US lawmakers move to push bill slashing PA funding through busy Senate

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Legislation that would cut US funding to the Palestinian Authority if it doesn’t stop paying terrorists and their families was added to a larger appropriations bill on Thursday in a bid to increase its chances of passing Congress.

The Taylor Force Act, which advanced through the Senate Foreign Relations Committee last month, is now included in a foreign operations bill slated for a vote by the full chamber in December.

Putting the measure into a broader package is aimed at giving it a second path to passage while Congress is gearing up for a busy legislative session.

The bill can still move forward as stand-alone legislation, but because US President Donald Trump has sent Capitol Hill a lofty to-do list, advocates worry it won’t be scheduled for a near-term debate and vote on the Senate floor.

This maneuver thus ties the Taylor Force Act to an appropriations bill already scheduled to be voted on by year’s end, in the case that the measure never sees individual floor-time.

A political operative who has been lobbying for the bill told The Times of Israel on Thursday that that method was always part of their strategy, although they would rather have it go to the floor — which would force senators to disclose a position on it.

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, the latest version of the Taylor Force Act passed the Senate foreign affairs panel in August by a vote of 17-4.

If passed by Congress and signed into law, it would cut US funding to the PA until Ramallah stops paying stipends to Palestinian terrorists and their families. The State Department would also be mandated to publish an annual, declassified report detailing the PA’s practices regarding cash payments that reward terrorism.

Israel, too, has demanded that the PA stop paying these wages via intermediary organizations.

The Palestine Liberation Organization has condemned the measure, saying shortly after its committee passage that the “unacceptable” legislation would violate Palestinians’ human rights.

Trump has not yet signaled he would sign the bill into law, though a White House official told The Times of Israel in July that he supports its principal objective.

According to a [recently published Israeli report](http://www.timesofisrael.com/pa-payments-to-prisoners-martyr-families-now-equal-half-its-foreign-aid/), the PA’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 budgetary aid Ramallah expects to receive this year.

The PA Finance Ministry’s 2017 budget, published on its website in July, also said that salaries to incarcerated and released Palestinian prisoners, many of whom are convicted for terrorism, will amount to NIS 552 million ($153.4 million) this calendar year.