

# Congressional Update: Week Ending April 21

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**Congress remains in recess. The House will reconvene on Tuesday, April 25. The Senate will reconvene on Monday, April 24.**

## **I. Congress Returns with Much to Do**

Although Congress is still in recess, there are two major domestic issues that are likely to be addressed when Congress returns next week.

**Affordable Care Act Repeal:** The first issue the House will likely address is the repeal of the Affordable Care Act (ACA). Despite the failure to pass legislation last month, the House leadership and President Donald Trump are determined to bring a bill to the floor of the House as soon as the recess is over. Assuming the legislation moves, it will take up the better part of the week, leaving little room for other legislative matters.

As of April 20, no deal had been reached on the legislation but the White House is pushing for a bill that can be passed. Republicans are still divided and the key to passage is to craft a bill that can be supported by the Freedom Caucus. Republican members are expected to discuss the issue over the weekend. In his press conference with Italian Prime Minister Paolo Gentiloni on April 20, the president appeared optimistic that Congress would act to repeal the ACA.

**Avoiding a Government Shutdown:** The current Continuing Resolution (CR) funding US government (USG) programs expires on April 28. According to congressional staff, Congress plans to pass another short-term CR that will fund the USG through early May, to avoid a government shutdown for which Republicans would likely be blamed. Another short-term CR will give appropriators time to work out a long-

term CR that will fund the remainder of Fiscal Year 2017. Work on the Fiscal Year 2018 budget is not expected to begin until President Trump submits his budget to Congress on May 18.

**Middle East Issues/North Korea/Russia:** North Korea, Iran, Syria, Yemen, and Russia are all issues that have demanded and will continue to demand congressional attention. However, other than one or two possible closed briefings on North Korea, and perhaps on Iran's compliance with the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), these crucial foreign policy issues may not see any significant action next week due to the need to pass another CR and the focus on repealing the ACA.

The Senate Foreign Relations Committee (SFRC) will hold a hearing on Libya titled "The Crisis in Libya: Next Steps and US Policy Options" with the Honorable Deborah Jones, former US ambassador to Libya (2013-2015) and Dr. Frederic Wehrey, senior fellow at the Middle East Program, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace.

## **II. At the Think Tanks**

**Stimson Center:** On April 19, the Stimson Center hosted a panel titled "The Difficult Road Ahead: Stabilizing Iraq and the Gulf Region." As mentioned at the event, many policy analysts and other individuals often conflate the problems facing Iraq and Syria as due to the two nations' struggle against the Islamic State. However, the goal for the speakers was to shed light on how the United States and its allies in the Gulf region can contribute to lasting peace and stability in a post-ISIL Iraq.

The panel of speakers included Iraq's Ambassador to the United States Fareed

Yasseen, the *Wall Street Journal's* Jay Solomon, former US Ambassador Lincoln Bloomfield, Jr., and Richard Burchill of TRENDS Research & Advisory. Each speaker contributed a unique perspective to the process of reconstruction and reconciliation in Iraq, but all seemed to agree on a few key issues. First, the panelists mentioned that for Iraq to experience longstanding peace and prosperity moving forward, the United States and its partners in the Gulf region will need to provide more than just military support. Investing in infrastructure, social services, and the Iraqi economy are crucial aspects of support. Additionally, support cannot—or should not—wait until all areas are liberated from ISIL. The panelists all agreed that investing in the rebuilding of safe and liberated areas in Iraq will help facilitate the resettlement of internally displaced persons and allow the community to start the healing and reconciliation process with groups at risk for ethnic and/or sectarian conflict.

Some of the panelists were wary of Iran's growing influence in the region and whether the Islamic Republic and the Shiite militias in Iraq will be destabilizing forces in the country in the future. Ambassador Yasseen argued that Iraq wants to be Iraq—not a proxy of Iran—and thus he and his government are confident that the citizens will unite to prevent Iraq from being a battlefield for an overarching proxy battle between Sunni and Shiite powers.

**The Heritage Foundation:** On April 20, The Heritage Foundation held a discussion on “Iran Aircraft Sales: Implications and Complications.” The foundation brought together three leading experts to discuss how Iran's agreements with aircraft providers like Boeing and Europe's Airbus could complicate ongoing US efforts to contain Iran's spreading influence in the Middle East. This panel

discussion brought together some of the most frequent critics of Iran and the JCPOA, featuring Mark Dubowitz and Dr. Emanuele Ottolenghi of the Foundation for Defense of Democracies and Heritage's own Diane Katz.

Each speaker took a moment to share his or her disdain for the JCPOA and the lifting of Iran's sanctions. Aside from that point, the speakers all touched on unique aspects of what they identified as tactics for pressuring the Iranian regime into changing some of its policies. Dr. Ottolenghi argued for the reissue of sanctions against the airline companies, which were lifted due to the negotiation of the JCPOA. He stated that there are clear parameters for removing sanctions from Iran's aviation sector, which include the prohibition against the use of commercial aircraft for non-civilian purposes. Since implementation, however, Ottolenghi said that he had recorded over 750 instances of Iranian violations of such prohibitions, including continued, non-civilian flights from Tehran to Damascus and Latakia in Syria.

Ms. Katz offered a comprehensive explanation of the role of the Export-Import Bank and how it is possible that Boeing's newly inked deal with Iran could be subsidized by US taxpayers. She noted that the Export-Import Bank uses tax dollars to guarantee the loans of foreign governments and/or entities in order for those foreign entities to purchase US goods that are exported out of the United States. Katz was critical of Boeing and the Export-Import Bank and argued that there are few firewalls in place that prevent taxpayers' money from facilitating the sale of aircraft to what she called the leading state sponsor of terror.

Mr. Dubowitz illustrated how and why Iran's acquisition of these aircraft can be problematic for security in the Middle East. He expanded on

Ottolenghi's points about the use of aircraft for non-civilian purposes like airlifting supplies and personnel to Syria and Yemen. But he went further and explained that Iran is likely using a non-sanctioned airline (i.e., Iran Air) for these malign activities instead of the currently sanctioned airlines in an effort to test the United States. To address these testy activities, Dubowitz advocated for reissuing sanctions,

but he also wanted to target one US company: Boeing. Boeing is an industry leader in aviation production, but he said that it is frequently rewarded huge contracts from the US Department of Defense as well. In this aspect, Dubowitz proposed placing Boeing "at the back of the line" for contract awards due to its status as the only US contractor that sells to Iran.

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