

Heard on the Hill

Senate measure calls for designating IRGC a terrorist group. The Senate has passed a provision urging the Bush administration to designate Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) a terrorist organization. The measure, introduced by Sens. JON KYL (R-AZ) and JOSEPH LIEBERMAN (I-CT), passed as an amendment to the fiscal year 2008 Defense Authorization Bill. The IRGC—an elite military branch of Tehran's government consisting of some 125,000 members—arms, funds and trains terrorist networks from Gaza to Afghanistan. The proposed designation would allow the United States to freeze the assets of the IRGC and of those who conduct business with it.

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House members raise questions about Saudi arms deal. Members of the House Foreign Affairs Middle East Subcommittee raised questions about the Bush administration's proposed arms sale to Saudi Arabia. Noting Saudi Arabia's history of support for terrorism, Rep. GARY ACKERMAN (D-NY), who chairs the subcommittee, asked during a hearing: "Why should we believe that they see the war on terror as we do, and why sell them those weapons?" Ranking Member MIKE PENCE (R-IN) said the proposed sale "merits consideration, with vigorous oversight."

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House secures insurance coverage for Israel travelers. The House of Representatives passed a terrorism insurance bill by a vote of 312-110 that includes provisions preventing firms from denying life insurance coverage to those anticipating travel to Israel. "If we allow companies to deny life insurance for legal travel abroad, we give in to those who want to restrict our freedoms," said Rep. DEBBIE WASSERMAN SCHULTZ (D-FL), who introduced the provisions along with Reps. BARNEY FRANK (D-MA) and SPENCER BACHUS (R-AL). •NER•

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NEAR EAST

Report

OCTOBER 1-15, 2007

AIPAC'S BIWEEKLY ON AMERICAN MIDDLE EAST POLICY

EDITOR'S COMMENTS

French Cuffs

Under the leadership of its new president, France has joined the United States at the forefront of the international efforts to prevent Iran from obtaining nuclear weapons.

As a key European Union member, one of the three EU nations leading these international efforts and a permanent member of the U.N. Security Council, France is in an excellent position to help generate real economic pressure on Iran—currently the most promising avenue toward forcing Tehran to stop its nuclear weapons program.

EU nations—particularly France, Germany and Italy—are Iran's biggest foreign investors and trade partners. Should they choose to pull out of Iran, as the United States did in the 1990s, the fragile Iranian economy could go into a tailspin, endangering the very existence of the Iranian regime.

This provides the EU with unmatched economic leverage over Iran. If major EU nations were to condition continued economic engagement with Iran on its cessation of uranium enrichment, Tehran would likely comply.

In sharp contrast to his predecessor Jacques Chirac, French President ...see *Editor's Comments cont'd on pg. 70*

Atomic Block

HOUSE VOTES OVERWHELMINGLY TO TOUGHEN IRAN SANCTIONS

The House of Representatives has passed a bill that strengthens U.S. tools to cut off funds to Iran's nuclear program and prohibits U.S. nuclear cooperation with those aiding Iran's illicit atomic efforts.

The Iran Counter-Proliferation Act was introduced by Reps. Tom Lantos (D-CA) and Ileana Ros-Lehtinen (R-FL). The bill imposes mandatory sanctions on energy companies investing more than \$20 million in Iran. The vote came a day after President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad spoke at Columbia University and hours before he addressed the United Nations General Assembly.



Photo by the Associated Press

The House of Representatives has demonstrated strong bipartisan support for curbs on Iran.

"Iran faces a choice between a very big carrot and a very sharp stick," said Rep. Lantos, chairman of the House Foreign Affairs Committee. "It is my hope that they will take the carrot. But today, we are putting the stick in place."

Demonstrating bipartisan support for strong efforts to contain Tehran's illicit nuclear ambitions, the House passed the bill by a 397-16 vote.

The measure, which is still pending in the Senate, is one in a series of bills designed to choke off funding for Iran's nuclear program. Lawmakers view the legislation as a means to limit Iran's ability to harm U.S. allies and interests in the Middle East and pressure the Islamic Republic to stop its atomic work.

The act prohibits U.S. firms from using ...see *Atomic Block cont'd on pg. 70*

NER INTERVIEWS

DAVID SCHENKER, EXPERT ON SYRIA, LEBANON, JORDAN AND PALESTINIAN AFFAIRS

David Schenker is a Senior Fellow in Arab Politics at the Washington Institute for Near East Policy.



Photo courtesy of The Washington Institute for Near East Policy

According to Schenker, a nuclear-armed Iran would be able to operate with impunity.

NER: Iranian possession of nuclear weapons would pose a very serious threat to Israel. Would it also threaten other U.S. allies and broader American interests?

David Schenker: Yes. A nuclear-armed Iran would seek domination over the Persian Gulf region, where two-thirds of the world's oil reserves are located. Under a nuclear umbrella, Iran would be able to operate in the Gulf with impunity.

Possession of nuclear weapons would encourage more Iranian meddling or even blackmailing in Gulf Arab states, and embolden Iran to activate or try to manipulate what in many Gulf Arab states is a plurality, or even a majority, of Shiites (Bahrain, for example, and Saudi Arabia's Gulf coast oil region). Such activity would pose a great threat not only to the stability of the Gulf Arab states, which already regard Iran as predatory and dangerous, but also to the free flow of oil.

NER: What is the nature of the Syrian-Iranian relationship?

DS: This relationship has blossomed under Syrian President Bashar Assad. Not only has Iran's financial investment in Syria increased, but the Iranians have essentially purchased Syria's debt to Russia, paving the

way for Syria to buy more advanced Russian weapons. Since the Syrians still don't have enough money to pay for this expensive weaponry, Iran has come to their aid. The Iranians apparently are paying \$750 million for the sale to Syria of 50 top-of-the-line Russian-made anti-aircraft missile systems.

As part of the deal, the Iranians are getting ten of these systems. In addition, Iran is providing technical assistance for Syria's weapons of mass destruction (WMD). In a real sense, Iran is now Syria's patron.

NER: Can the United States wean Syria away from its alliance with Iran?

DS: No. Syria would regard us as a fickle, untrustworthy friend, instead of a 30-year-old tested, ideologically compatible, financially supportive, reliable strategic ally in Tehran. There's just no reason for Syria to do this.

The United States will never have a good relationship with this Syrian regime. There are too many issues of contention. Even if Syria stopped undermining stability in Iraq by sending in jihadists, there would still be the issue of Syria undermining stability in Lebanon by assassinating Lebanese parliamentarians, of supporting Hizballah, Hamas and Palestinian Islamic Jihad terrorism, and of deploying missiles and WMD. And even if you took care of all those issues, which is a pretty long shot—because it would mean alienating Syria's sole strategic ally, Iran—at the end of the day you would still have the issue of governance. Syria is a brutal dictatorship. We can't have good relations with this regime.

NER: What is the nature of Syria's relations with Hizballah and Hamas?

DS: Under Bashar, Syria has enhanced its relationship with Hizballah. Unlike his father Hafez Assad, who regarded Hizballah as a mere tool, a blunt instrument against Israel, Bashar appears to have genuine admiration for Hizballah and has acted accordingly. Syria was always involved in the transshipment of Iranian weapons to Hizballah, but under Bashar, Syria has provided its own Russian-made, top-of-the-line anti-tank weapons to Hizballah, which used them

very effectively against Israeli tanks in the 2006 war in Lebanon. The Syrians also gave Hizballah medium-range rockets, some of which hit Haifa and killed many civilians.

Even after the United Nations condemned Syria for violating U.N. Security Council Resolution 1701 by continuing to provide Hizballah with weapons, the flow of

UNLIKE HIS FATHER HAFEZ ASSAD, WHO REGARDED HIZBALLAH AS A MERE TOOL, A BLUNT INSTRUMENT AGAINST ISRAEL, BASHAR APPEARS TO HAVE GENUINE ADMIRATION FOR HIZBALLAH AND HAS ACTED ACCORDINGLY

arms across the Syrian border goes on. Hizballah says it now has more rockets than it had before the war. So, with Syrian assistance, Hizballah has rearmed.

Bashar has also improved Syria's relationship with Hamas. The most telling sign came after Hamas' kidnapping of [the Israeli soldier] Gilad Shalit last summer. Traditionally, Hamas' offices in Damascus were represented to be mere information offices. But after Shalit's abduction, Hamas was allowed for the first time to hold a press conference in Damascus to issue a claim of responsibility for the kidnapping. That was the end of the fiction that these offices were merely for information, and Damascus clearly had no problem with that.

NER: What is Syria's role in Lebanon?

DS: The Syrians are very concerned that the pro-Western majority in the Lebanese parliament will elect a pro-Western president in the upcoming presidential elections. They are doing everything they can to undermine that with the cooperation of Hizballah and the Hizballah-allied parliamentary opposition under General [Michel] Aoun.

What you have, really, is a campaign to denude the pro-Western, anti-Syrian Lebanese government of its parliamentary majority by assassinating its members. There is a lot of evidence that the Syrians are behind these assassinations. They are coming very close to achieving their goal. •NER•

Time for Action

AS A FALL MEETING BETWEEN ISRAELI AND PALESTINIAN LEADERS APPROACHES, ARAB STATES CAN TAKE CONSTRUCTIVE STEPS BUT HAVE STILL NOT ACCEPTED U.S. CALLS TO PARTICIPATE

In July, President Bush called a fall meeting of Israeli and Palestinian leaders and their Arab neighbors in the region. In recent months, Israel and the Palestinian Authority (PA) government of Mahmoud Abbas have taken a number of conciliatory steps toward each other.

At this time, however, it remains to be seen whether U.S. allies such as Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Jordan and other members of the Arab League will appear at the meeting and play a constructive role.

Since the announcement of the meeting, there has been a flurry of diplomacy. Following her recent trip to the region, Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice, who will chair the gathering, asserted that friendly Arab states have a constructive role to play. “Coming to the meeting also brings certain responsibilities,” she added, including renouncing violence and supporting a two-state solution for Israelis and Palestinians.

In Congress, Sens. Charles E. Schumer (D-NY) and Lindsey Graham (R-NY) are gathering signatures from their colleagues on a letter to Secretary Rice that calls on key Arab players to take “concrete, positive actions to promote peace and stability in the region.”

U.S. Leaders are Urging Arab States to Attend the Meeting

In their letter, the senators call for inviting Arab League states to “participate in the upcoming international meeting and be a full partner of the United States in advancing regional peace.”

“The invitations are very important because for the time being the Saudis are not coming, the Egyptians are reluctant, et cetera,” French Foreign Minister Bernard Kouchner said recently. “The Arab League, [Arab League Secretary General] Amr Moussa, told me they will not attend the conference” unless Israel

makes concessions before the talks even begin, Kouchner said.

Recently, Israeli President Shimon Peres also emphasized the value of Arab participation. He also asserted that Arab demands on Israel to make concessions before the talks begin—without the Jewish state receiving anything in return—were counterproductive.

the United States), Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates and others have failed to do so.

Backing the government of Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas and Prime Minister Salam Fayyad would also be helpful. By providing financial, diplomatic and political support for Abbas and Fayyad, Arab states could help the Palestinian Authority govern effectively and fight terror.

Arab states can also support Abbas by joining him in rejecting a rapprochement between the Palestinian Authority and the terrorist group Hamas (unless it agrees to recognize Israel, reject terrorism and accept prior agreements).

The senators also call for an end to anti-Israel incitement and urge Arab states to prevent their citizens from giving money to terrorist groups.

Arab States Can Play a Helpful Role by Delegitimizing Terror

In his July remarks, President Bush stated that “a Palestinian state will never be created by terror.” In a recent statement, the Quartet—consisting of the United States, European Union, Russia and the United Nations—also affirmed its support for “a two-state solution based on a rejection of violence.”

Israel has taken several measures to improve its relations with the Palestinians, including releasing prisoners, dismantling roadblocks and releasing funds to Abbas’ new PA government. Under Abbas and Prime Minister Salam Fayyad, the PA government has reciprocated by increasing financial transparency and refusing to reconcile with the terrorist group Hamas.

At this point, it remains uncertain whether Arab states will follow up on the progress made by Israelis and Palestinians by playing a helpful role and choosing to attend the conference. •NER•



There are a Number of Constructive Steps Arab States Can Take

A key step for Arab countries would be to recognize Israel and establish relations with the Jewish state. In his July remarks, President Bush asked Arab states to support the peace process by “ending the fiction that Israel does not exist” and by “sending cabinet-level ministers to Israel.”

Senators are also calling on Arab states to “end the Arab League boycott of Israel in all its forms.” While Bahrain and Oman have reportedly taken this step (as part of their free-trade agreements with

Nicolas Sarkozy has publicly sided with the United States on Iran and on a slew of other international issues. Even prior to his election as president, Sarkozy stated in Washington that the prospect of a nuclear-armed Iran is "terrifying," and that "all options should be left open" to prevent it from materializing. As president, he called for tough economic sanctions against Iran to avoid the need to choose between "the Iranian bomb or bombing Iran."

Declaring that "if we allow Iran to acquire nuclear weapons, we would incur an unacceptable risk to stability in the region and in the world," Sarkozy said his government was "strongly" urging French companies "to refrain from going to Iran." He had previously asked French oil and gas companies not to bid for new projects in Iran, and called on French banks to get out of that country.

Sarkozy's bold new approach has significantly enhanced the prospects of meaningful new sanctions that could force Iran to stop its nuclear weapons program. Russian and Chinese obstruction has sharply reduced the likelihood of a timely, effective Security Council sanctions resolution. Absent such a resolution and given that to a large extent, U.S. sanctions are already in place, tough new EU sanctions would provide the best hope for success. Sarkozy's efforts to persuade France's EU partners to join Paris in adopting such sanctions deserve strong U.S. support. •NER•

In Memoriam: Herb D. Katz

A BELOVED SUPPORTER OF AIPAC LEAVES BEHIND A LEGACY OF COMMITMENT TO A VARIETY OF JEWISH AND ISRAEL-FOCUSED ORGANIZATIONS

Near East Report notes with sadness the passing of long-time AIPAC National Board member Herb Katz, of Hollywood, Florida. Herb's affiliation with AIPAC spanned more than a quarter of a century.

Rising through the ranks to serve as AIPAC's Management Committee Chairman, Herb helped lead the organization through a time of tremendous growth and expansion of its activities as the organization grew to include 18 offices throughout the nation and in Jerusalem.

Inspired by his love of America and Israel and his commitment to his community, Herb applied the lessons he learned in business to help ensure AIPAC's financial health and long-term welfare.

Herb served as Florida Regional Chairman and is widely credited with AIPAC's

successful growth in Broward and Miami-Dade counties. A prolific political activist, Herb's relationships with leading members of the Florida Congressional delegation spanned several decades, making him a trusted friend of many leaders in Congress.

In addition to his long-time devotion to AIPAC, Herb was a leading philanthropist, devoting time and resources to a wide range of Jewish and Israel-focused organizations such as American Friends of The Hebrew University, the United States Holocaust Memorial Council and CLAL—the National Jewish Center for Learning and Leadership.

Herb leaves behind his wife Eleanor, five children, and eight grandchildren. His memory will live on at AIPAC, an organization he worked so hard to help build. •NER•



Photo by Suzanne Mazer

Katz applied lessons learned in business to important causes.

Atomic Block....cont'd from pg. 67

foreign subsidiaries to bypass current sanctions on Iran's energy sector and bans nuclear collaboration with any entity that is involved with Iran's nuclear program. It also chokes off resources to the Islamic Republic by ending all Iranian imports to the U.S.

The U.N. Security Council has already passed two rounds of binding sanctions requiring the Islamic Republic to stop enrich-

ing uranium. So far Tehran has refused, and the Security Council is considering a third round of sanctions to force Iran's compliance.

In addition to the measures passed here at home, the international community has taken a tough stand against Tehran's atomic ambitions. French President Nicolas Sarkozy recently stated that a nuclear-armed Iran would be an "unacceptable risk to stability in the region and in the world." •NER•

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