



## Congressional Update

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The 115<sup>th</sup> Congress convened on January 3, 2017 and lawmakers in both houses wasted little time in voicing concerns about recent developments in the Middle East.

### **I. Israel and Palestine**

As outlined in ACW's January 6, 2017 [report](#), the House and Senate each introduced resolutions denouncing United Nations Security Council (UNSC) Resolution **2334**, which reaffirmed that Israeli settlements in Palestinian territory occupied since 1967 are illegal and violate international law. The House overwhelmingly adopted the resolution [HRes11](#) by a vote of 342-80.

The Senate's resolution, [SRes6](#), was considered and amended by the Senate Foreign Relations Committee (SFRC) and placed on the Senate calendar. The scheduled Senate vote on the resolution for January 17 did not occur. The earliest the resolution can be considered will be Friday, January 20, when the Senate reconvenes at 4:00 p.m. following the presidential inauguration.

In addition to these two resolutions, several other resolutions were introduced to reaffirm the Senate's support for Israel ([SRes5](#)) and highlight House members' disappointment in President Obama and his administration for failing to veto UNSC Resolution **2334** ([HRes14](#)). Two competing resolutions were also introduced in the House: one reaffirmed the United States' commitment to settling the Israel-Palestine conflict through a two-state solution ([HRes23](#)) while the second pointedly called for rejecting the two-state solution in favor of prioritizing Israel's security concerns ([HRes27](#)). **SRes5** has been referred to the SFRC, while the House resolutions are pending before the House Foreign Affairs Committee (HFAC).

Both chambers introduced complementary bills mandating that the US Embassy be relocated to Jerusalem. The "**Jerusalem Embassy and Recognition Act**" ([S11](#)), introduced by Senator Dean Heller (R-Nevada) and seven Republican cosponsors, and the "**Jerusalem Embassy and Recognition Act of 2017**" ([HR265](#)), introduced by Representative Leonard Lance (R-New Jersey) and no cosponsors, would each revoke the president's current authority to waive the required move—as set forth in the [Jerusalem Embassy Act of 1995](#)—and significantly reduce the

State Department's appropriated funds until such a move was completed. The two bills have been referred to the SFRC and HFAC, respectively.

## II. Iran

It is evident that Congress has not softened its hawkish stance toward Iran, as each house proposed legislation taking direct aim at the Islamic Republic. The "Iran Ballistic Missile Sanctions Act" ([S15](#)), introduced by Senator Heller with no cosponsors, would amend previous sanctions acts to include ballistic missiles and related technology in the non-proliferation clauses and extend sanctions against Iran should it pursue acquiring or developing missiles or launching technology. A joint resolution, introduced in the House by Representative Alcee Hastings (D-Florida) and no cosponsors and titled the "**Authorization of Use of Force Against Iran Resolution**" ([HJRes10](#)), would, if passed and signed by the president, authorize the president to use military force against Iran if it should seek nuclear weapons. **S15** has been referred to the Senate Banking Committee, and **HJRes10** has been referred to the HFAC.

## III. The Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL)

Representative Tom Cole (R-Oklahoma) introduced [HConRes2](#), a concurrent resolution that would allow for the continued use of military force against ISIL. The resolution maintains that the president has the authority to direct the armed forces in a campaign against the terrorist organization and any associated forces or organizations. It is important to note that concurrent resolutions are not binding laws. Should the resolution pass both the House and Senate, it is not sent to the president for further action. The resolution is pending before the HFAC.

## IV. Hearings

As the presidential inauguration looms, Congress continues to hold confirmation hearings for the president-elect's cabinet nominees. While there is no set date for official confirmation hearings, the new administration can officially send nominations to the Senate on Inauguration Day. Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell (R-Kentucky) was [quoted](#) on January 9 as saying he would like the Senate to confirm "up to six or seven" of the nominees that same day.

**1. Rex Tillerson, Secretary of State designate:** On January 11, the former CEO of ExxonMobil [testified](#) before the SFRC. Among other things, senators attempted to gauge Mr. Tillerson's knowledge and opinions regarding Russia's involvement in the Syrian war and the idea of the United States implementing a Muslim registry as the president-elect once vowed to do. Prior to the Tillerson hearings, the SFRC held a closed briefing on recent administration actions in response to the Russian hacking and harassment of US diplomats.

**2. General James Mattis, Secretary of Defense nominee:** On January 12, General Mattis [testified](#) before the Senate Armed Services Committee (SASC). He was critical of the pace of the United States' military campaign against ISIL in Syria and favored more aggressive steps in fighting the organization. The retired marine also offered interesting remarks when discussing the nuclear deal between Iran, the United States, and other world powers. Although he stated it required adjustments, he said he believed the United States should maintain and abide by the agreement; this is in stark contrast to comments made by the president-elect.

**3. Governor Nikki Haley, US Ambassador to the United Nations nominee:** On January 18, Governor Haley [testified](#) before the SFRC. She engaged in a spirited discussion with senators about the United Nations, which recently drew the ire of a number of senators as a result of UN Resolution **2334**. Haley told the panel that she wanted to explore the idea of withholding funding for the UN Human Rights Council because membership of the Council includes Cuba and China, and because of the Council's support for resolutions against Israel. She also told the panel she would support President-elect Trump's potential action to relocate the US Embassy to Jerusalem. Haley was questioned about UNSC Resolution **2334** and potential funding cuts proposed in **S107**, introduced on January 12 by Senators Lindsey Graham (R-South Carolina) and Ted Cruz (R-Texas). The text of **S107** is not yet available.