



Obama Wants “Buy In” From Congress on Plan to Battle ISIL

President Obama wants Congress to have a “buy in” to the plan for combating the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) he will present to the nation in a prime-time address Wednesday, Press Secretary Josh Earnest told reporters Monday. When asked about actions the president plans to take, Earnest quoted public statements Obama has already made on ISIL and said more specific answers would come when the president unveils the strategy Wednesday night.



“As a general matter, what I can say is that the president is interested in their buy-in, is interested in a Congressional debate and is interested in consulting closely with the leaders in Congress so that they feel bought into this process and they feel like the partners that they actually are as the elected representatives of the American people,” Earnest said during Monday’s White House press briefing.

The “buy-in” label for what the role of Congress should be was used by the president in an interview aired Sunday on NBC’s *Meet the Press*. Asked by host Chuck Todd if he would seek a vote from Congress authorizing further military action, Obama said he already has the authority he needs:

I’m confident that I have the authorization I need to protect the American people. And I’m always going to do what’s necessary to protect the American people. But I do think it’s important for Congress to understand what the plan is, to have a buy in, to debate it.

And that’s why we’ve been consulting with Congress throughout. And this speech will allow Congress, I think, to understand very clearly and very specifically what it is that we’re doing but also what it is we’re not doing. We’re not looking at sending in 100,000 American troops.

Obama has said repeatedly that he would not send ground troops, or combat units, back into Iraq where the United States, Great Britain, and other coalition partners fought al-Qaeda insurgents for nearly a decade, from 2003-2011. The number of U.S troops he has so far authorized to be in the country is about 1,200, counting those at the U.S. embassy, the Baghdad airport, and at Joint Operation Centers in Baghdad and the Kurdish capital of Irbil, according to the Pentagon. By putting a number (100,000) on how many American troops he will not send in, the president might have unintentionally raised the question of whether there is some number under 100,000 that might be sent. But as he described in general terms what lies ahead, he outlined a plan of action similar to what has already been undertaken.

“We’re going to be as part of a coalition, carrying out air strikes in support of work on the ground by Iraqi troops, Kurdish troops. We are going to be helping to put together a plan for them, so that they can start retaking territory that ISIL had taken over.”

Beyond continued air strikes in Iraq, it’s not yet clear what the president meant when he said, “The next



Written by [Jack Kenny](#) on September 9, 2014

phase is to start going on some offense.” Sen. John McCain of Arizona and other Republicans have called for air strikes against ISIL bases in Syria, but Obama’s remarks suggested that the initial offensive would be limited to Iraq.

He also spoke of a need for a literal “buy in” from Congress to provide the funding needed for a continuing offensive. “It’s going to require some resources, I suspect,” the president said. Defense Secretary Chuck Hagel and Army Gen. Martin Dempsey, the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, have said that the money for the current airstrikes and several hundred security and advisory personnel could be paid for from existing Fiscal 2014 funding but additional funding would be needed for Fiscal Year 2015, which begins October 1 of this calendar year.

Earnest said the president is committed to “intensive consultation” with Congress over the anti-ISIL strategy and had invited the Democratic and Republican leaders of both the House and Senate to meet with him at the White House Tuesday “to discuss some of these issues and to “follow up on the very successful NATO summit that the president attended.”

It remains to be seen, however, what the Congress will have to debate if the president already has a plan in place and is convinced he already has the authority he needs to carry it out. Polls indicate a majority of the American people support the air strikes in Iraq and few in Congress are likely to oppose that. Most members seem reluctant to have a vote on military action this close to an election when a debate over Iraq likely to stir unpleasant memories of the last Iraq War and an unknown reaction on the part of the voters.

The president obviously wants the political equivalent of an “Amen” from Congress, so if things go badly he can share the blame for unintended consequences that occur in nearly every military campaign. But the Constitution gives the Congress the power to declare war, not the privilege to be consulted on acts of war that might be carried out under another name, as was the case with the “kinetic military action” in Libya in 2011. The U.S. and NATO bombing campaign during Libya’s civil war brought about the desired fall of the Moammar Gadhafi regime, but also the triumph of the same jihadist element the United States is now bombing in Iraq.

Members of Congress, like millions of other Americans, will be watching and listening when Obama sets forth the nation’s military strategy for dealing with the current crisis in Iraq. Whether they will remain mere spectators of American foreign and military policy is a question less about the future of Iraq than about the status of our constitutional Republic.



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