

Obama to Congress: Rubber-Stamp My “Perpetual War”. “Blank Check to Use US Military Force in Perpetuity”

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President Obama’s proposed AUMF seeks retroactive congressional approval for wars he has been conducting for six months. Even if Congress does not oblige him, Obama will continue to bomb Iraq and Syria, falsely claiming that the 2001 AUMF gives him that authority.

As President Barack Obama presented his proposed [Authorization for Use of Military Force](#) (AUMF) to Congress, he declared, “I do not believe America’s interests are served by endless war, or by remaining on a perpetual war footing.” Yet Obama’s proposal asks Congress to rubber-stamp his endless war against anyone he wants, wherever he wants. Obama has launched 2,300 airstrikes in Iraq and Syria since August 8, 2014. In his six years as president, he has killed more people than died on 9/11 with drones and other forms of targeted killing in Pakistan, Yemen and Somalia – countries with which the United States is not at war.

Obama’s proposed AUMF contains some purported limitations, but their vagueness amounts to a blank check to use US military force in perpetuity.

“Associated Persons or Forces”

The president’s proposal authorizes force against the Islamic State (ISIS or ISIL) and its “associated persons or forces.” They are defined as “individuals and organizations fighting for, on behalf of, or alongside ISIL or any closely-related successor entity in hostilities against the United States or its coalition partners.”

This proviso contains no geographical limitation. It would authorize the use of military force anywhere in the world. “[T]he executive branch could interpret this language to authorize force against individuals far from any battlefield with only some remote connection to the group – potentially even in the United States itself,” according to the American Civil Liberties Union.

No “Enduring Offensive Operations”

Obama’s AUMF “does not authorize the use of the United States Armed Forces in enduring offensive ground combat operations.” This provision contains no definition of “enduring.” Does this mean one month? One year? Three Years? Or perhaps six months with a break, then another six months?

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This provision is riddled with exceptions. The 3,000 US military personnel currently in Iraq are exempted from the limitation. So are special operations forces, as well as those collecting intelligence, involved with "kinetic strikes, or the provision of operation planning and other forms of advice and assistance to partner forces." These exemptions are so vague, they can justify just about any US troops.

Nor is the term "offensive" defined in the proposal. By labeling operations defensive, Obama or his successor could use increasing numbers of ground troops. What if any of the US personnel currently serving in Iraq are attacked? Under Obama's AUMF, the United States could deploy thousands of US troops and call it a defensive operation.

2001 AUMF Still in Force

The three-year sunset provision in Obama's proposal is rendered meaningless by the continued existence of the [AUMF Congress gave President George W. Bush](#) in 2001. Obama claims he already has authority to wage his wars under the 2001 AUMF, which authorizes the president to use "force against those nations, organizations, or persons he determines planned, authorized, committed, or aided the terrorist attacks that occurred on September 11, 2001, or harbored such organizations or persons."

Even if Congress were to authorize Obama's wars in Iraq and Syria, those wars would still violate the UN Charter.

But the 2001 AUMF's license is limited to those connected with the 9/11 attacks. In fact, when Bush asked for authority "to deter and preempt any future acts of terrorism or aggression against the United States," Congress refused. Yet Obama has used the 2001 AUMF to justify his ongoing drone war and his invasion of Iraq and Syria, in spite of the absence of any connection with the 9/11 attacks.

Without repealing the 2001 AUMF, "any sunset of the new authorization will be ineffectual, since the next president can claim continued reliance on the old one," according to Rep. Adam Schiff (D-California).

On February 13, 2015, a group of [Democratic senators introduced a bill](#) to repeal the 2001 AUMF in three years. This bill would note that Congress "never intended and did not authorize a perpetual war" when it passed that AUMF.

Bipartisan Opposition to Obama's Proposed AUMF

Some Democrats think Obama's proposed AUMF is too broad. Sen. Barbara Boxer (D-California) [wrote in The Huffington Post](#) that the language prohibiting "enduring offensive ground combat operations" is "vague, overly broad and confusing."

Many Republicans think Obama's proposal constrains his ability to use US ground troops against ISIS. Ironically, the GOP, which consistently seeks to reign in Obama's authority, wants to grant the president more power to use military force.

It is likely that Congress will ultimately agree on a reworded AUMF to give Obama congressional cover to pursue his wars.

Violation of UN Charter

But even if Congress were to authorize Obama's wars in Iraq and Syria, those wars would still violate the UN Charter. The charter requires all states to settle their disputes peacefully, and to refrain from the use of armed force except when acting in self-defense or with the blessing of the Security Council.

The Syrian government has not consented to Obama's bombing in Syria. And although the Iraqi government has blessed Obama's bombing campaign, Iraqi Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi "is a puppet government that Obama installed and therefore has no authority under international law to consent to U.S. military operations in Iraq," according to [law professor Francis Boyle](#). "It is like in Vietnam when we had our puppets there asking us to conduct military operations there."

Indeed, ISIS is a direct outgrowth of the US invasion and installation of former Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki, a Shiite Muslim who viciously killed, disappeared and tortured Sunni Muslims after most US troops pulled out. Many Sunnis in Iraq see ISIS as preferable to US bombs.

Pursue Diplomacy, Not Permanent War

Obama's drone strikes have killed large numbers of civilians; only 2 percent of those killed have been high-level al-Qaeda or Taliban leaders. They have also created increased resentment against the United States. When people see their loved ones felled by US bombs, they are more susceptible to recruitment by extremist groups that seek to do us harm.

Likewise, "[b]ombing different groups who live in the same area as ISIS has helped unite ISIS with more moderate groups, more reasonable groups, who could have been persuaded to rejoin the political process," according to Raed Jarrar of the American Friends Service Committee. [Sarah Lazare reports](#) that in December 2014, a US coalition bomb hit a jail operated by ISIS in al-Bab, Syria, killing at least 50 civilians.

We need to stop using military force as a solution to everything – indeed, it is a solution to nothing.

We need to stop using military force as a solution to everything – indeed, it is a solution to nothing. We must focus on diplomacy, including, as [Phyllis Bennis advocates](#), pressuring our allies such as Turkey, Saudi Arabia, Qatar and the UAE to stop allowing ISIS to cross their borders and stop financing and arming all groups who claim to oppose President Bashar al-Assad in Syria.

There are groups pursuing nonviolent solutions in Syria, Damascus-born author and poet [Mohja Kahf notes](#). We should support the Organization of Women's Freedom and the [Federation of Workers Council and Trade Unions in Iraq](#).

We must also push for the repeal of the 2001 AUMF and prevent the passage of a new AUMF.

We cannot rely on Congress or the president to reverse the course of rampant US militarism. It is up to us to make our voices heard. Mass opposition in the United States to Obama's proposed airstrikes on the Assad regime in 2013 was instrumental in preventing those strikes. Congress and the White House do respond to popular pressure. We must call, write, email and demonstrate, write letters to the editor and op-eds, and voice our disapproval of Obama's perpetual war.

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