



Written by [Raven Clabough](#) on September 22, 2014

House Puts Hold on War Powers Resolutions Until After Elections

In a clearly politically calculated move, the House of Representatives has reportedly placed an amendment into the jobs package that will ban War Powers Resolution actions until after the midterm elections.

Antiwar.com writes, “The bill kills all War Powers Act mechanisms between now and the mid-term elections, and prevents any member of Congress trying to force a vote on the new ISIS war.”



The United States has been making airstrikes on ISIS-controlled Iraq since August 8 under the War Powers Act, which permits military action for 60 days without congressional authorization. Such authorization would be necessary in October in order for the airstrikes to continue.

But this stealthy amendment now ensures that such a vote will not happen before the midterm elections.

Rep. Pete Sessions (R-Texas) has defended the amendment, stating that it is necessary for the House to “protect its members” by prohibiting a vote on the war until after the elections.

Speaking in opposition to the amendment was Rep. Jim McGovern (D-Mass.), who argued that it ultimately strips Congress of any obligation to carry out one of its necessary and important duties. He declared,

It is perfectly clear that the House will not debate and vote on an authorization on Iraq at this time. Unfortunately, it is not clear if any vote will ever happen at any time in this House, even after we come back in November — even though there’s a growing bipartisan consensus that such an authorization is needed.

This rule freezes out each and every Member of this House from taking any action to move forward the possibility of a vote on Iraq or Syria under the terms put in place by the War Powers Resolution.

McGovern gave an impassioned speech in which he declared that the daily bombing already taking place in Iraq constitutes sustained combat operations, the continuation of which requires congressional authorization:

For six weeks I have been waiting, patiently, for the Leadership of this House to recognize what we all know is true: the U.S. is engaged in hostilities and carrying out sustained combat operations in Iraq and that it is time for the House to debate and vote on an authorization.

Yesterday, this House voted to authorize training and equipping Syrian opposition forces. But we have yet to debate and vote on an authorization for the combat operations we are already carrying out in Iraq: over 150 airstrikes — bombs falling nearly every day — in Iraq. And if that doesn’t count as sustained combat, then I don’t know what the hell does.

McGovern closed by asking his colleagues to act rather than remain on the sidelines:



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Not only are we engaged in sustained combat operations in Iraq, but the president announced last week that he intends to escalate and expand those military operations, and quite likely extend them to Syria.

This is a moment in history when the House should not and must not remain silent, let alone slink out of town. We have a responsibility to act.

As stated by McGovern, Congress has voted to approve Obama's plan to train and equip moderate Syrian rebels.

Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid (D-Nev.) indicated that a lengthier debate on military actions will take place when the Senate debates on the National Defense Authorization Act after the election, and stated that language related to Syrian rebels is already in the bill. However, his words did little to quell concerns from both Democrats and Republicans who believe that a full war debate should take place after the elections to address more than the plan to train and arm rebels that was approved last week.

In both parties, there are indications that there are divides over how to proceed in the Middle East.

Some Democrats have voiced opposition to deeper military intervention and to the fact that there will not be a major war debate after the elections, asserting that they have been misled. "That's the illusion," said Rep. Peter Welch (Vt.), one of 85 House Democrats who opposed the president's request. "This was the vote."

And not all Republicans support the combat operations currently taking place. Rep. Raúl Labrador (R-Idaho) said that Republicans need to be more cautious moving forward. "We used to tread very carefully when it came to the use of force," he said. "That's what being a Republican used to be."

Rep. Cynthia Lummis (R-Wyo.) asserted that her "no" vote was difficult and that she would consider her decision after a longer debate. "It is going to be a profoundly difficult decision that I intend to be perched on from now until Dec. 11," when the current authority expires, she said.

As noted by the *Wall Street Journal*, it is clear that foreign policy is a "wild card" in the upcoming midterm elections. The latest *Wall Street Journal*/NBC News poll reveals that nearly 70 percent of the American people lack the confidence that the president will achieve his goals in fighting the terrorist group ISIS.

Peter Fenn, a Democratic political consultant, observes that Obama's speech and decisions regarding ISIS could be a pivotal point for this administration, either to revive support for the president or reinforce doubts about his leadership. "It can play both ways," said Fenn. "Right now Democrats are in tough shape to hold the Senate, and the events of the next seven weeks could be quite important. This could be the defining moment."

Republicans require six seats to take control of the Senate, and are hopeful that the president's handling of ISIS will give them the ammunition they need to achieve just that.

The *Wall Street Journal* reports,

Republicans are trying to use the opportunity to bolster their broad critiques of Mr. Obama and to tie Democrats to him, a theme that already was a central part of their campaign strategy. They say the president has underestimated the militant group and moved too hesitantly to confront it.

It is clear that this is a major component of the GOP strategy as foreign policy has begun to dominate campaigns recently.



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Senate Republican Leader Mitch McConnell (R-Ky.), for example, who is currently in a tough reelection bid, aired an ad that featured a clip of President Obama admitting, “We don’t have a strategy yet.” Likewise, GOP Senate candidate Scott Brown of New Hampshire is attempting to connect his opponent with the Obama administration’s foreign policy.



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