



Written by [Alex Newman](#) on November 18, 2017

Coalition of Lawmakers Seeks to End Illegal Wars

The Authorization for Use of Military Force (AUMF), passed in 2001 after the September 11 attacks, has been abused by three presidents to justify more than three dozen military interventions in some 20 nations. Now, lawmakers on both sides of the aisle say that is more than enough. Republican and Democratic members of Congress are demanding a serious debate on Capitol Hill about whether these wars — especially the 16-year-old fiasco in Afghanistan — should continue to devour American lives and treasure. And even if the American people's elected representatives do decide that the seemingly never-ending wars should go on, it is time for more congressional oversight and a proper declaration of war, as required by the U.S. Constitution, lawmakers said.



The concerned lawmakers have been on this mission for years, with one of the Democratic lawmakers having opposed the AUMF since it was first approved in 2001 amid the hysteria following an attack. Just this week, though, at a viewing of the 2017 fictional film *War Machine* at the Capitol, a growing bipartisan coalition reiterated their demand for legislation to deal with the ongoing war in Afghanistan. “We remain locked in a war without end,” Representative Barbara Lee (D-Calif.) told attendees on November 14 at the Capitol. The AUMF “set the stage for perpetual war,” continued Lee, the only lawmaker to vote against the AUMF before it was signed into law a week after the 9/11 attack. “That blank check has been used everywhere in the world.”

The AUMF was originally marketed as congressional authorization for then-President George W. Bush to use military force against those who attacked the United States on September 11. But since then, it has been used by Bush, Barack Obama, and Donald Trump to justify some 37 engagements across at least 19 countries, Lee explained. Today, after years of trying, Lee, the daughter of a veteran who styles herself an “Army brat,” still wants to repeal the AUMF. This summer, she even got an amendment added to the Defense Department's appropriations bill that would have repealed the scheme. But before it could go to the full House, the amendment was removed.

While she was alone in September of 2001 — she was not opposed to using force to go after terrorists, but presciently worried that the language in the AUMF would be abused — she is not alone anymore.

On the other side of the aisle, one of the leading advocates for reconsidering the AUMF has been Representative Walter Jones (R-N.C.; shown above). Earlier this year, Jones [introduced a bill](#) that would cut all money for U.S. military combat operations in Afghanistan one year from the date of enactment. He has been trying for a while. And at the film screening this week, he was still speaking out. “It goes on and on and on,” Jones said of the war. “The American people deserve that their Congress — who support the Constitution when we take our oath — should be responsible for continuing to have a



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debate for sending our young men and women to die in war.”

In a September letter to House Speaker Paul Ryan (R-Wis.), Jones said he had written to Ryan and former House Speaker John Boehner over a dozen times regarding the need for debate in Congress on the authorization of military force in Afghanistan. “Despite repeated calls for action, nothing has happened,” the conservative North Carolina congressman declared. “You, sir, are the leader of the House and you are responsible for bringing this debate to the floor.”

The issue is now more urgent than ever, Jones added, noting that President Trump had failed to withdraw from Afghanistan and was in the process of increasing the U.S. military presence in that country. “I am angry because I have seen the waste, fraud, and abuse in that country for years,” continued Jones, who earlier this year publicly asked God to forgive him for originally voting in favor of the wars. “We are losing lives, and taxpayers are being taken advantage of.”

In particular, regarding the waste of American tax money, Jones cited the estimated 100,000 “ghost soldiers” (who appear not to exist) bilking U.S. taxpayers, as well as a Pentagon plan to introduce “rare goats” to Afghanistan that spent millions for 9 animals and failed to stimulate the economy. He also pointed to [a report from non-profit watchdog Judicial Watch](#) showing that a foreign company hired to train Afghan “intelligence” officers had billed U.S. taxpayers more than \$50 million for, among other things, luxury cars including Porsches, an Aston Martin, and a Bentley.

Ryan is at least partly to blame. “With all due respect, I believe that a Speaker of the House is complicit in the waste and abuse of taxpayers’ money when he or she denies a debate to the members who have taken an oath to uphold the Constitution,” Jones wrote to Speaker Ryan, who has become increasingly toxic with conservatives and grassroots Republicans hoping to rein in government and restore constitutional limits on the feds. “After 16 years, the waste, fraud, and corruption is more rampant today than ever. This is an insult to American taxpayers.”

“If the People’s House can afford 7 luxury cars for the executives of that firm, pay \$6 million for 9 goats to boost the Afghan cashmere industry, and pay almost 100,000 Afghan ghost soldiers who don’t exist, how can we not hold a debate?” Jones wondered. “At a time when hurricanes and wild fires are devastating this country, we need to use our tax dollars wisely. We must help out our own people first and foremost. For that reason, Mr. Speaker, I ask that you bring a debate on the war in Afghanistan to the House Floor NOW.” Ryan, of course, refused to allow a debate.

In March, Jones worked with Representative John Garamendi (D-Calif.) to introduce the bipartisan H.R. 1666 that would end funding for the Afghan war unless and until Congress passes legislation authorizing it. “Congress has failed to uphold its constitutional responsibility of authorizing our military to engage in conflicts abroad,” said Garamendi, a member of the Armed Services Committee. “H.R. 1666 will require congressional oversight into our conflicts overseas, and hopefully put us on the path to ending the longest war in U.S. history.”

“Over 2,100 American lives have been lost in the Afghanistan War, and over 20,000 others have left the battlefield with physical or mental wounds,” Garamendi continued. “Congress’s silence on this issue is insulting to the brave men and women who serve our great country, and I hope members from both parties will come together and debate this critical issue for our nation.” In a [statement](#) released by his office, it was also pointed out that the open-ended AUMF usurps the constitutional power of Congress — and only Congress — to declare war under Article I of the U.S. Constitution.

Another GOP lawmaker working to force a debate on the AUMF and the war in Afghanistan is



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Representative Thomas Massie (R-Ky.), who co-sponsored [H.R. 1666](#) and has been a leading advocate for the U.S. Constitution that every lawmaker swore to uphold. Speaking at the *War Machine* film showing this week, Massie noted that the U.S. government is no longer fighting to win in Afghanistan — and that the Taliban will remain there after American forces leave.

He also pointed out that very soon, servicemen who were not even born when the war began will be deployed — including, potentially, his own son, who hopes to join the military. “Year after next, we will have soldiers deployed to this war who were born during the war,” the conservative Kentucky lawmaker was [quoted as saying](#) in *Stars and Stripes*. “If that doesn’t send chills up your spine, I don’t know what will.”

Massie also highlighted the \$40 billion in the proposed defense bill’s war account, enough to purchase five Nimitz-class aircraft carriers. “Why are you sinking five aircraft carriers in the mountains of Afghanistan?” he asked. “Not to say anything about the human life that will be lost.”

And finally, as more than a few commentators and lawmakers have pointed out over the years, Afghanistan has a well-deserved reputation for bringing empires to their knees. “Afghanistan is called the graveyard of empires for a reason,” Massie told the audience. “Alexander the Great learned that the hard way. The Soviet Union. The British Empire. Why do we have to learn that the hard way? It’s time to get out of Afghanistan.”

Of course, as this magazine and its predecessor publications have been pointing out for nearly six decades, only Congress has the power to declare war — something it has not done since World War II. While on the campaign trail, Trump stated repeatedly that he understood that fact, and that he would abide by the Constitution in matters of war. So far, though, Trump has continued the policies of Obama and Bush, launching even more deadly drone strikes than his predecessors.

If the war in Afghanistan is truly a good idea, it should be no problem for lawmakers to debate the issue, vote for a proper declaration, define the goals, and then explain to their constituents why more Americans must die in that nation. If they refuse to do that, it is time for U.S. forces to come home, and for the U.S. government to obey the Constitution that authorizes its existence in the first place.

Photo of Rep. Walter Jones: AP Images

Alex Newman is a correspondent for The New American, covering economics, education, politics, and more. He can be reached at anewman@thenewamerican.com. Follow him on Twitter [@ALEXNEWMAN_JOU](#) or on [Facebook](#).

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