



Written by [Steve Byas](#) on July 17, 2017

Speaker Ryan Opposes Effort to Repeal AUMF

Pressure has been building in the House of Representatives to repeal the 16-year-old Authorization for Use of Military Force (AUMF) resolution passed in the wake of the 9/11 attacks upon America, but Speaker Paul Ryan (R-Wis.) is resisting the effort, calling it a “mistake.”

Ryan met last week with Representative Barbara Lee (D-Calif.), who has led the charge to terminate the AUMF. Last month, even Lee was surprised when her amendment to an appropriations bill to repeal the AUMF passed on a bipartisan vote in the House Appropriations Committee. In fact, only one member of the committee voted no.



When the AUMF originally passed Congress in 2001, it was only three days after the attacks that took down the two World Trade Centers, and caused great damage to the Pentagon. Even Congressman Ron Paul voted for it. The AUMF was only 60 words, and it turned over to the president the authority to take military action against nations or groups who committed acts of terrorism against the United States.

Barbara Lee was the lone member of Congress to oppose the AUMF. She argued at the time, and has continued to argue, that the resolution was overly broad. She has been proven correct, as the resolution has been used as justification for military actions in more than a dozen countries. For example, presidents have even cited the AUMF of 2001 in launching airstrikes against Libya and Syria, although no one credibly argues either of those countries had anything to do with the 9/11 attacks.

“This is a blank check that has been on the books for 16 years. The Constitution requires us to exercise our responsibility in matters of war and peace, and we’ve been missing in action,” Lee said.

Ryan argues that using the appropriations process to end the AUMF of 2001 is the wrong way to do it, but he has prevented any floor votes on ending the AUMF through any other method. This leads one to conclude that Ryan’s argument means that he does not want to repeal the 2001 authorization of force. Lee’s stand-alone bill has not even been given any committee hearings.

Ryan said he was not sure the committee members even understood the amendment — a comment that drew a sharp response from one of the Republican members of the committee, Representative Tom Cole (R-Okla.). He insisted that there was no confusion in the meeting room, and asserted, “It’s time for leadership to wake up, and the administration to wake up, and send over a recommended AUMF, mark it up and take it to the floor.” Defending the use of an appropriations amendment to force a floor discussion of whether to repeal the 2001 resolution, Cole added, “I don’t know any other way to get their attention because we’ve been talking about it for years.”

Senate Foreign Relations Committee Chairman Bob Corker (R-Tenn.), on the other hand, opposes repealing the old AUMF, until a new resolution is put into place, arguing that would leave our military



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“naked” in its war against ISIS. The lone member of the House Appropriations Committee to vote against Lee’s amendment, Representative Kay Granger (D-Texas), expressed similar sentiments, stating, “It cripples our ability to conduct counterterrorism operations against terrorists who pose a threat to the United States.” She lamented that it “would tie the hands of the U.S.”

It certainly would limit the authority of the president to take military action on his own. The framers of the Constitution placed the power to declare war in the hands of Congress, not the president. The abuse of the 2001 AUMF resolution demonstrates the problem with these open-ended resolutions that Congress had resorted to since World War II. The Gulf of Tonkin Resolution handed over discretionary authority to President Lyndon Johnson in the Vietnam War, and the 2001 AUMF made the same mistake.

When Lee voted against the 2001 AUMF, she was widely condemned across the political spectrum and even received death threats, resulting in her being afforded 24-hour-a-day protection from the Capitol Police. In stark contrast, when her amendment unexpectedly passed in last month’s House Appropriations Committee meeting, she was feted to applause from her fellow members.

Lee said, “I’m pleased that more members of Congress are seeing what I saw then. We need to rein this in and have Congress included it’s our constitutional responsibility.”

It certainly is. In 2013, then-private citizen Donald Trump tweeted, “The president must get congressional approval before attacking Syria — big mistake if he does not!” Unfortunately, *President* Trump ignored his own admonition with his recent bombing of Syria. But perhaps the tide is turning, and Congress will reclaim the power it was given by the Founding Fathers, and, in Lee’s words, “rein this in.”

Photo of Speaker of the House Paul Ryan: AP Images



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