

US House leaders block resolution against Libya war

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Top Republicans and Democrats in the House of Representatives joined forces Friday to defeat a resolution that would have demanded an end to US military operations in Libya within 15 days. The resolution was voted down 148 to 265, with both House Speaker John Boehner, the leading Republican, and House Minority Leader Nancy Pelosi, the leading Democrat, opposing it.

Majorities of both parties backed the continuation of the war, although a significantly higher percentage of Democrats took the pro-war position. The Republicans split 144 to 87, while the Democrats divided 121 to 61.

Congressman Dennis Kucinich of Ohio, a liberal Democrat and former presidential candidate, introduced the resolution, which would have had the force of law if passed by both the House and the Senate. It declared Obama to be in violation of the War Powers Act, the 1973 legislation adopted in the wake of the Vietnam War to make future undeclared wars subject to congressional approval.

The House Republican leadership intervened to block a vote on the Kucinich resolution Wednesday, fearing it might pass with the vast majority of Republicans voting for it in order to deal a political blow to President Obama.

The next day, at a closed-door caucus of the House Republicans, Boehner took the unusual step of introducing his own resolution on the Libya war, one that would merely express the “sense of the House” and not be legally binding. The resolution criticized the Obama administration’s refusal to seek congressional approval for the war and demanded answers within 14 days to a series of questions about US goals in Libya.

Boehner defended the toothless resolution as an effort to avoid undercutting US relations with NATO allies, like Britain and France, which are carrying out the bulk of the military operations against Libya. He said that the Kucinich

resolution “goes too far,” adding, “We may have differences regarding how we got here, but we cannot turn our backs on our troops and our NATO partners who have stuck by us over the last 10 years.”

The Boehner resolution criticizes Obama mainly for failing to generate adequate war propaganda, saying that the administration needed to provide Congress “a compelling rationale based upon United States national security interests for current United States military activities regarding Libya.”

The resolution demands that the administration turn over documentation on how the decision to launch the war was made, on how the war in Libya will affect ongoing US wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, and on the nature of the Libyan rebel groups fighting to overthrow the regime of Muammar Gaddafi.

On Friday, the House took up the Boehner resolution and passed it by a vote of 268 to 145, with nearly all Republicans supporting it, along with 45 Democrats. Only then did the Republican leadership permit a vote on the Kucinich resolution, which was defeated by nearly the same margin.

Boehner made it clear that he supported the war in Libya and merely objected to the high-handed refusal of the White House to get a congressional rubber stamp for the military action. “This resolution puts the president on notice,” he declared. “He has a chance to get this right. If he doesn’t, we will make it right.”

Other top Republicans declared their support for the war. House Foreign Affairs Committee Chairwoman Ileana Ros-Lehtinen (Republican of Florida) said, “We must not let our frustration with the president’s contempt for Congress cloud our judgment and result in our taking action that would harm our standing, our credibility and our interests in the region.”

In the successive debates on the two resolutions, both Republicans and Democrats denounced the Obama administration's refusal to abide by the deadline set by the War Powers Act, after initially complying with the act by notifying Congress formally on March 21 that he had ordered air strikes against Libya.

Under the War Powers Act, the president must obtain congressional backing for a war within 60 days of beginning military action. If he fails to win congressional approval, he has an additional 30 days to withdraw all US forces from combat. Obama allowed the 60-day deadline to expire May 21 without even acknowledging his legal obligation to Congress.

In a briefing to reporters aboard Air Force One, White House spokesman Josh Earnest called both the Boehner and Kucinich resolutions "unnecessary and unhelpful." He declared, "The administration believes strongly in the concept of consulting with leaders in Congress. It is the view of this administration that we've acted in accordance with the War Powers Act because of this regular consultation."

If a spokesman for George W. Bush had made such a declaration, the liberal wing of the Democratic Party and its editorial representatives, from the *New York Times* to the *Nation*, would have fulminated against the obvious sophistry of equating "consulting with leaders" and the legal requirement to obtain a congressional vote sanctioning military action. Kucinich and others would have rushed to file impeachment resolutions.

No such action is threatened against Barack Obama, unless it comes from the Tea Party wing of the House Republicans, who raised the unconstitutional character of the Libya war in the course of Friday's debate. None of these Republicans, of course, raised any objection to the trampling on constitutional norms under the Bush administration.

Among those backing the Kucinich resolution were several prospective or announced candidates for the Republican presidential nomination, including Ron Paul of Texas and Michele Bachmann of Minnesota, as well as more than 40 of the freshmen Republicans elected in the 2010 congressional sweep.

After the vote, Kucinich told reporters that he had actually collected more Republican votes than Democratic because he focused solely on the constitutional issues, not the nature of the war in Libya. "Nowhere in this debate did I get into the merits or demerits of our involvement in Libya," he said,

as though that was something positive.

Kucinich said the relative lack of support among Democrats was because of "strong appeals from the White House and the Democratic leadership." Pelosi spoke in the debate against the antiwar resolution, and the top three Democrats, including Pelosi, Steny Hoyer and James Clyburn, all voted against it.

The Ohio Democrat praised Boehner, saying, "the Speaker has taken a stand for the institution, and he may not have been ready to come as far as I wanted to go today, but we certainly took a step in the direction of accountability."

Friday's votes were a signal of the deepening divisions within the American ruling elite and its two political parties, in the face of the mass upsurge in the Middle East and North Africa, and the intractable obstacles they confront in all three ongoing wars—Libya, Iraq and Afghanistan.

Last week, the House adopted by an overwhelming margin a legally binding amendment to the National Defense Authorization Act, the main Pentagon spending bill, barring the deployment of US troops on the ground in Libya.

Two other antiwar measures have been narrowly defeated in the past 10 days. On May 26, the House rejected an amendment by liberal Democrat James McGovern of Massachusetts and conservative Republican Justin Amash of Michigan that would have required "an accelerated transition of military operations to Afghan authorities." It was defeated in a 204 to 215 vote.

On June 2, an amendment to prohibit the Department of Homeland Security from engaging in any activity in support of the war in Libya was defeated by an even closer margin, 208 to 213.

Both parties are well aware of the overwhelming antiwar sentiment among the American people, who see trillions squandered on imperialist military adventures while federal, state and local governments all claim there is "no money" to maintain basic social services. These sentiments can find no genuine expression, however, within the existing two-party system.



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