

WIN WITHOUT WAR



Progressive Foreign Policy Debrief

Intel for Advocacy

[HOW THE U.S. SENATE MADE HISTORY BY ASSERTING ITS WAR POWERS ON YEMEN](#)

The United States Senate last week for the first time in history invoked the 1973 War Powers Act and voted to end U.S. support for the Saudi-UAE coalition's war in Yemen. The final vote was 56-41.

This is a huge deal (that probably hasn't gotten the media coverage it deserves considering the firehose of news that the bumbling Trump administration produces on any given day).

So how did it happen? The short answer is that it was a classic case of an inside-outside strategy where a small cadre of senators saw the need to act, with grassroots activists creating the political space and the public support necessary to get it done.

THE INSIDE GAME

Back in mid-2016 -- at a time when most of Washington had no idea what was going on in Yemen, let alone that the U.S. was complicit in war crimes -- Sens. Chris Murphy and Rand Paul recognized the folly of this policy and began forcing their fellow Senators to reckon with the effects of the U.S. role in the conflict. (Remember: The U.S. Congress, the Senate in particular, hasn't exactly been known to challenge U.S. military engagements in the Middle East, let alone support for Saudi Arabia and the UAE.)

Indeed, here's a rough timeline of events that led us to this point, which includes points and some previously unreported stories relayed by Murphy in an email to supporters on Sunday:

- In September 2016, Murphy and Paul introduced a resolution to block a tank sale to Saudi Arabia **given their probable use in Yemen**. Murphy said he got "blank stares" when explaining it to his fellow Democratic Caucus members. Sen. Lindsey Graham led the opposition. The measure was defeated handily with only 27 votes in support.
- As the humanitarian crisis in Yemen worsened, Murphy and Paul tried again a year later to block a missile sale to the Saudis. "I worked the vote really hard" this time, Murphy said. But Graham got some Senators to hold firm and the measure again failed, **this time by a much slimmer margin with 47 Senators in support**.

WIN WITHOUT WAR



- In late 2017, **Reps. Ro Khanna, along with Thomas Massie, Mark Pocan and Walter Jones, decided to force their colleagues to vote on ending unauthorized U.S. military support for the Saudi and UAE-led war.** Though Republican House leadership rebuffed their efforts to invoke the War Powers Resolution of 1973, the increased attention and desire for legislative action led to passage of a non-binding resolution in which the House of Representatives finally stated for the record that U.S. military support -- in the form of refueling, intelligence sharing, and targeting assistance -- had never been authorized by Congress. This step laid the groundwork for what came next in the Senate.
- In early 2018, **Sens. Bernie Sanders and Mike Lee joined the fight, suggesting the Senate pursue an alternative route to rebuking Executive Branch support for the war** by forcing a vote under the 1973 War Powers Act. While many senators were now inching toward the Murphy-Lee-Sanders position, the measure ultimately failed 44-55 largely due to a combination of the unprecedented nature of the procedure and a full court press by the Trump administration, the Saudi Crown Prince, and a massive army of well-paid lobbyists.
- As the war dragged on, the situation grew ever more dire. Fourteen million Yemenis edged closer to the brink of famine while an estimated 85,000 children died of starvation and preventable diseases. In August, the Saudi-coalition, with U.S. support and U.S.-made weapons, deliberately bombed a school bus in Yemen, killing dozens of children on a field trip, the latest in a continued pattern of strikes targeting civilians. And in October, the world learned of the brutal murder of journalist Jamal Khashoggi at the behest of the Saudi Crown Prince, **creating a fever pitch of opposition to continuing the status quo of the U.S.-Saudi relationship** and, in particular, continued support for the ongoing war in Yemen.
- In late November, the entire Senate Democratic caucus, with support from even some GOP hawks like Sen. Graham and Foreign Relations committee chair Sen. Bob Corker, finally took action, as 63 Senators voted to advance War Powers Resolution from Committee to the Senate floor.
- Finally, last week, Sens. Sanders, Murphy, Lee and their supporters fended off amendments to weaken and undercut the resolution, and the Senate ultimately passed S.J.Res.54 with 56 votes in support. **This marked the first time in history that the U.S. Senate has voted to cut off support for an ongoing war.** As Sen. Murphy said, "History made."

WIN WITHOUT WAR

Sen. Sanders explained the victory [this way](#): “And I think the historic importance of today is not only moving the United States out of that horrific war, but is **having the country see that their elected representatives are about to take back their constitutional responsibilities** on the issues of war, one of the most important functions that the United States Congress has.”

- Earlier that day in Sweden, warring parties **agreed to terms for de-escalating the fighting** in some of Yemen’s most affected areas, and to future peace talks at the end of January, giving hope to Yemenis during a dark time.
- Paul Ryan’s tenure as Speaker has been marked by the complete abdication of Congress’s constitutional responsibility to debate and vote on when and where the United States goes to war. And unfortunately, in one of his final acts as Speaker, he **twice maneuvered the House to block even considering a comparable measure** before the end of the 115th Congress. While advocates of peace in Yemen are still pushing for such a vote, they will likely have to wait until Nancy Pelosi regains the Speaker’s gavel in January.

THE OUTSIDE GAME

The reality is that none of this would have been possible without the countless advocates and organizers who have worked tirelessly to bring attention to the crisis in Yemen while laying the foundation for a life-saving peace. From mass [digital mobilization](#) that generated hundreds of thousands of actions, to Yemeni-American-led protests on the ground that demanded congressional action, people-power was essential for this win.

We here at Win Without War are immensely proud of the work we and our partners have done on Yemen. Together, our movement walked the halls of Congress, educating Representatives, Senators, and their staffs about the issue. Win Without War activists contacted Congress over 200,000 times. We forced the media to pay attention to a humanitarian crisis happening under their nose. We placed paid advertisements, convened partners, and held congressional and public briefings. We did everything we could, guided by the basic truth that #YemenCantWait.

But most importantly, we were not alone. Dozens of organizations and countless activists and everyday people helped make this historic victory possible. We can’t list every organization or individual here, but without their tireless work, Congress would still be silent and the progress made in Sweden at the peace talks between Yemen’s warring parties may never have happened. We will continue to try and amplify the good work of the many amazing partners working for peace in Yemen on our twitter account ([@WinWithoutWar](#)), and we hope you will join us.

WIN WITHOUT WAR



And to everyone reading this that had a hand in this progress, **thank you, thank you, thank you.**

THERE'S MORE WORK TO BE DONE

Yet even as we celebrate this historic progress, we recognize that our work is not done. While the Senate vote is an unprecedented step forward in Congress's reassertion of its war powers, the war continues. As we've already mentioned, public pressure and the Senate vote were both instrumental in helping secure a crucial initial [ceasefire agreement](#) in the key port of Hodeidah and other de-escalatory and trust-building steps in Sweden this month. With the next round of talks slated for the end of January, the world will be watching to see if we can finally begin to end the largest humanitarian crisis on the planet.

And, of course, we'll be watching too! In the weeks and months ahead, you'll no doubt be hearing much more from us on Yemen -- ways you can take action, examples of progressive leadership, and analysis of how and when the 116th Congress moves to reclaim its war powers and push for peace. When that happens, we hope you'll join us in forcing an end to U.S. military involvement in this catastrophic war and humanitarian disaster once and for all.