

US Congress to vote to fund Syrian “rebels”

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The US Congress is to vote this week on the Obama administration’s request for authorization to train and arm “rebel” forces in Syria fighting the government of President Bashar al-Assad, with overwhelming approval expected in both the Democratic-controlled Senate and the Republican-controlled House of Representatives.

The House is expected to go first, following the decision by Speaker John Boehner to recall members to assemble Monday, one day earlier than previously planned. At that point, an amendment to authorize funding the anti-regime forces in Syria to the tune of \$500 million will be added to a pending bill to provide stopgap funding for the federal government through December 11.

“Based on all the information that I’ve looked at, the Free Syrian Army has by and large been very well vetted by our intelligence officials,” Boehner said. Referring to Obama’s nationally televised address last week on US military operations against the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS), he said the US president “doesn’t want US boots on the ground,” therefore requiring that Washington fund the Free Syrian Army. Boehner added, “We only have one commander in chief. At this point in time it’s important to give the president what he is asking for.”

White House Chief of Staff Denis McDonough, appearing on several Sunday television interview programs, praised the Republican response to Obama’s request for funding the Syrian opposition forces. “We are seeing very good progress in Congress, including in the House under the speaker’s leadership, to make sure that we have the authorities to train and equip those Syrian oppositionists who are fighting,” he told “Fox News Sunday.”

McDonough made the same argument as Boehner—either Syrian “rebel” forces would fight ISIS or US combat troops would be required. “Everybody

believes there has to be someone on the ground, some ground force,” he said. “If it’s not the Syrian opposition, trained and equipped by the United States, authorized by Congress, and the Congress takes the step this week, then it’ll have to be US troops.”

The television images of ISIS beheading two US journalists and a British aid worker are being used to intimidate popular opposition to yet another US war in the Middle East and ensure a near-unanimous vote in both the House and Senate.

Perhaps the most hysterical expression of this propaganda for war came from South Carolina Republican Senator Lindsey Graham, who described ISIS as a threat to the lives of every human being in the United States. “They’re intending to come here,” he said, adding that Obama needed to “rise to the occasion before we all get killed back here at home.”

How an organization with somewhere between 10,000 and 30,000 fighters, many of them just recently mobilized, could threaten a country of 320 million, Graham did not explain. Instead, he compared ISIS to Hitler, saying, “This is a radical Islamic army that’s pushing a theory of a master religion, not a master race like the Nazis.”

He added, giving the bottom line for Republican support for Obama’s war in Syria, “There is no way in hell you can form an army on the ground...without a substantial American component.”

Another spokesman for the Washington war hawks, former CIA and NSA director Michael Hayden, told “Fox News Sunday” that he expected the number of US military personnel on the ground in the Iraq-Syria war zone would be “close to 5,000 by the end of the year.” This might not include regular combat troops, he said, adding, “It might be through covert action rather than more overt activity. I actually think we will end up with small American Special Operations forces active within this broad theater in Syria and Iraq.”

The military-intelligence apparatus will also use the supposed threat of ISIS to push back against any measures to curb the domestic surveillance activities of the National Security Agency, CIA and other agencies. Republican senators have already declared that the threat of ISIS justifies rejection of even the token legislation introduced by Democratic Senator Patrick Leahy to put limits on some forms of NSA data collection targeting Americans.

Still under discussion at the White House and on Capitol Hill is whether a separate resolution to authorize US military action against ISIS in both Iraq and Syria is necessary. Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid said there would be no action on such a resolution until after the November 4 election—another indication that both Democrats and Republicans aim to prevent the American people from having any opportunity to register their opposition to another war in the Middle East.

White House officials have insisted that no new resolution is required to authorize air strikes against ISIS targets in Iraq or Syria, claiming that two previous congressional resolutions, passed in 2001 to authorize military action against Al Qaeda and in 2002 to authorize the invasion of Iraq, still hold sway.

This argument is remarkable from a legal standpoint, since the 2001 Authorization for Use of Military Force (AUMF) is limited to groups that carried out the 9/11 terrorist attacks, and the 2002 AUMF targets the Iraqi government of Saddam Hussein.

ISIS was not formed until 2012, and even its predecessor, Al Qaeda in Iraq, was established only in 2004, after the US invasion and occupation of Iraq provoked widespread opposition in Iraq's Sunni Muslim minority.

In order to invoke the authority of the 2002 resolution backing the attack on Iraq, Obama would have to declare his own war against ISIS, in alliance with a US puppet regime in Baghdad, to be the continuation of Bush's war against Iraq, which formally ended with the final US withdrawal at the end of 2011.

Any congressional resolution to authorize funding the Syrian opposition—let alone a broader resolution on US military operations against ISIS—would provide a legislative fig leaf for a direct attack by the US military on the government of Assad in Syria, which is the real goal of the Obama administration's latest intervention

in the region.



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