

House Vote on Syria Withdrawal Suggests a Fissure in War Coalition

by Daniel Platt

March 10—From the time of the Vietnam War until early in this century, it was safe to assume that a significant anti-war faction existed within the Democratic Party, which could act as a counterweight to the Republicans, who loved to posture with the “big stick” and who enjoyed cordial relations with the arms manufacturers. Democrats were more apt to express skepticism

finally presented itself in 2016, when British intelligence launched the “Russiagate” campaign, alleging that the Russian government preferred the candidacy of Donald Trump over that of Hillary Clinton, and that Russian agents were engaged in covert operations to assist Trump.

The Democratic leadership saw the opportunity to gain partisan advantage by posing as the defenders of American sovereignty against the “foreign menace”. Soon even the most tender Democratic liberals were beating the war drums with a ferocity that surpassed even that of their Republican opponents. In a last gasp of antiwar sentiment during October 2022, thirty Democratic members of the House Progressive Caucus signed a timid and obsequious letter (“Dear Mr. President: We write with appreciation for your commitment to Ukraine’s legitimate struggle against Russia’s war of aggression.”) calling for efforts to negotiate an end to the war in Ukraine. But they withdrew and renounced the letter less than

WITHDRAWING U.S. TROOPS FROM SYRIA



Tally of the March 8 vote, by party affiliation, by the U.S. House of Representatives on H.Con. Res. 21, directing the President to withdraw U.S. troops from Syria within 180 days.

about the pro-war narratives that the intelligence agencies helpfully provided to major news and entertainment media.

With the end of the Warsaw Pact in 1991, the proponents of a “unipolar world” could hardly contain their excitement, and it became increasingly urgent to suppress any dissent with respect to their proposed wars of conquest. The golden opportunity to corral wayward Democrats into the warmongering camp

24 hours later, after the party’s ideological enforcement machine cracked the whip.

Meanwhile, in a perplexing reversal of roles, a faction of Republicans emerged which has resisted the war drive, in some cases due to the traditional Republican reluctance to spend tax dollars on anything at all, but in other cases for more philosophical reasons (see *EIR*, March 10, 2023, “Political Battle Erupts Over Genocidal Sanctions

Against Syria.”) In May 2022, 11 Senate Republicans and 57 Republicans in the House voted against the initial funding package of \$40 billion to arm Ukraine against Russia. It has now become acceptable for Democratic Party PACs and media organs such as *Salon* to depict these Republicans as “Putin’s puppets,” mirroring the attacks on antiwar Democrats as “Commie symps” from the 1960s.

Mobilization, Rallies Unite Activists

As long as resistance to the war drive could be written off as merely a left-wing or right-wing aberration, the sanctity of the “narrative” was preserved.

However, in recent weeks an upsurge of grassroots activism has



CC/Gage Skidmore

Although H.Con.Res. 21, introduced by U.S. Congressman Matt Gaetz, directing the President to withdraw U.S. troops from Syria, failed to pass, it forced opposition to the global war policy out into the open and forced the entire House to go on record on where its members stand.

From the Syria Withdrawal Debate (H.Con.Res. 21)

Ilhan Omar, Democrat of Minnesota

Mr. Speaker, I rise today to support Congress restoring its Constitutional authority over matters of war and peace. No matter what else we are discussing here today, the plain and simple truth is that Congress has not authorized military presence in Syria. For far too long, we in Congress have neglected this key Article 1 responsibility. If my colleagues believe that we need the military in Syria, then they should author an AUMF [Authorization for the Use of Military Force—ed.]. They should debate that in committee. They should bring it to vote on the floor.

We must not continue to hand over power to the executive branch when the politics gets too difficult.

Andy Biggs, Republican of Arizona

One Syrian analyst said this recently, quote, Until we see the externals confront each other directly rather than on the Syrian ground, I don’t see an actual

end to the Syrian conflict, close quote. You know who the externals are? The U.S., Russia, Iran. That’s the externals. We have no authority to be one of those externals.

[The] analyst went on to say this is a proxy war—that’s what’s happening. It’s another U.S.-Russia proxy war. Is that our objective? Regime change? Is that what it is? No. We don’t know what the objective is. You can’t even define what the exit ramp is. Now you have us with our allies the Turks, and our allies the Kurds. They are fighting against each other. They don’t want each other.

General Milley, who is our all[y]? The Kurds? The Turks? Who is it? Is it the Assad regime? He can’t tell you. No one can tell you. All of this is being done without legal authority. It’s time for us stop fighting proxy wars. It’s time for us not to say, oh, next time—next time we’ll take care of these AUMFs. We have had time after time. This is the time to get rid of them.

begun to fracture the monolithic support for global war. The “Rage Against the War Machine” rallies that were held around the nation on the weekend of Feb. 18-19 made a point of uniting activists from both the left and the right, enraging the gatekeepers on both ends of the spectrum.

In addition, there has been a growing movement of constituents, members of the Schiller Institute as well as others, who have chosen to confront their elected officials over their pro-war stance, with a particular emphasis on those who identify as “progressives,” such as the members of the “Squad.” Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, Ilhan Omar, Rashida Tlaib, Hakeem Jeffries, Elizabeth Warren and Ayanna Pressley are among the high-profile elected Democratic Representatives and Senators who have responded evasively in public fora to questions about their support for the war, and it is beginning to have an effect. These encounters were witnessed not only by groups of voters in their respective districts, but by an audience totaling millions on YouTube.

On March 8, Republican Rep. Matt Gaetz forced a roll call vote in the House of Representatives on his H.Con.Res. 21 [House Concurrent Resolution 21 —ed.], a privileged resolution under the War Powers Resolution, directing the President to remove all U.S. troops from Syria within 180 days of the its passage. Although the resolution failed by a vote of 321-103, with 56 Democrats and 47 Republicans voting for it, it was significant in that it forced opposition to the global war policy out into the open on a bipartisan basis, and forced the entire House of Representatives to go on record on this critical issue.

Of particular significance, many liberal Democrats, including Representatives Ocasio-Cortez, Omar, Tlaib and Pressley, voted “Yea” on the resolution (House Minority Leader Hakeem Jeffries, ever the sycophantic neocon, voted “Nay.” A complete list of the Members of Congress and how they voted is available [here](#). In fact, despite being introduced by a conservative Republican, the resolution received the endorsement of the House Progressive Caucus, and this time it did not wilt within 24 hours.

Gaetz had characterized his resolution as a means to test “where the anti-war movement in Congress stands.” The leadership in the House, of both parties,

including House Speaker Kevin McCarthy and Rep. Michael McCaul (Chairman of the House Committee on Foreign Affairs), pressured their members to vote against the Gaetz bill in the name of “national security.” McCaul argued during the debate over the resolution that American troops were needed in Syria to fight radical Islamist groups, despite the fact that the United States has a long history of funding and training these same groups for “regime change” purposes.

In response, Gaetz said,

Syria is such a mess. We are sometimes funding both sides in the same battle.

He asked to enter into the record an [article](#) from the March 27, 2016 *Los Angeles Times*, “In Syria, militias armed by the Pentagon fight those armed by the CIA.”

A delegation of activists from the Schiller Institute visited more than 24 congressional offices on the day of the vote on the resolution. The presence of these activists, and a mobilization of calls and emails by numerous organizations, along with the recent rallies, demonstrations, and the confrontations at local town hall meetings, combined to help create an environment where members of the House were emboldened to defy the instructions they were receiving from party leaders. Representative Gaetz later said,

While today’s vote may have failed, my fight to end forever-wars and bring our troops home has only just begun.

He has also introduced Feb. 9 the “Ukraine Fatigue Act” ([H.Res.113](#)) to cut off all U.S. funding of the war in Ukraine.

The breakdown of rigid party-line voting, and the growing cooperation among disparate forces on matters of existential importance, such as the avoidance of nuclear war, is a hopeful sign that the Members of Congress are beginning to pay closer attention to the needs of their constituents, rather than allowing themselves to be guided strictly by the leaders of their parties, by deep-pocket donors, and by the appallingly corrupt corporate media.