOU, which expires in 2018. The current MOU provides Israel \$30 billion over ten years. Fifty-one Republicans and 32 Democrats signed the letter.

Israel Imperiled: Threats to the Jewish State. On April 19, the House Foreign Affairs Subcommittees on Middle East and North Africa and on Terrorism, Nonproliferation, and Trade held a joint hearing on the threats Israel faces. Witnesses were: Michael **Rubin** of American Enterprise Institute (AEI); Johnathan **Schanzer** of Foundation for Defense of Democracies (FDD); David **Makovsky**, WINEP; and Tamara Cofman **Wittes**, Brookings. In her opening **statement**, Middle East Subcommittee Chair Ileana Ros-Lehtinen called for increased scrutiny over efforts to delegitimize the Jewish State. The hearing was predictable. All the witnesses agreed Israel faces multiple threats, including from Iran and Syria as well as non-state actors in Lebanon and along the Syrian border. Other threats emanate from Hamas in Gaza, Hizbollah, and the power-sharing arrangement with the PA.

II. Saudi Arabia

Limit US Munitions to Saudi Arabia. On April 20, Representatives Ted Lieu (D-California) and Ted Yoho (R-Florida), along with 112 cosponsors, introduced **HJRes90, a joint resolution to provide limitations on the transfer of certain United States munitions from the United States to Saudi Arabia.** The resolution has been referred to the House Foreign Affairs Committee (HFAC).

HJRes90 is the companion bill to the Senate resolution, SJRes32, introduced by Senators Chris Murphy (D-Connecticut) and Rand Paul (R-Kentucky) on April 13. In an appearance before the Brookings Institution on April 21, Murphy acknowledged the strategic importance of the US-Saudi relationship but asserted it needs to be “revised.” He criticized the Kingdom for its human rights abuses and its support for Wahhabism, and Saudi military objectives that run counter to US interests. He believes his legislation has “a lot of interest” but conceded passage could be an uphill battle. Other observers, however, have noted that the bill is unlikely to be enacted into law. While there is concern in Congress about the Kingdom’s role in Yemen, human rights and extremism, most members understand the strategic importance of the bilateral relationship and believe Murphy’s legislation will only create further tensions.

Justice against Sponsors of Terrorist Act (JASTA). As noted in the April 18 Congressional Update, two bills, S2040 and HR3815 would allow the victims of the 9/11 terrorist attacks to sue Saudi Arabia. S2040 is pending on the Senate floor. However, last week Senator Lindsey Graham (R-South Carolina) placed a hold on the legislation, thereby preventing Senate floor consideration – for now. Senate Minority Leader Harry Reid (D-Nevada) supports passage, putting him at odds with President Obama. On the House side, Speaker Paul Ryan (R-Wisconsin) has expressed doubts about the bill, lessening the chances for House passage.

It is unclear when and if the legislation will come to the Senate floor. Reportedly both Senator Jeff Sessions (R-Alabama) and Graham are pushing for a compromise on the bill, but whatever compromise is being considered has not been made public. **Note:** A separate report is forthcoming on this issue.

Human Rights in Saudi Arabia. On April 19, Senators Marco Rubio (R-Florida), Ron Johnson (R-Wisconsin), Patrick Leahy (D-Vermont) and James Risch (R-Idaho), sent a letter to President Obama expressing their concern regarding the Kingdom’s continued treatment of human rights advocates,



particularly the documented prosecutions of non-violent activists who are engaging in freedom of expression. The letter warns that unless the President makes these issues a priority during his trip to the Kingdom, human rights abuses will continue to occur with "...impunity and the full potential of the US-Saudi relationship will continued to be impeded." Senator Rubio's press release is [here](#).

III. Iran

Banning Iran's Access to US Dollars or Financial Markets. On April 19, Representative Ed Royce (R-California), introduced **HR4992, to codify regulations relating to transfers of funds involving Iran.** Representatives Ileana Ros-Lehtinen (R-Florida), and Ryan Costello (R-Pennsylvania) subsequently cosponsored the bill. The bill has been referred to the House Financial Services Committee. Royce's [press](#) release explains the purpose of the bill as being to prevent the Obama Administration from allowing Iran access to transactions involving the US dollar as long as the Iranian regime continues to engage in illicit activities, including its ballistic missile program and support for terrorism.

Banning Iran's Access to US Dollars or Financial Markets. On April 19, Representatives Peter Roskam (R-Illinois), Mike Pompeo (R-Kansas) and Lee Zeldin (R-New York), introduced **HR4995, Preventing Iran's Access to United States Dollars Act of 2016.** The bill has been referred to the HFAC and Financial Services Committee. Roskam's press release with the ridiculous title "No Dollars for Ayatollahs" is [here](#). The Roskam bill is the companion bill to S2752 introduced on April 6 by Senators Marco Rubio (R-Florida) and Mark Kirk (R-Illinois) that now has a total of five Republican cosponsors. (See April 12 Congressional Update).

Interestingly, all the bills introduced on this subject have only Republican cosponsors. They lack Democratic cosponsors indicating Democrats may be reluctant to support these measures. An April 20 [article](#) in *Al Monitor* reached a similar conclusion.

IV. Kuwait

US Ambassador-designate to Kuwait. On April 18, the Senate received the nomination of Lawrence Robert Silverman to be US Ambassador to the State of Kuwait. The nomination will be considered by the SFRC but no hearing has yet been scheduled.