US Senate unveils revised version of Taylor Force Act

August 2, 2017

By [Eric Cortellessa](http://www.timesofisrael.com/writers/eric-cortellessa/)

The Times of Israel

<http://www.timesofisrael.com/us-senate-unveils-revised-version-of-taylor-force-act/>

The US Senate Foreign Relations Committee unveiled on Tuesday an updated version of a bill that would cut US funding to the Palestinian Authority over salaries paid to terrorists and their families.

The new text of the Taylor Force Act incorporates some of the advice given to the panel during a hearing last month, but does not include a waiver that would allow the US president to disregard the law on national security grounds.

It does, however, allow for continued funding toward humanitarian programs that “directly benefit the Palestinian Authority” and it exempts the East Jerusalem Hospital Network from being stripped of American financial support.

Other provisions call on “all donor countries” to “cease direct budgetary support until the Palestinian Authority stops all payments incentivizing terror” and requires the PA to revoke any laws that result in terrorists being compensated.

Furthermore, the State Department would be mandated to put out an annual, declassified report detailing the PA’s practices regarding cash payments that reward terrorism.

The latest version of the bill will be reviewed by the committee on Thursday during its [business meeting](https://www.foreign.senate.gov/hearings/business-meeting-080317). That session will provide US lawmakers the opportunity to offer amendments and additional revisions before they ultimately vote on whether to send the legislation to the entire chamber.

The bill, which is named after a former US army officer who was [stabbed to death](http://www.timesofisrael.com/vanderbilt-student-taylor-force-named-as-us-victim-of-jaffa-terror-attack/) by a Palestinian assailant while visiting Tel Aviv in March 2016, was introduced by South Carolina Sen. Lindsey Graham (R) in February.

US President Donald Trump announced last month that [he supported the bill’s objective](http://www.timesofisrael.com/white-house-gingerly-backs-goals-of-bill-slashing-pa-funding/) but did not unequivocally endorse it.

“While the administration agrees with the high-level goals of the Taylor Force Act, it is currently in Congress’s hands and we will continue to closely monitor the specifics of the legislation,” a senior administration official told The Times of Israel last month.

For months, the White House stayed mum on the issue, leaving some on Capitol Hill wondering whether Trump and his team feared the legislation would disrupt their attempts to broker an Israeli-Palestinian peace deal, which the administration has consistently said is a “top priority.”

Trump did, however, confront PA President Mahmoud Abbas about Palestinian terror payments during their meetings in Washington and Bethlehem in May.

There has also been speculation that the Israeli government did not actually support the measure. Israel’s Ambassador to the US Ron Dermer tried to quell those suspicions during his address to the Christians United for Israel’s annual conference two weeks ago.

“Israel believes that the United States should end economic assistance to any government that pays people to kill Jews,” he told a crowd at the Christians United for Israel’s annual conference in Washington. “Period.”

“I can assure you that Israel is not the slightest bit concerned that the Taylor Force Act will pass,” he added. “Israel would be concerned if the Taylor Force Act didn’t pass.”

Impressions of Israeli consternation over the bill have stemmed, in part, from a June letter signed by hundreds of high-level Israeli military officials warning the bill would spur a security crisis.

The letter, which was orchestrated by Commanders for Israeli Security, said the legislation would “undermine PA stability; expand the circle of frustration and hostility; erode the security coordination; and thus hurt Israeli security.”

But a source close to the group told The Times of Israel that their letter of opposition was to the bill’s “original language” and that they would “support the amended draft.”

According to [a recently published Israeli report,](http://www.timesofisrael.com/pa-payments-to-prisoners-martyr-families-now-equal-half-its-foreign-aid/) the Palestinian Authority’s 2017 budget for payments to inmates in Israeli prisons and so-called “families of martyrs” is equal in sum to about half of the foreign aid Ramallah expects to receive this year. According to the PA Finance Ministry’s 2017 budget, published on its website earlier in July, salaries to incarcerated and released Palestinian prisoners, many of whom are convicted terrorists, will amount in 2017 to NIS 552 million ($153.4 million).