

The week ending January 30, 2015

IRAN

Bipartisan vote boosts Iran sanctions bill

By a strong bipartisan vote, the Senate Banking, Housing and Urban Affairs Committee on Thursday approved legislation that would impose new sanctions on Iran if it does not agree to limit its nuclear program by the June 30 deadline set by international negotiators. According to [The Washington Examiner](#), the committee voted 18-4 to approve the bill by Sens. Mark Kirk, R-Ill., and Bob Menendez, D-N.J., on the understanding that it will not go to the floor before March 24, the self-imposed deadline negotiators have set to reach a political framework for a final agreement. Six Democrats joined all 12 Republicans in voting to approve the bill. According to a draft of the bill, if no final agreement is reached by the June 30 deadline, sanctions that had been waived as part of an interim deal would be reinstated on July 6 and additional sanctions would be imposed, starting with tighter restrictions on Iran's access to markets for its oil.

U.S. - ISRAEL RELATIONSHIP

House Foreign Affairs Committee Pushes for Suspension of Palestinian Aid

On Jan. 22, leaders of the House Foreign Affairs Committee signed a bipartisan letter to Secretary of State John Kerry expressing concerns over the Palestinian Authority's (PA) recent move to join the International Criminal Court (ICC). The United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon proclaimed that the Palestinians will become ICC members on April 1, despite the State Department's objections that the PA "does not qualify to join the ICC." The ICC prosecutor Fatou Bensouda has already opened a preliminary examination regarding the current situation between Israel and the PA. Due to the Palestinian move at the ICC, the House letter encourages Kerry to reconsider financial aid to the PA. "If the PA becomes a member of the ICC, it will undoubtedly attempt to exploit the organization for its own purposes, and ultimately make the prospect of peace with Israel far more difficult to achieve," the letter stated. "The United States should not support direct economic assistance to the PA until it demonstrates a meaningful reversal of this destructive course and proves it can be a willing partner in peace." "The actions of the PA have greatly aggravated the already fragile political environment in the region," the letter declared. "The United States must make it clear that the only path to a Palestinian state is through direct negotiations."

Senators waiting on Palestinian aid pending review of ICC moves

According to [JTA](#), three in four U.S. senators pledged not to support assistance to the Palestinian Authority until the Obama administration reviews the admittance of Palestine

to the International Criminal Court. “Current law prohibits economic assistance to the Palestinian Authority if the Palestinians initiate an ICC investigation of Israeli nationals or ‘actively support such an investigation,’” said the letter sent Thursday by 75 senators to Secretary of State John Kerry. Typically it takes years for examinations to become investigations. However, some legal experts argue that by granting the ICC jurisdiction in its territory, the Palestinian Authority may be legally understood to have “initiated” an investigation. The exemption in the letter for humanitarian assistance “to the Palestinian people” means much of the \$500 million in annual U.S. aid will likely continue, although a cutoff could affect security assistance for the Palestinians. The American Israel Public Affairs Committee praised the letter, which was initiated by Sens. Kirsten Gillibrand (D-N.Y.) and Marco Rubio (R-Fla.). “The Palestinian effort to seek an ICC investigation of Israel is a direct attempt to delegitimize Israel’s right to self-defense against Hamas terror,” the lobby said in a statement.

HEZBOLLAH

7 wounded as soldiers come under attack on Lebanon border

An Israeli army patrol came under anti-tank fire from Hezbollah operatives Wednesday in the northern Mount Dov region along the border with Lebanon reports [The Times of Israel](#). The IDF confirmed that at least seven soldiers were wounded in the attack [and 2 were killed]. The incident took place in an area of the border that doesn’t have a fence. At the same time, and for over an hour after the attack, IDF positions in the area, as well as on nearby Mount Hermon, were hit with mortar shells. Israel responded to the attack with artillery strikes in southern Lebanon. Families living on the border of the villages fled further within, fearing they’d be hit, said the officials, who are based in south Lebanon. IDF Chief of Staff Lt. Gen. Benny Gantz was holding high-level consultations to mull further responses to the attack. Defense Minister Moshe Ya’alon issued a stern warning to Hezbollah and its patron Syrian President Bashar Assad. “The Assad regime is responsible for the fire into Israel, and we will exact a heavy price from any government or organization that violates our borders,” Ya’alon said Wednesday. “We have no intention of ignoring or abiding terrorist attacks on our soldiers and citizens.”

ISRAEL IN THE NEWS

Five years post-quake Israel is still helping Haiti heal

Within 24 hours of the severe earthquake that rocked Haiti on January 12, 2010, Israel’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs sent a 220-person team of rescuers, disaster-management experts and medical personnel. Five years later, Israeli humanitarians are still on the ground helping Haitians rebuild their lives and communities. “Today, on the fifth anniversary of the earthquake, we remember the victims and renew our commitment and dedication to helping the survivors,” IsraAID Director Shachar Zahavi said earlier this month. IsraAID: The Israel Forum for International Humanitarian Aid is always one of the first relief groups to respond to disasters across the globe. Its policy is to stay on the ground after the emergency to create and implement an infrastructure of programs to rehabilitate the affected community, leaving only once those programs are functioning in the hands of local residents trained by IsraAID. In Haiti, Zahavi tells [ISRAEL21c](#), the organization’s focus is getting people resettled at home. He cannot say when IsraAID will cease its work in the island nation altogether. “We always have an exit strategy, though right now we have no idea how long we’ll stay in Haiti,” Zahavi says.