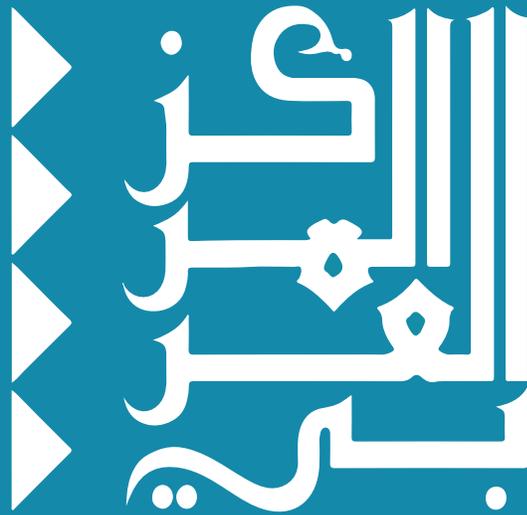


# Congressional Update: Week Ending July 7, 2017

Marcus Montgomery

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Arab Center Washington DC  
المركز العربي واشنطن دي سي

## I. Congress

Lawmakers had the week off in observance of Independence Day. A daunting policy schedule awaits their return as leaders in both chambers pursue an ambitious agenda in the few weeks before the month-long recess begins at the end of July. Domestic issues will be the main priority, but here are some things to watch for next week.

### Nominations

Multiple Senate committees will hold confirmation hearings. On July 11, the Senate Foreign Relations Committee (SFRC) will hold a hearing for David Steele Bohigian to be Executive Vice President of the Overseas Private Investment Corporation (OPIC). OPIC is a government agency tasked with mobilizing private capital to address development needs around the world. The agency currently has active programs in several countries in the Middle East, including Israel, Jordan, Lebanon, Egypt, Iraq, Tunisia, and the West Bank and Gaza. The SFRC will also hold a hearing for Jay Patrick Murray to be an Alternate Representative of the United States for Special Political Affairs in the United Nations.

On July 12, the Senate Judiciary Committee will hold a hearing for Christopher Wray, Donald Trump's nominee to be the director of the Federal Bureau of Investigation.

### Hearings and Legislation

The House Foreign Affairs Subcommittee on the Middle East and North Africa and House Homeland Security Subcommittee on Counterterrorism and Intelligence will hold interesting hearings on July 13. The House subcommittee will examine President Trump's proposed budget for fiscal year 2018 and assess what the proposals mean for US interests in the Middle East and North Africa. The Homeland Security subcommittee will be exploring the flow of Islamic State fighters out of Syria and Iraq and what threats the United States can expect for the group's diaspora. Additionally, the same committee has discussed the possibility of holding another event on the same day to examine the threat of al-Qaeda, but as of this update, no event has been officially scheduled.

*Countering Iran's Destabilizing Activities Act of 2017*. S. 722 has hit yet another hurdle in the legislative process. After the Senate unanimously agreed to correct an issue that the House cited as a "blue slip" violation, some representatives are now dissatisfied with the solution the Senate adopted. House Democrats are concerned that the adjustment adopted by their Senate counterparts weakens a provision in the Russia sanctions amendment that allows Congress to prevent President Trump from ending or easing sanctions on Moscow. The House minority is particularly disgruntled with the

language because it appears to limit the minority's ability to force a vote on any White House action regarding Russia sanctions. It should be noted that, while the parties in both chambers spar about technical issues in the Russia sanctions language, there is still wide ranging support for the titular Iran sanctions.

*Taylor Force Act.* On July 12, the SFRC will consider **S. 474**. The bill is commonly known as the Taylor Force Act and was named after a US veteran who was fatally stabbed in Tel Aviv in 2016. The bill, introduced by Senator Lindsey Graham (R-South Carolina), would condition US financial assistance to the Gaza Strip and West Bank on those steps taken by the Palestinian Authority to “end acts of violence against Israeli citizens perpetrated by individuals under its jurisdictional control” and to cease payments to the families of Palestinians accused of committing terrorist attacks. This was introduced in the past, but the Obama Administration persuaded lawmakers to scuttle the bill. Sources on Capitol Hill are seeing momentum pick up for the legislation now and expect to see it pass the Senate sometime this summer.

## **II. Trump Administration**

In the last week, the Trump Administration appears to have taken a more pronounced role in mediating the ongoing crisis between Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) neighbors. On July 2, the president himself spoke to leaders involved in the crisis, indicating his concern about the rift. Additionally, Secretary of State Rex Tillerson and Secretary of Defense James Mattis have reached out to officials in the disputing countries to ease tensions. Secretary Tillerson will travel to Kuwait—itsself a leading figure in the mediation efforts—to discuss solutions to the crisis.

## **III. Around the District**

*What the U.S. and its Gulf Partners Are Doing to Cut Off Funding to Violent Extremist Networks.* On July 6, The Arab Gulf States Institute hosted a panel of three former US Treasury Department officials who discussed the technical details of what the United States and its Gulf allies are doing to halt the funding of violent extremist networks. The panelists included Katherine Bauer, a fellow at the Washington Institute for Near East Policy; David Cohen, the former deputy director of the Central Intelligence Agency; and Juan Zarate, the chairman and co-founder of the Financial Integrity Network.

While the discussion was generally a technical assessment of agency efforts to combat terrorist financing, the panelists specifically stressed the importance of cooperation between the United States and the GCC states to reducing the financing of terrorism. The panelists unanimously agreed that the Gulf crisis is a “burden and a barrier” to this cooperative effort. Cohen argued that the United States is

most successful when it and its like-minded allies work together to gather information and execute a common strategy. However, the ongoing rift ruptures the essential elements of crucial intelligence sharing. According to Zarate, there is a silver lining in the GCC dispute, though. He argued that the list of grievances and demands that the Saudi-led bloc presented to Qatar actually reflects back on the countries involved and draws attention to the very real shortcomings every GCC state has with the financing of violent extremism.

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