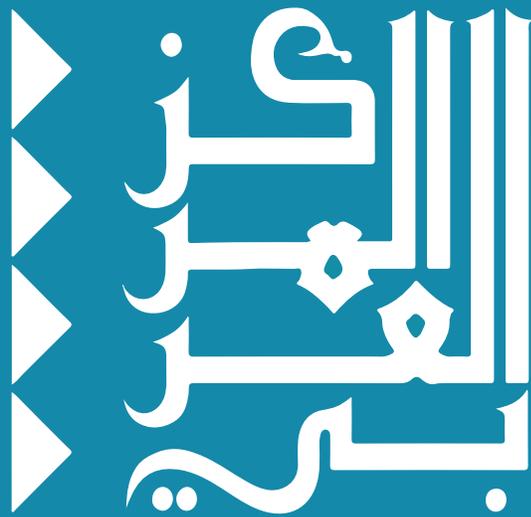


# Congressional Update: Week Ending April 28th

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

## I. Budget Issues

By Friday, April 28, Congress was set to pass the Continuing Resolution (CR) to fund the US Government at Fiscal Year 2016 levels through May 5, when Congress hopes to pass another CR to fund the government through the end of FY 2017 (September 30, 2017). Meanwhile, the Appropriations Committee is putting the finishing touches on an FY 2017 supplemental that will fund crucial defense department expenditures, and then it will begin work on the FY 2018 budget, which President Donald Trump is expected to submit on May 18.

## II. Update on Iran Sanctions Legislation

The Iran sanctions bill, **S. 722**, is pending before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee (SFRC). The Committee is expected to mark up the bill before Congress adjourns for the Memorial Day Recess. The House bill, **H.R. 1698**, Iran Ballistic Missiles and International Sanctions Enforcement Act, is significantly different from the Senate bill, and the House Foreign Affairs Committee (HFAC) is not expected to mark it up before the Iranian elections on May 19.

## III. Update on Syria Sanctions Legislation

The HFAC is scheduled to mark up **H.R. 1677**, the Caesar Civilian Protection Act of 2017, on May 3. Following approval by the full committee, the bill may be quickly considered by the full House later next week. The horrendous use of chemical weapons against

Syrian civilians, mostly women and children, has outraged many in Congress and has been the impetus for the scheduled markup.

In a related development, on April 12, Representatives Brendan Boyle (D-Pennsylvania) and Ruben Gallego (D-Arizona) sent a letter to President Trump urging him to clarify “whether it is now his Administration’s policy to seek the removal from power of Syrian President Bashar al-Assad.”

## IV. Hearings and Briefings of Interest

**The Crisis in Libya: Next Steps and US Policy Options:** On April 24, the SFRC gathered to hear assessments on the current state of affairs in Libya. It has been six years of instability and tension since the fall of Muammar Qadhafi. The witnesses who appeared before the committee are experts on the ongoing conflict and gave sober analyses of the options available to restore stability and ease tensions.

Dr. Frederic Wehrey of the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace laid out two imperatives that the United States should focus on when formulating a strategy in Libya: thwart the growth and spread of terrorist groups, and help the locals develop a stable and inclusive government. As of now, any support militant groups find in Libya appears to be simply transactional among historically neglected populations. An even distribution of oil revenues as well as Libyan-led dialogue in pursuit of inclusive governance should be

enough to root out any further support of militant extremists, according to Dr. Wehrey.

The Honorable Deborah K. Jones, who spent two years in Tripoli as an ambassador, assessed the conflict in Libya as unlike the traditional civil wars in the Middle East and North Africa. Libyan society is extremely fractured—a fact that predates Qadhafi himself—but it is not divided along secular-Islamist lines like many suggest. Rather, this is a war of attrition between a side that is trying to uphold the status quo of power and centralized wealth, and the other side that seeks democratic, inclusive governance and wealth distribution. In order to stabilize the country, the United States and its allies should support the Libyan people's goals and ensure that local populations take accountability, starting at the municipal level.

**A Review of the United States' Assistance for Egypt:** On April 25, the Senate Appropriations Subcommittee on State, Foreign Operations, and Related Programs held a hearing to assess how US assistance is being used by Egypt and if lawmakers should reconsider the aid that has historically been afforded to successive regimes. With concerns about President Abdel Fattah el-Sisi's human rights abuses and consolidation of power in an undemocratic system, Chairman Lindsey Graham (R-South Carolina) suggested the United States needs to better understand where its investment is used in Egypt.

Each of the three witnesses presented different assessments and recommendations for US aid to Egypt. First, Dr. Michele Dunne of the

Carnegie Endowment for International Peace noted that Sisi's regime is fostering instability and pressuring the population in such a fashion that civil unrest could rise in the near future. She pointed out that in a number of economic metrics, the Egyptian population—particularly the younger generation—scores uncomfortably high on the misery index that assesses how people view their personal financial state. President Sisi's economic strategy is geared toward lining the pockets of the Egyptian military, a fact that the United States should take that into consideration when issuing economic aid. As such, Dr. Dunne suggested that the United States should not give Egypt cash or any funding that can disappear quickly, but extend aid that fosters strong investment and spending practices.

Second, Elliott Abrams of the Council on Foreign Relations flatly suggested that the United States rethink its aid to Egypt. Abrams noted that the US aid package afforded to Egypt is based on a strategy developed after former President Anwar Sadat participated in the Camp David Accords, and it is sorely outdated. He argued that Egypt's stated goal is fighting domestic terrorism, but it invests strictly in traditional military forces that are rigid and capable only of conducting traditional state-on-state warfare. Because Egypt is not focused on combatting domestic terrorism efficiently and has little to no role in calming regional instability, Abrams argued US aid is better spent elsewhere.

The Honorable Tom Malinowski—a former Assistant Secretary of State for Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor—echoed many of Elliott Abrams’s points about Egypt no longer holding the same position of influence in the greater Middle East. Additionally, he noted that over President Obama’s years in the White House, positive engagement and conditional aid did little to change Egypt’s priorities. Therefore, Malinowski argued that Washington should focus on coercing Egypt to change one thing in particular: how it treats US citizens. He recommended the United States force Egypt to relax its strict laws against nongovernmental organizations and to cease the anti-American sentiments that are spread through state-run media.

**Syria After the Missile Strikes: Policy Options:** On April 27, the HFAC held a hearing to assess US policy towards Syria and President Bashar al-Asad after the tomahawk missile strike President Donald Trump authorized. There was overwhelming support by committee members for President Trump’s decision to launch a limited strike in response to Asad’s chemical attack. However, several members called upon the White House to formally submit a request to Congress for an authorization for the use of military force (AUMF). A majority of committee members in attendance were concerned about the Trump Administration’s seemingly absent strategy for Syria.

The panel of witnesses for the hearing included Michael Singh of the Washington Institute for Near East Policy, Charles Lister of the Middle

East Institute, and Dr. Dafna Rand of the National Defense University. Each of the witnesses brought different perspectives, but the three seemed to agree that President Trump does need to formulate and clearly articulate a strategy for Syria. Each provided recommendations for US policy in Syria.

Mr. Singh suggested three objectives for the United States to pursue: 1) ensure that the conflict in Syria does not spread through the region to fragile arenas like Iraq, Jordan, or Lebanon, or to allies like Israel; 2) counter Iran’s influence in Syria and its attempt at building a link to proxies in Lebanon and elsewhere in the region; and, 3) defeat the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL), deny terrorist groups safe haven in Syria generally, and ensure that jihadist groups do not return after Raqqa is liberated.

Mr. Lister recommended similar points regarding Iran. However, his main recommendation addressed the issue of counterterrorism (CT) efforts in Syria. While ISIL is the most pressing threat in Syria, Mr. Lister noted that CT efforts must be extended to combatting Iranian-backed Shiite militias and the resurgent al-Qaeda affiliates that have embedded in the opposition forces. Lastly, he urged the United States and its allies to enforce zones of calm in distinct areas of Syria, which would allow some reconstruction and reconciliation efforts to begin.

Finally, Dr. Rand proposed several goals for the United States to pursue. Like the witnesses

before her, she emphasized the need to liberate ISIL-held territory in Syria. In the long term, she also advocated for a political solution to the conflict that excludes Bashar al-Asad and incorporates a new, inclusive governing body. Lastly, she told the committee that top priorities in the present are to guard against the proliferation of chemical weapons and to ensure the safety of civilians, promote accountability, and provide humanitarian relief.

## V. Legislation of Interest

***Combatting International Travel by Terrorists (S.942)***: Introduced on April 26 by Senator Marco Rubio (R-Florida) and no cosponsors, the bill would require a plan to combat international travel by terrorists and foreign fighters, accelerate the transfer of certain border security systems to foreign partner governments, establish minimum international border security standards, and authorize the suspension of foreign assistance to countries not making significant efforts to comply with such minimum standards. The bill has been referred to the SFRC.

***Iran's Persecution of the Baha'i Community (S.Res.139)***: Introduced on April 25 by Senators Ron Wyden (D-Oregon), Marco Rubio (R-Florida), John Boozman (R-Arkansas), and Dick Durbin (D-Illinois), the resolution condemns the government of Iran's state-sponsored persecution of its Baha'i minority and its continued violation of the International Covenants on Human Rights. The resolution has been referred to the SFRC.

***Iran's Persecution of the Baha'i Community (H.Res.2747)***: An identical resolution was introduced in the House on April 25 by Representatives Ileana Ros-Lehtinen (R-Florida), Ted Deutch (D-Florida), Steve Chabot (R-Ohio), Eliot Engel (D-New York), Chris Smith (R-New Jersey), Jan Schakowsky (D-Illinois), Lynn Jenkins (R-Kansas), and Brad Schneider (D-Illinois). The resolution has been referred to the HFAC.

## VI. Events Next Week

### Monday, May 1

The Washington Institute on Near East Policy (WINEP) will hold a discussion on the upcoming Trump-Abbas meeting with WINEP Fellows Dennis Ross, David Makovsky, Ghaith al-Omari, and Ehud Yaari. 12:00 noon. WEBCAST.

The Heritage Foundation will host a discussion, "Is It Time for Congress to Pass an ISIS Specific AUMF?" with keynote remarks by Representative Todd Young (R-Indiana). 12:30-1:30 p.m. WEBCAST.

### Wednesday, May 3

The HFAC will mark up the Caesar Civilian Protection Act of 2017 at 10:00 a.m. in 2172 Rayburn House Office Building.

### Friday, May 5

The Atlantic Council will host a discussion, "Nurturing People-to-People Ties with Iran,"

with Kamiar Alaei, Associate Dean, State University of New York at Albany; Stan L. Albrecht, Former President, Utah State University; Bahman Baktiari, Executive

Director, International Foundation for Civil Society; and Shahrzad Rezvani, Attorney and Board Member, Iranian-American Bar Association. 10:00-11:30 a.m. at the Council.

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