

US Congress Lines Up Behind Drive for War Against Syria

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Leading members of the US Congress have moved quickly to declare their support for President Barack Obama's proposed resolution enabling the use of force against Syria.

The move to get a congressional authorization is aimed at providing a fig-leaf of legitimacy to a unpopular war that is based on lies. In this way it is similar to the 2001 Authorization of Use of Military Force, which became the rationale for sweeping military attacks and domestic repression.

Following a closed-door meeting between Obama and leading members of Congress Tuesday morning, Republican House Speaker John Boehner declared that he would "support the president's call to action." He added, "This is something that the United States, as a country, needs to do. ... I believe that my colleagues should support this call for action."

House Democratic leader Nancy Pelosi added her support, saying, "from a national security standpoint, we have to send a very clear message to those who have weapons of mass destruction of any variety that they should forget about using them," adding that "It is really something that, from a humanitarian standpoint, cannot be ignored, or else we cannot say never again."

Congressmen from both political parties entirely accept the lies promoted by the Obama administration, above all the claim that the planned action in Syria will be "limited." Before the meeting with Boehner and Pelosi, Obama himself reiterated this claim, insisting that what is planned is not "Iraq or Afghanistan" and that there will be no "boots on the ground."

In fact, the administration is seeking the resolution in part because it is planning a major military operation to reverse the course of the Syrian civil war and unseat or kill Syrian President Bashar Al-Assad. This is merely a prelude to action against Syria's main ally, Iran, and behind it, Russia.

While insisting that its plans are limited in order to help sell the war to the American people, administration officials have repeatedly made clear that they want to "degrade" the Syrian military—that is, destroy large sections of the air force—and "upgrade" the opposition by directly supplying lethal weapons.

The leaders of both parties accepted entirely the pretext employed by the administration to justify the war: Assad's supposed use of chemical weapons. This state of affairs was summed up in the comments of Adam Schiff, a California Democrat on the House Intelligence Committee, who told the press earlier in the day, "The debate is shifting away

from 'Did he use chemical weapons?' to 'What should be done about it?' "

The aims of the war drive were elaborated in an afternoon hearing of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, in which Secretary of State John Kerry, Secretary of Defense Charles Hagel, and Joint Chiefs of Staff Chairman Martin Dempsey made the case for bombing Syria.

Kerry opened his remarks by saying "some people here and there, amazingly, have questioned the evidence of this assault on conscience. I repeat here again today that only the most willful desire to avoid reality can assert that this did not occur as described or that the regime did not do it. It did happen, and the Assad regime did it."

Kerry's statement was aimed not at members of the committee, but at the US population, which is skeptical of the administration's claims and overwhelmingly opposed to military action. The Senators accepted the vague and unsubstantiated claims that Syrian president Bashar al-Assad used chemical weapons despite the fact that no new evidence was presented. Any minor questions about the administration's claims were referred by the panelists to a closed-door session to take place Wednesday.

The panelists sought to further reinforce the claim by Obama that he is seeking a limited military engagement, and sought to rule out any sort of ground invasion. Kerry insisted, "let me be clear: President Obama is not asking America to go to war... We all agree, there will be no American boots on the ground." For the US Secretary of State, launching military strikes aimed at taking out a foreign country's military is not "war."

These pretenses were undermined in statements earlier Tuesday by House Majority Leader Eric Cantor, who framed Obama's proposal for a "limited war" in a much broader context. "The Syrian conflict is not merely a civil war; it is a sectarian proxy war that is exacerbating tensions throughout the Muslim world," he said. "It is clear Iran is a principal combatant in this conflict, and its direct involvement is an integral part of Iran's bid to establish regional hegemony. Were Assad and his Iranian patrons to come out on top it would be a strategic victory for Iran, embolden Hezbollah, and convince our allies that we cannot be trusted."

In the Senate testimony, Kerry himself outlined a scenario in which US troops invade Syria on the pretext of securing chemical weapons supplies as the country "imploded." He said it would be "preferable not to" have a prohibition on ground troops. Kerry latter backtracked, saying that the administration was comfortable with a resolution that did not authorize ground troops. "There will not be boots on the ground with respect to the civil war," he said, in carefully worded language that avoided mention of what would happen afterward.

The administration, in any case, sees any resolution passed in Congress as authorizing action but not restricting it. That is, nothing the Congress may or may not pass will be interpreted as prohibiting any action by the president. In the only significantly confrontational exchange with Kerry, Republican Senator Rand Paul said, "You're probably going to win; just go ahead and say it's real. And let's have a real debate in this country and not a meaningless debate that in the end you lose and you say, oh, well, we have the authority anyway."

In response, Kerry restated the administration's claim that the president had the right to disregard a congressional vote. "I will leave to the man who was elected to be president of the United States the responsibility for telling you what his decision is, if and when that moment came."

Throughout the hearing, protesters denouncing the war plans were unceremoniously ejected from the Senate chambers.

A vote on the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, which will likely take place today, is expected to pass by a wide margin.

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