



Written by [Jack Kenny](#) on November 26, 2014

Sen. Paul Would Declare War, Send Ground Troops Against ISIS

Senator Rand Paul (R-Ky.) is planning to introduce a resolution in Congress formally declaring war on the Islamic State and authorizing “limited” use of ground forces against the Islamic State terrorists the United States is now fighting with air strikes in Iraq and Syria, the [Daily Beast reported](#).



A draft of the resolution obtained by the online journal states that “the organization referring to itself as the Islamic State has declared war on the United States and its allies” and that it “presents a clear and present danger to United States diplomatic facilities in the region, including our embassy in Baghdad, Iraq, and consulate in Erbil, Iraq.” The resolution would allow the use of U.S. troops “as necessary for advisory and intelligence gathering operations,” and, should the need arise, for “the protection or rescue of members of the United States Armed Forces or United States citizens from imminent danger.” But it would also authorize “limited operations against high value targets,” something U.S. Special Forces have already been doing, [according to some reports](#), despite President Obama’s repeated pledge that U.S. ground forces would not be sent back to Iraq for combat operations.

But Obama’s shifting stance might appear like Gibraltar compared to the dizzying reversals of policy Senator Paul has set forth in his declarations over the past five months. On June 19, he had published in the *Wall Street Journal* an op-ed piece entitled: [“America Shouldn’t Choose Sides in Iraq’s Civil War.”](#) He was adamant then against “boots on the ground.”

“First, we should not put any U.S. troops on the ground in Iraq, unless it is to secure or evacuate U.S. personnel and diplomatic facilities.” And while not wanting to “completely rule out airstrikes,” Paul sharply questioned their usefulness.

“What would airstrikes accomplish? We know that Iran is aiding the Iraqi government against ISIS. Do we want to, in effect, become Iran’s air force? What’s in this for Iran? Why should we choose a side, and if we do, who are we really helping?”



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In August, Paul penned another op-ed for the *Journal*, stressing once again the dangers of unanticipated consequences to our military interventions. The 2011 air war in support of rebels in Libya strengthened jihad forces there, he noted, and CIA arming and training of Syrian rebels strengthened militants affiliated with al-Qaeda. Setting his sights on former Secretary of State and likely Democratic presidential contender Hillary Clinton, Paul wrote: “We are lucky Mrs. Clinton didn’t get her way and the Obama administration did not bring about regime change in Syria. That new regime might well be ISIS.”

Paul, who has made no secret of his own presidential ambitions, took delight last summer in contrasting his non-interventionist stance with the “gung-ho” posture of “war hawk” Clinton.

“If you wanna see a transformational election in our country, let the Democrats put forward a war hawk like Hillary Clinton, and you’ll see a transformation like you’ve never seen,” Paul predicted in an [interview with Meet the Press](#). “I think that’s what scares the Democrats the most,” he added, “is that in a general election, were I to run, there’s gonna be a lot of independents and even some Democrats who say, ‘You know what, we are tired of war. We’re worried that Hillary Clinton will get us involved in another Middle Eastern war, because she’s so gung-ho.’”

But by early September, Paul was apparently feeling rather “gung-ho” himself, declaring: “If I were president, I would call a joint session of Congress. I would lay out the reasoning of why ISIS is a threat to our national security and seek congressional authorization to destroy ISIS militarily.” At that point he apparently was ready to destroy them without those ground forces conducting “limited operations against high value targets,” for in the same month he told the *Daily Beast*, “I don’t think there needs to be any American soldiers over there on the ground,” adding: “I don’t mind helping them through technical support, through sophisticated intelligence, drones, Air Force, etc.” Paul was clear in stating: “The people on the ground fighting these battles, going hand-to-hand with ISIS, need to be their fellow Arabs and those who, I think and hopefully do, represent civilized Islam.”

What’s less clear is what Paul will be trying to accomplish by proposing a declaration of war against the Islamic State. The president needs no declaration to defend troops or an embassy under attack. Of all the charges that have been made by Paul and others concerning the attack on U.S. facilities in Benghazi in 2012, no one has yet blamed the president for not asking Congress for a declaration of war while our people were under attack with high-powered assault weapons and the outpost was in flames. The [historical record of the Constitutional Convention](#) makes clear that the power of Congress to declare war was written with the intent of “leaving to the Executive the power to repel sudden attacks.”

The president’s earlier air war to rescue rebel forces and bring down the Gadhafi government in Libya was another matter. That was an offensive war undertaken with no congressional authorization whatsoever. Obama has claimed he has authority for the current bombing campaign against ISIS under the Authorization for the Use of Military Force (AUMF) passed by Congress in 2001 and another AUMF passed a year later. But the first authorized force against members of al-Qaeda and any and all who aided and abetted them in the 9/11 attacks, an event that predates the formation of the organization called the Islamic State. The second authorized action was to disarm and depose the Iraqi government of Saddam Hussein. Obama has said both have outlived their usefulness, and has declared his intention to ask Congress for a new resolution authorizing military action against ISIS. Meanwhile, he continues to bomb away in both Iraq and Syria.

Perhaps some of the shifts in Paul’s positions are due to the fact that he is aiming at a moving target. Obama has already taken us into a war with ISIS without an act of Congress. If Paul proposes a



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declaration of war, he will be asking Congress to do something it has not done since World War II, despite all the presidential wars since then. The typical AUMF is full of “if’s” and “but’s” and leaves it to the president to decide and declare whether we are at war, thereby giving tacit congressional approval to presidential usurpation. It was a point Senator Paul’s father, former Texas congressman and three-time presidential candidate Ron Paul, made when he was opposing the Iraq War. As he recalled in his book, *Revolution: A Manifesto*,

In 2002, as war with Iraq loomed, I proposed that Congress officially declare war against Iraq, making it clear that I intended to oppose my own measure. The point was to underscore our constitutional responsibility to declare war before commencing major military operations, rather than leaving the decision to the President or passing resolutions that delegate to the president the decision making power over war.

It seems unlikely that Rand Paul would eventually vote against his own resolution, but who knows what he or his Senate colleagues might do after all the anticipated costs and consequences of our latest Middle East adventure have had a full airing and debate? In a number of speeches he has made since his 2010 election to the Senate, the younger Paul has indicated he is not as principally opposed to military interventions as his father. It might be that with his presidential campaign in mind he is trying, as many believe, to attract the support of more hawkish Republican primary voters, who may be attracted to his limited-government views on domestic policies, but still believe our nation should be policing the world with a more aggressive foreign policy. But his proposal will at least have the virtue of putting the decision of war and peace where the Constitution has placed it, with the Congress of the United States.

“Shooting first and asking questions later has never been a good foreign policy,” he wrote in August. A resolution calling for a declaration of war would surely be the occasion for a thorough debate in Congress, with members, hearing from their constituents, questioning such a decision before war is declared instead of after it has been going on a number of years and the country comes to the sad conclusion that it was a colossal mistake. As the Kentucky senator has noted, “many of those clamoring for military action now are the same people who made every false assumption imaginable about the cost, challenge and purpose of the Iraq war.”

Photo of Senator Rand Paul (R-Ky.): AP Images



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