



Congress Pushes for War with Iran

Congress is trying to tie the president's hands on Iran--and it's about hegemony, not security.

In another resolution apparently designed to prepare for war against Iran, the U.S. House of Representatives, in an overwhelmingly bipartisan [401–11 vote](#), has passed a resolution ([HR 568](#)) urging the president to oppose any policy toward Iran “that would rely on containment as an option in response to the Iranian nuclear threat.”

With its earlier decision to pass [a bill](#) that effectively sought to ban any negotiations between the United States and Iran, a huge bipartisan majority of Congress has essentially told the president that nothing short of war or the threat of war is an acceptable policy. Indeed, the rush to pass this bill appears to have been designed to undermine the ongoing international negotiations on Iran’s nuclear program. According to Iranian-American analyst [Jamal Abdi](#), a prominent critic of both the Iranian regime and U.S. policy, the motivation for the resolution may be to “poison those talks by signaling to Iran that the President is weak, domestically isolated, and unable to deliver at the negotiating table because a hawkish Congress will overrule him.”

President Obama’s “red line” on Iran — the point at which his administration would consider taking military action against the country — has been the reactionary regime’s actual procurement of nuclear weapons. The language of this resolution, however, significantly lowers the bar by declaring it unacceptable for Iran simply to have “nuclear weapons *capability*” — not necessarily any actual weapons or an active nuclear weapons program. Some members of Congress have argued that since Iranians have the expertise and technological capacity to develop nuclear weapons, they already have “nuclear weapons capability.” The hawkish Senator [Joe Lieberman](#) (I-CT) [has argued that](#) “everybody will determine for themselves what [capability] means.”

In case there was any doubt about the intent of Congress in using this language, when Senator Rand Paul (R-KY) offered a clarifying amendment to a similar clause in a recent Senate resolution — declaring that “nothing in the Act shall be construed as a declaration of war or an authorization of the use of force against Iran” — both its Republican and Democratic sponsors summarily rejected the amendment.

[Colonel Lawrence Wilkerson](#), former chief of staff for Secretary of State Colin Powell, noted how “this resolution reads like the same sheet of music that got us into the Iraq war, and could be the precursor for a war with Iran. It’s effectively a thinly-disguised effort to bless war.”

As the liberal Zionist group [Americans for Peace Now](#) observed, the legislation suggests that “unless sanctions imminently result in Iran voluntarily shutting down its entire nuclear program (and somehow deleting the nuclear know-how from the brains of its scientists), military force will be the only option available to the Obama Administration and will be inevitable in the near term.”

Though it is not legally binding, the resolution does limit the president’s options politically. As pundit and former Capitol Hill staffer [M.J. Rosenberg has noted](#), the bill was “designed to tie the president’s hands on Iran policy.” And, as with the case of Iraq, the language of such non-binding resolutions can easily be incorporated into binding legislation, citing the precedent of what had been passed previously.

The End of Containment

There is enormous significance to the resolution's insistence that containment, which has been the basis of U.S. defense policy for decades, should no longer be U.S. policy in dealing with potential threats. Although deterrence may have been an acceptable policy in response to the thousands of powerful Soviet nuclear weapons mounted on intercontinental ballistic missile systems aimed at the United States, the view today is that deterrence is somehow inadequate for dealing with a developing country capable of developing small and crude nuclear devices but lacking long-range delivery systems.

Indeed, this broad bipartisan consensus against deterrence marks the triumph of the neoconservative first-strike policy, once considered on the extreme fringes when first articulated in the 1980s.

This dangerous embrace of neoconservative military policy is now so widely accepted by both parties in Congress that the vote on the resolution was taken under a procedure known as "suspension of the rules," which is designed for non-controversial bills passed quickly with little debate. Indeed, given the serious implications of this legislation, it is striking that there was not a single congressional hearing prior to the vote.

The resolution also demonstrates that the vast majority of Democrats, like Republicans, have embraced the concept of "full-spectrum dominance," the Bush-era doctrine that not only should the United States prevent the emergence of another rival global superpower such as China, but it should also resist the emergence of even a regional power, such as Iran, that could potentially deter unilateral U.S. military actions or other projections of American domination.

Limiting the President

It is unprecedented for Congress to so vigorously seek to limit a president's non-military options in foreign policy. For example, in 1962, even the most right-wing Republicans in Congress did not push for legislation insisting that President Kennedy rule out options other than attacking Cuba or the Soviet Union during the Cuban missile crisis. What might be motivating Congress is the fact that, in electing Barack Obama in 2008, the American people brought into the White House an outspoken opponent of the U.S. invasion of Iraq who not only withdrew U.S. combat forces from that country but promised to "[change the mindset](#)" – the idea that the United States could unilaterally make war against oil-rich Middle Eastern countries that did not accept U.S. domination – that made the Iraq war possible. Both Democratic and Republican hawks, therefore, appear determined to force this moderate president to accept their neoconservative agenda.

Deterrence, when dealing with a nuclear-armed party, is indeed a risky strategy. The international community does have an interest in preventing Iran from developing nuclear weapons, as well as in forcing India, Pakistan, and Israel to disarm their already-existing arsenals. All reasonable diplomatic means should be pursued to create and maintain a nuclear-free zone in that volatile region.

However, the idea that deterrence against Iran would not work because the country's clerical leadership, which controls the armed forces, would decide to launch an unprovoked nuclear attack against Israel or the United States — and therefore invite massive nuclear retaliation that would cause the physical destruction of their entire country — is utterly ridiculous. The far more realistic risk to worry about is the enormous devastation that would result from a U.S. war on Iran.

The real "threat" from Iran is if that country achieves nuclear capability, it would then have a deterrent to a U.S. attack that was unavailable to its immediate neighbors to the east (Afghanistan) and west (Iraq), both of which were invaded by U.S.-led forces. Both Democrats and Republicans appear to be united in their belief that no country should stand in the way of the unilateral projection of military force by the United States or its allies.

Indeed, this resolution is not about the national security of the United States, nor is it about the security of Israel. It is about continuing U.S. hegemony over the world's most oil-rich region.