

U.S. House Debates and Votes Down Withdrawal from Iraq and Syria

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Wednesday afternoon, by a vote of 288-139 with one voting “present” and five not voting (roll call of who voted which way is [here](#)) the U.S. House of Representatives voted down a [resolution](#) (H.Con.Res.55) that would have required the President to . . .

remove United States Armed Forces deployed to Iraq or Syria on or after August 7, 2014, other than Armed Forces required to protect United States diplomatic facilities and personnel, from Iraq and Syria. (1) by no later than the end of the period of 30 days beginning on the day on which this concurrent resolution is adopted; or (2) if the President determines that it is not safe to remove such United States Armed Forces before the end of that period, by no later than December 31, 2015, or such earlier date as the President determines that the Armed Forces can safely be removed.

While some number of the 139 yes votes were apparently cast by Congress members wanting a chance to vote yes on more war during the next 30 days or the next 6.5 months, most were presumably cast by Congress members actually favoring withdrawal or wanting to go on record as favoring withdrawal in a vote that stood little chance of succeeding. Almost two years ago now, Congress was compelled by public pressure to indicate its intention to vote no on missile strikes into Syria. Since that time it has refused to vote wars up or down, while allowing them to be launched and waged and escalated.

Of course, votes for wars have a history of pleasing campaign funders and displeasing voters. Congresswoman Jackie Walorski, in Wednesday’s debate, made clear that she wanted to have the war continue but maintain the right to denounce it as completely ill-conceived. That’s why a vote needed to be forced, to put Congress members on record one way or the other, to not let them have it both ways. There are now [288 of them](#) who should be removed from office at the earliest opportunity and, like Hillary Clinton in 2008 and hopefully in the future, blocked in the pursuit of higher office.



Of course, President Barack Obama has made clear that he will wage war with or without Congress, but a vote by Congress to withdraw, and (if needed) perhaps a further vote to cut off funding, and (if needed) perhaps a further vote to impeach, would at the very least be interesting.

The resolution was brought by Reps. Jim McGovern, Barbara Lee, and Walter Jones under the War Powers Resolution, which allows any Congress member to force a debate and vote on

any war that a president has launched without legal authorization. Congressman McGovern chose, however, not to use the debate he had forced in the manner in which then-Congressman Dennis Kucinich used to use it, namely as a debate on ending a war. Instead, McGovern framed this as a debate on whether to have a debate.

So, for two hours on Wednesday, proponents of war advocated at length with great passion and fear mongering for more war, while proponents of having a debate advocated procedurally for the proper use of Constitutional war powers and for having a debate. But of course they knew the resolution was very likely to fail, meaning that their debate on whether to have a debate would be all there was in the way of debating.

McGovern also chose to frame the debate defensively, arguing against opponents' assertions that his resolution required withdrawal in 30 days, claiming on the contrary that the resolution gave the President until the end of the year "if he chooses." But, of course, the resolution, quoted above, didn't say "if he chooses" — rather "if the President determines that it is not safe to remove." McGovern seemed to be admitting that that was nonsense. It's dangerous to leave troops in a war; it's *always* safe to remove them, but McGovern was prepared to allow Obama to pretend the opposite "if he chooses."

A number of opponents of the resolution, in fact, pretended the opposite on Wednesday, arguing for more war "to protect the troops." Meanwhile another opponent of the resolution, Brad Sherman, argued that the resolution would indeed pull troops out in 30 days because they were in no danger.

The highlights of the debate came when four Congress members spoke against war, and one in particular did so with passion and wisdom. His name was John Lewis. He said that people are "sick and tired of war" and that war only makes matters worse, "Terrorism is not stopped by weapons. Bombs don't end hate." I've asked his office to send me his written remarks and am also hoping they post them [here](#).

The others who spoke against war were Barbara Lee, very briefly, Rick Nolan, also briefly, and Charlie Rangel who pushed myths about the inherent violence of the Middle East and the goodness of past Good Wars, but who also said there was no reason for U.S. troops to be over there, and that ISIS wasn't invading our jobless communities. Rangel was the first to bring war opposition into Wednesday's "debate."

Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Martin Dempsey had on Wednesday in a committee hearing pushed the idea that religious sectarianism had created the disaster that in fact U.S. war-making has created in Iraq. Dempsey also said that there was no military solution, so instead he would use both the U.S. military *and* arming and training of Iraqis. So now you know what "no military solution" means — a phrase that has apparently maintained the same relationship to its dictionary definition as "imminent" or "combatant."

Speaking in favor of war on Wednesday were Reps. Ed Royce, Eliot Engel (a believer in well-vetted moderate rebels and possibly the tooth fairy), Vicky Hartzler, Gerald Connolly, Joe Wilson (who seems to think Congress should take orders from military), Brendan Boyle, Lee Zeldin, Ted Poe, George Holding, David Cicilline, Adam Kinzinger (who wants Assad overthrown), Brad Sherman, and Michael McCaul.

Rep. Thomas Massie spoke for Constitutional war powers, but not for or against war. So did Walter Jones and Jim McGovern for that matter. Rep. Sheila Jackson Lee wants a war debate,

but paints war as philanthropy for its foreign victims, and restraint as greedy self-interest. Rep. Jerrold Nadler says he doesn't know if war should go on but that he and his colleagues should decide if war should go on. Rep. Eleanor Holmes Norton wants a vote for DC for or against war, but speaks only in praise of war. Rep. Mark Sanford wants a war debate, mentions war's financial cost, but never quite says yes or no to more war.

Royce gave a long pro-war closing after McGovern's quick procedural wishy-washy closing that never actually opposed war.

Royce claimed there was no third option beyond war or doing nothing. [Here are some of those missing options.](#)

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