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EDITORIAL

New Iran Sanctions Legislation Marks an Important Step

On Aug. 2, President Donald Trump signed into law the Countering America’s Adversaries Through Sanctions Act (H.R. 3364). This bipartisan legislation—overwhelmingly adopted by the House of Representatives on July 25 and the Senate on July 27—is the first significant foreign policy statute that Congress approved this year. It strengthens sanctions targeting Iran’s ballistic missile program, destabilizing actions in the Middle East, human rights abuses and illicit conventional weapons trade.

The new law marks an important step in ensuring that America holds Iran accountable for its expanding, destabilizing behavior throughout the Middle East.

IRAN—THE WORLD’S LEADING STATE SPONSOR OF TERRORISM—REMAINS ISRAEL’S AND AMERICA’S GREATEST LONG-TERM THREAT IN THE MIDDLE EAST.

Since implementation of the 2015 nuclear deal—the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA)—Tehran has only become more emboldened and seeks to destabilize the Middle East in a variety of ways.

• Expanding Ballistic Missile Program
  Since July 2015, Iran has carried out at least 15 ballistic missile tests in defiance of United Nations Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 2231. Its missiles can already reach Israel, the Gulf Arab states, and U.S. forces in the region. Last month, Iran test-launched a satellite-carrying rocket into space. The United States and its allies are concerned that the same technology used to launch satellites could also be used to develop Intercontinental Ballistic Missiles (ICBMs) capable of hitting America.

• Supporting Terrorist Groups
  In June, the U.S. State Department reaffirmed that Iran “continued to be the leading state sponsor of terrorism.” Notably, Iran provides significant financial and military support to Hezbollah, its terrorist proxy in Lebanon—the group has killed more Americans than any other terrorist group except al-Qaida. In addition to an estimated $1 billion in annual support, Iran has transferred massive weapons stocks to Hezbollah helping it stockpile 150,000 rockets and missiles. Some of these can reach any point within Israel.

Iran has also provided large-scale financial and material support to Palestinian terrorist groups, including Hamas and Palestinian Islamic Jihad. With this aid, Hamas has dramatically bolstered the size, accuracy and range of its rocket arsenal. Iranian expertise can also be seen in Hamas’ complex underground tunnel network.

• Purchasing New Weapons
  Under UNSCR 2231, the United Nations Security Council must approve the sale and transfer of offensive weapons to Iran. Nonetheless, Iran is seeking to purchase advanced weapons systems. “Tehran is putting considerable resources into conventional military priorities such as

• Fomenting Regional Instability
  Iran foments unrest throughout the region by using its Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) to fund and train Shiite militias and terrorist proxies. Iran has backed insurgencies in Iraq, Afghanistan, Bahrain, Lebanon, Saudi Arabia and Yemen aimed at dominating its neighbors, attaining regional primacy and exporting its Islamic Revolution.

• Supporting Syria’s Assad Regime
  Despite Syrian dictator Bashar al-Assad’s slaughter of his own people and loss of international legitimacy, Iran continues to provide his regime with financial, material and military support. Iranian involvement in the conflict has contributed to the chaotic maelstrom on Israel’s northern frontier.

• Challenging America in the Region
  Iranian Supreme Leader Ayatollah Khamenei continues to make clear that he has no desire to improve relations with the United States. Iran’s government-sponsored rallies and parades continue to feature “Death to America” chants—and its military has made numerous unsafe approaches to U.S. naval vessels, fired a rocket within 1,500 yards of a U.S. warship, and illegally detained ten U.S. service members. Iran also continues to unjustly hold Americans captive.

In addition to these destabilizing activities, Iran’s brutal theocratic regime engages in systemic human rights abuses against its own people in an effort to preserve its hold on power. Despite the 2013 election and 2017 re-election of the relatively pragmatic hardliner President Hassan Rouhani, Iran has increased executions and heightened repression of women, minorities, journalists and political dissidents.

THE NEW SANCTIONS TAKE SIGNIFICANT STEPS TO TARGET IRAN’S DESTABILIZING ACTIONS.

Directed solely at Iran’s regional aggression and human rights abuses, these sanctions do not violate the JCPOA, which is strictly limited to nuclear-related activity. The legislation specifically:

• Mandates sanctions on persons that engage in any activity that materially contributes to Iran’s ballistic missile program. These sanctions would affect those engaged in any effort to manufacture, acquire, possess, develop, transport, transfer or use ballistic missiles.

Since July 2015, Iran has carried out at least 15 ballistic missile tests in defiance of United Nations Security Council Resolution 2231.
• Imposes terrorism-related sanctions on Iran’s Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC). The U.S. government has already designated the IRGC’s Quds Force—the organization’s foreign activities branch—as a terrorist group. This legislation makes clear that the entirety of the IRGC is complicit in its terrorist activities.
• Mandates sanctions on persons violating UNSCR 2231’s arms embargo.
• Authorizes the president to impose sanctions on Iranians responsible for human rights violations against those who seek to promote human rights in Iran or who expose illegal Iranian government activity.

THE NEW SANCTIONS ARE IMPORTANT IN HOLDING IRAN ACCOUNTABLE FOR ITS REGIONAL AGGRESSION.

AIPAC commends Congress and the President for demonstrating to Iran that it cannot continue to destabilize the region and threaten Israel and U.S. interests without facing consequences. Moving forward, Washington should:

• Continue to push back on Iran’s regional aggression;
• Strictly enforce all ballistic missile, terrorism, conventional arms, and human rights sanctions on Iran, including those mandated by H.R. 3364;
• Ensure Iran’s compliance with the 2015 nuclear deal, so long as it is in effect, while highlighting the danger of allowing an unreformed Iran to expand its nuclear infrastructure as the deal’s restrictions expire;
• Expand missile defense cooperation with Israel;
• Stand with Israel as it confronts Iranian-backed terrorists; and
• Ensure Israel has the means to defend itself—by itself.

Israel’s Growing Ties with East Asia

Israel places a high priority on expanding ties with countries around the globe, especially given growing efforts to boycott, divest from and sanction the Jewish state. One region that offers Israel enormous potential to foster greater bilateral trade and investment is East Asia—home to the world’s second and third largest economies.

Countries in this region are drawn to Israel’s innovative technological advances to meet their challenges in a variety of fields. Israel, for its part, not only views East Asia as an important destination of its technology exports, but also as a key source of human and economic capital that can help grow domestic industry.

For example, the Third China-Israel Science & Technology Innovation Investment Summit, held this past June, attracted thousands of Chinese and Israeli business leaders, investment institutions and government representatives. And in July, Japanese automobile giant Toyota’s research arm announced its first investment in an Israeli startup.

Such recent developments underscore that despite efforts to isolate the Jewish state economically, Israel continues to find new ways to combat divestment with investment.
CHINA

China is the world’s second largest economy—behind the United States—and Israel’s largest Asian trading partner; approximately one third of foreign investment in Israeli technology comes from China. In 2016 alone, Chinese investment in Israel increased more than tenfold to $16.5 billion.

In March 2017, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and Chinese President Xi Jinping met in Beijing to deepen bilateral ties, especially in technology and innovation. To this end, the two countries signed more than a dozen agreements. Netanyahu and Xi also pledged to accelerate the completion of an Israel-China free trade agreement.

“We have always believed,” said Netanyahu, “that Israel can be a partner—a junior partner—but a perfect partner, for China in the development of a variety of technologies…in every area.”

Xi stated that a “comprehensive innovation partnership” between the two countries would increase bilateral cooperation and “[bring] more on-the-ground benefits to Israel and China.”

Netanyahu and Xi also discussed Israel’s place in China’s One Belt One Road (OBOR) initiative—China’s plan to create a transportation and communication stream line that stretches from China to Europe. China sees Israel as an integral partner to help shape the OBOR initiative in the Mediterranean region due to its strategic location. In this regard, a potential railway linking Israel’s port cities of Eilat, on the Red Sea, to Ashdod on the Mediterranean may be of particular interest to China—a topic broached by Israeli officials with their Chinese counterparts.

This project would not be the first major Chinese investment in Israeli infrastructure. A Chinese government contractor built the Carmel tunnels project for more than $300 million in 2007-2010. A Chinese company is building the future Ashdod port at a cost of $1 billion. And another Chinese company will operate the new deep-sea port being built in Haifa.

Japan, the world’s third largest economy, also views Israel as an important partner in a wide range of sectors. For example, the island nation is looking to Israel to help strengthen its cybersecurity technology ahead the 2020
Summer Olympic Games in Tokyo. Despite its small population, Israel receives 16 percent of the world’s cybersecurity investment.

In May 2017, Israeli Economy Minister Eli Cohen and his Japanese counterpart Hiroshige Seko signed two agreements that call for greater business and cybersecurity cooperation. The agreement dealing with cybersecurity calls for increased investment and collaboration between the two countries, including a joint training program, collaborative workshops and the contribution of Israeli experts to Japan’s Center of Excellence in Cyber Security.

“We need Israeli support in the cyber field ahead of the 2020 Tokyo Olympics, and we look forward to fruitful cooperation,” said Seko.

The second agreement deals more broadly with trade, with the goal of doubling bilateral trade volume. It specifically calls for increased governmental and private sector cooperation, including in fields like artificial intelligence, robotics, the Internet of Things and autonomous driving.

“I see cooperation with Japan, the third biggest economy after China and the United States, as a strategic goal for the Israeli economy,” Cohen said. “Minister Seko’s visit to Israel is a sign of Japan’s serious intentions to become closer to Israel and increase our economic relations.”

The two agreements build upon a growing trend of Japanese interest in the Israeli startup scene. In 2014, Japanese e-commerce firm Rakuten purchased the Israeli communication giant Viber for $900 million. And in 2016, Japan’s External Trade Organization in Tel Aviv reported that the number of Japanese companies that opened an Israeli subsidiary increased from 35 to 50 between 2015 and 2016.

VIETNAM

Although Vietnam’s economy is dwarfed by those of China and Japan—it was ranked 46th largest in 2016—the Southeast Asian country has become an increasingly important destination for Israeli technology and expertise, especially in agriculture and water security. Of note, in the first quarter of 2017, Israel had 25 foreign direct investment projects in Vietnam totaling over $46 million.

In March 2017 Israeli President Reuven Rivlin traveled to Vietnam to further bilateral ties. “I believe that cooperation between Israel and Vietnam can contribute to the advancement and improvement of the lives of many,” Rivlin said. “Together we can promote food security, agricultural advancements, water technologies, education, health, hi-tech, and cyber.”

During his trip, Rivlin—along with Vietnamese Deputy Prime Minister Vuong Dinh Hue—attended the Vietnam-Israel Business Forum, hosted by the Vietnam Chamber of Commerce and Industry in collaboration with the Israeli Embassy in Vietnam. The two leaders expressed hope that Vietnam and Israel would conclude a free trade agreement in the coming year.

Also in March 2017, Israeli company Water Gen, whose innovative technology extracts clean drinking water from thin air, inked a deal with the Hanoi government to provide drinkable water to the residents of the Vietnamese capital.

“The government of Vietnam greatly esteems the technological developments in Israel, and I hope that the Israeli technology that we supply to Vietnam will significantly help to improve water conditions in the country,” said Water Gen President Mikhael Mirilashvili after the signing in Hanoi.
Agriculture has also become an important focal point of Israeli-Vietnamese cooperation. For example, of the 500 graduating students of the 2016-2017 agricultural program at Israel’s Ramat Negev Desert AgroResearch Center, 350 hailed from Vietnam. The 11-month training course provides students insights into Israel’s modern agricultural, including state-of-the-art technology and business management, so that they can bring this knowledge back home to Vietnam. The Ramat Negev Desert AgroResearch Center is one of four agricultural technical institutes in Israel providing training to Vietnamese students. Such programs that foster people-to-people ties are another way Israel can help blunt efforts to isolate it internationally.

These recent developments in Israel’s ties with China, Japan and Vietnam demonstrate how Israeli technological innovations and know-how can serve as a springboard to advance relations with other countries. And while the campaign to isolate the Jewish state economically should not be underestimated, the strategy of combating divestment with investment, partnership and trade serves as a powerful tool for Israel as a growing number of countries realize the great benefit of deepening ties with the Jewish state.

UNIFIL: Passive Observer to Hezbollah’s Violation of International Law

The Israel Defense Forces (IDF) revealed in June that the Iranian-backed terrorist group Hezbollah has been operating along the Israel-Lebanon border under the guise of an environmental NGO—Green Without Borders—to spy on Israel. The United Nations Interim Forces in Lebanon (UNIFIL) subsequently rejected Israel’s claim, stating that it “has not observed any unauthorized armed persons at the locations or found any basis to report a violation of resolution 1701.”

This most recent incident underscores how UNIFIL’s passivity in the face of Hezbollah’s blatant disregard for United Nations Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 1701—adopted in 2006 following the Second Lebanon War—has permitted the terrorist group to turn southern Lebanon into a fortress from which it can attack Israel with impunity.

UNIFIL HAS FAILED TO ENSURE HEZBOLLAH’S DISARMAMENT.

UNSC 1701 increased the size of UNIFIL—originally created in 1978 to patrol the Israel-Lebanon border—and authorized it to take “all necessary action” to confirm the withdrawal of Israeli forces from Lebanon and ensure the disarmament of all non-state actors in Lebanon, including Hezbollah. While the U.N. recognized that Israel complied with UNSCR
by removing its forces from Lebanon, Hezbollah continues to defy and disregard all of its provisions. The terrorist group now has up to 40,000 fighters, thousands of whom are battle-tested from fighting on behalf of Bashar al-Assad in the Syrian civil war.

UNSCR 1701 also specifically mandates that the area between the Blue Line—the internationally recognized border between Israel and Lebanon—and the Litani River in southern Lebanon remain “free of any armed personnel…and weapons other than those of the Government of Lebanon and of UNIFIL.” Hezbollah personnel, however, are routinely spotted in this area. In 2008, and again in 2015, Hezbollah openly defied UNSCR 1701 by conducting military exercises in the border region.

In April 2017, Hezbollah organized a tour for Lebanese photographers and journalists, reportedly accompanied by armed fighters, along the border with Israel. In response, Israeli Ambassador to the U.N. Danny Danon wrote a letter to the U.N. Security Council stating: “It is extremely disturbing that armed Hezbollah militants feel free to move openly in UNIFIL’s area of operation, without being challenged by UNIFIL or LAF [Lebanese Armed Forces] personnel. The well-documented and photographic proof of this blatant provocation once again verifies the maintenance of arms by Hezbollah in southern Lebanon, in clear violation of UNSC resolutions 1701 and 1559. This recent report adds to other evidence that demonstrates Hezbollah’s ongoing efforts in strengthening its military infrastructure in southern Lebanon.”

Since UNSCR 1701’s passage in 2006, Hezbollah’s arsenal has grown nearly tenfold with Iran’s help. Then, the terrorist group possessed approximately 15,000 rockets; today it has up to 150,000 missiles and rockets—many of which are more destructive and capable of precisely targeting any location in Israel. Hezbollah now also possesses advanced Russian-produced SA-22 anti-aircraft missiles and P-800 Yakhont anti-ship cruise missiles that can strike Israel’s offshore gas platforms. Troublingly, Iran recently began building underground missile factories for Hezbollah in Lebanon, and has supplied the group with drones, which have been deployed to spy on Israel.

The terrorist group has also embedded its forces within civilian infrastructure—virtually all of southern Lebanon is a Hezbollah fortress of underground bunkers, rocket launch sites and interconnecting tunnels. While UNIFIL has pledged to investigate Hezbollah’s practice of using human shields, it has done nothing to remove Hezbollah facilities from civilian areas. The Iranian proxy will almost certainly use the inhabitants of southern Lebanon as human shields in any future confrontation with Israel,
which will significantly increase Lebanese civilian casualties.

**UNIFIL’S PASSIVITY IN SOUTHERN LEBANON PREVENTS IT FROM THWARTING HEZBOLLAH WEAPONS SMUGGLING AND TERRORIST ACTIVITY.**

Although Israel’s northern border has been relatively quiet since 2006, multiple incidents of cross-border violence underscore UNIFIL’s shortcomings in maintaining peace.

- In 2013, Hezbollah planted an explosive on the Israel-Lebanon border, injuring four Israeli soldiers.
- In 2014, a Hezbollah roadside bomb injured two Israeli soldiers in a disputed strip of territory along the Lebanon-Israel-Syria border, known as Shebaa Farms.
- In 2015, Hezbollah launched anti-tank missiles at an Israeli vehicle traveling in the Shebaa Farms area, killing two IDF soldiers. The terrorist group later claimed it was retaliation for an alleged Israeli drone attack.

According to a March 2017 U.N. Secretary-General report, “UNIFIL does not proactively search private property for weapons in the south, unless there is credible evidence of a violation of resolution 1701.” Israeli Maj. Gen. Aviv Kochavi recently told U.S. Ambassador to the U.N. Nikki Haley that a substantive change of UNIFIL strategy would require a “confrontation with Hezbollah, [who] very crudely violates U.N. decisions.”

Many analysts believe that UNIFIL’s passivity stems from intimidation by Hezbollah and the reluctance of the Lebanese state to cross swords with the terrorist group. For example, Hezbollah fighters have blocked UNIFIL soldiers from accessing U.N. monitoring posts near the Israeli border, forcing them to withdraw. The U.N. mandate also restricts UNIFIL from increasing its forces in Lebanon or deploying them along the Lebanon-Syria border unless Beirut specifically requests such action; the Lebanese government has never asked UNIFIL to expand its activities or take any measures to limit Hezbollah’s freedom of action in southern Lebanon.

Later this month, the UNSC must renew UNIFIL’s annual mandate. Given UNIFIL’s failure to acknowledge the threat from Hezbollah—much less do anything to diminish it—the United States must seek an improvement in UNIFIL’s performance. Washington should highlight UNIFIL’s deficiencies during the review process and urge it to find the means to remedy them. The United States must also demand that the international community hold Hezbollah and its sponsor Iran accountable for their blatant defiance of UNSCR 1701. Encouragingly, U.N. Ambassador Nikki Haley said Aug. 7 that the United States wants UNIFIL to take on an expanded mission and investigate any Hezbollah violations in southern Lebanon.
Iran Hopes to Fill Post-ISIS Vacuum in Eastern Syria

The limited ceasefire in southwestern Syria, which went into effect last month, ostensibly uses Russian police forces to prevent Shia militias—including Lebanese Hezbollah—involved in the Syrian civil war and led by Iran’s Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps from establishing themselves on the borders of Israel and Jordan.

Tehran and Damascus accepted and began implementing this ceasefire with their Russian allies because they apparently believe it will prove to be a boon for their long-term aspirations in Syria. Quiet in the southwest allows them to concentrate their limited military resources in eastern Syria, where they are winning the battle against the Islamic State (ISIS) and laying the groundwork for an Iranian-controlled land-bridge stretching from Iran to Lebanon. Once they have achieved victory in the east, Iran, Hezbollah and Syria may decide to move their forces toward the Israeli and Jordanian borders. There is no assurance that Moscow will use its police units deployed to enforce the ceasefire to thwart this potential advance.

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Iran is bidding for regional dominance.

Since the 1979 founding of the Islamic Republic, Iran has sought to “export” its revolutionary presence throughout the Middle East in a bid to restore Persia’s traditional role in the region and supplant American influence. Tehran—flush with cash from sanctions relief under the 2015 nuclear deal—and its loyal terrorist proxies are working to destabilize the Middle East, inflame sectarian tensions, and support Assad’s bloody war in Syria. Iran has also intervened in Iraq—where it controls Shia militias larger than the Iraqi Army—Bahrain and Yemen. The overarching goal of these interventions is to establish Iranian political and military regional primacy, position Tehran to lead the radical Muslim struggle against Israel, and export the Islamic Revolution to Shia communities throughout the Middle East.

Syria is vital to Iran because it provides a critical piece in the “land bridge” stretching from Tehran to Beirut via Mosul in Iraq and the Syrian cities of Deir ez-Zour and Damascus. Hezbollah and other Iranian-led fighters are currently pushing east from Aleppo towards Raqqa to conquer Deir ez-Zour—the key to controlling eastern Syria and completing the strategic “land bridge.” Such a route would enable the land transport of large numbers of
weapons and fighters from Iran to Syria and Lebanon. This accomplishment would greatly benefit Tehran, especially if it were to lose access to the Beirut and Damascus airports during a future Hezbollah conflict with Israel. If Iran and Assad achieve control over eastern Syria at the expense of ISIS, they will almost certainly turn their attention to reconquering the two remaining pockets of anti-Assad Arab rebels located in the northern province of Idlib, by the Turkish border, and in the southwest, including the Syrian Golan Heights.

ISRAEL IS ALARMED BY TEHRAN’S AMBITIONS.

Israel is wary of Iran establishing itself and its Shia proxy militias next to the Israeli Golan Heights border with Syria, and worries that the flow of Iranian arms to Hezbollah will increase. Israel suspects that Hezbollah—emboldened by Tehran’s success in Syria—will eventually seek open conflict with the Jewish state. Hezbollah has invested extensive resources and taken many casualties in Syria, but it has also gained invaluable battlefield experience that will make it a much more formidable foe if it resumes hostilities against Israel.

Israel is unlikely to countenance Iranian troops or proxies approaching Israel’s borders. In response to the latest ceasefire, the Israeli security cabinet convened to discuss its concerns and to endorse the three Israeli “red lines” in Syria, previously laid out by Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu. Israel will oppose:

• An established presence of Iran and Hezbollah-led Shia militias on Israel’s northern border.
• The permanent “establishment of an Iranian military presence in Syria as a whole.”
• Hezbollah’s acquisition of “precision weapons.”

WHAT NEXT?

Securing a corridor of unbroken Iranian and Iranian-backed Shia influence from Tehran to Beirut would be a major victory in Iran’s project of regional Middle East hegemony. Stemming the Iranian tide will become increasingly difficult for Tehran’s opponents as Iran, Russia and Assad get closer to wiping out the vestiges of ISIS’s “Caliphate” in eastern Syria. Israel may eventually go beyond its current efforts to interdict Iranian arms shipment and take far more extensive action to defend itself.

On Aug. 1, U.S. Secretary of State Rex Tillerson stated, “The direct presence of Iranian military forces inside of Syria, they must leave and go home, whether those are Iranian Revolutionary Guard forces or whether those are paid militias— foreign fighters—that Iran has brought into Syria in this battle.”
Israeli Defense Minister Avigdor Lieberman had a clear message to Iran last month: “We [Israel] retain exclusive responsibility for the security of Israeli citizens, and therefore our freedom of action is absolute. We will do everything that is needed.”

The Final Frontier: U.S.-Israel Space Cooperation

For over three decades, the United States and Israel have worked together to “boldly go” where only few other countries have ventured—space.

The U.S.-Israel space relationship began in 1985, when the Israel Space Agency (ISA) and NASA began cooperating on several projects on a case-by-case basis. A decade later, the two agencies regularized cooperation and signed their first agreement outlining areas of mutual cooperation in the peaceful use of space. Subsequently, NASA selected Israeli Air Force Col. Ilan Ramon in 1997 to train with NASA in Houston. Ramon would become Israel’s first astronaut; his life and six others were tragically cut short in the 2003 Columbia space shuttle disaster.

In June 2011, astronauts aboard the U.S. space shuttle Endeavor conducted three Israeli experiments during a mission to the International Space Station (ISS). While two of the three returned to earth with Endeavor, one experiment was left at the ISS for continued study, marking the first Israeli experiment to take place there.

And in October 2015, NASA and ISA formally entered into a new agreement to bolster collaboration on civil space activities. Under this deal, NASA will be able to utilize Israeli innovation and technology in U.S. space programs—including future missions to Mars and many other endeavors.

Then-NASA Administrator Charles Bolden praised the new accord, stating, “Our two countries have had a long history of cooperation in space exploration, scientific discovery and research, and we look forward to the opportunities this new agreement provides us to build upon this partnership.”

Adding to this momentum, Reps. Derek Kilmer (D-WA), Jim Bridenstine (R-OK), Mario Diaz-Balart (R-FL) and Marc Veasy (D-TX) introduced in February 2017 the United States and Israel Space Cooperation Act (H.R. 1159), bipartisan legislation that aims to deepen collaboration between the NASA and ISA.

“There are several new exciting developments in the world of U.S.-Israel collaboration,” said Israeli astrophysicist Eli Waxman. “The Israeli start-up StemRad has created a radiation vest that might make space cooperation safer, solar blankets are being developed, ULTRASAT will unlock the secrets in deep space and Israel is competing for a Google space prize to land on the moon.” Several important examples of current U.S.-Israel space cooperation in both the public and private sectors are featured below.

ULTRASAT

ULTRASAT is a proposed satellite whose advanced ultraviolet (UV) telescope will scan
the cosmos to investigate how massive stars die, as well as the environment around black holes at the centers of galaxies. The joint collaboration between scientists at Israel’s Weizmann Institute, California Institute of Technology and ISA is targeting 2022 for the satellite’s launch. A proposal for U.S. funding for ULTRASAT was submitted in December 2016, and NASA is expected to announce its decision later this year.

“My view is that a mission like ULTRASAT can take big steps forward in all aspects of U.S.-Israel space cooperation,” said Waxman. “Unlike other innovations that have a small Israeli contribution as part of a larger U.S. initiative, ULTRASAT is a jointly developed and produced project.”

“We are aiming to build this groundbreaking technology at the low cost of $100 million including the launch,” he continued. “This will be able to create opportunities for more missions and more collaborations between the two nations.”

ASTRORAD ANTI-RADIATION VEST

In July 2015, Israel’s StemRad and U.S. defense company Lockheed Martin inaugurated a joint research-and-development initiative—the AstroRad anti-radiation vest—that may one day keep astronauts safe from harmful radiation on deep-space exploration missions, including on future missions to Mars. The Israeli company announced in March 2017 that this new product, a derivative of an innovative StemRad vest designed for first-responders, will be tested on Exploration Mission-1, an unmanned NASA mission scheduled to launch in late 2018.

GOOGLE LUNAR XPRIZE

In January 2017, Israel’s SpaceIL won a position as one of five finalists in the multi-million-dollar Google Lunar XPrize race to the moon. This competition began with 33 teams a decade ago. With 30 engineers working in an Israel Aircraft Industries facility in Yehud, Israel, SpaceIL hopes to finish the spacecraft in the next 11 months. “The fact that we’re one of five teams that achieved this shows what we always knew: We are at the forefront of global technology in Israel and the space industry here has potential to be a leader globally,” said Kfir Damari, one of SpaceIL’s founders. “This gives us a lot of motivation to shoot for the moon.”

“We have waited for this moment for a long time,” said SpaceIL CEO Eran Privman. “Our hard work over the past six years is bearing fruit and we’re looking forward to the historic day of SpaceIL’s launch and to see the first Israeli spacecraft landing on the Moon.”

FOSTERING THE NEXT GENERATION

On April 18, a small satellite built by Israeli high school students was launched into space.
from NASA’s Kennedy Space Center in Cape Canaveral, Florida, as part of an international research project. The Duchifat-2 (Hoopoe) is one of 28 nanosatellites from 23 countries participating in the European Union’s QB50 thermosphere research program—and it is the only satellite in the program constructed by high school students.

“Duchifat-2 is not only an educational venture that brings space closer to youth and lays the way for tomorrow’s generation, it is also an international research project. This is Israeli pride for the future generation, and an opportunity to increase public awareness about space,” said Israel’s Science Minister Ofir Akunis.

The Israeli satellite will study the plasma density in the lower thermosphere and send signals to the Herzliya Science Center, where students will analyze the data.

As the United States and Israel strengthen their ties across many important areas, exploration of “the final frontier” provides ample opportunity for the two allies to deepen their bilateral relationship in the decades ahead.

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**Washington Brief: A Recap of News From the Hill and Beyond**

**CRUCIAL IRAN SANCTIONS BILL SIGNED INTO LAW**

On Aug. 2, President Donald Trump signed the Countering America’s Adversaries Through Sanctions Act (H.R.3364) into law.

The bipartisan legislation—overwhelmingly adopted by the House of Representatives on July 25 and the Senate on July 27—strengthens sanctions targeting Iran’s ballistic missile program, destabilizing actions in the Middle East, human rights abuses and illicit conventional weapons trade.

“This legislation is the product of very careful, and sometimes difficult, negotiations on a bipartisan basis,” said House Democratic Whip Steny Hoyer (D-MD) in a floor statement prior to the House vote. “It… imposes new sanctions on Iran’s ballistic missile program, which threatens the United States, our Gulf allies, and Israel.”

“…Tehran continues to threaten Israel by providing funding and advanced rockets to Hezbollah, its leading terrorist proxy,” said House Foreign Affairs Committee Chairman Ed Royce (R-CA). “It continues to hold Americans hostage while developing intercontinental ballistic missiles capable of delivering nuclear weapons.”

In addition to Iran, H.R. 3364 also requires sanctions on Russia and North Korea.
“With near unanimous support in both chambers of Congress, this legislation sends a strong signal to Iran, Russia and North Korea that our country will stand firm and united in the face of their destabilizing behavior,” said Senate Foreign Relations Committee Chairman Bob Corker (R-TN).

“The Congress of the United States has sent a clear message tonight to the governments of the Russian Federation, Iran and North Korea—there will be consequences for their dangerous, destabilizing activities against our country, our allies, our interests and our values,” stated Senate Foreign Relations Committee Ranking Member Ben Cardin (D-MD).

KEY SENATE COMMITTEE ADOPTS LEGISLATION TO PENALIZE PALESTINIAN TERRORIST PAYMENTS

On Aug. 3, the Senate Foreign Relations Committee (SFRC) adopted the Taylor Force Act (S. 1697), bipartisan legislation which would eliminate funding that directly benefits the Palestinian Authority (PA) if it continues its abhorrent practice of paying salaries to terrorists or their families.

The bill—named in honor of U.S. Army veteran Taylor Force, who was brutally murdered in a March 2016 terrorist attack in Tel Aviv—was adopted in a 17-4 bipartisan vote.

“This bill shines a light on the very real problem of ‘Pay to Slay,’” said Sen. Lindsey Graham (R-SC), the legislation’s author. “Taylor was an American hero who was brutally murdered at the hands of terrorists. Yet instead of condemning this horrific attack—and so many others like it—the Palestinian Authority rewards terrorists…It is long past time to let the Palestinian Authority know that these practices are wholly unacceptable.”

“We absolutely cannot accept a policy that rewards acts of terrorism like the one that tragically took the life of Taylor Force,” stated SFRC Chairman Bob Corker (R-TN). “This legislation will force the Palestinian Authority to make a choice: either face the consequences of stoking violence or end this detestable practice immediately.”

“The Palestinian Authority must stop paying prisoners serving time in Israeli jails for acts of terrorism, as well as the families of deceased terrorists. This practice incentivizes acts of terrorism against Israeli and U.S. citizens,” said SFRC Ranking Member Ben Cardin (D-MD). “The important step taken today by the Senate Foreign Relations Committee is intended to send an unambiguous signal to the Palestinian Authority that it must stop incentivizing terror.”

Current law requires a reduction of U.S. assistance by an amount equivalent to that paid by the PA, the Palestine Liberation Organization, or any affiliated organization to individuals that committed acts of terrorism or their families.

However, this important step has not yet put an end to Palestinian incitement, necessitating the increased pressure provided by the Taylor Force Act. The legislation does not affect U.S. funding for security cooperation, nor does it cut humanitarian programs if the U.S. government can certify that the PA is taking credible steps to end violence against Israelis and Americans.

HOUSE SUPPORTS FUNDING FOR U.S.-ISRAEL MISSILE DEFENSE COOPERATION

On July 14, the U.S. House of Representatives authorized a total of $705 million for U.S.-
Israel missile defense cooperation in the Fiscal Year 2018 National Defense Authorization Act—representing a $558 million increase above the president’s budget request for these programs and $105 million over last year’s adopted funding level.

These funds will provide both research-and-development support and procurement funding for the Iron Dome, David’s Sling, Arrow-2 and Arrow-3 cooperative missile defense systems—programs which help Israel defend its citizens against rockets and missiles and also advance America’s own missile defense capabilities.

The inclusion of this vital funding was made possible through the leadership of House Armed Services Committee Chairman Mac Thornberry (R-TX) and Ranking Member Adam Smith (D-WA), House Armed Services Subcommittee on Strategic Forces Chairman Mike Rogers (R-AL) and Ranking Member Jim Cooper (D-TN).

SENATE APPROPRIATIONS COMMITTEE APPROVES FUNDING FOR U.S.-ISRAEL ENERGY CENTER

On Aug. 1, the Senate Appropriations Committee approved $4 million—to be matched dollar-for-dollar by Israel—toward the establishment of a joint U.S.-Israel Energy Center. The center will serve to foster collaboration between the U.S. Department of Energy and Israel’s National Infrastructure, Water and Energy Ministry, and bolster bilateral cooperation in a variety of energy-related fields, including production, renewables and cybersecurity.

“The activity of the Joint Energy Center is occurring in coordination and full partnership with the Energy Ministry and the Innovation Authority and the U.S. Department of Energy,” stated Israel’s Energy Ministry. “We are looking forward to the approval of the American budget, in order to advance the project.”

The creation of this bilateral energy center is a direct outcome of the U.S.-Israel Strategic Partnership Act of 2014—a landmark piece of legislation that declared Israel a “major strategic partner” of the United States and laid the groundwork for cooperation in areas like water, energy and homeland security.

To this end, Chairman of the U.S. Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee Lisa Murkowski (R-AK) and Ranking Member Maria Cantwell (D-WA) last year urged the Senate and the Department of Energy to fund this program, writing, “Collaborative research programs, technology transfer, and industry partnerships would connect two of the world’s most innovative countries—building bridges and helping to move new technologies to the market.”

Following the Appropriation Committee’s approval of the funds, Cantwell stated: “I am looking forward to this partnership between world class American and Israeli universities conducting joint research and development on the energy challenges facing both nations. I plan to work with the Department of Energy to ensure that this promising program is accessible to all interested and qualified universities in the United States—including those in my home state of Washington.”

CARDIN, PORTMAN DEFEND ANTI-BDS LEGISLATION

On July 20, the authors of the “Israel Anti-Boycott Act” (S.720), Sens. Ben Cardin (D-MD) and Rob Portman (R-OH), released a letter defending their legislation against claims by
the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) of First Amendment infringement.

“We cannot state this strongly enough: the bill does not ‘punish U.S. persons based solely on their expressed political beliefs,’” wrote the senators. “Nothing in the bill restricts constitutionally protected free speech or limits criticism of Israel or its policies.”

“The bill makes one small but important change in current law. The EAA [Export Administration Act] currently prohibits U.S. persons from complying with unsanctioned foreign boycotts imposed by foreign countries. The new legislation would extend this prohibition to unsanctioned foreign boycotts imposed by international governmental organizations such as United Nations agencies or the European Union.”

The letter also brings to attention that U.S. courts have consistently upheld these EAA provisions with regards to the Arab League Boycott of Israel—a point that the original ACLU letter neglected to acknowledge.

Defending their own records in regard to supporting constitutionally protected free speech, the two senators noted that their bill “does not limit the rights of American citizens or organizations to express their views on Israeli or American foreign policy.”

“The bill does not prevent U.S. companies and individuals from expressing their points of view, speaking in favor of boycott, divestment, or sanctions (BDS) activities, engaging in boycott activity of their own accord, or being critical of Israel.”

On July 17, the ACLU released a letter opposing S.720, stating that it would punish individuals for their political beliefs and is a direct violation of the First Amendment.

**UNITED STATES ANNOUNCES NEW SANCTIONS AGAINST IRAN’S DESTABILIZING BEHAVIOR**

On July 18, the Trump administration sanctioned 18 individuals and entities supporting Iran’s ballistic missile program and the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps’ (IRGC) military procurement network. On July 28, an additional six entities tied to Iran’s ballistic missile program were targeted.

“The Administration is continuing to conduct a full review of U.S. policy toward Iran. During the course of this review, the United States will continue to aggressively counter Iran’s malign activities in the region,” said State Department Spokesperson Heather Nauert. “While the review is ongoing, the United States will also continue to expect strict Iranian adherence to Iran’s nuclear commitments under the JCPOA and look to the International Atomic Energy Agency to continue to monitor and verify all of Iran’s nuclear commitments.”

“This Administration will continue to aggressively target Iran’s malign activity, including their ongoing state support of terrorism, ballistic missile program, and human rights abuses,” said Treasury Secretary Steven Mnuchin. “These sanctions target procurement of advanced military hardware, such as fast attack boats and unmanned aerial vehicles, and send a strong signal that the United States cannot and will not tolerate Iran’s provocative and destabilizing behavior. We will continue to target the IRGC and pressure Iran to cease its ballistic missile program and malign activities in the region.”
In conjunction with the sanctions, the Department of Justice, on July 17 unsealed two indictments against individuals involved in illicit Iranian procurement efforts. Mohammed Reza Rezakhah and Mohammed Saeed Ajily, both Iranian nationals, were charged with hacking a Vermont-based computer company and exporting “defense articles” without an export license—in violation of sanctions against Iran.

DEMOCRATIC SENATORS TO TREASURY SECRETARY: HOLD IRAN ACCOUNTABLE FOR TERRORIST FINANCING

On July 25, Sens. Richard Blumenthal (D-CT), Robert Casey (D-PA), Chris Coons (D-DE) and Ron Wyden (D-OR) sent a letter to Treasury Secretary Steven Mnuchin expressing “grave concern” regarding the Financial Action Task Force (FATF) decision to continue the suspension of its call for countermeasures against Iran, despite Tehran’s ongoing support for terrorist groups.

“Iran has proven it remains staunchly committed to funding terrorism, fueling violence and instability,” noted the senators. “Iran continues to fund terrorist proxies through loopholes in its terrorist financing laws, flaunting support for groups like Hezbollah and Hamas who are responsible for maiming and murdering Americans and our allies and partners. Iran has wasted and abused the year it was given to improve its act. It remains a threat to our national security, as well as the safety and integrity of the international financial system.”

FATF is the international organization responsible for legal and regulatory guidelines on anti-money laundering and counter-terrorist financing. In June 2016, FATF suspended a prior decision calling for countries to impose countermeasures on Tehran due to its terrorist financing and deficiencies in combating money laundering. The 12-month suspension—a result of an Iranian action plan designed to address some of these issues—was renewed in June 2017.

Spearheaded by Sen. Blumenthal, the letter calls on the Treasury secretary to hold Iran accountable for money laundering and terrorist financing activities and provide the evidence used to justify FATF’s decision.

“To ensure Iran is held accountable,” the senators wrote, “we request the evidence used to justify the decision to continue suspending countermeasures against Iran—the world’s largest state sponsor of terrorism.”

“As the U.S. Department of the Treasury represents the United States at FATF, we urge you to address these concerns with FATF and ensure improved treatment of Iran is conditioned on Iran ending its financing of terrorism.”

SECRETARY TILLERSON: IRAN “MUST LEAVE” SYRIA AND “GO HOME”

On Aug. 1, Secretary of State Rex Tillerson warned that Iranian forces deployed in Syria “must leave and go home, whether those are Iranian Revolutionary Guard forces or whether those are paid militias—foreign fighters—that Iran has brought into Syria in this battle.”

The secretary also underscored Iran’s role in destabilizing the region. Iran is “persistent in [its] efforts to exert their influence across the Middle East,” he said, “and it is our intent working with our allies in the region to push back on Iran’s expansionist efforts to destabilize
areas, particularly Yemen, Iraq, [and] Syria, but we also see them in the theaters of Afghanistan.”

Tillerson specifically highlighted Iran’s “ongoing ballistic missile programs, [its] export of terrorism, [its] export of instability in Yemen, [and its] export of foreign fighters into Iraq and Syria.” Iran’s ballistic missile program, he noted, violates the “spirit of the [2015 nuclear] agreement.”