

EDITORIAL

Congress Must Support Bipartisan Hezbollah Sanctions Legislation

Last month, U.S. Ambassador to the United Nations Nikki Haley successfully prodded the U.N. Security Council to expand the mandate of the U.N. Interim Forces in Lebanon (UNIFIL). The Council unanimously adopted Resolution 2372, extending the peacekeeping force until August 2018 and encouraging it to act against Hezbollah's weapons smuggling and terrorist activities

This is a step in the right direction—one which we hope will lead to action, but America can and must do much more to counter the threat from Hezbollah. An important new initiative, the Hizballah International Financing Prevention Amendments Act of 2017 (S.1595 and H.R. 3329), known as HIFPAA, would weaken the Lebanese-based terrorist group by toughening sanctions on Hezbollah and those that support it.

THE HEZBOLLAH THREAT IS EXPANDING.

Hezbollah's destabilizing activities are expanding apace. Situated along Israel's northern border, throughout southern Lebanon and in Beirut's suburbs, Hezbollah—an Iranian-backed proxy group—maintains an advanced military arsenal larger than many national armies. With an estimated 150,000 rockets and missiles and up to 40,000 fighters, Hezbollah

is positioned to inflict significant casualties on Israel in a future war. Moreover, Iran has also reportedly established underground weapons factories in Lebanon to produce the Fateh 110 missile, capable of pinpoint targeting most Israeli population centers and military sites.

Hezbollah relies on multiple streams of income. In addition to extortive taxes and fees levied against the hundreds of thousands of Lebanese Shia under its jurisdiction, the group receives up to \$1 billion annually from Iran. Hezbollah has also developed a sophisticated worldwide financial network which distributes gains from its overseas criminal activities. Former U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration Operations Chief Michael Braun told the House Financial Services Committee last year that Hezbollah “has metastasized into a hydra with international connections that the likes of the Islamic State and groups like al Qaeda could only hope to have.”

PENDING BIPARTISAN LEGISLATION WOULD TOUGHEN SANCTIONS ON HEZBOLLAH AND ITS SUPPORTERS.

HIFPAA, which was introduced in both houses of Congress in July 2017, would impact the flow of financial and material support to Hezbollah.

Authored by Sens. Marco Rubio (R-FL) and Jeanne Shaheen (D-NH) and House Foreign Affairs Committee Chairman Ed Royce (R-CA) and Ranking Member Eliot Engel (D-NY), the bill targets Hezbollah's ability to fundraise and recruit, increases pressure on banks that do business with it, and cracks down on foreign governments that knowingly provide significant financial support to the terrorist group. The bill would specifically:

- Impose sanctions on foreign individuals and companies that aid Hezbollah’s fundraising or recruitment activities, including the provision of support to Hezbollah media outlets.
- Require an annual report on banks that provide assistance to Hezbollah and are tied to countries deemed State Sponsors of Terrorism. The report must contain a determination on whether such banks are in violation of U.S. law banning material support to terrorist entities.
- Impose sanctions on foreign government agencies or linked organizations that knowingly provide significant financial or material support to Hezbollah.
- Impose sanctions on Hezbollah by reason of its significant transnational criminal activities, including narcotics trafficking.
- Mandate an annual report on countries that support Hezbollah or in which the group maintains important portions of its global logistics networks. The report also must include a list of provinces and municipalities outside Lebanon that allow or tolerate Hezbollah activity, including training, financing and recruitment.
- Mandate a report on estimated net worth of senior Hezbollah members, including any senior foreign political figures of the terrorist group.

THE LEGISLATION ENJOYS BIPARTISAN SUPPORT.

In announcing the legislation, Rep. Royce said: “As Iran’s leading terrorist proxy, Hezbollah has been fomenting insecurity around the Middle East for decades... The U.S. cannot allow Hezbollah to threaten our ally Israel and undermine our interests in Syria. These sanctions will severely limit Hezbollah’s financial network and transnational criminal activities, as well as crack down on its backers—most importantly Iran.”

Rep. Engel stated: “We are introducing the Hizballah International Financing Prevention Act Amendments at a critical time. Battle-hardened Hezbollah fighters are coming home after fighting for the murderous Assad regime and more and more rockets are pointed at Israel’s population centers. Congress must close any possible loophole that could allow foreign funding of Hezbollah. Acting swiftly—and in a bipartisan manner—will show Hezbollah’s foreign sponsors that the United States will not sit by while Hezbollah grows stronger.”


Sen. Rubio said, “The president and Congress should build on the successes of our 2015 law that targets Hezbollah, its proxies and its enablers, and enact this new bill to strengthen international efforts to combat the financing and expansion of Hezbollah’s terrorist and missile threats, as well as its narcotics trafficking and other transnational criminal activities.”

“In the time since the Hizballah International Financing Prevention Act was signed into law in 2015,” said Sen. Shaheen, “Hizballah has continued to do Iran’s bidding in the region by threatening Israel’s security and fighting in Syria in support of the murderous dictator Bashar al-Assad. The U.S. must continue to

do all it can to cut off Hizballah’s sources of financing...Lebanon is an important ally of the United States, and I am hopeful that our governments can continue to work together to combat terrorism and bring further stability to their country.”

THE WAY FORWARD

Countering the Hezbollah threat must remain a priority for U.S. decision makers, HIFPAA is one important step Congress can take to stem the flow of material and financial support to the terrorist group. To this end, AIPAC urges members of both the House and Senate to cosponsor the bill and ensure its final passage and full implementation.

Concurrently, the United States must continue to push the UNIFIL to fulfill its extended mandate to limit Hezbollah’s presence in southern Lebanon. UNIFIL must seize the opportunity offered by U.N. Security Council backing to finally play its role in eliminating armed militias in southern Lebanon—including Hezbollah.  AIPAC

Seeing Israel with Their Own Eyes

Israel is best understood by experiencing it first-hand—a concept that is key to continued bipartisan congressional support for the Jewish state. The American Israel Education Foundation (AIEF)—AIPAC’s affiliated charitable foundation—brings lawmakers to Israel each year in order to help

them better understand our democratic ally and the importance of a strong U.S.-Israel relationship.

This past summer, AIEF brought more than 50 members of Congress—both Democrats and Republicans—on two separate trips to Israel. Forty-one out of 60 freshman members of Congress participated, representing 18 of 28 new Democratic members and 23 of 32 Republican freshmen.

The lawmakers met with Israeli politicians, traveled throughout the country and viewed its borders, visited holy sites, spoke with Israeli citizens and families, heard from Palestinian leadership, and saw the remarkable innovations that are fueling Israeli-American collaboration in the 21st century.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu also met with Democratic members of Congress on Aug. 7 and Republican lawmakers on Aug. 10 to express his gratitude for their “strong support” of the Jewish state.

The two trips joined together for a day of bipartisan programming, a tradition inaugurated by Majority Leader Kevin McCarthy (R-CA) and Democratic Whip Steny Hoyer (D-MD) in 2015. The 2017 bipartisan day included a meeting with U.S. Ambassador to Israel David Friedman, a visit to Palmachim Air Force Base and a tour of the Arrow long-range missile defense system, and a panel discussion with Israeli entrepreneurs.

“We have made a point of making sure we have an overlapping time here in Israel with Republicans and Democrats because this is not a partisan issue,” McCarthy said. “We have shared values, shared security interests throughout the world, and there is no stronger

bond between any ally we have—being the only democracy in the Middle East.”

“Some of us are Democrats and some of us are Republicans. But we’re not here as Republicans and Democrats. We’re here as Americans who support Israel’s security, its sovereignty and the safety of its people,” said Hoyer. “We’re here because the United States and Israel are partners for peace and partners for security.”



PHOTO: ISRAELI DEFENSE FORCES


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Several Democratic and Republican members of Congress shared their personal impressions of their trips to Israel upon their return.

Following his first international trip as a member of Congress, Rep. Lloyd Smucker (R-PA) said: “I am more optimistic about the future of Israel than I had ever imagined. But I also understand that the world is a very dangerous place, and especially in the Middle East, and we have to ensure that we’re doing everything we can to mitigate the threats not only to Israel but to us.”

Rep. Darin LaHood (R-IL) stated, “Israel

is the number one democracy in the Middle East, they’re our strongest ally there, we have important military and economic relationships with Israel.”

Rep. Josh Gottheimer (D-NJ) said, “There were different aha moments for everyone. A lot of different ‘I get it.’” For him, he added, “it all came together at Masada [a historic desert fortress].” 

Israel’s Expanding Ties with Latin America

On Sept. 11, Benjamin Netanyahu became the first sitting Israeli prime minister to visit Latin America when he began a multi-day visit to Argentina, Colombia and Mexico. This historic visit underscores the growing importance that Israel places on the region. In turn, many Latin American countries increasingly view Israel as an important trade, technology, security and development partner.

ARGENTINA

Israel-Argentina relations have been complex and far too often marked by tragedy. In 1992, Hezbollah terrorists—on Iran’s orders—bombed the Israeli Embassy in Buenos Aires, killing 29 people and injuring 242. In 1994, Hezbollah attacked the Jewish community center in the Argentinian capital with even more devastating results: 85 people were killed and more than 300 injured.

Previous Argentine governments stymied investigations into these horrific crimes. Marred by allegations of corruption, the government of former Argentinian President Cristina Fernandez de Kirchner cynically signed a 2013 agreement with Iran to investigate the attacks by establishing a Tehran-based joint commission. And in 2015, Alberto Nisman—the prosecutor probing the 1994 bombing of the Jewish community center—was found dead in his apartment hours before he was set to testify in Argentina’s Congress that Fernandez sought to trade Iranian oil in return for minimizing Iran’s role in the attack. His death was at first ruled a suicide, though the case was reopened last year due to the mysterious circumstances surrounding the incident.

Following his November 2015 election, President Mauricio Macri has altered Argentina’s approach. During his first month in office, he definitively abandoned the 2013 agreement. In October 2016, Argentina renewed extradition calls for former Iranian Foreign Minister Ali Akbar Velayati, the suspected mastermind of the attacks. And in March 2017, Macri held a historic meeting with Israeli survivors and relatives of victims of the 1992 Israeli embassy attack. Previous presidents had only met with families of Argentinian victims.

“[Macri] strengthened Argentina’s position compared with what it was before. I honor his commitment and the integrity of his effort to determine what happened,” Netanyahu said during his visit this week.

Deepening relations with Israel has been of priority for Macri even before he became president. In fact, during his tenure as mayor of Buenos Aires, the city used Israel as its model for expanding entrepreneurial ecosystems and

won the March 2015 Global Entrepreneurship Congress’s Cities Challenge. “We envision our city as being the center of innovation and creativity, as well as a benchmark for Latin America and the world—and working closely with the local entrepreneurial ecosystem is critical in this path,” said Macri.



PHOTO: AP IMAGES

Deepening relations with Israel has been a priority for Argentinian President Mauricio Macri even before he became president.

Netanyahu and Macri met on the sidelines of the World Economic Forum in January 2016 and reaffirmed the importance of growing the Israel-Argentina relationship. “Macri told me unequivocally: ‘We are starting a new slate with Israel. Our interests and values make this partnership necessary and therefore we are beginning a new era,’” said Netanyahu following the meeting.

Following their bilateral meetings this week, Netanyahu and Macri announced the signing of several agreements, including on public security, customs duties, cooperation in social insurance, as well as a declaration regarding pre-World War II archival documents that will foster a deeper understanding of the Holocaust.

“We are strong democracies, we are committed to seizing the future for our people, to give them a life of purpose, a life of progress, a life of realizing the potential that every one of our citizens has, and for this we have to realize that today the future belongs to those who innovate,” said Netanyahu. “Israel is an innovation nation, some say it’s the innovation nation, and we’re eager to share with Argentina the vast opportunities that come from innovation.”

COLOMBIA

Colombia places a high priority on becoming a technological leader in Latin America. To this end, Bogota is not only heavily investing in professional training programs and providing tax incentives, it is also looking to cultivate relationships with other tech giants, including Israel. In 2015, Israel and Colombia signed a R&D cooperation agreement to enable firms from both countries to receive funding for joint ventures. “This agreement will encourage Israeli industry to focus on several technological fields with the Colombian industry. The potential for cooperation is significant and through the agreement, Israeli companies can gain exposure to Colombian firms and to new potential avenues of cooperation,” said Avi Hasson, the former chief scientist at the Israeli Ministry of Economy.

“Your country, Israel, is a world leader in terms of innovation,” Colombian President Juan Manuel Santos told Netanyahu during their Sept. 13 meeting. “We like to say that Colombians are born innovators. But if we learn from you how to channel this innovation into progress, then we will be able to do it much better.”

Security is one important aspect of Colombia-Israel cooperation. Prior to the 2016 ceasefire

that ended a more than 50-year conflict between the Colombian government and FARC—a Marxist guerilla group designated by the United States as a terrorist organization—Israel reportedly provided Bogota with military training, advice and arms. Colombia—which has the second highest number of landmines after Afghanistan—now faces the difficult task of clearing its territory of landmines. As a result, a Colombian delegation traveled to Israel last year to seek expertise from the Israeli Defense Ministry’s National Mine Action Authority on ways to mitigate the threat from these deadly explosive devices.

“Israel has been a friend and ally of Colombia and lately it has been a great ally in the construction of peace in our country,” Santos told Netanyahu. “You have offered help to us in several areas, including, for example, something that is very humanitarian, which is the removal of anti-personnel mines.”

MASHAV—Israel’s international aid organization—also considers Colombia a priority country in Latin America. To this end, the Israeli development agency brought a contingent of Colombian school principals and teachers to Israel earlier this year to take part in a specialized program that provides strategies to strengthen schools back home.

MEXICO

Israel and Mexico are important trading partners that seek to deepen their relationship. In 2000, the two countries signed a free trade agreement (FTA). Already, bilateral trade totaled \$700 million in 2015—a 300 percent increase since the FTA’s implementation.

“[Mexico is] one of the world’s great economies. It’s great nation, a great people,

a great culture. We want to be close, even closer, to Mexico. And this is what this meeting signifies,” said Netanyahu following his Sept. 14 meeting with Mexican President Enrique Pena Nieto.

“We have agreed to establish and begin the... negotiations to look over this [free trade] agreement so that the commercial relationship between both nations intensifies and grows,” said Nieto.

Recently, water security has emerged as an area of increased cooperation. Israeli innovation in this sector has effectively made Israel water-secure despite its dry desert climate, and Mexico is interested in these technologies to better utilize and expand its own water resources.

In 2013, Israel’s national water carrier Mekorot and CONAGUA, Mexico’s national water commission, signed an agreement to protect and improve the quality of groundwater in Mexico. In 2014, the two countries also signed an accord to advance joint research-and-development projects, particularly in areas such as water management and desert agriculture. “We are delighted with Mexico’s vote of confidence in Israel’s economy, industry, and innovation, which have long been global brands,” said Hasson.

Last month, Mexican petrochemical company Mexichem bought Israel’s iconic drip irrigation manufacturer Netafim for \$1.5 billion— Mexichem will have an 80 percent stake in the company, while Kibbutz Hatzerim, Netafim’s founder, will retain a 20 percent stake.

Mexichem also committed to maintain manufacturing of the innovative water technology in Israel at its present level for 20 years. “Netafim positions us to become

a leading developer of solutions to address food and water shortages, and respond to the need to increase crop yields and meet higher sustainability standards for fertilization,” said Mexichem CEO Antonio Carrillo Rule.

ISRAELI-LATIN AMERICAN RELATIONS BENEFIT ALL PARTIES

As Latin American countries face a variety of challenges, they are increasingly turning to Israel for help. Prime Minister Netanyahu’s historic visit illustrates that while the Israel-Latin America relationship spans decades, Israeli innovation and expertise in areas like trade, technology, and security, as well as development assistance offer important ways to deepen these ties. In turn, Israel benefits from engaging from these trade ties and the opportunity to build close political and economic relations with these fellow democracies.  AIPAC

U.S. Courts: Anti-Boycott Laws Don’t Violate Free Speech

In 1977 and 1979, Congress added provisions to the Export Administration Act (EAA) that prohibits Americans engaged in interstate or international commerce from complying with foreign governmental boycotts of friendly nations. The Israel Anti-Boycott Act of 2017 (H.R. 1697 and S. 720) would extend these rules to also prohibit compliance

with new, similar boycotts of Israel initiated by international governmental organizations.

American courts have consistently upheld current law in the face of arguments that it restricts constitutionally protected free speech. The courts have distinguished between the extensive free speech rights American citizens enjoy and the limited free speech rights enjoyed by persons engaged in commerce. They have consistently found that Congress may prohibit American citizens and companies from complying with foreign boycotts that conflict with U.S. interests, and that Congress may restrict the information Americans can provide to foreign governments with respect to foreign boycotts. Summaries of two key court cases follow:

TRANE CO. V. BALDRIGE, 552 F. SUPP. 1378 (W.D. WIS. 1983)

Background: The EAA prohibits American companies from providing information “to comply with, further, or support any boycott fostered or imposed against a foreign country which is friendly to the United States.”

In 1978, Kuwait’s boycott office requested that Trane Company provide information about its activities with Israel, Israeli companies and other non-Israeli companies. The Arab League’s Central Boycott Office in 1980 requested similar information from United Technologies Corporation (UTC). Trane Company and UTC sued the Department of Commerce for enforcing the EAA’s prohibition on answering such queries.

Argument: Trane and UTC argued that the prohibition against their furnishing requested information violated their free speech rights under the First Amendment. They contended

that their proposed responses deserved the full First Amendment protection afforded to “traditional speech,” as compared to less protected “commercial speech,” and that the EAA prohibitions were unconstitutional because they were overreaching and did not directly advance substantial governmental interests.



PHOTO: AP

American courts have consistently held that Congress has full constitutional authority to prohibit Americans engaged in interstate or international commerce from furnishing information about their activities with Israel in order to comply with foreign government boycotts.

Decision: The court held the EAA to be constitutional. The court rejected the plaintiffs’ argument that the EAA regulates traditional speech stating that it was “abundantly clear that [the] plaintiffs’ sole interest in providing responsive answers is economic” because the questionnaires were solely intended to further potential commercial transactions. The court next disregarded the plaintiffs’ claim that the EAA violates the First Amendment protections granted to commercial speech. The court concluded that the government meets the test to determine whether regulation of commercial speech is constitutional. The court found first that the government has a substantial interest because the EAA involves “delicate foreign policy questions and the interest in forestalling

attempts by foreign governments to ‘embroil American citizens in their battles against others by forcing them to participate in actions which are repugnant to American values and traditions.’” Second, the court determined that the EAA directly advances the government’s interest to not allow U.S. persons to become involved in perpetuating the Arab boycott. Third, the court held that the EAA is no more extensive than necessary to further the government’s interest.

BRIGGS & STRATTON CORP. V. BALDRIGE, 728 F.2D 915 (7TH CIR. 1984)

Background: This case consolidated the appeals of two lower court rulings—Briggs & Stratton Corp. v. Baldrige, 539 F. Supp. 1307 (E.D. Wis. 1982) and Trane Co. v. Baldrige, 552 F. Supp. 1378 (W.D. Wis. 1983)—both of which held that the EAA did not violate free speech protections.

Argument: The appellants offered three arguments as to why their conduct should be considered highly protected traditional speech, rather than commercial speech. First, they argued that each question on the boycott questionnaire was implicitly an allegation that they have engaged in conduct contrary to the Arab boycott. They stated both that (a) they should have a right to communicate with boycott offices about the extent of their business dealings with Israel in an effort to promote the truth about their business relationships, and that (b) because such communications may not serve the economic interests of the foreign government they did not constitute commercial speech. Second, they asserted that their proposed communications should be seen as an attempt to influence the political decisions of a sovereign government, and as such should

be protected by the First Amendment. Third, the appellants argued that the presence of economic motivation alone was not enough to show that speech is commercial.

Decision: The court rejected each of the appellants’ arguments. First, the court held that the companies’ interest in disseminating truthful information could not be distinguished from their economic interests. The court was unpersuaded that the appellants had any interest in providing truthful information beyond the potential economic benefits that may result. Second, the court ruled that should the appellants wish to influence the Arab nations’ policies regarding Israel they were free to communicate their views. In the course of such attempts to persuade, however, they may not furnish information about the extent of their business dealings with boycotted countries or persons. The court observed that the appellants’ desire to answer a boycott questionnaire was not grounded in a desire to influence Arab governments’ policies towards Israel, but rather to avail themselves of potential business opportunities. Third, the court stated that while economic motivation alone may not prove that speech is commercial, it was undeniable that the appellants’ proposed answers to boycott questionnaires would serve only to allow them to continue their commercial dealings with the Arab world. No claim can be made that this conduct constitutes noncommercial speech.

CONCLUSION

American courts have consistently held that Congress has full constitutional authority to prohibit Americans engaged in interstate or international commerce from furnishing information about their activities with Israel in order to comply with foreign government

boycotts. The Israel Anti-Boycott Act merely extends the congressional authority articulated in federal case law to prohibit a company's compliance with a boycott initiated by an international governmental organization.



North Korea's Destabilizing Role in the Middle East

On Sept. 9, British authorities revealed that North Korea's rapid advancement in nuclear capabilities may be due in large part to Iranian assistance. According to this report, after decades of nuclear-related assistance from North Korea, Iran now has the technological capability of helping its patron in a symbiotic relationship that threatens the United States and its allies.

Iran is carefully watching how the world responds to North Korea's accelerated campaign to test and deploy a nuclear weapons arsenal with long-range delivery systems. Tehran will undoubtedly draw its own lessons from the North Korean experience.

NORTH KOREA HAS A HISTORY OF DESTABILIZING THE MIDDLE EAST.

Officially known as the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK), North Korea has involved itself in the Middle East for decades. Beginning in the 1960s, the country provided cheap military hardware, terrorist training and

mercenaries to the radical Arab rejectionist camp confronting Israel. Israeli pilots even directly encountered North Koreans flying Soviet-produced MiG fighter jets for the Syrian and Egyptian air forces in both the 1967 and 1973 wars. During the same period, Pyongyang was a principal sponsor of the Palestinian terrorist splinter faction Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP), providing the group with the means to execute some of its most brutal attacks on Israeli territory.



PHOTO: AP IMAGES

Reports indicate that Iran has sent scientists to North Korea, while North Korea has likewise sent technical experts to Iran to bolster Tehran's nuclear program.

Recently, North Korea has played a significant role in the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction and ballistic missile technology in the Middle East.

- **Nuclear technology:** North Korea has provided both Iran and Syria significant help in those countries' respective nuclear programs. In Syria, Pyongyang helped build a covert nuclear reactor in a remote desert area of eastern Syria near Deir ez-Zor. The construction of such a reactor in Syria was a red line

for Israeli decision-makers, forcing Israel to send fighter jets to destroy the facility. Had this reactor been completed, the plutonium it produced could well have given the Bashar al-Assad regime and its allies in Tehran a strategic capability that would have imperiled Israel and made the subsequent Syria civil war even more catastrophic.

While not much is readily available in the public domain about North Korea's support of Iran's nuclear program, some reports indicate that Iran has sent scientists to North Korea, while North Korea has likewise sent technical experts to Iran to bolster Tehran's nuclear program. Iran has also reportedly sent observers to North Korean nuclear missile tests.

- **Ballistic missiles:**

North Korea has provided significant material support to Iran's ballistic missile program and has even sold Iran advanced ballistic missiles, in turn allowing it to further develop its home-grown missile industry. Notably, Iran's Shahab missiles—which can now target all of the Middle East and much of Europe—are in fact based upon a North Korean design.

The DPRK has recently launched multi-stage intercontinental ballistic missiles able to reach the United States. These tests will provide critical data and technical lessons to help Iran's own program to perfect a delivery system capable of delivering a nuclear warhead.


- **Chemical weapons:**

Unsurprisingly, North Korea has also exported other forms of “strategic

expertise” to its Middle East allies, including chemical weapons. In addition to a growing nuclear arsenal, the North Korean regime has amassed one of the world's largest stockpiles of poison gas—to include thousands of tons of nerve agents and other toxic chemicals—with which to threaten South Korea, a key U.S. ally.

One of the deadliest exports to date has been the transfer of chemical weapons production technology, expertise and materials to the Assad regime—which in turn has horrifically used these deadly weapons against its own people in the ongoing Syrian civil war. The Israeli Air Force reportedly targeted a Syrian center of North Korean-supported chemical weapons development when it struck the Scientific Studies and Research Center on Sept. 7.

THE GREATEST IMPACT OF NORTH KOREA'S MOUNTING STRATEGIC CHALLENGE AS AN EMERGING NUCLEAR PROLIFERATOR MAY BE THE PRECEDENT IT SETS... PARTICULARLY IN THE EYES OF LIKEMINDED AGGRESSORS.

Iran's leaders are viewing the unfolding situation in North Korea with great interest, studying just how far the international community will go to respond to Kim Jong-un's aggression. Based on this experience, Iran will be able to better plan its own path to strategic nuclear weapons capability to threaten Israel, U.S. forces and other U.S. allies in the Middle East and beyond.  AIPAC

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

KEY SENATE COMMITTEE ADVANCES PRO-ISRAEL MEASURES

On Sept. 7, the Senate Appropriations Committee advanced a number of pro-Israel measures in the Fiscal Year 2018 State, Foreign Operations, and Related Programs Appropriations Bill.

The bill provides \$3.1 billion in annual security assistance to Israel—fully meeting America’s commitment under the current Memorandum of Understanding between the two countries. It also provides Israel with \$7.5 million for assisting with refugee resettlement.

The bill also maintains key restrictions on assistance to the Palestinians and adopted the Taylor Force Act, bipartisan legislation that cuts funding for assistance that directly benefits the Palestinian Authority due to its ongoing practice of providing payments to convicted terrorists and the families of those who died while committing acts of terrorism against Israelis and Americans.

“Taylor Force was an American hero who was brutally murdered at the hands of terrorists,” said Sen. Lindsey Graham (R-SC), author of the bill. “Yet instead of condemning this horrific attack—and so many others like it—the Palestinian Authority rewards terrorists. Today we are sending a strong message to the Palestinian Authority that this practice is wholly

unacceptable and inconsistent with peace. This is a good day for the family of Taylor Force, and so many others who have lost loved ones to this brutal practice.”

The bill includes new language to address the rampant anti-Israel bias at United Nations organizations, such as:

- A five percent withholding of any U.S. funds to a specialized agency or other U.N. entity that takes official action against the national security interest of the United States or U.S. ally, including Israel. Funding can only be released if the Secretary of State determines and reports that the agency or entity is taking steps to address the action that resulted in the reduction; and
- Requiring the U.S. Ambassador to the U.N. to submit a report to Congress describing instances of anti-Israel bias at the U.N.

The measure also maintains stringent prior-year restrictions on U.N. Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA) funds.

REPS. CALL FOR INVESTIGATION OF IRANIAN AIRLINE

On Aug. 23, Reps. Peter Roskam (R-IL), Andy Barr (R-KY), Lee Zeldin (R-NY) and Dave Reichert (R-WA) sent a letter to Treasury Secretary Steven Mnuchin urging him to investigate newly published photos of Iranian-backed militants onboard an Iran Air commercial aircraft. The Congressmen urged the secretary to re-sanction Iran Air if it were found guilty of transporting military goods and/or personnel to Syria since the implementation of the 2015 Iran nuclear deal, also known as

Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA).

“Iran’s use of commercial aircraft for military purposes violates international agreements as well as Iranian commitments under the JCPOA,” the letter states. “We believe these photos mandate a thorough investigation of these practices and a comprehensive review of Iran’s illicit use of commercial aircraft. During this investigation, the United States should suspend current and future licenses for aircraft sales to Iran”

ISRAELI AID GROUP PROVIDES EMERGENCY RELIEF TO U.S. STATES

Israel has provided crucial aid to both Texas and Florida following hurricanes that ravaged the two states.


On Aug. 28, seven volunteers from IsraAID—an Israeli non-governmental aid organization—flew to Houston, Texas to join ongoing emergency relief efforts in the flood-ravaged city. The group will join three IsraAID volunteers already on the ground in Houston when Hurricane Harvey made landfall as a Category 4 storm. Other Israeli organizations that traveled to Texas include ZAKA Search and Rescue Organization, and the Israel Rescue Coalition (IRC).

According to IsraAID co-director Navonel Glick, the 10-person Israeli relief delegation to Texas includes disaster management experts, mental health experts and engineers who will coordinate a two-stage response.

The first stage includes emergency relief and trauma support, and the second involves debris removal. “The immediate response is a crucial part of preventing long-term devastation among the affected communities. Beyond the initial

tragedy and destruction, long-term trauma can have a debilitating effect for a population. In addition to the immediate response IsraAID will also aim to build the resilience of the local community and if necessary provide capacity-building.”

IsraAID also received several tons of supplies and donations from Israel’s Foreign Ministry to distribute in Texas, and Israel’s Ministry of Diaspora Affairs donated \$1 million in humanitarian aid.

Israeli relief teams from IsraAID, ZAKA and IRC also rushed to Florida to help the state recover from the destruction wrought by Hurricane Irma earlier this week. “We intend to offer help in the best and most professional way we can, focusing on evacuation of stranded residents and treating the wounded,” said ZAKA International Rescue Unit chief officer Mati Goldstein.  AIPAC