

NEAR EAST REPORT

JANUARY 2016 • WWW.AIPAC.ORG/NER



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E-ISSN 1947-4458

Published by the American Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC).

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

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Defeating ISIS Requires Simultaneously Countering Iran

The United States and our allies face serious challenges today from both Sunni and Shia extremism in the Middle East and beyond. The Sunni Islamic State (ISIS) has declared war on the “infidel” West, Israel and Muslim nations that reject its barbaric interpretation of Islam. Shia Iran, joined by its regional allies, is extending its control from Lebanon in the west to Iran’s border with Afghanistan in the east, with a southern outpost in Yemen. ISIS’s brutal terrorist attacks in Paris and California have raised its profile in America, leading some to believe we must subordinate other regional goals—including confronting Iranian expansionism—to the overriding necessity of defeating ISIS. Nothing could be further from the truth. Defeating ISIS is indeed essential; the best way to achieve this is to simultaneously confront the even greater long-term threat posed by Iran.



Maintaining pressure on Iran provides the West with its best hope to assemble the moderate Sunni coalition required to defeat ISIS. (Pictured from left to right: Syrian dictator Bashar al-Assad, Iranian Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei and ISIS leader Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi)

Two Very Different Dangers

ISIS and Iran detest each other, but they share many goals and methods. Both are stridently anti-Western and aim to upend the few remaining stable states in the Middle East—Israel, Jordan, Saudi Arabia and the Gulf monarchies—in the name of a radical and theocratic version of Islam. Both employ and facilitate terrorism, either directly (as does ISIS) or directly and through proxies such as Hezbollah, Syrian President Bashar al-Assad, and Iraq’s Shia militias (as in Iran’s case). Yet closer inspection reveals that the overall dangers that Tehran and ISIS pose for the United States, Europe, and Israel are of strikingly different magnitudes: Tehran resembles an undefeated heavyweight champion with years of experience who is eyeing the world title, while

ISIS is more akin to an upstart middleweight fighter who has scored some surprising upsets but whose long-term viability in the ring is questionable. A few examples illustrate the differences:

- **Iran** has a population of over 80 million and the resources of an industrialized state with advanced military, nuclear and ballistic missile capabilities. In comparison, over the past six months **ISIS** has lost about a third of the land it once held and now controls no more than five million people living in largely underdeveloped and impoverished parts of Syria and Iraq.
- **Iran** is governed by an unchallenged Supreme Leader who is patiently implementing a sophisticated long-range anti-Western and anti-Israel foreign policy agenda. In comparison, **ISIS** is run by a fractious coalition of Jihadists, Sunni tribes, and ex-Ba'athists whose long-range planning is in part linked to hopes for a millennial "end of days" cataclysmic confrontation with the West.
- **Iran** boasts a military of over 500,000 men, including the well-trained Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps, which trains and leads tens of thousands of terrorists and irregulars in Lebanon, Syria, and Iraq. In comparison, **ISIS** has at best 100,000 lightly equipped fighters, and has suffered severe losses recently battling in Kobane, Ramadi and Sinjar.
- **Iran** asserts control in four Arab capitals: Baghdad, Damascus, Beirut, and Sana'a. In comparison, **ISIS** is largely limited to the Sunni hinterland of Iraq and Syria; the extent to which it actually controls its small "franchises" in Libya, Sinai, Yemen, and elsewhere is unclear.
- The **Iran-Hezbollah-Assad troika** is responsible for roughly eight times as many dead Syrians as **ISIS**. Furthermore, according to a survey of 900 Syrian refugees in five German cities, 70 percent of Syrian refugees blame Assad—not ISIS—for their exodus. The sponsor of the poll concluded that it showed that "the battle against ISIS terrorism will not solve the [refugee] problem."

None of this is meant to suggest that ISIS does not pose a serious challenge to America, Western Europe, and Israel. ISIS has shown in Paris and San Bernardino that it is not satisfied with attacking the "near enemy" (neighboring Muslim states) but is determined to assault the "far enemy" (the West) as well. The issue is not *whether* the West needs to defeat ISIS, but *how best* to eliminate this peril while continuing to confront the even more significant long-term risks posed by the Islamic Republic of Iran.

Not Either/Or but Both

This quandary is less difficult to resolve than it seems, primarily because *maintaining pressure on Iran provides the West with its best hope to assemble the moderate Sunni coalition required to defeat ISIS.*

Europe and the United States can contribute training, air support and special operations assistance in the fight against ISIS, but the task of liberating its Sunni strongholds belongs to the many anti-ISIS Sunni tribes and opposition groups in Iraq and Syria, helped by moderate Sunni states such as Jordan, Saudi Arabia and the Gulf emirates. These Sunni forces, however, will be understandably reluctant to fully cooperate with the United States against ISIS if they conclude that Iran, Assad, and radical Shia might be the ultimate beneficiaries of their sacrifices. Many moderate Sunnis, for example, deplored the 2003 U.S. invasion of Iraq not because they supported Saddam Hussein, but because they feared that Washington was delivering Baghdad to Tehran on a silver platter.

More recent events in Iraq and Syria underscore the centrality of combining both anti-Iran and anti-ISIS strategies. During the 2007-2008 “surge” of U.S. forces in Iraq, Sunni tribes joined the fight against Jihadist terrorism only when convinced that Washington would restrain the Shia-dominated and Iranian-influenced Baghdad government and defend Sunni interests in territories liberated from ISIS’s predecessor. Likewise, America recently encouraged Baghdad to reconquer Ramadi with a mixed Shia-Sunni Iraqi army counterterrorism force (aided by Sunni tribal irregulars) and to forego Iran-controlled Shia militias, lest the city’s Sunni inhabitants conclude that exchanging ISIS’s control for Baghdad’s amounted to going from the frying pan into the fire. The same logic applies to Syria: the Sunni majority there will not turn decisively against ISIS (and other radical jihadists such as Jabhat al-Nusra) until satisfied that Iran and Assad will not reap the rewards.

Nothing could damage the struggle against ISIS and the quest to stabilize pro-Western Sunni regimes in the Middle East more than for the West to suspend its efforts to contain Iran and depose its ally Assad in the misguided belief that it cannot fight on two fronts at once. Even worse would be the appearance of an informal U.S.-European alliance with Tehran and Damascus against radical Sunni Jihadism. This would almost certainly rally much of the Sunni population in Syria and Iraq to ISIS’s side and trigger a mass withdrawal of moderate Sunni states from Washington’s anti-ISIS coalition. We can, however, avoid these perils if we understand that anti-ISIS and anti-Iran operations reinforce each other. With patience, perseverance and resolve America can, in time, achieve both critical objectives. 

IDF Conduct During the 2014 Gaza Conflict

Israel far exceeded its responsibilities under the Law of Armed Conflict (LOAC) when battling Hamas in the summer of 2014. According to an October 2015 assessment by a respected international group of retired military and defense officials, the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) made “unprecedented efforts” to avoid civilian casualties during Operation Protective Edge.

The High Level Military Group—composed of senior military experts from Australia, Colombia, France, Germany, India, Italy, The United Kingdom, the United States, and Spain—was formed in early 2015 to



According to the HLMG, Israel exceeded its humanitarian responsibilities throughout the conflict. It facilitated the passage of a total of 5,637 trucks transporting 122,757 tons of supplies from the Jewish state into Gaza, and supported the entry of 71 doctors and nearly 200 ambulances, as well as the establishment of a field hospital at the Erez crossing for injured Gazan civilians.

The group’s findings contradicted those reported by the notoriously anti-Israel United Nations Human Rights Commission (UNHRC), which previously had concluded that Israel violated international law, had unclear objectives and did not do enough to protect Gaza’s civilians. It is also the second independent investigation led by former military officials to strongly endorse Israeli ethics during the conflict. In March 2015, the Jewish Institute on National Security (JINSA) released a report with similar findings to HLMG.

“Members of the High Level Military Group, many of whom had never visited the country prior to our fact-finding visits were united in their view that Israel’s efforts were entirely justified, appropriately conceived and lawfully carried out, and necessary in the defense of that country’s national security,” concluded the HLMG report. “It is further our view that in the overall conduct of its campaign, the IDF not only met its obligations under the Law of Armed Conflict, but often exceeded them, both on the battlefield and in the humanitarian relief efforts that accompanied its operation.”

independently investigate Israel’s conduct during the conflict in the larger context of adding “a professional military and legal element to debates about warfare in the 21st Century, which at times have been ill-informed and politicized, and which are of vital importance to our own armies and alliance partners.” Most of these experts had no prior connection with the Jewish state, and participants included a former chairman of the NATO military committee, a former chief of staff of the Italian army, a former U.S. ambassador-at-large on war crimes and a former director-general of the Indian Defense Intelligence Agency.

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Israel did not want this conflict, Hamas did.

According to the HLMG, Israel did not seek out a fight with Hamas, it sought to deter the terrorist organization from launching indiscriminate rocket attacks into the Jewish state. “Israel communicated its desire for de-escalation to Hamas through third-party intermediaries and public diplomacy, before ultimately being forced to launch an operation to defend itself against the untenable threat to its population from Hamas’s rocket and tunnel assaults,” wrote the HLMG. Further, the HLMG stated, “No country would accept the threat against its civilian population that these rockets present to Israeli population centers.”

The report states that Israel only engaged militarily when its attempts at de-escalation failed. The assault began as an aerial mission limited to halting indiscriminate Hamas rocket fire. But when the danger posed to Israeli civilians by Hamas’s underground tunnel network was fully realized, the operation turned into an “appropriately narrow and clearly defined” ground operation to locate and destroy the tunnels. The IDF’s ground force operations were contained to a limited territorial area and did not enter into Gaza territory further than three kilometers.

Hamas, on the other hand, provoked Israel in hopes that it would fuel a larger conflict—and it rejected overtures to de-escalate the situation, according to the report. The Arab Spring had caused a severe shakeup of Middle Eastern paradigms and alliances, with Hamas finding itself “in a position of considerable strategic isolation, a predicament which was a major contributing factor to the renewed outbreak of hostilities.” So, it sought “a major violent escalation intended to significantly improve its position vis-à-vis Israel, its relationship with the Palestinian Authority, its external sponsors and its own population.”

The conflict began on July 7 and ended on Aug. 26, 2015. And in the end, Hamas agreed to terms in a final ceasefire agreement that were basically identical to those offered in a July 15, 2015, Egyptian-negotiated ceasefire proposal to which Israel had agreed prior to its ground operation.

“It is further our view that in the overall conduct of its campaign, the IDF not only met its obligations under the Law of Armed Conflict, but often exceeded them, both on the battlefield and in the humanitarian relief efforts that accompanied its operation.”

**- High Level Military Group,
“An Assessment of the 2014 Gaza Conflict”**

Israel actively protected Gaza’s civilians, Hamas actively endangered them.

The HLMG found Israel’s conduct during the conflict, as it relates to the protection of Gaza’s civilians, to exceed what they would expect from their own militaries. The report cited that in many cases, the IDF took on

significant risk at the peril of its own soldiers, and with a high tactical cost, in order to avoid civilian casualties. “It fought under restrictive Rules of Engagement and it is obvious that instances existed throughout the conflict where the IDF did not attack lawful military objectives on account of a deliberate policy of restraint...It further used its formidable intelligence capability in an effort to contain its action as closely as possible to Hamas’s assets and protect the civilian population...”

The report specifically cites Israel’s extensive intelligence apparatus and pre-strike measures as having had a significant impact on reducing civilian casualties. As a result of its accurate and thorough intelligence, the IDF was able to separate Hamas’s military assets from civilian infrastructure with “unprecedented” accuracy, and “contain its action as closely as possible to Hamas’s assets and protect the civilian population amid which these were purposely and unlawfully embedded.” The report also detailed Israel’s “thorough protocol” to warn civilians prior to a military strike, including dropping leaflets, making radio announcements, telephone calls and text messages, and communicating via third parties such as U.N. agencies. These efforts were in addition to what the IDF terms a “knock on the roof,” a practice where a projectile small enough not to cause structural damage or bodily injury is exploded on the roof of a target in order to warn those around that a strike is forthcoming. “It is our assessment that the procedures the IDF deploys in order to give prior warning of an attack are extensive and well conceived.”

While Israel actively tried to help civilians, Hamas actively tried to exploit and endanger them. The HLMG concluded that not only did Hamas disregard the safety of civilians, both in Gaza and in Israel, but its military strategy intentionally put both populations in harm’s way. Hamas launched up to 4,000 rockets and mortars “deliberately and indiscriminately” at Israeli civilian populations during the conflict hoping Israel would retaliate. And Hamas’s strategy of embedding its military structure among its own civilians showed “a flagrant disregard for LOAC and the safety of its own population...” Hamas encouraged the use of human shields to avert strikes on its military infrastructure. At the beginning of the conflict, a senior Hamas spokesman asked about this tactic responded, “The policy of people confronting the Israeli warplanes with their bare chests...has proven effective...We in Hamas call upon our people to adopt this policy.” Training guides seized by the IDF also showed how Hamas fighters should deliberately use civilians as cover for combat operations and how to hide weapons in civilian areas.

Indeed, evident in Hamas’s strategic concept is the active encouragement of harm to its own civilians. Hamas understands clearly that it benefits from harm to its own civilians not only in seeking to galvanise Palestinians for its war on Israel, but rather by pursuing an asymmetric strategy aimed at the court of international public opinion, where Hamas’s tactic of drawing Israel into fighting in civilian urban areas with the resultant casualties and television pictures is a targeted attempt to erode Israel’s legitimacy at the cost of Gaza’s civilian population, whom Hamas’s strategy thus purposefully endangers.

Israel exceeded its humanitarian responsibilities, and Hamas tried to obstruct those efforts.

Israel launched an extensive campaign of humanitarian support for the civilian population of Gaza throughout the duration of the conflict, “Despite clearly aiding Hamas” and which the report called “an extremely rare historical occurrence...” The report states that during the conflict, Israel’s office for the Coordination and Liaison Administration for the Gaza Strip (CLA) facilitated the passage of a total of 5,637 trucks transporting 122,757 tons of supplies from Israel into Gaza, and supported the entry of 71 doctors and nearly 200 ambulances, as well as the establishment of a field hospital at the Erez crossing for injured Gazan civilians. The IDF also helped evacuate those seeking medical attention at the facility. And in order to ensure that all this happened in an effective manner, “the IDF set up a sophisticated coordinating structure incorporating military, NGO and civilian representatives during the conflict.” Eighty-nine Civilian Affairs Officers (CAO), a program created by CLA in 2010, were also integrated into combat units to advise commanders in regard to operational aspects as related to humanitarian matters—all of the CAOs were fluent in Arabic.

The IDF also set up an Infrastructure Coordination Centre—operating 24 hours a day throughout the conflict—to maintain Gaza’s critical infrastructure needs, including fuel, electricity, water and sewage and communications. “Israel appears to have made a substantial effort to facilitate the preservation, repair, or import of the necessary components to ensure an acceptable level of supply,” cited the report. In total, Israel facilitated 782 truckloads of various fuels and gas into Gaza, made 22 repairs to water infrastructure, three repairs to the sewage system and 13 repairs to communications infrastructure. Israel also donated large amounts of rice, flour, sugar, cooking oil and bottled water to alleviate civilian suffering.

The report reveals that Hamas devoted time and resources to prevent Israeli aid from reaching Gaza residents. “We were further alarmed by incidents that point to an effort by Hamas to actively obstruct Israel’s humanitarian efforts during the conflict,” wrote the HLMG. Specifically, Hamas and other Palestinian factions opened fire at the Kerem and Erez crossings intending to halt the transfer of humanitarian aid, leading to fatalities, injuries and delays in delivering assistance. Much of the aid Israel provided had to be provided in secret for fear of being targeted by Hamas and it had to be rid of any markings indicating origins in Israel so that Hamas would allow the supplies to enter. Further, the HLMG found that Palestinian civilians feared execution by Hamas for cooperating with Israel. And lastly, the terrorist group also sought to prevent civilians from obtaining medical care at Israel’s field hospital.

Conclusion

The HLMG concluded its report with a clear viewpoint: Israel acted within, and at times exceeded, the Law of Armed Conflict. In fact, the Israeli government and IDF used all of the resources at its disposal to keep Gaza’s

civilian population as safe as possible and to limit collateral damage. All civilian casualties are deeply unfortunate, but given Hamas' penchant for nesting within civilian population centers, the Palestinian casualties that resulted are not indicative of Israel's intentions (nor necessarily its actions).

In addition, the HLMG determined that Hamas made no attempt to follow LOAC, including intentionally endangering its own population, and that it abused Israel's adherence to the code for operational gain. And finally, regarding previous reports on the conflict, the HLMG stated:

Without seeking to deny the necessity or discourage in any way the practice of appropriate formal and informal checks and balances on warfare in the international system, we further note that in reviewing commentary from the United Nations Human Rights Council, a number of NGOs such as Amnesty International, and sections of the media commentary on the 2014 Gaza Conflict, there are stark, unwarranted condemnations of the IDF's conduct that do not accord with our own examination. We believe that where ideological motivation can be discounted, the principle for this disparity is the absence of the appropriate military and legal expertise and judgement in much of this commentary. 

U.S.-Israel Foundation Invests \$7.5 Million in Joint R&D Projects

On Dec. 16, 2015, the U.S.-Israel Binational Industrial Research and Development (BIRD) Foundation agreed to allocate over \$7.5 million to nine new joint research-and-development projects between American and Israeli companies.

Approved by BIRD's board of governors in Tel Aviv, this year's joint projects will focus on healthcare, agro technology, environment, nano-satellites, electronics and other initiatives. Each venture can receive up to \$1

million in direct funding from the Foundation. In addition to BIRD grants, companies will be permitted to access private sector cost sharing for a total project value of \$21 million.

“Technological cooperation with Israeli companies is becoming a growing trend in the U.S. where, in today's competitive global economy, companies are seeking out innovation and talent.”

**- Eitan Yudilevich,
Executive Director, BIRD**

These nine new initiatives are just the latest investments in BIRD's 38-year history—BIRD typically supports 20 collaborative projects per year. Since its 1977 establishment, BIRD has issued over \$300 million in conditional grants to joint American-Israeli ventures, providing 50 percent of the budget for more than 900 shared projects and facilitating company sales of more than \$10 billion. The ultimate goal of the Foundation is to bring together Israeli and American expertise to mutually benefit industrial research and development.

In addition to BIRD, an off-shoot named BIRD Energy was created in 2009 to boost binational energy cooperation between the two allies. Since the passage of the U.S. Energy Independence and Security Act of 2007, which included key provisions on enhanced U.S.-Israel cooperation on renewable energy and energy efficiency, BIRD Energy has funded 28 projects and provided \$22 million in total funding. In 2015, it funded six separate projects focusing on solar energy, energy efficiency, smart grid development and wind energy.

Following the announcement of the new grants, BIRD Executive Director Eitan Yudilevich said, "Technological cooperation with Israeli companies is becoming a growing trend in the U.S. where, in today's competitive global economy, companies are seeking out innovation and talent. BIRD works to actively promote such cooperation through our activities and financial support."

Below is a look at BIRD's first nine 2016 research and development projects:

BDR Technologies (Ness Ziona, Israel) and MagBioSense (St. Louis, MO)

Israel's BDR Technologies is teaming up with St. Louis-based start-up MagBioSense to jointly develop a diagnostic device for heart attack victims, offering laboratory-quality sensitivity at the point-of-care. In 2013, MagBioSense's founder Amos Danielli moved his company to the United States from Israel.

ECONcrete Tech (Tel Aviv, Israel) and Besser Company (Alpena, MI)

Israeli sustainable development company ECONcrete Tech is pairing up with leading U.S. concrete equipment manufacturer Besser Company to produce a bio-enhanced dry cast concrete product that can mitigate the effects of harsh climate. Prior to this project, ECONcrete has lent its technological expertise to the United States through the Hurricane Sandy rebuilding task force and the Brooklyn Bridge Park.

Elbit Systems (Haifa, Israel) and Tyvak Nano-Satellite Systems (Irvine, CA)

Leading Israeli high-tech defense and homeland security company Elbit Systems Ltd. is working with California's Tyvak Nano-Satellite Systems to create a small-satellite search and rescue application. In addition to the BIRD Grant, Elbit Systems was selected by the Pentagon to jointly develop a helmet for the F-35 fighter jet that will allow pilots to see images from the cameras on the airplane.

Forrest Innovations (Caesarea, Israel) and U.S. Company

Forrest Innovations, an Israeli hi-tech company with a focus on agriculture, will partner with an unnamed U.S. company to advance disease control solutions in potatoes. In June 2015, the organization announced that it will open a U.S. headquarters in St. Louis.

Groundwork BioAg (Lod, Israel) and Marrone Bio Innovations (Davis, CA)

Two leading environmental innovation companies, Israel's Groundwork BioAg and California's Marrone Bio Innovations, are working together to develop a biological stacked seed treatment. Marrone focuses on creating bio-based pesticides and Groundwork BioAg designs and manufactures bio inoculants for mainstream agriculture.

Kramer Electronics (Jerusalem, Israel) and iRule (Detroit, MI)

Detroit's iRule and Jerusalem's Kramer Electronics are teaming up to generate a distributed advanced commercial control solution. iRule has created a universal remote control for mobile devices and Kramer Electronics specializes in distributing signal management products.

Screenovate (Ra'anana, Israel) and U.S. Company

Israel's Screenovate technology will work on a joint wireless display project with an unnamed U.S. organization. The company is known for technological innovation in screen duplication solutions.

VocalZoom (Yokne'am, Israel) and Vixar (Plymouth, MN)

Israeli start-up VocalZoom and New England's Vixar are jointly creating a vertical cavity surface emitting laser (VCSEL) module for sensing applications. The joint technology will enable applications to obtain personalized information about the user who is communicating with a device. This information originates from the optical data produced on facial skin when a person speaks.

WSC Sports Technologies (Bnei Brak, Israel) and Krossover Intelligence (New York, NY)

WSC Sports Technologies and Krossover Intelligence are sharing their sports technology know-how to create custom highlights for amateur athletes. Both companies use unique technology to help sports content owners maximize their video collections. Krossover provides an online video indexing platform that provides data analytics technology to sports teams and WSC Sports Technologies has developed an innovative work automation platform that can maximize sports content. 

Washington Brief: A Recap of News from the Hill and Beyond

Members of Congress to Administration: Sanction Iran

Leading lawmakers from both parties, including supporters of the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), criticized the administration for delaying new sanctions on Tehran over its missile program.



On Dec. 30, 2015, the U.S. Department of Treasury notified Congress that it intended later that day to impose sanctions on nearly a dozen companies and individuals for providing support to Iran’s ballistic-missile program.

The administration, however, walked back its notification and the sanctions were not issued.

“We just have additional work that we need to do as the U.S. government before we would announce additional designations,” Deputy National Security Advisor Ben Rhodes said about the delay.

Members of Congress are pressing the administration to impose the new penalties, warning that the delay will embolden Tehran’s destabilizing regional activities.

House Minority Whip Steny Hoyer (D-MD) [said](#) he was “disappointed that the Administration has delayed punitive action in response to Iran’s recent ballistic missile tests.”

“Under that agreement, Iran’s non-nuclear violations of U.N. Security Council resolutions will merit punitive action, and I will continue to press for decisive action by the United States and our international partners. Otherwise, we will have a serious problem with our credibility in enforcing the JCPOA,” said Rep. Hoyer.

Seven House Democrats—spearheaded by Rep. Nita Lowey (D-NY)—sent a [letter](#) to President Obama expressing “serious concern with Iran’s recent violation of international law by test-firing medium-range missiles.”

“Inaction from the United States would send the misguided message that, in the wake of the JCPOA, the international community has lost the willingness to hold the Iranian regime accountable for its support for

terrorism and other offensive actions throughout the region—including in Syria, Yemen, Lebanon, and the Gaza Strip,” wrote the representatives. “This behavior—including these ballistic missile tests—poses a direct threat to American national security interests and those of our allies.”

Speaker of the House Paul Ryan (R-WI) [urged](#) the administration to act on the latest illicit ballistic missile test, stating that the United States “cannot allow Iran’s threatening activities to continue without consequence.”

Sen. Chris Coons (D-DE) [told](#) the Wall Street Journal that “strict, aggressive, and consistent enforcement is critical to punishing Iran for its destabilizing behavior and making the nuclear deal work.”

“I believe in the power of vigorous enforcement that pushes back on Iran’s bad behavior,” said Coons. “If we don’t do that, we invite Iran to cheat.”

Senate Armed Services Committee Chairman John McCain stated that the administration “continues to turn a blind eye to Iranian saber rattling...for fear Iran will walk away from the nuclear deal.”

Chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee Bob Corker (R-TN) [expressed](#) concerns regarding the implementation of the Iran nuclear deal in light of the delayed sanctions.

“I fear that pressure from our ‘partners’—or threats from the Iranian government that it will walk away from the deal or threaten the U.S. in other ways—have caused the administration to rethink imposing sanctions for Iran’s violations of the testing ban,” said Sen. Corker. “If our administration cannot impose consequences for ballistic missile launches now, when sanctions and a clear U.N. ban are still in place, I have no confidence it will enforce the JCPOA or penalize future launches when sanctions are lifted.”

Sen. Charles Schumer (D-NY) said that “the Treasury Department’s sanctions in response to Iran’s clear violation of UN Security Council Resolution 1929’s ban on ballistic missile activity sends a message to Iran that they can’t use the new regime to cheat in other areas. It is essential that the United States be willing to act unilaterally on any violations and that we remain vigilant to spot and act on any violation of international agreements.”

Congress Passes Omnibus Bill with Key Pro-Israel Provisions

On Dec. 18, 2015, Congress passed a \$1.1 trillion omnibus appropriations bill—which was signed by President Obama that same day—for the 2016 fiscal year, which contains essential U.S. assistance to Israel.

An omnibus is a catch-all bill that wraps multiple initiatives into one piece of legislation. In this case, the bill provides funding for all U.S. government agencies and programs, including foreign aid.

Expressing strong bipartisan support for Israel, Congress allocated \$3.1 billion in security assistance to the Jewish state, \$487.6 million for U.S.-Israel cooperative missile defense programs, \$40 million for a new U.S.-Israel anti-tunneling initiative and \$2 million for U.S.-Israel cooperative energy programs.

The passage of \$3.1 billion in security assistance to Israel fulfills the eighth year of a 10-year Memorandum of Understanding between the two nations.

The bill also renewed the Department of Defense's authority to replenish stockpiles in Israel by an additional \$200 million annually for two years, and extended Israel's ability to use existing U.S. loan guarantees for an additional four years.

By providing Israel with strong U.S. security assistance, America ensures that the Jewish state maintains a robust qualitative military edge (QME) over its adversaries.

The legislation also includes restrictions on aid to the Palestinians, enforcement of the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action and other funding initiatives throughout the Middle East.

The omnibus bill passed in the House of Representatives by a vote of 316-113 and in the Senate 65-33.

Treasury Sanctions Key Hezbollah Support Network

On Jan. 7, the U.S. Department of the Treasury sanctioned a key Hezbollah financier Ali Youssef Charara and his telecommunications company Spectrum Investment Group Holding SAL.

“Today’s actions continue Treasury’s ongoing efforts to target Hezbollah and its supporters under Executive Order (E.O.) 13224, which have recently included actions against a key Hezbollah support network based in Africa, global Hezbollah-linked procurement networks, and numerous other officials and facilitators,” wrote the Treasury in a [press release](#). “As a result of this action, all assets of those designated today that are based in the United States or in the possession or control of U.S. persons are frozen, and U.S. persons are generally prohibited from engaging in transactions with them.”

As a member of the state-designated terrorist organization, Charara has obtained millions of dollars from Hezbollah to invest in commercial initiatives that economically aid the group.

“Hezbollah relies upon accomplices in the business community to place, manage, and launder its terrorist funds,” said Adam Szubin, Acting Under Secretary for Terrorism and Financial Intelligence. “We are committed to exposing and disrupting these networks to pressure Hezbollah’s finances and degrade its ability to foment violence in Lebanon, Syria, and across the region.”

Bipartisan Resolution Opposing Anti-Israel European Labeling Guidelines Introduced in the House

On Dec. 14, 2015, Reps. Nita Lowey (D-NY), Peter Roskam (R-IL), Eliot Engel (D-NY), and Ed Royce (R-CA) introduced a [resolution](#) in the House of Representatives denouncing the new European Commission labeling guidelines on Israeli goods produced in the West Bank and other areas.

The bipartisan legislation states that the new labeling guidelines “undermine efforts to achieve a negotiated Israeli-Palestinian peace process” and calls on the European Union to help assist with the conflict resolution.

“New European Commission guidelines to single out Israeli products manufactured in the West Bank and other areas only encourage and prompt consumers to boycott all Israeli goods,” the members of Congress said in a [joint statement](#).

“As Israel’s largest trading partner, the European Union should play a constructive role to help bring the parties back to the negotiating table and resolve their differences, not try to extract one-sided concessions and feed into politically-motivated acts to boycott Israel. This resolution expresses our opposition to the EU labeling decision and all other boycott, divestment, and sanctions efforts directed against Israel or Israeli-controlled territory.”

Congress Adopts Bipartisan Legislation Targeting Hezbollah Finance

On Dec. 18, 2015, President Obama signed into law the [Hezbollah International Financing Prevention Act of 2015](#), a bipartisan effort aimed at cutting off the Iranian-backed terrorist organization from the international finance system.

The bipartisan legislation was adopted by the House of Representatives unanimously on Dec. 16 and by the Senate on Nov. 17.

Spearheaded by Reps. Ed Royce (R-CA) and Eliot Engel (D-NY) in the House and Sens. Marco Rubio (R-FL) and Jeanne Shaheen (D-NH) in the Senate, the bill would require international financial institutions to choose between doing business with Hezbollah or the United States.

The bill would allow U.S. sanctions on foreign financial institutions that knowingly facilitate the activities of Hezbollah by providing significant financial services.

The legislation also targets satellite and other providers that transmit the Lebanese television station al-Manar, which broadcasts Hezbollah propaganda; in 2004, the United States designated al-Manar a Specially Designated Global Terrorist entity and banned its broadcast in the United States.

Hezbollah has killed more Americans than any terrorist group other than al-Qaeda, including 241 U.S. servicemen in the October 1983 U.S. Marine Corps barracks bombing in Beirut. The group was designated a Foreign Terrorist Organization by the United States in 1997, and provoked a war with Israel in 2006. It is estimated that it has an arsenal of 150,000 rockets capable of striking any location in the Jewish state. Since 2012, Hezbollah has actively fought in the Syrian civil war on behalf of the Assad regime, where its fighters have gained critical warfighting experience and acumen.

America, Israel Sign Health Innovation Deal

On Jan. 5, Israeli Health Minister Ya'acov Litzman and U.S. Secretary of Health and Human Services Sylvia Mathews Burwell signed in Washington D.C. a cooperation agreement on health innovation.

In the meeting, it was decided that both countries would invest in cancer and other research and promote cooperation in the field of aging and health quality indicators. Sec. Burwell told Minister Litzman that she was "very impressed with Israel innovation in medicine," adding that she "regarded Israel as a devoted partner in advancing health in the world." 