

HOUSE PASSES RESOLUTION TO END U.S. SUPPORT FOR YEMEN WAR

Relevant for: International Relations | Topic: Effect of policies and politics of developed & developing countries on India's interests

Rare move: A file photo of tribesmen loyal to Houthi rebels, in Sanaa, Yemen. AP

The House of Representatives passed a resolution on Wednesday to end U.S. support for the Saudi-led war in Yemen. The resolution, introduced by Representative Ro Khanna (incidentally, an Indian American) of California, passed 248 to 177, with 18 Republicans and 230 Democrats supporting it.

"If you care about the outrage that the Saudis are inflicting on Americans and on the world, the only patriotic thing to do is to vote for this resolution," Mr. Khanna said.

The U.S., while not directly involved in combat in Yemen, has, since 2015, provided the Saudi-led coalition with support and intelligence for its war against Houthi rebels, who have some backing from Iran. In November, the U.S. announced that it was stopping to refuel coalition aircraft engaged in Yemen.

The resolution calls for the U.S. to withdraw any troops that affect the Yemen war within a period of 30 days. It grants an exemption to forces fighting al-Qaeda and its associates. The Resolution also formalises and mandates the Department of Defense policy of halting aircraft refuelling.

The war has left some 50,000 dead, according to an independent estimate, millions displaced, and spawned a famine.

Rebuke to Trump

The House resolution is a rebuke to the Trump administration which has shielded Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman (MBS) from any personal fallout associated with the murder of Saudi dissident and *Washington Post* columnist Jamal Khashoggi. Khashoggi was killed, and his body dismembered on October 2 last year by Saudi agents at the Kingdom's consulate in Istanbul, according to Turkish investigators.

American intelligence agencies had concluded that MBS had ordered the murder of Khashoggi — a conclusion that many lawmakers, including prominent Republicans, accepted but President Donald Trump and his top Cabinet officials had pushed back against. Reports emerged last week that MBS had said he would use "a bullet" on Khashoggi if the journalist did not stop criticising the Kingdom and return to it.

The House resolution passed on a day when the Foreign Ministers of Saudi Arabia, the U.S., the U.K. and the UAE met in Warsaw to discuss the Yemen situation. It invokes the War Powers Act (1973), which requires Congressional approval for military action that lasts beyond 60 days unless there has been a formal declaration of war.

Congress has not used this Act since 1973.

Virtual blank cheque

“Article I of the Constitution gives Congress the responsibility to declare war. Yet we’ve given Presidents of both parties a virtual blank cheque to send our brave service-members into harm’s way while we’ve stood on the sidelines,” House Foreign Affairs Committee Chairman Eliot Engel said on the House floor.

“With the measure we’re considering today, we take some of that power back.”

Republicans, who controlled the House last year, prevented a similar Bill from passing a House vote although the Republican-controlled Senate passed a similar Bill in December. Nancy Pelosi, who was then Speaker Presumptive, had promised to bring it to vote after she took the gavel.

The House resolution passed with two amendments — one condemning anti-Semitism and the second, allowing intelligence sharing in the Yemen conflict when “appropriate in the national security interest of the United States”.

Anti-Semitism

The anti-Semitism amendment, which was put forth by House Republicans in an unusual procedural tactic called a “motion to recommit”, is seen as a reaction to Representative Ilhan Omar’s controversial comments last week on U.S. foreign policy towards Israel.

If the Senate passes a similar Yemen Bill, it could lead to the President to veto it. The Trump administration had, earlier this week, called into question the premise of invoking the War Powers Act, saying U.S. forces are not directly involved in the Yemen conflict and that invoking it would harm bilateral relationships.

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