

NEAR EAST REPORT

AIPAC'S BIWEEKLY ON AMERICAN MIDDLE EAST POLICY

July 30, 2013

www.aipac.org/ner



U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry embarked on his sixth trip to the Middle East, where he met with Arab leaders to restart negotiations on an Israeli-Palestinian peace process.

E-ISSN 1947-4458

Published biweekly except when Congress is out of session by The American Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC).

Funded in part by the American Israel Education Foundation, the charitable organization affiliated with AIPAC.

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Secretary Kerry speaks to the Arab League alongside Jordan's Foreign Minister Nasser Judeh on July 17, in Amman, Jordan.

Kerry in Context: U.S. and Israel's Persistence Leads to Resumption of Peace Talks in Washington

Secretary of State John Kerry traveled to Amman, Jordan on July 15 to hold meetings with Arab League, Jordanian and Palestinian officials in hopes of bringing Israelis and Palestinians back to the negotiating table. Kerry's trip marks his sixth to the Middle East since entering office on February 1, and the greatest number of peacemaking missions to the region by a secretary of state since Condoleezza Rice.

By the end of the week, the top U.S. diplomat announced that his efforts had come to fruition, revealing on July 19 that the two sides had established "a basis" for resuming direct peace negotiations after more than three years of stalemate.

The announcement came after a week of presentations to Arab leaders to detail the sweeping regional benefits of a bilateral peace agreement between Israelis and Palestinians, including a survey of Egypt's political uncertainty and the civil war in Syria.

The turning point for Kerry occurred last week, following a meeting between Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas and his leadership to address the American push for renewed talks. Shortly thereafter, Kerry announced that his mediating role had culminated in the established basis for renewed negotiations between Israelis and Palestinians.

"This is a significant and welcome step forward," he said. "If everything goes as expected, [P.A. negotiator] Saeb Erekat, [Israeli Justice Minister] Tzipi Livni and [Netanyahu advisor] Isaac Molho will be joining me in Washington to begin initial talks within the next week or so."

Then on Thursday, a senior Israeli official confirmed that negotiations would begin on July 29 in Washington.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, who has gone on record since 2009 to declare his willingness to make significant steps for peace, expressed his approval of Kerry's efforts. "I view the resumption of the diplomatic process at this time as a vital strategic interest," he said. "It is important in and of itself in order to try and bring about the conclusion of the conflict between us and the Palestinians, and it is important in light of the strategic challenges that are before us."

Netanyahu backed his words on July 28, when the Israeli cabinet approved the release of 104 Palestinian prisoners jailed prior to the 1993 Oslo Accords. The move further confirms Israel's eagerness to resume peace talks, and Jerusalem's willingness to make bold compromises in the process.

Palestinian officials agreed to reunite around the table with the Israelis and Americans, after nearly three years of refusing to meet directly with Israel without preconditions. "It's really very, very hard, but I have my commitment," said Erekat, normally the most outspoken amongst Palestinian politicians. "We're going to do everything we can to make it work."

While few details are certain, senior officials in Jerusalem expect the upcoming meetings in Washington to deal with the agenda for holding discussions and the timetable for talks. They are presumed to last about nine months, opening with negotiations of borders of an independent Palestinian state and Israel's security demands.

Additionally, Secretary Kerry announced on July 29 that former U.S. Ambassador to Israel and current Vice President and Director of Foreign Policy at the Brookings Institute, Martin Indyk, would serve as U.S. Special Envoy for Israeli-Palestinian Negotiations.

Despite uncertainty, Mr. Kerry's diplomatic persistence with Arab leaders sends a strong message about America's intentions. His efforts indicate both that peace between Palestinians and Israelis is a top priority for the United States, and that America believes the

barriers hindering a peace agreement can be broken. "Through hard and deliberate, patient work, and most importantly through quiet work, we have been able to narrow those gaps very significantly," the Secretary told reporters this week. "We continue to get closer and I continue to be hopeful that the two sides will come to sit at the same table."

Israel Eager to Return to the Table

Over the past several years, Israel has demonstrated its eagerness to renew peace talks with the Palestinians. Since 2009, Prime Minister Netanyahu has called for the establishment of an independent Palestinian state, while also reducing barriers to civilian movement in the West Bank and significantly bolstering the Palestinian economy by implementing beneficial tax and loan agreements.

Israeli officials had spoken hopefully that Kerry's efforts would convince Abbas to reengage in direct talks. "Kerry has succeeded in promoting the chances of opening negotiations," said President Shimon Peres. "The coming days are critical."

With the announcement that the two sides will meet this week in Washington, Israelis and Palestinians will reunite at the negotiating table for the first time since talks broke down in 2010.

Secretary Kerry's Trips to the Middle East in 2013:

- February 24-March 6: Kerry visited with the Syrian Opposition Coalition in Rome, followed by a trip to Turkey, Egypt, Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, and Qatar. He discussed bilateral and regional issues of concern with the leadership of each country.
- March 19-27: Secretary Kerry accompanied President Obama on his travel to Israel, the Palestinian Territories, and Jordan. He then met with Iraqi leaders in Baghdad and Afghani leaders, including President Karzai in Kabul.
- April 6-15: The Secretary met with senior Turkish officials to discuss a range of bilateral and global issues in Istanbul, followed by trips to Jerusalem and Ramallah where he engaged with Israeli and Palestinian leadership on the topic of renewing peace talks.

Continued: Kerry in Context: US and Israel's Persistence Leads to Peace Talks in Washington

- May 21-28: After a visit to Oman, Kerry traveled to Amman, Jordan to meet with international leaders about working towards a political solution to the Syrian civil war. He then continued to Jerusalem and Ramallah to meet with Israeli and Palestinian leadership. He capped off the trip by returning to Amman to participate in the World Economic Forum.
- June 21-July 2: Kerry traveled to Doha to meet with senior Qatari officials about bilateral and regional issues, before continuing on to Jeddah to meet with Saudi leaders. He then met with senior Kuwaiti officials to discuss regional issues, and continued to Amman, Jerusalem, Ramallah, and Tel Aviv to hold meetings about advancing the peace process.
- July 15-18: Last week, Secretary Kerry traveled to Amman to hold meetings with Arab League officials and Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas about renewing Israeli-Palestinian negotiations. He also visited the Za'atri Refugee Camp and met with Syrian refugees in Jordan.

Egypt's Turbulent Transition: An Interview with Eric Trager

In a region already plagued by persistent instability, Egypt has become another locus of crisis. Following the Egyptian military's ouster of President Mohamed Morsi on July 3, Muslim Brotherhood activists and secular oppositional forces have engaged in deadly clashes. To learn more about the situation on the ground in Egypt, Near East Report interviewed Eric Trager of The Washington Institute for Near East Policy to elicit his expert analysis.



Eric Trager is the Next Generation Fellow at The Washington Institute for Near East Policy.

Trager, the Next Generation Fellow at The Institute, is a Ph.D. candidate in political science at the University of Pennsylvania, where his research focuses on Egyptian opposition parties. He was in Egypt during the 2011 anti-Mubarak revolts, and his writings have appeared in numerous publications, including the New York Times, Wall Street Journal, Foreign Affairs, the Atlantic, and the New Republic.

Continued: Egypt's Turbulent Transition: An Interview with Eric Trager

From 2006 to 2007, Mr. Trager lived in Egypt as an Islamic Civilizations Fulbright fellow, where he studied at the American University in Cairo and received his M.A. in Arabic studies with a concentration in Islamic studies. He served as a research assistant at The Washington Institute from 2005 to 2006 upon graduation from Harvard University with a degree in government and language citations in Arabic and Hebrew.

NEAR EAST REPORT: What precipitated the Egyptian military's action two weeks ago?

Eric Trager: It's important to focus on two factors. First, the Muslim Brotherhood's blatantly undemocratic attempts to consolidate power unified the once-disparate opposition against it. This began following President Mohamed Morsi's November 22 constitutional declaration, through which he asserted unchecked executive authority and which he then used to ram an Islamist constitution through to ratification a few weeks later. This anti-Brotherhood anger then metastasized in subsequent months as conditions worsened, with long gas lines, multiple-times-daily electricity outages, and rising food prices. This popular anger was reflected in the unprecedented numbers of Egyptians who turned out to protest the Muslim Brotherhood's rule on June 30.

The second factor was President Morsi's total lack of control. By attempting to govern without consensus, and by then appointing unqualified Muslim Brothers to ministerial and gubernatorial positions, Morsi and the Muslim Brotherhood increasingly met resistance from within Egypt's tremendous bureaucracy. So by June 30, Morsi controlled practically nothing: the police in particular, as well as many governmental institutions simply stopped being responsive to him, and Morsi had assented to the military's autonomy under the new constitution. So in a sense, his removal – whether by military intervention, popular uprising, or some other mechanism – was inevitable, because Morsi was by that point a president in name only, and that's simply not sustainable in a country of approximately 90 million people.

NER: What is happening on the ground now, and who are the key players on both sides?

ET: Right now, the situation on the ground is extremely unstable. The Muslim Brotherhood has escalated its protests against Morsi's removal in the past three weeks, and violence between the Brotherhood and anti-Brotherhood protesters, as well as between the Brotherhood and security forces, has increased. While the Egyptian military is now trying to orchestrate a civilian-led transition that has returned figures from the Mubarak regime to positions of

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authority, Gen. Abdel-Fattah al-Sisi has made it clear that he remains the ultimate power broker. Moreover, persistent civil strife will likely overshadow any attempt to move the post-Morsi political process forward.

NER: To what extent is Israel communicating with the military?

ET: Communication between the Israeli and Egyptian militaries remains strong. Israel has green-lighted further deployments in the Sinai.

NER: What role has the military played in hindering the flow of weapons smuggling to Gaza?

ET: Historically, the Egyptian military has hesitated to accept responsibility for the Sinai, because it doesn't want to be blamed for failure and views this as an Interior Ministry (i.e., police) responsibility. But in recent weeks it has dealt more aggressively with the tunnels to Gaza – destroying them rather than just flooding them – and the United Nations reported earlier this week that the latest crackdown has rendered 80 percent of those tunnels non-functional.

NER: How does the violence and political instability affect the United States?

ET: Political instability and violence will undermine Egypt's ability to act as an anchor of regional stability and peace. This is why the United States should look beyond its traditional emphasis on Egypt's commitment to the peace treaty with Israel and countering terrorism, and also focus on helping Egypt achieve more inclusive governance. Without the kind of stability that only a truly inclusive system can provide, Egypt will be internally weak, and therefore unreliable for the U.S. and its allies. Washington's failure to criticize Morsi's power-grabbing governing style was a terrible mistake in this regard, and it would similarly be a mistake to not hold Egypt's military accountable for shepherding a transition to more democratic rule.

NER: Where do you predict Egypt will be in 3 months? 6 months? 12 months?

ET: Given that neither the Egyptian military and its millions of supporters nor the Muslim Brotherhood appear likely to back down from the current crisis, persistent civil strife is the most likely scenario. The one silver lining is the \$12 billion cash infusion that Egypt received from Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, and the U.A.E. after Morsi's ouster, which may give the transitional

Continued: Egypt's Turbulent Transition: An Interview with Eric Trager

government some breathing room to enact reforms and improve Egyptians' livelihoods. But if the experience under the military junta that ruled Egypt from the time of Mubarak's ouster until Morsi's election is any guide, it is hard to expect that this money will be spent appropriately, which is why I remain very pessimistic.

I hope you'll forgive me for not making any predictions about the next year: Egyptian politics are so tumultuous that it's hard to know what will happen beyond a two-week timeframe!



Heard On The Hill

House Passes Defense Appropriations for FY14

The House passed the \$594 billion defense bill on July 24, which included nearly \$500 million for Israeli Cooperative Programs. The appropriations allow \$220 million for Iron Dome, \$150 million for David's Sling, \$75 million for Arrow 3 and \$44 million for Arrow 2.

Two key amendments, which were proposed by Reps. Mike Coffman (R-CO) and Rosa DeLauro (D-CN), were added to the bill and their aim is to stop the United States from doing business with a Russian weapons export company which is known to have dealings with the governments of Iran and Syria.

Continued: Heard on the Hill

The legislation, which passed by a vote of 315-109, now goes to the Senate for debate. Rep. Buck McKeon (R-CA) does not seem optimistic for a timeline on the budget, saying "It is going to be very difficult to get a spending bill for 2014 passed." Last year's bill for FY13 was not approved until December.

Senate Committee Finalizes Mark-Up of Foreign Aid Bill

The Senate Appropriations Committee passed the FY 2014 State and Foreign Operations Bill on July 25, which includes \$3.1 billion in funding to Israel as part of the 10-year Memorandum of Understanding between the United States and Israel.

The legislation also includes a number of key pro-Israel provisions and important new policy language related to Palestinian and Egypt aid restrictions.

Subcommittee Chair Patrick Leahy (D-VT) and Ranking Member Lindsey Graham (R-SC) included new bill language which would end aid to the Palestinian Authority if the Palestinians initiate or support cases against Israeli nationals at the International Criminal Court.

In addition, Egypt's security assistance was altered in a way that doles out the \$1.3 billion in military assistance in 25 percent increments based on Egypt meeting various benchmarks including steps towards a democratic transition in government and upholding of human rights and upholding security in the Sinai.

It also continues to tie Egypt's aid to its adherence to the peace treaty with Israel and, unlike the House, continues to provide \$250 million in economic assistance.

Concerning the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestinian Refugees (UNRWA), Senator Mark Kirk (R-IL) successfully included report language requiring the State Department to issue a report to the Committee on the number of people receiving UNRWA services who 1) called Palestine their place of residence between June 1946 and May 1948 and were displaced, and 2) who are their descendants.

The Committee also refused to include an administration request to provide funding for UNESCO and a waiver for the provision in law that prohibits U.S. funding to any U.N. agency that accepts the Palestinians as a member state.

Continued: Heard on the Hill

It did, however, accept an amendment from Sen. Mary Landrieu (D-LA) to provide limited funding for a UNESCO World Heritage Program that could help a specific project in Louisiana.

Court Says Americans Born in Jerusalem Cannot List Israel as Country of Birth on Passport

American citizens born in Jerusalem cannot claim Israel as their place of birth on their passports, a federal appeals court in Washington ruled on July 23.

A unanimous three-judge panel of the U.S. Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia Circuit ruled that the president - and not lawmakers - has sole authority to say who, if anyone, maintains sovereignty over the historic holy city claimed by Israelis and Palestinians.

"Today's decision not only flies in the face of basic geography, but thumbs its nose at the fact that the U.S. Constitution clearly places authority over passports and regulations regarding U.S. citizens born abroad in the hands of Congress," said Rep. Eliot Engel (D-NY), Ranking Member on the House Foreign Affairs Committee.

In 2012, the congressman signed an amicus brief with the Supreme Court in *Zivotofsky v. Clinton* arguing for the constitutionality of a 2002 law requiring the State Department to list "Israel" as the country of birth on U.S. passports for American citizens born in Jerusalem. The Supreme Court remanded the case back to the lower court.

The United States has recognized the sovereignty of Israel since it declared independence in 1948. Israel considers Jerusalem its political and spiritual capital, while Palestinians seek to make East Jerusalem the capital of a future country.

Senators Call for Sanctions on Russian Company with Ties to Syria

The United States should sever ties with a Russian weapons company accused of providing arms to the Assad regime in Syria, two U.S. Senators said.

Sens. Mark Begich (D-AK) and Kelly Ayotte (R-NH) sent a letter to President Obama on July 8, that calls on the administration to sever ties with Rosoboronexport, a state owned Russian weapons export company that has sold weapons to the Assad regime, including the S-300 advanced anti-aircraft missile system.

Continued: Heard on the Hill

The company “has supplied the Assad regime with guns, grenades, tank parts, attack aircraft, anti-ship cruise missiles, and air defense missiles, which the regime in turn uses to perpetuate its rule and murder innocent civilians,” according to the senators.

Begich and Ayotte fear the weapons could be used against Israel and could make the implementation of a potential no-fly zone in Syria more difficult. The Pentagon recently announced it was purchasing 30 helicopters from Rosoboronexport for the Afghan military.

“American taxpayer dollars should not be provided to a Russian state-owned corporation that is complicit in the murder of thousands of innocent Syrian men, women, and children,” the senators added.

Congressmen Condemn E.U. for its Ban on Funding for Israeli Organizations in West Bank

Four congressmen came out strongly against the European Union’s decision to ban funding to Israeli companies and organizations in the West Bank and East Jerusalem.

Eliot Engel (D-NY), Trent Franks (R-AZ), Doug Lamborn (R-CO) and Brad Sherman (D-CA), all co-chairmen of the Israel Allies Caucus, sent a strongly worded letter assailing the ban to Catherine Ashton, the E.U.’s head of foreign affairs and security policy.

“It is our belief that a sustainable framework for peace can only be decided through direct negotiations between Israeli and Palestinian leadership. Like you, we want to achieve a peaceful, negotiated, solution to this conflict,” wrote the four representatives on July 18. “But, the cause of peace is not advanced by the E.U. placing blame for lack of progress solely on Israel’s shoulders. This is simply not the case.”

Capitol Hill Applauds E.U. Decision to List Hezbollah’s Military Wing as a Terrorist Organization

Several lawmakers lauded the European Union on July 22 for its decision to add Hezbollah’s military wing to its list of terrorist organizations. Although, some want the E.U. to go further and label all of Hezbollah as a terrorist group like the United States, Israel, Canada, France and other countries have.

Continued: Heard on the Hill

“I commend the European Union for recognizing Hezbollah for what it is - a terrorist organization,” said Sen. Kirsten Gillibrand (D-NY). “The evidence is clear that Hezbollah has conducted horrific acts of terrorism and continues to intend to do harm to Western targets. The E.U. did the right thing to designate Hezbollah’s military wing as a terrorist organization and I urge the E.U. to take a step further and put the political wing of Hezbollah on the terrorist blacklist. We must send a strong message to Hezbollah and do everything we can to thwart this terrorist group’s dangerous activities.”

Rep. Edward R. Royce (R-CA), chairman of the House Foreign Affairs Committee, said the E.U. designation was “an important step recognizing the grave threat Hezbollah poses to our mutual security.”

Rep. Henry Waxman (D-CA), who has spearheaded several bipartisan letters to the E.U. on the issue, added, “One year after Hezbollah shed blood on European soil in Bulgaria, they will suffer the consequences. This step helps to ensure that Hezbollah will not be able to access money and services in Europe that would help them spread their hateful and dangerous violence around the globe.”

The House and Senate unanimously passed resolutions calling for such a move during the last Congress, and President Obama joined their calls in February after Bulgaria linked Hezbollah to last year’s deadly attack on Israeli tourists in the Black Sea resort town of Burgos.

Editorial: Diplomacy with Iran

America’s strategy on Iran has three dimensions: diplomacy, sanctions and a credible military threat. With Iran fast approaching a nuclear weapons capability, now is the time to further solidify all three of these commitments. The United States should engage in smart negotiations, continue to increase economic sanctions and make clear to the leaders in Tehran that we are prepared to use military force if diplomatic efforts are ignored. The Iranian regime must understand that we will not allow them to acquire a nuclear weapon.

As America looks to start negotiations with the newly elected Iranian President Hassan Rouhani, we all hope the talks will succeed and that Iran will finally come to the table ready to compromise.



Iranian President-Elect Hassan Rouhani served as Iran's chief negotiator, where he touted his ability to hold the West at bay through talks.

Given the rapid progress of its nuclear proliferation program and its increasing ability to advance the rate of uranium enrichment to weapons grade, the Iranian regime must prove it is serious about reaching a deal, today.

However, we must also not forget Tehran's history of using talks to forestall pressure and continue its illicit activities. In fact, it was Rouhani who as Iran's chief negotiator touted his ability to hold the West at bay through talks, while Iran advanced its nuclear program.

While the fate of talks remains uncertain, Iran's nuclear program is rapidly advancing. Tehran is now installing advanced centrifuges that could quadruple the pace of Iran's uranium enrichment. Iran may be nearing the final stages of acquiring a nuclear weapons capability.

Iran is racing towards acquiring the world's most dangerous weapon. A nuclear weapon in the hands of the world's leading state sponsor of terrorism could have cataclysmic repercussions for our safety and security. We must not allow that to happen.

Until Iran takes demonstrable, concrete steps to limit its nuclear program, we must increase the sanctions and further the pressure on the regime. Sanctions are already having a dramatic impact on the Iranian economy. Oil exports are down, inflation is up and the regime is struggling to pay its bills. But the centrifuges keep spinning. We must do more.

Next week, the House is likely to take up a new bill that will achieve that objective. The Nuclear Iran Prevention Act ([H.R. 850](#)) would strengthen enforcement of current U.S. sanctions on Iran, provide a path to get Iran's oil exports to zero, target Iran's foreign currency

reserves and, for the first time, specifically authorize the president to impose sanctions on any entity that maintains significant commercial ties to Iran. The bill was introduced by House Foreign Affairs Committee Chairman Ed Royce (R-CA) and Ranking Member Eliot Engel (D-NY).

Passage of this legislation sends an important and urgent message to Iran: only tangible actions will earn you sanctions relief. It also reinforces the president and Congress' policies that the U.S. will prevent Iran from acquiring nuclear weapons.

Finally, the United States must increase the credibility of its military threat to stop Iran. President Obama has made clear that the United States will not allow Iran to acquire a nuclear weapon—containment is not an option. America must maintain a strong physical presence in the Persian Gulf and the broader Middle East as a deterrent to Iran, to give credibility to the president's statements.

Diplomacy, sanctions and a credible military threat can still stop Iran, but time is quickly running out.

[Take action now](#) and urge your House member to vote for final passage of the Nuclear Iran Prevention Act, and [click here](#) for a video to learn more.