



Congressional Update

Roxanne Perugino

With contribution from John Gregory, Congressional Intern

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Note: Congress will adjourn on July 18 for an extended summer recess and will not return to session until September 6. Members will attend the Republican and Democratic National Conventions (July 18-21 and July 25-28, respectively).

I. Palestinians

Terrorism in the West Bank. On July 6, members of the House Foreign Affairs Committee convened to address growing concerns over US financial aid to the Palestinian Authority (PA), or as the committee prefers, “financially rewarding terrorism in the West Bank.” HFAC Chairman Ed Royce (R-California) originally said the hearing would focus on the “Challenges of Israeli-Palestinian Peacemaking” but changed the title when notice was sent out to HFAC members. Royce changed the title of the hearing because of the recent Palestinian violence and his belief that Israel does not have a willing partner for peace.

Testimony was heard from three witnesses: [Dr. David Pollock](#), Kaufman Fellow at the Washington Institute for Near East Policy (WINEP); [Yigal Carmon](#), president and founder of the Middle East Media Research Institute (MEMRI); and former congressman [Robert Wexler](#), who now serves as president of the S. Daniel Abraham Center for Middle East Peace. All three have well-known credentials as supporters of Israel.

Peace between the Israelis and Palestinians seems absolutely as distant as ever. Unfortunately, Wednesday’s hearing was short on new policy ideas toward ending this conflict and abundant in grandstanding and promotion of Israeli policies. The majority of committee members – led unsurprisingly by the Republicans - used the hearing as yet another political opportunity to declare their unwavering commitment to Israel while issuing sweeping denunciations of the Palestinian Authority (PA). Representative Scott Perry (R-Pennsylvania) tried to steer the hearing in the direction of the original title of peacemaking, and Pollock and Wexler focused on



that topic. Carmon, however, relished the opportunity to address Palestinian terrorism, acknowledging the Palestinian Authority's (PA) "conspicuous efforts" to finance the murder of Israeli Jews, as well as other Palestinian practices that serve to institutionalize and spread violence and hatred.

Pollock and Wexler urged the committee to apply the breaks on an all-or-nothing approach regarding foreign aid to the PA. To deny the PA funding would be commensurate to ensuring the self-governing body's demise, they argued. Of course, many members expressed little concern over such a fate, but as witness testimony would remind us, there is no shortage of myopia among this committee when it comes to the PA. The PA receives approximately one-third of its overall budget from foreign aid. In Pollock's opinion, if Congress elects to eliminate funding to the Palestinians, the PA will merely look to other foreign governments to replace US aid, governments with intentions less noble than our own, in his words. This only promises to sow greater suspicion among regional actors and further undermine the peace process. Moreover, the Israeli leadership itself is against such a policy that would, in its view, expose the PA to a greater risk of collapse. Should the relatively moderate PA fails, they argue, the door becomes wide open for a more extreme governing body – for instance, Hamas – to fill the void. This could be catastrophic for Israeli security.

Instead, witnesses called only for a reduction in funding as a means to apply political pressure on President Mahmoud Abbas and the PA. Yet the committee remained unconvinced. In fact, the proceedings ultimately devolved into a shouting match between Representative Mark Meadows (R–North Carolina) and Robert Wexler. Wexler served on the Foreign Affairs Committee Middle East Subcommittee while a member of Congress and was a passionate witness for continuing assistance to the PA. Wexler's chief concern was that Congress lacked a comprehensive plan beyond the outright denial of foreign funding. If Congress were to go forward with this kind of legislation, he pleaded with the committee to consider its indirect effects on extremist elements like Hamas, and to ensure there is a "Step Two" that would *actually* facilitate the peace process. After all, to stamp out the elements that truly trouble Palestinian society and perpetuate this cycle of violence requires a multifaceted strategy, one that entails political and diplomatic components, as well as economic assistance.



By the end of the morning, there was little cause for optimism, both in terms of effective US policy on the matter and the chances for an eventual peace agreement. Members offered little more than their expressions of horror over the violence committed by Palestinians, while the witnesses attempted to outline ways in which the US can “nudge” the two sides toward peace. Anything more in terms of US efforts, Dr. Pollock asserted, is simply “a fool’s errand.”

II. House Judiciary to Hold Hearing on JASTA Legislation

On Thursday, July 14, the House Judiciary Subcommittee on the Constitution and Civil Justice will hold a hearing on **S2040 the Justice against Sponsors of Terrorist Acts (JASTA)** with Anne Patterson, Assistant Secretary of State for Near Eastern Affairs and Brian Egan, Legal Advisor, Department of State. A second panel will be comprise of private sector and academic witnesses.

Judiciary Chairman Bob Goodlatte (R-Virginia) is under pressure from the sponsors of the JASTA legislation to mark up the bill but no markup session has been announced. Congress will adjourn at the end of this week for the Republican National Convention (July 18-21), and then for Democratic Convention (July 22-28) and for the traditional August recess. So, there is little time to schedule a markup of the legislation.

In a related development, on July 6, Representatives Walter Jones (R-North Carolina), Stephen Lynch (D-Massachusetts) and Thomas Massie (R-Kentucky) held a press conference to call for the declassification of the 28 pages of the 9/11 Commission Report. All three are original cosponsors of **HRes779**, a nonbinding resolution introduced last month calling for unilateral declassification by Congress of the 28 pages under the principle of constitutional separation of powers, and of **HRes14**, a nonbinding resolution introduced last year urging President Obama to declassify the 28 pages. The conference also featured remarks by Terry Strada, head of the 9/11 Families United for Justice Against Terrorism organization, and her 19-year-old daughter Caitlyn.

Representative Jones plans to aggressively push for declassification after Congress returns to session in September. Next week he will send a letter to House Intelligence Committee Chairman Devin Nunes (R-California) and Ranking Member Adam Schiff (D-Washington), both



of whom have stated publicly that they see no reason to oppose declassification, asking them to hold a hearing on **HRes779** during the first week following the summer recess (September 6-9).

Strada's remarks focused solely on Saudi Arabia. She alleged that the Kingdom now opposes declassification after having claimed to support it. The 9/11 families have been "disrespected" by the Administration as the promised June 12 deadline for a decision on declassification has been ignored. She also accused White House Press Secretary Josh Earnest and CIA Director John Brennan of using a "smear campaign" against her group. Both have repeated the Saudi talking points in discouraging declassification. The 9/11 Families United for Justice Against Terrorism have the following goals:

- Members of Congress should support H Res779 and the Justice Against Sponsors of Terrorism Act (JASTA)
- Presidential candidates should publicly endorse declassification at the national Party conventions this month. Clinton, who has already supported declassification, should reaffirm this position.

Strada and her family were in Washington meeting with members of Congress regarding these goals. Following their Hill meetings Representatives John Katko (R-New York) Jim McGovern (D-Massachusetts), Elizabeth Etsy (D-Connecticut), and Louise Slaughter (D-New York) became cosponsors to **HR3815, Justice Against Sponsors of Terrorist Acts**, bringing the total cosponsors to the bill to 47.

III. Iran

(1) House Rejects Sale of Boeing Aircraft to Iran. On Thursday, July 7 the House approved two Iran-related amendments to the Financial Services and General Government Services Act, which would block the sale of Boeing and Airbus aircraft to Iran by prohibiting Treasury's Office of Foreign Assets Control (OFAC) from using funds to authorize a license necessary to allow aircraft to be sold to Iran. The second amendment ensures Iran will not receive loans from US financial institutions to purchase aircraft that can be used for military purposes, by prohibiting OFAC from using the funds to authorize the financing of such transactions. The House passed the bill by a vote of 239-185.



Earlier on Thursday, the House Financial Services Committee held a hearing on the proposed sale of Boeing aircraft to Iran. Boeing announced last month its intention to sell 80 commercial aircraft to Iran and lease another 29 aircraft for a total cost of \$25 billion.

Bipartisan concern exists that Iran would use the aircraft for illicit activities, perhaps even providing weapons to Syria to support the Assad regime. In June Representative Brad Sherman (D-California) sent a letter to the Obama Administration asserting that Iran would use the aircraft for “nefarious” purposes.

(2) More Iran Legislation and Letters. The first anniversary of the JCPOA is approaching and the Iran hardliners in Congress have been busy introducing yet more legislation that seek to limit the President’s authority to implement the JCPOA or to renegotiate the JCPOA. From a legal standpoint there is very little authority to do so and Congress knows that, but that will not stop certain elements from doing all they can to “punish” Iran.

(3) No Dollars for Ayatollahs Act. Seriously, this is the title of the bill. On June 21 Representative Peter Roskam (R-Illinois) and Charles Boustany (R-Louisiana), introduced this bill – **HR550**. The bill would amend the Internal Revenue Code of 1986 to impose an excise tax on US dollar clearing done for the benefit of Iran or Iranian persons. Roskam and Boustany issued a press [release](#) on the bill.

(4) More Iran Sanctions. Introduced on July 6, by House Majority Leader Kevin McCarthy (R-California) and no cosponsors, **HR5631, to hold Iran accountable for its state sponsorship of terrorism and other threatening activities and for its human rights abuses.** The purpose of the bill is to expand existing sanctions and impose new sanctions linked to the IRGC, Iran’s ballistic missile program, Iran’s support for terrorism and human rights abuses. The bill has been referred to the HFAC, Financial Services, Judiciary, Oversight and Government Reform, Ways and Means and Intelligence.

(5) Prohibit Export Import Aid to Iran. Introduced on July 7 by Senator Marco Rubio (R-Florida) and 3 Republican cosponsors, **S3138 would prevent Iran from directly or indirectly receiving assistance from the Export-Import Bank of the US.** S3138 is the Senate version of



HR5608, introduced June 28 by Representative Peter Roskam. Rubio press release on details of the bill is [here](#).

(6) JCPOA Oversight. Introduced on July 7 by Representative Raul Ruiz (D-California), **HR5677 would establish the United States-Israel joint commission to address Iranian compliance with the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action.** The bill has been referred to the HFAC.

(7) Iranian Illicit Maritime Activity. Introduced on July 7 by Representative Ruiz, **HR5668 would authorize assistance and training to increase maritime security and domain awareness of foreign countries bordering the Persian Gulf, the Arabian Sea, or the Mediterranean Sea in order to deter and counter illicit smuggling and related maritime activity by Iran, including illicit Iranian weapons shipments.** The bill has been referred to the HFAC.

(8) Release American Detainees. Introduced on July 6 by HFAC Chairman Ed Royce (R-California) and 8 cosponsors, **HRes808 calls on the Government of the Islamic Republic of Iran to release Iranian Americans Siamak Namazi and his father, Baquer Namazi.** The resolution has been referred to the HFAC. (Note: HFAC is scheduled to consider the resolution on Thursday, July 14).

(9) Ensuring JCPOA Transparency. This week Representative Ryan Costello (R-Pennsylvania) released a June 30 [letter](#) he and eight other Republican members sent to the Comptroller General of the General Accountability Office (GAO) calling on the GAO to review the executive branch process for identifying entities that are potentially sanctionable under the provisions of the Iran, North Korea, and Syria Nonproliferation Act and Executive Orders 12938 and 13382 for engaging in activities with Iranian sectors connected to space launch vehicles and missiles capable of delivering nuclear weapons. The letter notes that the GAO should limit the scope of its review “to activities that occurred after the implementation of the JCPOA.”

IV. Hearings Week of July 11-15

Tuesday, July 12:



House Appropriations is scheduled to mark up the FY 2017, State Foreign Operations bill. Time and room number are yet to be announced.

House Foreign Affairs Committee will hold a hearing on “Human Rights Under Siege Worldwide” with Mark Lagon, President, Freedom House; Thomas Farr, Ph.D, President, Religious Freedom Institute; Amanda Schnetzer, Director, Human Freedom Initiative, The George W. Bush Institute; and Mark Bromley, Chair, The Council for Global Equality. Scheduled for 10:00 AM in 2172 Rayburn House Office Building.

Senate Foreign Relations Committee will hold a hearing on “Review of the 2016 Trafficking in Persons Report” with Susan Coppedge, Ambassador-at-Large, Office to Monitor and Combat Trafficking in Persons, State Department. At 10:15 AM in 419 Dirksen Senate Office Building

House Foreign Affairs Subcommittee on Africa, Global Health, Global Human Rights, and International Organizations to hold a hearing on “Accountability over Politics” Scrutinizing the Trafficking in Persons Report” with the Honorable Susan Coppedge, Ambassador-at-Large to Monitor and Combat Trafficking in Persons, Department of State. At 2:00 PM in 2172 Rayburn House Office Building

Wednesday, July 13:

House Foreign Affairs Committee to hold a hearing on “Countering the Virtual Caliphate: The State Department’s Performance” with Richard Stengel, Under Secretary of State for Public Diplomacy and Public Affairs. Scheduled for 10:00 AM in 2172 Rayburn House Office Building

Thursday, July 14

Senate Foreign Relations Committee will hold a hearing titled “The Iran Nuclear Agreement: One Year Later” with Mar Dubowitz, Executive Director, Foundation for Defense of Democracies; Richard Nephew, Program Director, Economic Statecraft, Sanctions and Energy Markets, Center on Global Energy Policy; Columbia University. At 10:00 AM in 419 Dirksen Senate Office Building.

The House Homeland Security Committee will hold a hearing titled "Worldwide Threats to the Homeland" with Secretary of Homeland Security Jeh Johnson, FBI Director James Comey and



National Counterterrorism Center Director Nicholas Rasmussen at 10:00am in the Cannon House Office Building, Room 311.

House Foreign Affairs Committee to hold business meeting to mark up several bills and resolutions including **HRes729, expressing support for the expeditious consideration and finalization of anew, robust, and long-term Memorandum of Understanding on military assistance to Israel between the United States Government and the Government of Israel;**

HRes750, urging the European Union to designate Hizballah in its entirety as a terrorist organization and increase pressure on it and its members; and

HRes808, calling on the Government of Islamic Republic of Iran to release Iranian-Americans Siamak Namazi and his father, Baquer Namzi. At 10:15 AM in 2172 Rayburn House Office Building.

House Foreign Affairs Committee Subcommittee on the Middle East and North Africa will hold a hearing on “US Humanitarian Assistance to Syria: Minimizing Risks and Improving Oversight” with Thomas Melito, Director, International Affairs And Trade, Government Accountability Office, and Ann Calvaresi Barr, Inspector General, USAID. At 2:00 PM in 2172 Rayburn House Office Building.

The Tom Lantos Human Rights Commission will hold a hearing titled "Blasphemy Laws and Censorship by States and Non-State Actors: Examining Global Threats to Freedom of Expression" with David Saperstein, Ambassador-at-Large for Religious Freedom; Thomas Reese, Chairman of the US Commission on Religious Freedom; Vanessa Tucker, Vice President for Analysis at Freedom House; Nina Shea, Director of the Hudson Institute Center for Religious Freedom; Karin Karlekar, Director of Free Expressions Programs at PEN America; Courtney Radsch, Advocacy Director at the Committee to Protect Journalists; and Wael Aleji, Spokesman for the Syrian Network for Human Rights, at 2:00pm at the US Capitol.