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Progressive Foreign Policy Debrief

Intel for Advocacy

TRUMP WIELDS HIS AUTHORITARIANISM TO PROTECT AUTHORITARIANS

Donald Trump made another move toward solidifying his authoritarian presidency this week when he vetoed S.J.Res.7, the Yemen war powers resolution passed by a bipartisan majority of Congress demanding an end to U.S. military involvement in the Saudi/Emirati-led intervention in Yemen.

In addition to greenlighting more needless violence and suffering in Yemen, Trump's veto only further entrenched the U.S.'s status as a client state of Saudi Arabia and the UAE, particularly as the Trump administration continues to do as little as possible in response to the murder of Washington Post columnist Jamal Khashoggi. But that's not just our view:

- [The Atlantic](#): Trump “acted against the will of the American public, the U.S. Senate, and the House of Representatives, allying instead with Saudi Arabia and the autocrats who rule it” and proved “yet again that he valued good relations with despotic war criminals more than the lives of the many millions of Yemenis being starved and subjected to the most horrific conditions imaginable.”
- [The Intercept](#): Trump “stifled a moment of rare bipartisanship, flexing his own authoritarian tendencies to protect a fellow autocrat, the Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman.” Trump also “signaled his loyalty to a prince who has been widely implicated in the murder of Washington Post journalist Jamal Khashoggi, as well as the imprisonment and torture of numerous human rights activists.”

At the same time, **Trump's veto should serve as a giant wake up call to Congress.** For the first time since the War Powers Act became law in 1973, both chambers of Congress have directed the president to withdraw U.S. forces from a conflict. Indeed, if any president -- or indeed anyone in general -- needs a check on his power it is Donald Trump. In the case of Yemen, the House and Senate asserted their constitutional authority in a bipartisan manner to provide that check -- and Trump basically told Congress to piss off. **In effect, Trump's veto of S.J.Res.7 is a direct attack on Congress' power.**

Some have argued that Trump's veto might even amount to a constitutional crisis. David French at the conservative National Review outright called it “[an unconstitutional act](#)”:

WIN WITHOUT WAR



A declaration of war requires an affirmative act of Congress. A bipartisan majority's rejection of American participation in the Yemeni conflict is anything but an affirmation. **And when the Constitution requires congressional affirmation, then congressional rejection can't be vetoed by the president.**

French acknowledges settled law which says that Congress cannot invalidate executive action by a simple majority vote. But he adds that the Constitution "gives war-making powers explicitly to Congress. When it is construed as allowing the president to launch war on his own and then to continue that war in the absence of congressional supermajorities, the constitutional structure is fatally undermined."

WHAT'S NEXT ON YEMEN

Congress can obviously take a vote to override Trump's veto. Such a vote would largely cease to be solely about Yemen. Congress' constitutional role in deciding when and where the United States goes to war would also be at stake. Win Without War Policy Director Kate Kizer [explained in a piece](#) at LobeLog:

In fact, a Trump veto sets up a choice for members of Congress that goes well beyond Yemen. It will force Congress to decide whether it believes itself to be a co-equal branch of government and if it will rebuke what would be a blatant attack on its sole authority to decide when, where, and how the United States goes to war. **Overriding his veto is as much about protecting the separation of powers in the U.S. government as it is about ending the U.S. role in the war in Yemen.**

Overriding Trump's veto on Yemen is not [without precedent](#). In fact, the House vote to override President Nixon's veto of the War Powers Resolution of 1973 garnered 46 more votes than the original House vote on the bill, and achieved the two-thirds majority needed by just 4 votes (the original Senate vote was already a supermajority at 75 votes. The Senate vote to override Nixon's veto was also 75 votes in favor.)

Rep. Ro Khanna, a House leader on the Yemen issue, will also [reportedly](#) seek to sanction Saudi officials "involved in blockading shipments of humanitarian supplies to Yemen, cutting funding in defense appropriations bills for military involvement in Yemen, and further restricting arms sales to Saudi Arabia," [via](#), for example, the National Defense Authorization Act.

Meanwhile Sen. Chris Murphy, who led S.J.Res.7 along with Sens. Bernie Sanders and Mike Lee, said blocking the sale of precision guided missiles to Saudi Arabia is also on the table. "If there's any weapons sale to Saudi Arabia to help them perpetuate the war inside Yemen, there's going to be a vote to reject it on the Senate floor," he [said](#).

WIN WITHOUT WAR



MORE OPPORTUNITIES FOR CONGRESS TO REASSERT ITS POWER

Seeing that Congress passed a bill mandating the withdrawal of U.S. forces from an unauthorized conflict, it makes logical sense that it should continue that trend and repeal the 2001 Authorization for the Use of Military Force (AUMF), which authorized the U.S. invasion of Afghanistan but has been used since to justify subsequent, unrelated, and unauthorized wars around the world.

Rep. Barbara Lee introduced a [bill](#) in February to repeal the 2001 AUMF, and momentum is building with other progressive leaders [pledging](#) to end our forever wars.

Meanwhile, as the Trump administration is [pushing us closer to war with Iran](#), Sen. Tom Udall recently [introduced](#) a bipartisan measure that would prevent Trump from attacking Iran without congressional approval.

And on Venezuela, the House Foreign Affairs Committee last week [approved](#) a bipartisan bill that would block Trump from military action there -- a possibility he has actually [floated](#) as early as August 2017 -- without congressional authorization.

Overall, Trump ignoring Congress's power as a check on the executive branch is now largely a feature of his administration. The House and Senate now have plenty of opportunities -- even [outside](#) national security and foreign policy issues -- to rebalance the constitutionally mandated separation of powers.

BURIED LEDES

Regarding the Trump administration's [Iran policy](#), one thing is clear: **It has no idea what it's doing.**

Also this week, the State Department [quietly and reluctantly](#) **reaffirmed that Iran is abiding by the nuclear deal.**

As the Trump administration pushes for a [nuclear deal with Saudi Arabia](#), **U.S. nuclear firms are looking to cash in.**

A group of Rohingya women recently issued a [statement](#) **calling the voices of women and girls to be centered in the ongoing crisis.**

Sen. Bernie Sanders is [continuing to refine](#) **a new progressive approach to foreign policy.**

WIN WITHOUT WAR



Meanwhile, an aide to Sen. Elizabeth Warren [surveys the literature](#) on **emerging progressive foreign policy ideas and pulls out some common denominators.**

The debate on the U.S. role in the world continues as Win Without War Policy Director Kate Kizer talks grand strategy on the latest War on the Rocks [podcast](#).

The result of Israel's recent election may have been grim, [but there](#) is **a new generation here in the United States ready to stand up for Palestinian rights.**

TRANSPARENCY ALERT: [The Pentagon](#) **does not want to disclose how many nuclear weapons it has.** And DOD officials have been [don't seem too interested in](#) doing on-camera press briefings.

Read this [personal account](#) of the effects of Trump's trans ban.

Under either the Trump or House Dem [budget plan](#), **"the United States is expected to spend more on its military in 2020 than at any point since World War II, except for a handful of years at the height of the Iraq War."**

FASCISM ALERT: Right-wing vigilante militias at the southern border are **detaining asylum seekers at gunpoint with no legal authority** and [handing them over](#) to border patrol agents.

One clear avenue for improvement in U.S. nuclear policy has been roundly [neglected](#): **Getting more women in the field.**

Check out Ploughshares Fund's new podcast "[Press the Button](#)" which "offers the latest news, insider interviews and **in-depth perspectives on nuclear policy and national security.**"

And finally, if you haven't seen **Rep. Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez's video about the Green New Deal**, [you should](#).