

White House to draft Iraq-Syria war resolution

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16 January 2015

President Obama will send Congress a draft resolution to authorize war against the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) “in the near future,” congressional leaders said after a meeting at the White House January 13. The resolution would provide the legal basis for the war that Obama launched in August, with air strikes against ISIS targets in Iraq, which were extended to Syria a month later.

The incoming Republican Senate majority leader, Mitch McConnell, said Obama “indicated he is working toward sending us an authorization of the use of military force.” Congressional Republicans and Democrats have been pressing the White House to submit a draft resolution outlining the parameters of the military operations it intends to conduct, rather than leaving the initiative to Congress.

An effort to draft a resolution during the lame-duck session of Congress collapsed last month amid disagreements over whether the resolution should permit the use of ground troops, set limits on the duration of the conflict or restrict where US forces could be deployed.

Most congressional Republicans and many Democrats want to authorize the widest possible use of force, so that the resolution could be the basis not only for war with the Islamic fundamentalists but against the Syrian regime of President Bashar al-Assad.

McConnell told reporters: “I think a good starting place is for him to tell us what he wants, and to provide the initial document off of which we would work. And my feeling is that we’re just going to get that some time in the near future.”

Nineteen Republican and Democratic leaders, from the House and Senate, took part in the Tuesday meeting, which focused mainly on differences over domestic policy, such as the building of the Keystone

pipeline, Republican efforts to repeal sections of the Affordable Care Act (Obamacare), and tax and budget issues.

Senate Foreign Relations Committee Chairman Senator Bob Corker, (Republican—Tennessee) announced last week that he was meeting with Pentagon officials and Obama’s coordinator for the fight against ISIS, retired Marine General John Allen, about a war resolution, described in congressional jargon as an Authorization for the Use of Military Force (AUMF).

The Obama administration currently cites two decade-old AUMFs as its legal basis for resuming military operations in Iraq and bombing Syria: the resolution passed in September 2001, after the 9/11 terrorist attacks, which authorized the “war on terror,” including the invasion of Afghanistan, and the resolution passed in October 2002, authorizing the initial invasion and occupation of Iraq by the Bush administration.

Any new AUMF could be drafted either to supersede the two older resolutions, in effect repealing them, or to supplement them, leaving the older authorizations still in effect.

Corker said that language authorizing or banning the use of ground forces was one of the topics in his discussions with the Pentagon and White House. He indicated his own opposition to any such restriction, a position he said was shared by the administration.

After Tuesday’s meeting, the White House issued a statement saying Obama was “committed to working with members of both parties on text for an AUMF that Congress can pass to show the world America stands united” against ISIS.

A White House official told the press, “At the request of bipartisan members present at today’s meeting, the White House will continue to work with the

Congressional leaders on the details of that language, and we look forward to sharing a draft with Congress that reflects their bipartisan input.”

Senator John McCain, the new chairman of the Armed Services Committee, declared his support for the administration drafting a broad authorization resolution for congressional action. “I think it’s the right thing to do,” he said. “It’s what we’ve always asked for.”

Behind the scenes, with little or no public discussion or media reporting, the Obama administration and the Democrats and Republicans in Congress are moving to adopt a blank check for a new Middle East war, which could include the use of ground troops, a US invasion of Syria, and the deployment of American military forces to other countries in the region, including Turkey, Jordan, Saudi Arabia and even Iran.

The invocations of bipartisanship and national unity are the hallmarks of a campaign to browbeat the American people and intimidate prospective opponents of this new and expanded war.



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