

US House defeats measure to reduce funding for Libya war

Patrick Martin
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With the Democratic Party providing the majority of the pro-war votes, the US House of Representatives refused Friday to cut back funding for the continuation of the Obama administration's war against Libya.

The vote was 238 to 180 to defeat a measure introduced with the support of the House Republican leadership. It would have cut off funds only for Predator missile strikes and other unilateral US military attacks on the North African country, while allowing military operations in support of NATO air strikes to continue.

House Speaker John Boehner told the Republican caucus on Wednesday that he wanted to avoid any vote that would undermine US-NATO relations, and the resolution was drafted accordingly. But the Obama administration and the congressional Democratic leadership opposed any restriction on the war of aggression begun by the US, Britain, France and other NATO countries on March 19.

Secretary of State Hillary Clinton flew back to Washington from a diplomatic tour of Central America and the Caribbean to make a last-minute appeal to the House Democratic caucus on Thursday. She later summarized her argument at a press conference, reiterating the "humanitarian" pretext for a neocolonial war aimed at installing a puppet regime and gaining control of Libya's oil wealth—one that is increasingly exposed by attempts to assassinate Gaddafi and the rising toll of civilian deaths and injuries from NATO bombings of Tripoli and other urban centers.

Clinton cynically declared: "The bottom line is, whose side are you on? Are you on Gaddafi's side or are you on the side of the aspirations of the Libyan people and the international coalition that has been created to support them?"

National Security Adviser Thomas Donilon held a closed-door briefing at the White House early Friday with a select group of liberal Democrats, many of whom subsequently voted against the bill to restrict funding.

In the end, 149 Democrats joined with 89 Republicans to defeat the bill, while only 36 Democrats voted to partially defund the war, along with 144 Republicans.

Neither side evinced a shred of political principle in the daylong debate. What predominated was posturing and double-dealing in a legislature that has repeatedly set new lows for

subservience to corporate interests and to the military-intelligence apparatus.

Republicans who had upheld the right of a Republican president, George W. Bush, to wage war at will, now, with a Democrat in the White House, claimed to be upholding congressional authority. Democrats who struck a (purely rhetorical) antiwar posture while Bush was in office now baited opponents of the Libyan intervention as supporters of Muammar Gaddafi.

Meanwhile, the bipartisan unity behind the military operations of American imperialism was demonstrated in the Senate's 100-0 vote to confirm CIA Director Leon Panetta as the new secretary of defense. A similarly unanimous vote next week is expected to confirm the US commander in Afghanistan, General David Petraeus, to replace Panetta at the CIA.

The House Republican decision to hold the debate on Obama's policy in Libya had nothing to do with genuine opposition to the war, which has now passed the 100-day mark. Nor was it, as Boehner claimed, an effort to defend the authority of Congress against an administration that is in brazen violation of the law, having refused to seek congressional approval for the intervention as required under the War Powers Act.

Boehner emphasized his political agreement with the war in his speech in support of the funding reduction. "I support the removal of the Libyan regime," he said, "I support the president's authorities as commander in chief." His only disagreement was that Obama should have obtained congressional authorization for the intervention in Libya.

Democrats, such as Ohio Congressman Dennis Kucinich, who presented the bill as a serious antiwar measure, were no less duplicitous. Even were the resolution to pass both houses and overcome a certain presidential veto, it would not prevent the United States from playing a critical role in an illegal war of aggression against a virtually defenseless country.

Friday's proceedings began with a separate House vote against a resolution endorsing the Libya war and giving the Obama administration authority to continue the attack for the next year. A majority of Democrats, 115-70, voted for the pro-war resolution. It was defeated by a near-unanimous

Republican bloc, with only 8 in favor and 225 against, making the final margin an overwhelming 123-295 defeat.

This resolution was identical to the bipartisan measure introduced earlier in the week in the US Senate by Democrat John Kerry and Republican John McCain. The Republican leadership in the House sought a vote to show that the Kerry-McCain resolution had no chance of passage in the lower chamber.

For the House Republicans, the vote was a demonstration of hostility to the Obama administration rather than to the war against Libya. For the Democrats, the majority vote for the war demonstrated the entirely pro-imperialist and militarist character of the second party of the US ruling class.

The entire leadership of the House Democratic caucus, including Minority Leader Nancy Pelosi, the former speaker, and minority whips Steny Hoyer and James Clyburn, gave their support to the war, as did the new chairwoman of the Democratic National Committee, Debbie Wasserman Schultz.

Hoyer made the most inflammatory statements in the debate, saying that if war funding were cut back, “The message will go all over the world, the message will go to Muammar Gaddafi, the message will go to our NATO allies, the message will go to every nation of the world that America does not keep faith with its allies.”

Pelosi told the press afterwards that she did not regard Obama as defying the War Powers Act. “I, myself, believe the president has the latitude to do what he is doing as long as there are no boots on the ground,” she said.

Even among the 70 Democrats who voted against the resolution authorizing the war, fully half voted later in the day against the second resolution imposing a slight cutback in war funding.

Those responsible for spearheading the war in Iraq have rallied to Obama’s defense. A group of rightwing neoconservatives issued an open letter declaring, “The United States must see this effort in Libya through to its conclusion.” They made the same arguments for overthrowing Gaddafi they once made for overthrowing Saddam Hussein—alleged ties to terrorism and the supposed pursuit of “nuclear weapons and other weapons of mass destruction.”

Signing this declaration in support of Obama’s war in Libya were such figures as former Bush political adviser Karl Rove, Liz Cheney, daughter of the former vice president, and William Kristol, editor of the *Weekly Standard*.

The action of the House under Republican control—criticizing the war in words, while continuing to fund it—mimics the role played by the Democrats when they were in control and George W. Bush was president.

The Democrats won control of the House in the 2006 congressional elections in large measure by appealing to antiwar sentiment. But despite passing empty resolutions—including one condemning Bush’s escalation of the war in Iraq—the Democratic-controlled House invariably passed

the appropriations bills required to fund the gargantuan cost of the war.

In each case, the party in control of the House ultimately bowed to the power of the executive branch. This demonstrates that what is involved is not simply the policy of either of the two parties, both completely controlled by big business, but rather the putrefaction of American democracy as a whole.

The military-intelligence apparatus functions as a law unto itself, with the president as its nominal “commander-in-chief” and Congress as an impotent rubber stamp.

One Democratic congressman, Jerrold Nadler of New York, admitted this reality in the course of his remarks in the floor debate. “We have been sliding for 70 years to a situation where Congress has nothing to do with the decision about whether to go to war or not, and the president is becoming an absolute monarch,” he said.

Nadler, it should be noted, has held his congressional seat for 19 years and managed to accommodate himself to the process he verbally denounces. He will doubtless continue to do so in the future.

The Obama administration’s attack on Libya is another giant step in the complete subordination of American political life to militarism. Obama has asserted the right to attack another country not because it is a threat to the United States, but because the attack will facilitate the pursuit of “our values” and “our interests,” which include the “free flow of commerce”—i.e., control over Libya’s vast oil resources.

The Kerry-McCain resolution, which the White House has endorsed, declares that the president has the authority to wage war for “national security policy interests,” a deliberately broad and vague basis for waging war—one that openly defies international law, which prohibits the initiation of war except in self-defense.

In the 32-page document sent by the White House to Congress last week, Obama even claimed that bombing Libya and firing missiles at its cities did not constitute “hostilities,” because US troops were in no danger of Libyan retaliation. Based on that standard, the president could attack any country in the world, on his own discretion, as long as that country was too weak to fight back effectively.



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