

# Capitulation to Obama Will Backfire on Congress

by Carl Osgood

Sept. 22—Last week, the House and Senate, in a maneuver designed to limit debate and discussion about Congress’s war-making powers vis-à-vis the President, gave initial approval to Obama’s plan to create, from the ground up, a Syrian opposition force of 5,000 “vetted” fighters to battle both the Assad regime and the Islamic State militants in Syria. Despite the large votes in favor of the plan in both the House and the Senate, there is little confidence in Washington that Obama’s strategy for “degrading and ultimately defeating” IS (aka ISIS or ISIL) can actually work. Over the past week, think-tank experts and political commentators of all stripes have blasted the policy, and military leaders, usually represented by retired generals, have spoken out against it. Even Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Gen. Martin Dempsey has warned how difficult the strategy that Obama laid out will be to execute. Meanwhile, last week’s votes have done nothing to tamp down Congressional concerns, as shown by the clamor for a war authorization vote, after Congress returns on Nov. 12 for a post-election lame-duck session.

Feeding into the growing opposition is HR 428, the resolution sponsored by Rep. Walter Jones (R-N.C.) to declassify and release the suppressed 28 pages of the 2002 Congressional Joint Inquiry report into 9/11 which deals with the Saudi role in financing and supporting the hijackers. Seven members of the House have signed on as co-sponsors of the resolution since the Congress returned from its Summer recess on Sept.

8, bringing the total number to 17, in addition to Jones. The new signers include Howard Coble (R-N.C.), Mark Sanford (R-S.C.), James McGovern (D-Mass.), Louise Slaughter (D-N.Y.), William Lacy Clay (D-Mo.), Vance McAllister (R-La.), and Collin Peterson (D-Minn.).

The passage of HR 428 would be a useful first step to avoiding the disaster that Congress is otherwise marching toward by not stopping Obama’s alliance with the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia to, in fact, perpetuate war throughout Southwest Asia and ultimately, the world, on behalf of the bankrupt British Empire. Decisive, and absolutely required, is the removal of British puppet Obama from office, for offenses already committed, including launching this illegal war that could lead to World War III.

## **Boehner Rigs the Vote**

House Speaker John Boehner (R-Ohio) rigged the outcome on the Syria amendment by crafting a strategy, with the complicity of Minority Leader Nancy Pelosi (D-Calif.), that would make it an amendment to a must-pass funding bill, SJR 124, to keep the government running past Sept. 30. This resulted in the bill going to the Senate with the Syria amendment already attached to it, making it much easier for Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid (D-Nev.) to ram it through the Senate without a separate vote on going to war. The legislation provides that only allegedly “vetted” members of the Syrian opposition are to be provided with “assistance,”

but also that *no* additional funds were to be authorized (money is rather to be moved from other budget lines), and that the authorization will run out when the funding bill does, on Dec. 11.

The Sept. 17 vote in the House was indicative of the turmoil in Congress over Obama's plan. Reportedly, neither the Republican nor Democratic leaderships were whipping members before the vote, indicating that they were confident of the outcome. They probably thought the 273-156 vote in favor of the Syria amendment justified their strategy, but the vote was, in fact, much closer than was expected. Rep. Walter Jones, a leading anti-war Republican, predicted that only 15 Republicans would vote "no" on the Syria amendment, yet there were actually 71 GOP "no" votes. The Democrats were also split, with 85 voting "no" as opposed to 112 "yea" votes. Even many of those who voted for the amendment apologetically explained that they had grave reservations, but believed they should "do something" to stop IS.

Conservative commentator Pat Buchanan, in a Sept. 19 column on antiwar.com, explained that many members of Congress are nervous about relying on the "untrustworthy" Free Syrian Army (FSA), "the least effective force in [Syria's] civil war." Buchanan charged that the White House has no credible war plan, and that Obama "is not a war leader." The FSA "is not even the JV [junior varsity]." The U.S. plan to train some rebels, he wrote, will simply ensure that the war will be unending.

Much of the opposition, however, was clearly influenced by the fight for the release of the 28 pages, even among those who have not stepped up to co-sponsor the resolution. Four House members explicitly attacked the role of Saudi Arabia in sponsoring terrorism, as a reason to reject the plan to train the 5,000 Syrian rebel fighters. These included Beto O'Rourke (D-Tex.), Duncan Hunter (R-Calif.), and Lloyd Dogget (D-Tex.) (see *Documentation*, below).

SJR 124 then went to the floor of the Senate, under the conditions that Boehner had created for it, almost guaranteeing that it would pass by a large vote, which it did, 78-22, after four-and-a-half hours of debate. Sen. Rand Paul (R-Ky.) started the debate by moving that the Syria authorization be stripped out of the funding bill for a separate vote but was blocked. In a lengthy speech on the "insanity" of arming the Syrian rebels, he noted, among other things, that the recent history of the Middle East has seen secular dictators overthrown, and re-

placed with radical jihadists; and that numerous public reports are that ISIS gets much of its weaponry and funding from the Saudis, the Qataris, and other Gulf nations (see *Documentation*).

### **Congressional Opposition Mounts**

Because of the Dec. 11 expiration date in both the Syria authorization and the funding bill, there will have to be another vote in the Congress before then. The notion that President Obama can go to war in Iraq, and perhaps even Syria, without Congressional authorization, doesn't sit well with many members of Congress, however. Twelve members of the U.S. House of Representatives signed a letter on Sept. 18, calling on Boehner and Pelosi to allow a vote on authorization for military operations in Iraq and, "if necessary, Syria."

They wrote that the terms of HCR 105, which prohibits the President from deploying U.S. troops to Iraq without specific statutory authorization, and which passed the House by a 370-40 vote on July 25, have been met, and that U.S. forces are now engaged in sustained combat operations. They noted that "there is an increasing bipartisan recognition that the time has come to take up and debate an authorization regarding US military operations in Iraq."

(They could have also pointed out how Obama has violated the Constitution *and* the War Powers Act, the latter, by claiming he can put off the deadline for Congress to act by "restarting the clock" after every new deployment of missiles or troops.)

The 12 Members then ask Boehner and Pelosi to take the appropriate actions leading to a debate and a vote on an authorization. "We believe such a debate and vote is required, will enhance our national security and the ability of Congress and the executive to carry out U.S. foreign and defense policies abroad, will better safeguard our homeland, and will uphold the Constitutional and institutional responsibilities of the U.S. House of Representatives," they wrote.

The letter was signed by six Democrats and Six Republicans: James McGovern (D-Mass.), Tom Cole (R-Okla.), Walter Jones (R-N.C.), Barbara Lee (D-Calif.), Richard Nugent (R-Fla.), Paul Broun (R-Ga.), Steve Stockman (R-Tex.), John Garamendi (D-Calif.), Peter Welch (D-Vt.), Keith Ellison (D-Minn.), John Lewis (D-Ga.), and John Duncan (R-Tenn.).

The Administration argues that it can go to war on the basis of the 2001 Authorization to Use of Military Force (AUMF), passed in the aftermath of the Sept. 11,



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*Gen. Martin Dempsey told a Sept. 16 hearing of the Senate Armed Services Committee (shown here), that before the training of “vetted” Syrian rebels can begin, they must be screened for competence and loyalty; and that Obama’s stated policy of “no U.S. ground troops” may have to change.*

2001 attacks, and the 2002 Iraq War resolution. Secretary of State John Kerry got hammered on this, during a Sept. 17 hearing of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee (which he used to chair). When Chairman Robert Mendendez (D-N.J.) told him that a new authorization was needed, Kerry replied that the Administration “would want that to happen, but we won’t make our actions dependent on that, but we’ll be happy to work with you on that.”

Ranking Republican Bob Corker (Tenn.) told Kerry that he, President Obama, and Vice President Biden are exercising “terrible judgment,” in refusing to go to Congress. He also expressed his judgment that the plan to train 5,000 Syrian opposition fighters in Saudi Arabia looks “unserious,” is “unrealistic” and doesn’t match the rhetoric of the Administration. “You’re asking us to approve something that makes no sense,” he said.

The plan doesn’t make any sense to West Virginia Democrat Joe Manchin either, as he made clear during the Sept. 16 hearing of the Senate Armed Services Committee, at which Secretary of Defense Chuck Hagel and JSC Chairman Dempsey testified. Manchin told the witnesses that he can’t explain Obama’s strategy to his constituents so that it makes any sense to them, and that the question he hears everywhere is “What do you expect to be different than what you’ve

done in that region of the world for 13 years? If money or military might hasn’t changed it, what makes you think you can change it now?” The plan, Machin said, “makes no sense to me. And I can’t sell it. I’ve tried all my—you can’t sell this stuff. And no one believes the outcome will be any different.”

## The Military Speaks Out

Dempsey set the tone for much of the military commentary that followed when he told the Senate Armed Services Committee in the Sept. 16 hearing that the policy that Obama has seemingly set in stone, that is, no combat forces on the ground in Iraq, could be changed. Firstly, he told the committee that what he and Hagel were presenting was “an ISIL first strategy.” Secondly, he made the point that if conditions on the ground changed such that he thought U.S. troops, even if limited to a handful of advisors or special forces troops calling in airstrikes, were necessary, he would make that recommendation to the President.

He noted that Gen. Lloyd Austin, the commander of U.S. Central Command, agreed with him.

Two days later, retired Gen. James Mattis, Austin’s immediate predecessor at Centcom, told the House Intelligence Committee that it made no sense for Obama to announce ahead of time that U.S. ground troops would not be involved. “Half-hearted or tentative efforts, or airstrikes alone, can backfire on us and actually strengthen our foes’ credibility,” he said. “We may not wish to reassure our enemies in advance that they will not see American boots on the ground.”

Even less charitable was former Marine Commandant Gen. James Conway (ret.). “I don’t think the President’s plan has a snowball’s chance in Hell of succeeding,” he is reported to have said at a conference in Washington on Sept. 19. A source at the conference told the *Daily Caller* that Conway’s major concern was that the U.S. did not have a force on the ground in Syria it could rely on, comparable to the Kurdish Peshmerga in Iraq.

Dempsey told reporters traveling with him to Paris for meetings with his French counterpart, on Sept. 19, that it could take up to 12 months to create a viable Syrian opposition force, and 3 or 4 months just to get the program started, reported the Associated Press. Dempsey said that before training can even start, the

U.S. and certain allies must screen potential candidates in Syria for competence and loyalty. Initially, they will be provided small arms and other light weaponry, Dempsey said, but that could graduate to more sophisticated weaponry “once we know what’s in their hearts.” This timeline, confirmed by Pentagon press secretary R. Adm. John Kirby later that day, is not likely to increase the confidence among fence-sitters that Obama’s strategy has any hope of succeeding.

### A Real Strategy

As many commentators on both sides of the Atlantic have pointed out, the only sane policy for moving to wipe out the Islamic State is the formation of an alliance between the Western nations and the relevant powers that oppose it—Iran, Syria, and Russia. While there continue to be a string of intelligence leaks that the U.S. military is coordinating with the Syrians through third parties, including Russia, the fact remains that the British-directed Obama strategy specifically calls for continued warfare against the Assad government.

Among the most trenchant, and truthful, attacks on the Obama strategy was that by former Reagan director

of the Office of Management and Budget David Stockman. In a Sept. 19 article on his blog, Stockman blasts the “utter folly” of Obama’s plan. Obama has chosen as his allies the Saudis and other Arab Gulf states, which maintain their own brand of barbaric medievalism, while demonizing Iran, Stockman admonishes. By doing so, Obama and his neocon pals are removing “the one real political and military barrier to the expansionist ambitions of the Islamic State—the so-called ‘Shiite Crescent’ of Iran, the Assad regime in Syria, and Hezbollah.” As for the Free Syrian Army, Stockman notes, these “moderates” have “announced a truce with ISIS, on the grounds that their real enemy resides in Damascus, not Raqqa.”

While the U.S. military, including General Dempsey, have declaimed against an outright alliance with Syria’s elected government, they have repeatedly talked about a “deconfliction” policy, which apparently means just the kind of behind-the-scenes cooperation being hinted at in the press.

To get a more effective policy than that, the prerequisite, Lyndon LaRouche has insisted, is that not just Obama’s strategy, but Obama himself needs to be removed.

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## Congressmen Skewer Obama's War Policy

*The following are excerpts from statements in the House and Senate opposing the Administration's policy against ISIS/ISIL/Islamic State.*

### House of Representatives, Sept. 17

**Rep. Beto O'Rourke (D-Tex.):** Saudi Arabia is the most successful exporter of terrorism throughout the world. The logical conclusion [of this proposal] is to depose Assad, and replace him with a government of rebels. We've done this three times in the last 10 years; and the fourth country is Libya. No Muslim countries are contributing ground troops.

**Rep. Duncan Hunter (R-Calif.):** I oppose [H.R. 124]. I am looking for a reason to support it, but I can't find it. It trains Islamists to fight Islamists in a few years. This is not only used against America's enemies. I served in the U.S. Marine Corps in Iraq and Afghanistan. I won't vote for something that won't work. You don't crush the IS by training Islamic fighters. You can have no confidence you are arming the right people. The Saudi Arabians are the ones who provided the majority of hijackers. I refuse to work with Saudi Arabia.

**Rep. Lloyd Doggett (D-Tex.):** Despite billions expended and with courageous Americans on the ground, the results over more than a decade of trying to successfully train Iraqis and Afghans is not particularly encouraging; indeed, the reality is the American taxpayers have been compelled to pay for the arms for our enemies as well as our allies, nor do we have any explanation today as to how taking a few Syrians for training in Saudi Arabia—a country with its own brutal history of regular beheadings, financing extremists around the world, and opposing democracy almost everywhere—how that will work better than our previous training on the ground with Americans.

**Rep. Joe Heck (R-Nev.):** I can't support this bill. Arming Syrian rebels has always

been a fantasy. It's a plan destined to fail for the purpose of saying we did something.

### In the Senate, Sept. 18

#### **Sen. Rand Paul (R-Ky.):**

We have before us one of the most important duties of the Senate and the Congress; that is, to decide whether we will be involved in war. I think it is inexcusable that the debate over whether we involve the country in war—another country's civil war—that this would be debated as part of a spending bill and not as part of an independent free-standing bill. . . . Instead of having a debate over war, we will have a debate over spending. . . .

Madam President, if there is a theme that connects the dots in the Middle East, it is that chaos breeds terrorism. What much of the foreign policy elite fail to grasp, though, is that intervention to topple secular dictators has been the prime source of the chaos. From Hussein to Assad to Qadhafi, it is the same history—intervention to topple the secular dictator. Chaos ensues and radical jihads emerge. The pattern has been repeated time and time again.

Yet what we have here is a failure to understand, a failure to reflect on the outcome of our involvement in Arab civil wars. They say nature abhors a vacuum. Radical jihadists have again and again filled the chaotic vacuum of the Middle East. Secular dictators, despots who, frankly, *do* terrorize their own people, are replaced by radical jihadists, who seek terror not only at home but abroad. Intervention, when both choices are bad, is a mistake. Intervention, when both sides are evil,



*Sen. Rand Paul*

is a mistake. Intervention that destabilizes the Middle East is a mistake. Yet here we are again, wading into a civil war. I warned a year ago that involving us in Syria's civil war was a mistake, that the inescapable irony is that some day the arms we supply would be used against us or Israel. *That day is now.*

ISIS has grabbed up from the United States, from the Saudis, and from the Qataris, weapons by the truckload. We are now forced to fight against our own weapons, and this body wants to throw more weapons into the mix. Even those of us who have been reluctant to get involved in Middle Eastern wars feel, now that American interests are threatened, that our consulate and our embassy are threatened, we feel that if ISIS is left to its own devices, maybe they will fulfill what they have boasted of and attack our homeland.

So, yes, we must now defend ourselves from these barbarous jihadists. But let's not compound the problem by arming feckless rebels in Syria, who seem to be merely a pit stop for weapons that are really on their way to ISIS. Remember clearly that the President and his Republican allies have been clamoring for over a year for airstrikes against Assad. Assad was our enemy last year. This year he is our friend. Had all of those airstrikes, though, occurred last year in Syria, today ISIS might be in Damascus. Realize that ... involving ourselves in these complicated, thousand-year-long civil wars leads to unintended consequences....

We have not been sitting around doing nothing. Six hundred tons of weapons have already been given to the Syrian rebels. What happened during the period of time we gave 600 tons of weapons to the moderate rebels in Syria? ISIS grew stronger....

Many former officials are very forthright with their criticism. According to the former ambassador to Iraq and Syria, our ambassador says: We need to do everything we can to figure out who the non-ISIS opposition is because, frankly, *we don't have a clue*. Think about this: We are voting or obscuring a vote on a spending bill to send \$500 million worth of arms to Syria, to people who we say are the vetted moderate Syrian rebels. Guess what: One of the men with the most knowledge on the ground, who has been our ambassador to Syria, says we don't have a clue who the moderates are and who the jihadists are. And even if they tell you they are the moderates, they say: Oh, we love Thomas Jefferson. Give us a shoulder-fired missile. We love Thomas Jefferson.

Can you trust these people?...

I asked Secretary Kerry: Where do you get the authority to wage this war?

He says: From 2001.

Some of the people fighting weren't born in 2001. Many of the people who voted in 2001 are no longer living.

We voted to go to war in Afghanistan, and I supported going into that war, because we were attacked and we had to do something about it. But the thing is, that vote had nothing to do with this—absolutely nothing to do with this. You are a dishonest person if you say otherwise....

I said it yesterday: Mr. President, what you are doing is illegal and unconstitutional.

The response from Secretary Kerry was: We have Article II authority to do whatever we want.

That is absolutely incorrect. We gave power to the Commander in Chief to *execute* the war, but we were explicit that the wars were to be *initiated by Congress*....

There are valid reasons for war, but they should be few and far between. They should be very importantly debated and not shuffled into a 2,000-page bill and shoved under the rug.

When we go to war, it is the most important vote any Senator will ever take. Many on the other side have been better on this issue. When there was a Republican in office, there were loud voices on the other side.

I see an empty Chamber. There will be no voices against war because this is a Democratic President's war. The hypocrisy of that should resound in this nearly empty Chamber....

When we go to war, the burden of proof lies with those who wish to engage in war. They must convince the American people and convince Congress.... Until there is a vote—if there ever is one—this is *one man's war*. Our Founding Fathers would be offended, would be appalled to know that one man can create a war....

This President worries me, and it is not because of ObamaCare or Dodd-Frank or these horrific pieces of legislation. As I travel around the country, when people ask me, "What has the President done? What is the worst thing he has done?" It is the usurpation of power, the idea that there is no separation of powers or that he is above that separation. If you want to tremble and worry about the future of our Republic, listen to the President when he says: Well, Congress won't act; therefore, I must. Think about the implications of that....