



Written by [Warren Mass](#) on March 21, 2018

Senate Rejects Resolution to Remove Unauthorized U.S. Forces From Hostilities in Yemen

By a vote of 55 to 44, the Senate voted on March 20 to table (reject) S.J. Res. 54 — a joint resolution to direct the removal of U.S. armed forces from hostilities in Yemen that have not been authorized by Congress. Following the vote, the measure was ultimately referred back to the Senate Foreign Relations Committee for further debate without a final vote.



The resolution had bipartisan backing. CNN reported that three senators — Mike Lee, a Utah Republican, Bernie Sanders, a Vermont independent, and Chris Murphy, a Connecticut Democrat — had pushed for the vote, complaining the U.S. military was assisting Saudi Arabia and other countries in their ongoing conflict with Iranian-backed Houthi rebels in Yemen without congressional authorization.

Sanders made a valid point during the debate: “The Founding Fathers gave the power to authorize military conflicts to Congress, the branch most accountable to the people. Not to the President but to Congress.”

“This is not a complicated issue,” he continued. “Article 1, Section 8 [of the Constitution] says that the president can’t make war and send our young people into harm’s way. It is the Congress of the United States that should make war.”

It was undoubtedly this constitutional point that impelled Rand Paul (R-Ky.) to join Sanders, Lee, and the other 41 senators who voted against tabling the resolution. Paul has strongly opposed U.S. military intervention in Yemen and elsewhere for some time. A year ago, on March 9, 2017, during a hearing of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, Paul responded to testimony presented by Dr. Dafna Rand of the National Defense University. Said Paul:

The United States has the technical ability to kill anyone anywhere anytime [but] just because we can doesn’t mean we should, and I think we don’t have enough discussion about the practical ramifications of whether or not we kill more terrorists than we create.

I think Yemen is a perfect example of this. We’re supplying the Saudis with bombs, refueling the planes, picking the targets. I assume that we didn’t pick the target of a funeral procession, but we wounded 500 people and 140 people — I say “we;” the Saudis did it, but with our armaments. You think that Yemenis don’t know where the bombs are coming from?

We recently had a raid — and I don’t blame our soldiers. I mean, I have members of my family who



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actively serve. They do what they're told. But we're the policymakers. I mean, we sent them into Yemen. I've still not been told why we went to Yemen. Someone's got to make a decision: Did we — in killing a, you know, a few of the al Qaeda [members] in that village — was that worth the fact that we had to kill women and children, or women and children were inadvertently killed in that, including an American citizen?

The *New York Times* observed that the Senate debate on the resolution revolved around two separate issues: whether the U.S. forces in Yemen were, in fact, active participants in hostilities and how lawmakers should confront and potentially curtail foreign policy set by the executive branch.

The *Times* reported that the Trump administration sent Pentagon and State Department officials to visit Congress last week to make the case in a classified briefing that the measure was misguided and could do lasting damage to the United States' relationship with Saudi Arabia, which is regarded as an important Arab ally.

The report noted that as senators debated the resolution, President Trump was meeting with the Saudi crown prince Mohammed bin Salman at the White House.

The *Times* also reported that Trump administration officials insist that U.S. involvement in Yemen has been limited to noncombat support such as intelligence sharing, logistics, and military advice — and therefore is not subject to Senate approval.

However, that assertion is patently false, as was made evident on January 29, 2017, when a commando raid by U.S. Navy SEALs in Yemen killed 14 al-Qaeda operatives — but also at least 15 civilians including an eight-year-old girl, as well as one Navy SEAL, Chief Petty Officer Ryan Owens.

The young girl killed in that raid was Nawar al-Awlaki, the daughter of cleric Anwar al-Awlaki, an American citizen who was assassinated by the U.S. military in 2011.

Initial reports of the raid and the civilian deaths stated that the government of Yemen had withdrawn permission for the United States to launch any more Special Operations ground missions inside the country. However, those reports were not accurate. Yemeni Foreign Minister Abdul-Malik al-Mekhlafi told the Associated Press after the raid that it was “not true” that his government had asked U.S. forces to cease ground operations in Yemen. “Yemen continues to cooperate with the United States and continues to abide by all the agreements,” he said.

In a letter last week to Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell (R-Ky.) that was obviously intended to influence the vote on the defeated resolution, Defense Secretary Jim Mattis wrote: “New restrictions on this limited U.S. military support could increase civilian casualties, jeopardize cooperation with our partners on counterterrorism and reduce our influence with the Saudis.”

McConnell repeated some of the language of Mattis during a speech in the Senate before the vote, saying: “Withdrawing U.S. support would increase, not decrease, the risk of civilian casualties. And it would signal that we are not serious about containing Iran or its proxies.”

Senator Paul's father, former Representative Ron Paul (R-Texas) wrote a column in 2015 entitled: “The Failed ‘Yemen Model,’ ” that summarized the history of U.S. interventionism in Yemen as follows:

In 2011 the U.S. turned against Yemen's long-time dictator, Saleh, and supported a coup that resulted in another, even more U.S.-friendly leader taking over in a “color revolution.” The new leader, Hadi, took over in 2012 and soon became a strong supporter of the U.S. drone program in his country against al-Qaeda in the Arab Peninsula.



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Then Paul described an incident that was eerily similar to what happened again in 2017:

And the drone strikes have continued. Last Monday, in the first US strike after the coup, a 12 year old boy was killed in what is sickeningly called “collateral damage.” Two alleged “al-Qaeda militants” were also killed. On Saturday yet another drone strike killed three more suspected militants.

The U.S. government has killed at least dozens of civilian non-combatants in Yemen, but even those it counts as “militants” may actually be civilians. That is because the Obama administration counts any military-aged male in the area around a drone attack as a combatant.

Paul concluded his article with this lesson: “The lesson from Yemen is not to stay the course that has failed so miserably. It is to end a failed foreign policy that is killing civilians, creating radicals, and making us less safe.”

The Republican senators who voted against the resolution to end U.S. involvement in Yemen should keep in mind that a failed policy is a failed policy, whether the occupant of the Oval Office is a Democrat or a Republican.

Photo: U.S. Marine Corps.

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