

US Congressional Bill Calls for Inspections of Russian Far East Seaports, Sanctions against North Korea

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On May 4, the House of Representatives overwhelmingly voted to impose new sanctions on North Korea targeting its shipping industry and slave labor among other things as tensions continued to mount over North Korea's advancing nuclear and ballistic missile programs. The [Korean Interdiction and Modernization of Sanctions Act \(H.R. 1644\)](#) is designed to undercut North Korea's economy by cracking down on the network of banks and industries that help it avoid Western sanctions. In particular, it cracks down on North Korean shipping and use of international ports.

The bill bars ships owned by North Korea or by countries that refuse to comply with UN resolutions from operating in American waters or docking at US ports. The legislation also targets those who employ North Korean slave labor. Anyone who uses the slave labor that North Korea exports to other countries would be subject to sanctions under the International Emergency Economic Powers Act.

The Act also requires the Trump administration to determine within 90 days whether North Korea is a state sponsor of terrorism. Such a designation would trigger more sanctions, including restriction on US foreign assistance.

The bill includes "inspection authorities" over Chinese, Iranian, Syrian and Russian ports. The latter include the ports of Nakhodka, Vanino and Vladivostok.

No UN Security Council's resolution delegated the authority to inspect foreign seaports to the United States. The inclusion of such measures is seen as a hostile act. The legislation is a flagrant violation of international law.

Perhaps, the US lawmakers have not been informed that inspections of ships in Asia-Pacific are regulated by the [Memorandum of Understanding](#) on Port State Control in the Asia-Pacific Region, known as the Tokyo MOU, which has been in force since April 1994. Its section 3 called Inspection Procedures, Rectification and Detention describes in detail the procedures of ships inspections. Under the document, the US has no special rights to inspect foreign ships.

Suppose Russia or China introduced a special legislation foreseeing "inspection authorities" regarding US merchant vessels and specific American seaports, would the Congress accept it? Would the US administration and lawmakers put up with it? Do the representatives not realize that the bill violates the concept of international security and will be met with an

adequate response?

The text of the bill calls for compliance with the UN resolutions but no Security Council resolution ever mentioned Russian seaports. Do the lawmakers not understand that the idea of inspecting Russian seaports and ships is as realistic as dogs complying with barking ban? It's surprising that the bill in question was approved by such overwhelming majority without much debate regarding the consequences if it becomes law.

The previous Congress [went to any length to spoil](#) the bilateral relations with Russia. The current Congress [is doing the same thing](#). As soon as the prospects for improving the Russia-US relations open up, Congress steps in to create artificial hurdles on the way. Always the same song and dance.

Here is another example. On May 3, the House of Representatives passed the [Intelligence Authorization Act](#) (IAA) for Fiscal Year 2017. The bill envisions the creation of a new powerful committee across the security to thwart "covert Russian political interference around the world". The new body would bring together the representatives of the FBI, State Department, Pentagon, Office of the Director of National Intelligence, Justice Department, Treasury Department, the 16 intelligence agencies and any other agency, if the president deems it necessary.

Its activities can be broadened to include "such other duties as the president may designate" what constitutes a potentially expansive mandate. The bill requires the committee to prepare an annual report to key congressional panels on anti-Russian efforts. So, there will be a new committee created to duplicate the work of other agencies. This is a good example of what bloated bureaucracy means.

The bill would also restrict Russian diplomats from traveling more than 50 miles from official embassies and consulates without the effective permission of the FBI Director.

The Russian and US presidents talked on the phone on May 2, discussing the prospects for cooperation on such burning problems as North Korea and Syria. Neither can be solved without coordination of activities between the two great powers. The issues are hot on the world agenda and the interest is common. If the abovementioned bill becomes law, confrontation would be unavoidable. Nobody will win, everyone will lose. Hopefully, Senate and President Trump would be reasonable enough to prevent it from happening.

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