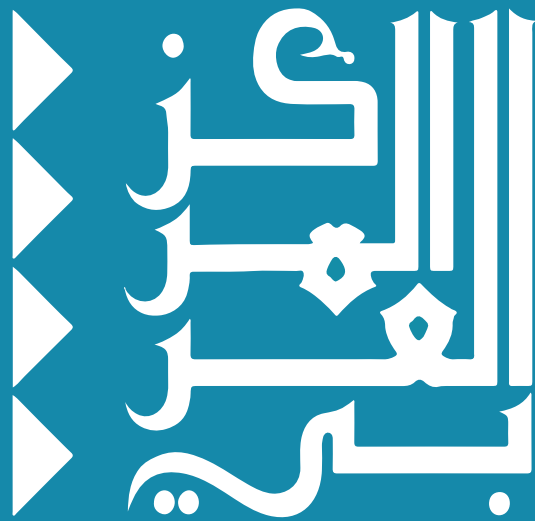


# Congressional Update: Week Ending April 7, 2017

ACW Research & Analysis Unit  
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Arab Center Washington DC  
المركز العربي واشنطن دي سي

## I. Congressional Schedule

The House has adjourned for the two-week Easter recess and will reconvene on Tuesday, April 25. The Senate is expected to adjourn today, Friday, and reconvene on Monday, April 24.

## II. President Sisi Goes to Capitol Hill

Egyptian President el-Sisi received a lukewarm welcome on Capitol Hill, according to some congressional sources. Although the Senate introduced a resolution which reaffirmed US-Egyptian relations (see below), several senators continue to express concerns about Egypt's human rights record, its crackdown on civil society members and unlawful imprisonment. Senator Tim Kaine (D-Virginia) sent a letter to President Donald Trump urging him to raise the case of imprisoned Egyptian-American Aya Hijazi during his talks with Egyptian President al-Sisi. Hijazi, the head of an NGO that cared for street children, has been imprisoned since May 2014 amid a crackdown on civil society. Signing the letter along with Kaine were Senators Ben Cardin (D-Maryland), Patrick Leahy (D-Vermont), Dick Durbin (D-Illinois), Mark Warner (D-Virginia), Marco Rubio (R-Florida) and Tammy Baldwin (D-Wisconsin).

## III. Congressional Hearings

*House Financial Services Joint-Hearing:* On April 4, the House Financial Services Subcommittees on Monetary Policy and Trade and Terrorism and Illicit Finance held a joint-

hearing titled "Increasing the Effectiveness of Non-Nuclear Sanctions Against Iran." Chairmen Andy Barr (R-Kentucky; Monetary Policy and Trade) and Stevan Pearce (R-New Mexico; Terrorism and Illicit Finance) indicated that the hearing was not meant to discuss the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), but to identify ways to utilize sanctions against Iran for its nefarious, non-nuclear activity in the Middle East. For the hearing, the subcommittees called on four witnesses to testify. The panelists included Mr. Behnam Ben Taleblu, Senior Iran Analyst for the Foundation for Defense of Democracies; Mr. J. Matthew McInnis, Resident Fellow at the American Enterprise Institute; Dr. Emanuele Ottolenghi, Senior Fellow for the Foundation for Defense of Democracies; and Dr. Suzanne Maloney, Senior Fellow at The Brookings Institution.

Congress members pressed the panelists about solutions to three specific problems: Iran's intercontinental ballistic missile (ICBM) testing and stockpiling, its involvement in Syrian and Yemeni conflicts, and its support for proxy-militant groups and terrorist organizations in the region. Committee members and witnesses both spoke frequently about the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) and its Quds Force, as they are driving forces behind most of Iran's aggressive behavior. While the witnesses varied slightly in their expertise and suggestions there were some common themes shared among the four. First, the majority of the experts shared a displeasure with the JCPOA and argued that additional sanctions are not only legal in the agreement's framework, but

crucial for deterring Iran's behavior – this is in stark contrast to Iran's perception of the legality. Second, the panel agreed in varying degrees that the IRGC can and should be sanctioned and that sector-specific sanctions should be levied against the Iranian economy to affect the IRGC's capabilities in facilitating the development of ICBMs and exporting terror across the region. It is interesting to note that while three of the four were unwavering in their belief in the use of sanctions, Dr. Maloney repeatedly doubted the effectiveness of non-nuclear sanctions as well as the designation of the IRGC as a foreign terrorist organization.

Additionally, there were several questions and comments regarding the recent agreement Iran signed with Boeing for the purchase of 60 airplanes and the possibility Iran would use the planes for military purposes. Mr. Ottolenghi responded that many of these commercial planes are immediately repurposed once they come back to Iran in order to carry weapons shipments to Syria and Yemen. He also noted that the actual procurement of these aircraft is "opaque." Dr. Maloney generally agreed with Ottolenghi's assessment. Both pointed out the best way to respond to Iran's action in this regard, is to work with the P5 partners to amend the JCPOA, adding a specific provision that would prevent Iran from undertaking these actions or curtail the sale of US commercial aircraft.

*House Subcommittee on Europe, Eurasia, and Emerging Threats:* On April 5<sup>th</sup>, the House Foreign Affairs Subcommittee on Europe,

Eurasia, and Emerging Threats held a hearing titled "Turkey's Democracy Under Challenge." The hearing was convened because on April 16<sup>th</sup>, Turkey will hold a constitutional referendum on 18 major amendments. These amendments will effectively turn Turkey into a presidential system by eliminating the position of Prime Minister and consolidating power with the president. Critics have argued the amendments will transform Turkey into an authoritarian regime, stripping the system of presidential checks and balances. Critics are also concerned about the human rights situation in Turkey as media that criticizes the government is quickly shut down. To discuss the potential challenges facing Turkey's democracy, the committee called on four witnesses for testimonies. The witnesses included Mr. David L. Phillips, Director, Program on Peace-Building and Rights, Institute for the Study of Human Rights; Mr. Mehmet Yuksel, People's Democratic Party in Turkey's Representative to the United States; Mr. Ali Cinar, President of the Turkish Heritage Organization; and Ms. Naz Durakoglu, Strategist and Senior Fellow in the Atlantic Council's Digital Forensic Research Lab. Three of the four witnesses argued that widespread corruption in Turkey would only worsen if the referendum passes. The witness in favor of the referendum – Mr. Cinar – argued that a shift towards a presidential system would eliminate military control over the government.

The ensuing dialogue focused heavily on how Congress should investigate human rights abuses in Turkey. Specifically, Mr. Phillips

suggested NATO make membership conditional on passing an annual review of the country's human rights record. He went on to say that strategically, while Turkey is a relatively important NATO ally, the US should diversify its interests in the region. He suggested expanding its use of air bases in Kuwait and Cyprus as options for limiting its reliance on Turkish resources. Ms. Durakoglu countered that ignoring Turkey is not an option, especially since the results of the referendum impact US democratic interests; she noted that a negative result could destabilize Cyprus' reunification process. She recommended US officials engage President Erdogan directly because messages to lower-level officials may not actually reach the president. The hearing concluded with witnesses divided over whether the referendum will pass, though all agreed either outcome will have profound repercussions for Turkish-American relations.

***House Subcommittee on National Security:*** On April 5, the House Oversight and Government Reform Subcommittee on National Security held an open hearing on "Assessing the Iran Deal." As the title suggests, the purpose of the hearing was to gather witness testimony to assess whether the Joint Comprehensive Plan Of Action (JCPOA) is working and how effectively it is being implemented. Subcommittee Chairman Ron DeSantis (R-Florida) believes the JCPOA is a bad deal which set the tone for the hearing. Additionally, committee members wanted to explore Iran's continued aggression and malign activities in the Middle East. The panel of witnesses

included General Michael Barbero, Ret. Lt. Gen. of the US Army and advisory board member for United Against Nuclear Iran; Mr. David Albright, president for the Institute for Science and International Security; Mr. Mark Dubowitz, CEO of Foundation for Defense of Democracies; Dr. Ray Takeyh; senior fellow at the Council on Foreign Relations; and Dr. Jim Walsh, a senior research associate at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology.

Four of the five witnesses and all of the Republican committee members derided the JCPOA as a broken deal that simply postponed Iran's nuclear capabilities, rather than abolish them. Democrats, for the most part, conceded that there were issues in the agreement that needed to be addressed, but otherwise called for maintaining the United States' commitment to the multilateral agreement. Dr. Walsh, on the other hand, was unique in his assessment of the JCPOA and Iran more generally. He characterized a "nuclear Iran" as a threat, but due to the implementation of the agreement, he argued that, in the context of nuclear capabilities, Iran was not even the United States' biggest security threat. Setting aside opinions of the JCPOA, when asked about the implementation, the witnesses varied less in their answers. They agreed that the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) has, early on, signaled that Iran has decommissioned the centrifuges and reactors as specified by the agreement. However, they also conceded that there are some instances when the deal needs more efficient implementation

and further instances in which the Iranian government obstructs IAEA oversight.

When the topic turned to Iran's aggressive action and malign activities in the Middle East, the discussion became somewhat heated. Many of the members and witnesses rallied around the same general points regarding Iran: it is the leading state sponsor of terror, it continues to develop a ballistic missile program, the Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) should be targeted and designated a foreign terrorist organization, as it continues to fuel sectarian conflict in the region. Things got testy when Dr. Walsh testified that since the hearing was focused on the JCPOA, it does not address those other behaviors. He argued that as a nuclear deterrent, the JCPOA was effective in its goals, and otherwise, Iran is not the most dire security threat the United States has—in fact, he cited it as a distant fourth behind Pakistan, India, and North Korea.

## V. At the Think Tanks

*Center for Strategic and International Studies:* On Friday, March 31 the Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS) held a panel discussion on “Deterring Iran After the Nuclear Deal,” which also coincided with CSIS' launch of a report by the same name. The purpose of the discussion was to bring together security experts to identify the primary strategy and motivations of the Islamic Republic, explore policy responses capable of countering Iran's actions in the Middle East, and offer overall deterrence strategies for the US policymakers to consider. For the event, CSIS hosted Dr. Colin

Kahl, an associate professor at Georgetown University; Mr. Michael Singh, senior fellow at the Washington Institute for Near East Policy; Dr. Jon Alterman, director of CSIS' Middle East Program; and Lt. Gen. Charles Brown, Jr. joined the panel via telecommunications from his posting with Central Command.

Generally, the panel discussed countering Iran outside of the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) and discussed the four main recommendations of CSIS' new report. Those recommendations include: uphold and strengthen the JCPOA, increase counterterrorism efforts against those proxy groups supported by Iran, sustain financial pressure while also incentivizing the Iranian regime's cooperation on regional issues, and counter Iran's malign activities in the region through conventional and unconventional operations. The panel generally agreed to varying degrees with the aforementioned recommendations, but the major point of disagreement revolved around what sanctions legislation—if any—should be adopted by Congress. Legislation **proposed by senators Bob Corker (R-Tennessee) and Bob Menendez (D-New Jersey) last Congress was used as an example.** To some on the panel, this was a great move by Congress in an effort to correct some of the shortcomings of the JCPOA. However, other panelists argued that additional sanctions could be perceived as neglecting the terms of the nuclear deal, provide Iran with legitimate concerns, and ultimately isolate the United States from its international allies.

*The Hudson Institute:* On April 3 – the same day Egyptian President Abdel Fatah el-Sisi visited the White House – the Hudson Institute held a panel discussion titled “US-Egypt Relations in the Age of ISIS.” The discussion was meant to discuss the expectations for the two countries’ relationship now that Trump succeeds an Obama administration that left Egypt at arm’s length. Specifically, Samuel Tadros, a senior fellow at both the Hudson Institute and the Hoover Institution – both conservative think tanks – and Alberto Fernandez, former Ambassador to Equatorial Guinea, offered their thoughts on how President Trump sees Egypt as a counterterrorism partner.

Both speakers outlined their ideas about what the Presidents wanted from their meeting at the White House. According to Tadros, President Sisi’s first priority was simply getting an invitation to the White House; an offer President Obama never extended to him. Second, Sisi would most likely seek commitment from the United States to contributing military and economic aid without the restrictions levied by Trump’s predecessor. The final request from Sisi would likely be for symbolic support from the Trump Administration for Egypt’s perceived leadership in the Arab world. Fernandez opined that President Trump would emphasize his desire for Egypt to assist in the “eradication” of the Islamic State and for the Sisi regime to address the underlying ideological roots of Salafi jihadism. The two speakers agreed that President Sisi’s speech about Islam needing an ideological revolution likely fell on gracious

ears in Washington – particularly Republicans in the White House and on Capitol Hill – and that the Egyptian president’s position on human rights is not a point of conflict as long as he controls the threat of terrorism in his own country.

*Center for Strategic and International Studies:* On Wednesday, April 5 the Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS) held a two-part panel discussion titled “Foreign Fighter Fallout.” This hearing brought together some of the foremost experts on the foreign fighter phenomenon – the influx of foreign individuals to a conflict – in an effort to understand the underlying causes of such frequent travel to the Islamic State’s areas in Iraq and Syria. Further, the panel was asked to discuss the potential effects of those foreign fighters returning to their home countries after ISIL’s defeat. For the first session of the discussion, Lt. Gen. Michael Nagata, director for strategic operational planning at the National Counterterrorism Center spoke one-on-one with CSIS’ director of the Transnational Threats Project, Mr. Thomas Sanderson, to discuss these issues. Lt. Gen. Nagata started the conversation by pointing out that the Islamic State is the most ethnically and sociologically diverse transnational organization that the United States has ever faced. The flow of foreign fighters to the group is rather unprecedented and it has forced the international community to approach the problem in two phases. First, the international community had to actually identify the problem and understand what was taking place. Additionally, members of the global coalition



had to broaden their means of communicating among one another. As a military official, Nagata spoke more about what the US government has done to address the problem. These approaches have included: comprehensive cooperation between all the entities of the government, adaptation of a non-military strategy to defeat ISIL, and developing a long-term, strategic patience in this long effort.

For the second part of the discussion, Sanderson was joined by Haim Malka, a senior fellow at CSIS; Aaron Zelin, a fellow at the Washington Institute for Near East Policy; and Prashanth Parameswaran, associate editor at *The Diplomat*. Each of the three guests discussed the flow of fighters from, and the return of those very combatants, to specific regions. Mr. Malka covered the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region and he particularly focused on Tunisia. Malka noted that although Tunisia is characterized as being the biggest single contributor of foreign fighters to ISIL in Syria and Iraq, he noted that the information may be misleading due to Tunisia's greater transparency in reporting such data. He argued that many countries may manipulate the number of fighters joining ISIL in order to downplay the severity of the issue. After discussing several underlying factors to the phenomenon, Malka described programs and initiatives being piloted in Tunisia and suggested expanding such efforts to other "source" countries—countries from which foreign fighters originate. Such programs include: adapting and expanding counterterrorism capabilities,

creating programs and empowering nongovernmental organizations to counter radicalism and address underlying causes, and usher in reforms of criminal justice systems, politics, and the economy. He suggested that these approaches could prove useful in Tunisia and should be implemented by other countries in the region to combat radicalism.

**Middle East Institute:** On Wednesday, April 5 the Middle East Institute (MEI) held a panel discussion titled "Containing the Civil War Contagion." With four ongoing civil wars raging in the Middle East and North Africa, this was held as a forum to discuss legitimate ways for the fighting to be quelled and prevent spillover of the conflict to neighboring countries. The panelists for the event included Dr. Kathleen Cunningham, associate professor at the University of Maryland; Dr. Marc Lynch, professor at the George Washington University; Mr. Kenneth Pollack, a senior fellow at the Brookings Institution; and moderated by MEI's Mr. Ross Harrison.

Each of the panelists had unique expertise about civil wars and intrastate conflict and they teamed up to tackle the daunting challenge of predicting the future dynamics of the wars in Syria, Iraq, Libya, and Yemen and also offer suggestions for policy responses to deescalate these wars. Dr. Lynch started out the discussion and explained the state of Middle East nations in the previous decade and explained that the Arab Uprisings of 2011 were simply a system of the states' eroded capabilities and the empowerment of civil society. This, combined

with external influence, allowed these four states to spiral into civil war. Unfortunately, Dr. Lynch assessed that there are only poor policy options to these conflicts. Mr. Pollack agreed with Dr. Lynch's assessments of the causes of these wars and added that in Libya and Syria, the autocratic regimes purposely spun a political problem into an ethnic, sectarian issue. When describing the international community's responses to ongoing wars, he laid out the United States' interests in the region. He noted that the US wants to limit spillover like terrorism, refugees, and secession and especially prevent the wars from sparking conflict in neighboring countries. Pollack added that the US has to have a comprehensive plan of intervention if it wants to end any of these conflicts and that intervention will come at a great cost. Finally, Dr. Cunningham—an expert on ending civil wars and international interventions—noted that the majority of civil wars in the modern era have ended in a negotiated settlement (whether total or partial settlement). She said Syria will probably follow a similar path, but because of severe fragmentation that has created numerous warring sides with disparate preferences it will be difficult and may only conclude with a negotiated partial settlement.

***Carnegie Endowment for International Peace:***

On Thursday, April 6 the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace held a day-long conference to address numerous issues regarding the Syrian conflict. This gathering was titled “Syria’s Trajectory and Challenges for the United States” and it addressed conflict

scenarios and international players involved in Syria, questioned whether a political solution was still viable in Syria, and examined the efforts needed for economic reconstruction and refugee repatriation. A number of guests—ranging from US-based scholars to Syrian academics—were invited to discuss these topics.

One of the most interesting topics was the prospects for economic reconstruction in Syria. The panel included Dr. Riad Hijab, Tayssir Raddawi, Tobias Ellwood, and Shanta Devarajan. This panel was arranged so the guests could discuss the potential timeline for reconstruction in Syria and what to expect during the repatriation efforts post-conflict. The panelists agreed on one main point; the international community should make plans for the reconstruction as early as possible before the settlement of the war. Reconstruction, in this sense, incorporated the general idea of rebuilding infrastructure and providing services, but the panelists also included the establishment of small business sectors, the construction of inclusive social institutions and the appropriate division of oil revenue as things that must be addressed in any future reconstruction efforts. As for the repatriation of refugees and internally displaced persons (IDPs), the panelists generally agreed that no population transfer should be carried out against these individuals' desires. Rather, the international community and central Syrian power that emerges should provide individuals with money and resources to resettle where



they want and then build communities and infrastructure around them.

## VI. Legislation of Interest

***Combating Anti-Semitism (H.R.1911):*** Introduced on April 5 by Representative Chris Smith (R-NJ), Bradley Schneider (D-IL), Eliot Engel (D-NY), Randy Weber (R-TX), Nita Lowey (D-NY), Peter Roskam (R-IL), Ted Deutch (D-FL), Gus Bilirakis (R-FL) and Marc Veasey (D-TX), the bill would amend the State Department Basic Authorities Act of 1956 to monitor and combat anti-Semitism globally. The bill has been referred to the HFAC.

***Prohibit US Combat Troops in Syria (H.R. 1923):*** Introduced on April 5 by Representatives Michael Capuano (D-MA) and Walter Jones (R-NC), the bill would prohibit the use of members of the United States Armed Forces to carry out offensive combat operations in Syria. The bill has been referred to the HFAC.

**Comment:** There have been numerous statements by members of Congress on the need to take action against Bashar Assad. Senator Tom Cotton (R-Arkansas) has called for military action against the Assad regime, Senator John McCain (R-Arizona) has called for arming the Free Syrian Army. While there may be congressional support for military action, several members, primarily Senator Tim Kaine (D-Virginia) are urging the passage of another resolution authorizing the use of military force, if President Trump decided to pursue military action against Syria. Congress has left town for its traditional Spring break, but as the carnage

in Syria continues, the possibility of military action will command congressional attention.

***US-Egyptian Relations (S.Res.108):*** Introduced on April 3 by Senators Ben Cardin (D-MD), Marco Rubio (R-FL), Tim Kaine (D-VA), Todd Young (R-IN), and Bob Menendez (D-NJ), the resolution reaffirms the commitment of the United States to the United States-Egypt partnership. The resolution has been referred to the SFRC.

***Iran Ballistic Missiles and International Sanctions Enforcement Act (H.R. 1698):*** The following members have joined as cosponsor to the bill bringing the total number of cosponsors to 134: Representatives Brett Guthrie (R-Kentucky), Todd Rokita (R-Indiana), Vicky Hartzler (R-Missouri), Robert Latta (R-Ohio), French Hill (R-Arkansas), Kristi Noem (R-South Dakota), James Comer (R-Kentucky), Kathy McMorris Rodgers (R-Washington), Katko (R-New York), Sean Patrick Maloney (D-New York), Phil Roe (R-Tennessee) Frank Pallone (D-New Jersey), Ann Wagner (R-Missouri), Lucille Roybal-Allard (D-California), Kurt Schrader (D-Oregon), Scott Perry (R-Pennsylvania), Salud Carbajal (D-California), Josh Gottheimer (D-New Jersey), David Joyce (R-Ohio), Lloyd Smucker (R-Pennsylvania), Brian Mast (R-Florida), David Scott (D-Georgia), Anthony Brown (D-Maryland), Michelle Lujan Grisham (D-New Mexico), Henry Johnson (D-Georgia), Nanette Barragan (D-California), David Rouzer (R-North Carolina), Doug LaMalfa (R-California), Chris Collins (D-New York), Alex Mooney (R-West Virginia), of West Virginia),

Tim (D-Ohio), Eric Swalwell (D-California) and Marc Veasey (D-Texas).

(R-Utah) and Dean Heller (R-Nevada), bringing the number of cosponsors to thirty-one.

***Countering Iran's Destabilizing Activities Act of 2017(S.722):*** The following Senators has signed on as a co-signers to the bill: Senators Deb Fischer (R-Nebraska), Orrin Hatch

While there has been much attention on Iran, it is unclear if and when the House and Senate Iran bills will be considered by the respective committees, HFAC and SFRC.

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