

Troops in Iraq: Congress Must Uphold Constitution

July 17—Representatives Jim McGovern (D-Mass.), Walter Jones (R-N.C.), and Barbara Lee (D-Calif.) gave impassioned presentations in the House of Representatives today on their House Concurrent Resolution 105, filed July 11. The measure, which now has three additional signators—Sam Farr (D-Calif.), Keith Ellison (D-Minn.), and Raul Grijalva (D-Ariz.)—mandates that all U.S. troops be withdrawn from Iraq by the end of the year, except for those needed to defend U.S. diplomatic facilities and personnel.

The Congressmen stressed that they were not addressing the President with this resolution, but Congress, which has repeatedly ducked its constitutional responsibility for war and peace. Jones urged, “We want the American people to join in and contact their Congressmen” on this.



Rep. Barbara Lee: “The American people deserve a vote on this resolution.”

The resolution reads, in part: “Pursuant to section 5(c) of the War Powers Resolution (50 U.S.C. 1544(c)), Congress directs the President to remove United States Armed Forces, other than Armed Forces required to protect United States diplomatic facilities and personnel, from Iraq—(1) by no later than the end of the period of 30 days beginning on the day on which this concurrent resolution is adopted; or (2) if the President determines that it is not safe to remove such United States Armed Forces before the end of that period, by no later than December 31, 2014, or such earlier date as the President determines that the Armed Forces can safely be removed.”

Bipartisan Effort

The first speaker was **Representative Lee**, who noted that “many of the same voices who championed the unnecessary war in Iraq [are] once again beating the drum for a renewed war in Iraq today. So we must not let history repeat itself. We must remember history. We must not be dragged back into a war in Iraq.”

She continued: “Over 100 Members of Congress now from both parties have signed a letter, Congressman McGovern, myself—many, Scott Rigell from Virginia—we are calling for the President to come to Congress for debate on an authorization before any military escalation on Iraq.”

“Last month, during the consideration of the 2015 Defense Appropriations bill, over 150 bipartisan Mem-

bers supported our amendment that would prohibit funds from being used to conduct combat operations in Iraq.

“Mr. Speaker, there is no military solution in Iraq. This is a sectarian war with longstanding roots that were inflamed when we invaded Iraq in 2003. Any lasting solution must be political and take into account all sides. The change that Iraq needs must come from Iraqis. They must reject violence in favor of a peaceful democracy that represents everyone and respects the rights of all citizens.

“The future of Iraq is in the hands of the Iraqi people. . . .

“I will finally conclude by saying sooner or later—*sooner or later*—we have got to go back and repeal the Authorization for Use of Military Force which has become a blank check for this war this past decade. It sets the stage for perpetual war. We need to repeal it. The American people deserve a vote on this resolution, and they deserve a vote for repealing this authorization. . . .”

‘We Can’t Fix This’

Representative McGovern then took the floor, underlining Iraq’s ethnic and religious divisions, and the fact that it is now facing simultaneously a crisis of governance and an invasion by extremist forces.

“In large measure,” he said, “Iraq is falling apart because of its sectarian government currently led by Prime Minister Maliki that excludes and represses most Sunnis, Kurds, and other ethnic and religious minorities; and an army that thinks more about saving its own skin than protecting the Iraqi people. This is what has laid the foundation for extremist forces, namely ISIL, to enter Iraq and take control of disaffected communities and territory.

“I do not believe we can fix this. Only the Iraqi people can fix this. And I certainly don’t believe our brave and stalwart military men and women can fix this.

“I believe that we should never have invaded Iraq. I also believe it is foolish to once again commit U.S. troops to try and save an Iraqi Government and army that cannot stand on their own. . . .”

The reason for the resolution that the three Representatives introduced, he said, was simple: “Congress has the responsibility to authorize the introduction of American troops where hostilities are imminent. In less than 3 weeks, in three separate deployments, the

U.S. has sent at least 775 additional troops to Iraq.

“We don’t know what might happen next to those troops or to yet another deployment of additional troops, but we do know that Congress should debate it. We do know that Congress should vote on whether to authorize it or not.

“That is what the Constitution of the United States demands of Congress. That is what the Constitution demands of us. Now is the time for Congress to debate the merits of our military involvement in this latest Iraq conflict—openly, transparently.

“Do we approve of these deployments and any future escalation? If so, we should vote to authorize it. If we do not support it, then we should bring our troops back home. It is that simple, Mr. Speaker. Congress has the responsibility to act on Iraq now....

“We introduced this concurrent resolution because we strongly believe that Congress has to step up to the plate and carry out its responsibilities when our servicemen and -women are once again being sent into harm’s way.

“The time for debate is now, not when the first bodybag comes home from Iraq, not when the first U.S. airstrikes or bombs fall on Iraq, not when we are embedded with Iraqi troops trying to back an ISIL-held town, and, worst-case scenario, not when our troops are shooting their way out of an overtaken Baghdad.

“Now, Mr. Speaker, is the time to debate our new engagement in Iraq—before the heat of the moment—when we can weigh the pros and cons of supporting the Maliki government or whatever government is cobbled together should Maliki be forced to step down—now, before we are forced to take sides in a religious and sectarian war; now, before the next addition of more troops takes place—make no mistake, I firmly believe we will continue to send more troops and more military assets into this crisis—now, Mr. Speaker, before we are forced to fire our first shots, launch our first missiles, or drop our first bombs.

“Now, Mr. Speaker, is when the House should debate and vote on this very serious matter. For those who say it is too early, too premature for this debate, I respectfully disagree. The administration has tacitly signaled when it notified Congress that our troops have been sent to a place where the threat of hostilities is imminent.

“The longer we put off carrying out our constitutional responsibilities, the easier it becomes to just drift



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Rep. Jim McGovern: “Do we approve of these deployments and any future escalation? If so, we should vote to authorize it. If we do not support it, then we should bring our troops back home. It is that simple, Mr. Speaker.”

along, and this is what Congress has done, over and over. We just kind of drift along, and it has to end. It has to end, Mr. Speaker. Congress must speak. Congress must act....”

Shirking Our Responsibility

The third speaker was **Representative Jones**, who introduced a theme that he reiterated several times: his own vote for the Iraq War that began in 2003, which he deeply regrets.

“When we continue to not debate whether we should be sending our young men and women to die,” he said, “we are shirking our constitutional responsibility that we, in this Congress, have raised our hand to swear that we will uphold the Constitution of the United States, but we don’t do that, Mr. Speaker, when it comes to war. And I blame myself. In 2003, I bought the lie that was told by the previous administration about the weapons of mass destruction that Saddam Hussein had, and how he was going to use that against the American people.

“That misinformation that was given by the previous administration caused us to go into Iraq, and I voted to give the President at the time—President Bush—the authority to bypass the Constitution. It is

called the AUMF, the Authorization for Use of Military Force, and I regret that and will until the day I die, because I gave up my constitutional responsibility to debate and to vote on whether we should go to war or not, and that was the constitutional responsibility of this Congress and of me being a Member of Congress.”

Jones denounced “my own side”—the Republicans—for having become “the war party,” whereas during Vietnam, it was the Democrats.

He quoted Republican Patrick Buchanan’s column (“Tell the Imperial President: No More Wars!” July 1): “It is astonishing that Republicans who threaten to impeach Obama for usurping authority at home, remain silent as he prepares to usurp their war powers—to march us into Syria and back into Iraq. Are Republicans now prepared to sit mute as Obama takes us into two new Middle East wars on his own authority?”

Jones then invoked “those who wrote the Constitution,” to stress that they had plenty of experience with war, and they set out sound principles. In a 1796 letter to James Monroe, George Washington wrote that “no nation has a right to inter-meddle in another,” and James Madison wrote that “the power to declare war, including the power of judging the causes of war, is fully and exclusively vested in the legislature.”

Jones continued: “We are the legislature. It is our responsibility to meet our constitutional duties. Mr. McGovern, I have signed over 11,000 letters to families and extended families in this country since we went into Iraq because I have asked God to forgive me for listening to the misinformation and the distortions by the previous administration to go into Iraq.

“That is my pain, and I will live with that pain.”

‘Big Issues’ Are Ignored

McGovern then intervened again, raising the issue of the war in Afghanistan.

“My colleague Mr. Jones and I had an amendment to the defense authorization bill a few weeks back, which said that President Obama had mentioned a couple of years ago that we would be out of Afghanistan by 2014. Clearly, that is not going to be the case.

“The amendment said that the President had to notify Congress of what our military plans were going



Rep. Walter Jones, pointing to the photo of a military funeral displayed behind him, said, “That is why we need to be on this floor . . . to debate whether we continue to allow the President—in this case, President Obama—to use the War Powers Act to send our troops into Iraq. And yet, we sit here idle.”

to be in Afghanistan, and that Congress should consider that and vote up or down on whether we should continue our military involvement in Afghanistan.

“That is hardly a radical bill. It is simply a bill that says: Congress do your job, you have an obligation—a constitutional obligation when it comes to war.

“This amendment, which was germane, it was in order—on the defense bill, no less—at the last minute, we were told we could not offer it, it would not be made in order because the leadership of this House didn’t want that debate, they were afraid it might pass.

“Well, that is the way democracy is supposed to work. If a majority in this place does not want to continue an endless war in Afghanistan or does not want to start another war in Iraq, then that ought to mean something.

“My criticism right now is not with the White House. I may have some disagreements with the President in terms of what his policy on Iraq might be, but he has done his job, he has notified us, he has sent letters up to Congress that have announced the deployments that he is making, and it says—consistent with the War Powers Resolution, so this is not a complaint about the White House. We may disagree with their policy, but they did what they were supposed to do.

“Our complaint is with this institution, that we are not doing what we are supposed to do.”

Later in the discussion, McGovern quoted several military and foreign policy experts about the possibility of reentering the Iraq civil conflict:

“Gordon Adams, a former senior White House budget official, said in mid-June: ‘What is happening in Iraq right now is both a cautionary tale and an unfolding tragedy. The caution is about the blithe American assumption that the United States is omnipotent, and that with enough money, goodwill, expertise, equipment, and training, Americans can build foreign forces and bring security to troubled areas around the world. The tragedy is that what the U.S. does, and has done, leads down the road to failure.’

“Retired U.S. Army Lt. Gen. Robert Gard, Jr., stated, on July 6: ‘The collapse of the Iraqi Army was not due to a shortage of trained Iraqi troops or the inferiority in firepower or equipment. The case was their lack of confidence in, and commitment to, Iraqi national institutions and leadership, both military commanders and political authorities. This intangible but essential element in combat effectiveness depends upon legitimate governance, not admonitions from foreign military advisers.’

“Retired Gen. Barry McCaffrey, on June 12, said: ‘At the end of the day, if your army won’t fight, it’s because they don’t trust their incompetent, corrupt generals, they don’t trust each other. This is an enduring civil war between the Shi’a, the Sunni, and the Kurds. So I don’t think we’ve got any options, and we’d be ill-advised to start bombing where we really can’t sort out the combatants or understand where the civilian population is.’”

McGovern summed up: “Mr. Speaker, I do not believe the United States should be involving itself militarily in a civil war, a sectarian war, a religious war, a struggle for power that has been going on for generations. We shouldn’t be taking sides in this conflict.

“I do believe that a region in turmoil is not in the best interest of the United States. But as so many have said, including the President, this requires a political solution and it requires the political will of all the key actors in the region, not just outside actors like the United States and the Europeans, but those in the region. The countries and leaders in the region need to step up to the plate and actually lead on finding a political solution or watch their neighbors go up in flames and hope the fire doesn’t jump to their homes and destroy them as well.

“This is why we need a full debate on what is happening in Iraq, in the region, what our options are, and whether or not we should keep sending troops to Iraq or not....

“That is what this privileged resolution that Mr. Jones, Ms. Lee, and I have suggested that we vote on. I don’t know why that is such a controversial issue, but for some reason, in this Congress, big issues like that don’t ever seem to make their way for debate on the House floor.

“This should not be a Democratic or Republican issue. In fact, there are Democrats who disagree with my position. There are some Democrats who believe we ought to continue to send more military aid and potentially more troops to Iraq, and there are Republicans who agree with me that we ought not to. So this is a bipartisan concern.

“I will close by simply saying to the Speaker of the House: Give us a vote. Let us debate this issue.

“To my fellow Members of Congress on both sides of the aisle: Live up to your constitutional responsibility. Demand a vote.”

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—Lyndon LaRouche,
Feb. 11, 2013

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