NOT VOTING—12

Castro (TX)	Kiley	Salazar
Cleaver	Leger Fernandez	Schrier
Estes	Lieu	Steube
Hoyer	Phillips	Weber (TX)

ANNOUNCEMENT BY THE SPEAKER PRO TEMPORE

The SPEAKER pro tempore (during the vote). There is 1 minute remaining.

□ 1402

So the resolution, as amended, was agreed to.

The result of the vote was announced as above recorded.

A motion to reconsider was laid on the table.

Stated for:

Mr. ESTES. Madam Speaker, I was not present for rollcall No. 135, on agreeing to the resolution, as amended. Had I been present, I would have voted ''aye.''

SYRIA WAR POWERS RESOLUTION

Mr. MCCAUL. Mr. Speaker, pursuant to the order of the House of today, I call up the concurrent resolution (H. Con. Res. 21) directing the President, pursuant to section 5(c) of the War Powers Resolution, to remove the United States Armed Forces from Syria and ask for its immediate consideration in the House.

The Clerk read the title of the concurrent resolution.

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mr. FLOOD). Pursuant to the order of the House of today, the concurrent resolution is considered as read.

The text of the concurrent resolution is as follows:

H. CON. RES. 21

Resolved by the House of Representatives (the Senate concurring), That, pursuant to section 5(c) of the War Powers Resolution (50 U.S.C. 1544(c)), Congress directs the President to remove the United States Armed Forces from Syria by not later than the date that is 180 days after the date of the adoption of this concurrent resolution.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The concurrent resolution shall be debatable for 1 hour equally divided among and controlled by Representative MCCAUL of Texas, Representative MEEKS of New York, and Representative GAETZ of Florida, or their respective designees.

The gentleman from Texas (Mr. MCCAUL), the gentleman from New York (Mr. MEEKS), and the gentleman from Florida (Mr. GAETZ), each will control 20 minutes.

GENERAL LEAVE

Mr. MCCAUL. Mr. Speaker, I ask unanimous consent that all Members may have 5 legislative days in which to revise and extend their remarks and include any extraneous material on the resolution under consideration.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Is there objection to the request of the gentleman from Texas?

There was no objection.

Mr. MCCAUL. Mr. Speaker, I yield myself such time as I may consume.

Mr. Speaker, the United States is not at war with Syria. Rather, the United States is conducting limited but important counterterrorism operations in Syria against ISIS, formerly known as al-Qaida in Iraq, pursuant to the 2001 counterterrorism AUMF.

Those operations are being reported regularly to Congress, consistent with the War Powers Resolution. They are not new or unique to the Biden administration.

In fact, let me quote President Trump about what we are doing here when he said: ''A small presence of United States Armed Forces remains in strategically significant locations in Syria to conduct operations . . . to address continuing terrorist threats emanating from Syria.''

''These ongoing operations, which the United States has carried out with the assistance of numerous international partners, have been successful in seriously degrading ISIS capabilities in Syria and Iraq.''

When ISIS was at the peak of its power in 2015, it controlled vast territory in Iraq and Syria, which it used to launch attacks in the Middle East and beyond. Those terrorists ruled with medieval brutality. We all remember the graphic videos of ISIS fighters beheading journalists and innocent civilians.

These monsters drew thousands of volunteers to join their ranks in Iraq and Syria and inspired terrorist attacks around the world.

Our U.S. military, working with a global coalition and local forces on the ground, helped to dismantle and destroy this vicious caliphate.

I am proud that our men and women in uniform answered the call to fight this menace, which threatened the United States and the world.

Even though ISIS no longer controls significant territory, there are still tens of thousands of hardened terrorist fighters in Iraq and Syria who are hell-bent on reestablishing their terror state.

In fact, in the last quarter of 2022, ISIS claimed 72 attacks in Iraq and Syria, including several IED attacks.

Thankfully, our small deployment of U.S. servicemembers is remarkably effective at working with local partner forces to achieve results and ensure the enduring and complete defeat of ISIS. Otherwise, these numbers would be much worse.

In 2022, we were involved in 108 partner and 14 unilateral operations, killing 466 ISIS operatives and detaining 215 others.

None of us want our soldiers overseas and in harm's way any longer than is absolutely necessary. I understand that the gentleman from Florida has introduced this resolution in good faith and is well intentioned, and he did it in response to a February 17 operation to kill an ISIS leader, in which four U.S. servicemembers were wounded.

Any injured or killed servicemember is a tragedy. We are eternally grateful for the sacrifice made by our men and women in uniform and their families and never take them for granted.

It is our responsibility as Members of Congress to reassess, on an ongoing basis, whether their deployments and the risk they involve are necessary. In doing that, we must recall President Obama's disastrous decision to prematurely withdraw our troops from Iraq in 2011.

A few short years later, American troops returned to fight the deadly ISIS caliphate, which grew out of the al-Qaida presence that had not been defeated.

The Chairman of the Joint Chiefs, General Milley, was in Syria just days ago to see our troops and assess the state of our mission. He went there to figure out what value this mission holds for our security. He said: ''Unless you support and devote the correct amount of resources to it, things will get worse,'' and, ''If you completely ignore and turn your back, then you are setting the conditions for a resurgence.''

That is why I strongly oppose this resolution directing the removal of United States Armed Forces from Syria, and I urge my colleagues to do the same.

□ 1415

If we withdraw our troops from Syria now, we could see a resurgence of ISIS or another lethal successor in a short time. Withdrawal of this legal, authorized U.S. troop deployment must be based on the total defeat of ISIS.

Let me be clear: Congress' power to declare war is one of our most solemn Article I responsibilities. I understand why some in this Chamber are uncomfortable with using a 22-year-old force authorization for current operations.

I believe that we should be working together, in a bipartisan manner, to have an updated replacement to this AUMF to address the current threat environment, while also keeping Congress engaged with our constitutional responsibilities.

But this resolution does not work to that end. I believe it would call for an artificial withdrawal and it would be a win for the ISIS terrorists committed to our destruction.

The bottom line is: The premise upon this resolution—as the Parliamentarian doesn't make fact-based determinations—the premise of this whole thing is that there is no authorization for troops to be in Syria today. It is just not accurate. In fact, it is wrong. In 2014, the ISIS threat was addressed under the Presidential authority of the 2001 AUMF.

I remember being in the White House with President Trump addressing this crisis, as well, about what to do about Syria, and whether we believe our U.S. troops should remain, in a very small footprint of 900 soldiers, in Syria.

At that time, President Trump made the decision that, under the 2001 AUMF, to keep these troops in country, and I believe that was the correct decision, and I stand by that.

Mr. Speaker, I urge my colleagues to join me in this opposition, and I reserve the balance of my time.

Mr. MEEKS. Mr. Speaker, I yield myself such time as I may consume.

Mr. Speaker, I rise in opposition to H. Con. Res. 21.

Mr. Speaker, though I oppose an indefinite U.S. military presence in Syria, this measure forces a premature end to our mission at a critical time for our efforts. Forcing such a premature removal of U.S. forces not only endangers our national security, it threatens that of our allies and partners across the region and beyond and, most of all, the Syrian Kurds.

Our very small footprint in northeast Syria, alongside our courageous Syrian Kurdish partners, continues to serve a valuable purpose as we partner with them in ensuring ISIS does not reconstitute and again destabilize the region or use Syria as a base for attacks elsewhere.

We have seen how ISIS has wrought its brutality, not only on the populations of Syria and Iraq, especially against ethnic minority groups, but also launched brutal attacks, such as those in Paris, Brussels, Istanbul, and beyond.

Our military and intelligence leaders continue to warn publicly about the potential for ISIS to resurge if they are given the opportunity, including Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff General Mark Milley, who, just last week, made a public visit to northeast Syria. He highlighted the importance of finishing the job against ISIS and emphasized, if we ignore and turn our back, then we are setting the conditions for a resurgence.

Our presence also serves a critical advisory and assist role as the SDF continues to administer ISIS detainee facilities, including those holding experienced, highly trained ISIS fighters, as the United States, along with our coalition partners, works to safely and humanely repatriate them to their countries of origin. Pulling the plug now on this important mission jeopardizes the important work and support role that we play.

Finally, while I share the passion of the cosponsor of this legislation for Congress reclaiming its war powers, I do not think this concurrent resolution is the proper vehicle for doing so.

Last Congress, under my leadership, the House Foreign Affairs Committee marked up repeals of three of the four existing AUMFs that are on the books. The full House passed each of these measures as well but, unfortunately, they languished on the other side of the Capitol.

We need to continue this work, and I look forward to working with Chairman MCCAUL and the gentleman from Florida on these efforts. Congress must repeal outdated war authorizations once and for all, and I applaud the Senate Foreign Relations Committee for their bipartisan vote to repeal the 2002 and the 1991 AUMFs earlier today.

So we have important work to do. We should define hostilities in statute, not because it is an easy fix, but because it is a hard question that underpins key national security issues around the globe.

Toughest of all, we must repeal the 2001 AUMF and replace it with a narrow force authorization that grants the President authority to combat select terrorists enumerated in countries where the United States' national security is at stake. I intend to introduce such an AUMF later this year.

I believe that the importance of combating ISIS in Syria should be on such an authorization, and this is part of why I oppose H. Con. Res. 21.

Mr. Speaker, I encourage my colleagues to oppose this resolution, and I reserve the balance of my time.

Mr. GAETZ. Mr. Speaker, I yield myself such time as I may consume.

Mr. Speaker, most Americans don't know a single Syrian, and so people watching this debate might wonder, how has it come to be that Syria has become the great platform of great power competition in the world?

It begins in 2011, during the Arab Spring, when Assad, who is undeniably a madman and a despot, opens fire on his own people protesting. Then part of the Syrian Army defects; they engage in warfare against Assad, and all of a sudden, they have a whole lot of weapons and money being sent from the rich gulf monarchies, through Jordan, into Syria.

So Iran is not just going to watch this. Assad is their ally. They activate Hezbollah, they then invade Syria. So now you have Jordan, the gulf monarchies, Iran.

But wait, Russia is pitching their vision of the world as a regime preservation force, whether you are Maduro or Assad. So they get involved.

What do they get for their time?

A warm-water port in the Eastern Mediterranean.

So we have got Russia, the gulf monarchies. Israel starts to get worried about Hezbollah and Iran, so Israel cuts a deal with Russia to keep Iran out of southern Syria.

If it doesn't get any worse than that, now all of a sudden, you have got the Kurds who declare war on Syria, and it makes it a little messy that the Kurds are also in conflict with Turkiye, which is a NATO ally.

Then somehow the United States in 2015, says, you know what? We need to get involved in this mess in Syria.

Since we have been there, we have seen Americans die. We have seen tens of billions of dollars wasted.

What is hilarious about the 2001 AUMF—that the neo-conservatives wave around like some permission slip for every neo-conservative fantasy of turning an Arabian desert into a Jeffersonian democracy—is that that very 2001 AUMF would justify attacking the people that we are fighting against and the people we are funding because both have ties to al-Qaida and, of course, the 2001 AUMF dealt with al-Qaida.

All this talk about a reemergence of ISIS; I would encourage my colleagues to go read the inspector general's report of the last quarter that indicates that ISIS is not a threat to the homeland. And with the Turks conducting operations in Syria against ISIS, with Assad and Russia having every incentive to create pressure on ISIS, I do not believe that what stands between a caliphate and not a caliphate are the 900 Americans who have been sent to this hellscape with no definition of victory, with no clear objective, and purely existing as a vestige to the regime change failed foreign policies of multiple former Presidents.

Mr. Speaker, I reserve the balance of my time.

Mr. MCCAUL. Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to yield such time as he may consume to the gentleman from Montana (Mr. ZINKE).

Mr. ZINKE. Mr. Speaker, I stand before you today in strong opposition to H. Con. Res. 21 to pull forces out of Syria.

Like many in this distinguished Chamber, I have served in the region. I spent 23 years as a Navy SEAL. I have hunted war criminals. I have dismantled terrorist cells, and I have fought for freedom on foreign shores.

There are several self-evident truths in Syria. First, the U.S. troops are authorized by Congress.

Second, I do believe that we should review those authorizations. They may need to be reviewed. We should have answers on objectives, on failures, on victories, on a plan for ultimate success. I agree.

But there is no doubt that Syria also remains a center for radical Islamic forces and terrorism, like ISIS, like PKK. These are organizations that will never stop, ever. They are committed to destroying this Nation and our allies, and we should be aware of their objectives.

Lastly, the hard truth is this: Either we fight them in Syria or we will fight them here. Either we fight and defeat them in Syria, or we will fight in the streets of our Nation.

To understand the scope of the military presence, we are talking about 900 troops. That is 900 troops that have to have the capability for intelligence collection, self-defense, surveillance, targeting. In case our troops get in trouble, that force must be sufficient to get them out of trouble because every sailor, soldier, airman, and marine, deserves nothing less.

Nine hundred military personnel is an objectively small contingent. When you look at it, that is about the size of a Walmart which employs, on average, 300 people.

So I agree with many of the supporters of the resolution that Congress has the powers, and these powers should be reviewed. We should ask the hard questions: What is the path to victory?

What are the resources that are being spent? Are they being spent in the right spot?

Is there a clear path to victory, and what are the interests of the United States?

But believe me, Mr. Speaker, I understand the burden of war. I have lost a lot of friends. I understand the consequences of war on foreign shores, both to the servicemen and our families, which is why I call on my colleagues today to ask the right questions, but to reject this well-intended, but really, really bad idea.

Mr. MEEKS. Mr. Speaker, I am glad to yield 1 minute to the gentleman from New York (Mr. NADLER), the ranking member of the House Judiciary Committee.

Mr. NADLER. Mr. Speaker, I thank the gentleman for yielding.

I rise in opposition to this resolution, and I want to associate myself with the remarks of the chairman and the ranking member of the Foreign Affairs Committee.

For all those reasons, we cannot withdraw our 900 troops now because of what was said about ISIS.

But in addition to that, we are defending the Kurds against certain slaughter at the hands of the Peshmerga if we were to withdraw our troops.

□ 1430

The Turks, as we know, are supporting the Peshmerga. In addition to which, if we were to withdraw our troops, that increases the worry that Israel has to have about Iran, and that increases the odds of a conflict between Israel and Iran, which is the last thing the Middle East needs or the world needs.

For all these reasons, I strongly urge this body to reject this resolution. We truly should review all of the AUMFs we have lying around. I didn't know we had one from 1991. This resolution is the wrong vehicle, and it is productive of chaos and probably slaughter. I, therefore, oppose it.

Mr. GAETZ. Mr. Speaker, my patriotic colleague, Mr. ZINKE of Montana, gave up the game when he said ISIS will never be gone. So, presumably, the position of those holding that viewpoint is that we have to stay in Syria forever, maybe make it the 51st State.

Mr. Speaker, I yield 1 minute to the gentlewoman from Georgia (Ms. GREENE), a member of the Homeland Security Committee and the House Oversight Committee.

Ms. GREENE of Georgia. Mr. Speaker, I have the great privilege of serving with many veterans here in Congress, and to them, I am so grateful for their service. This is also why I rise in support for this resolution, to pull our great military from Syria.

I would point out, on the official website for the U.S. Department of Defense, when it tells who the Department of Defense is on the ''about'' page, it says: We are your defense. The Department of Defense is America's largest government agency. With our military tracing its roots back to prerevolutionary times, the Department has grown and evolved with our Nation. Our mission is to provide the military forces needed to deter war and ensure our Nation's security.

That is the job of our Department of Defense, not to wage war in foreign lands and foreign countries at the expense of the American taxpayer. It is to deter war.

It is also the role of the Department of Defense to ensure our Nation's security, but our border is being ignored. Every single day, our border is invaded by thousands, and over 300 Americans die daily from fentanyl brought into our country by Mexican cartels. I would say those are the enemies we need to be focusing on, not in a country called Syria where no one in my district ever demands: ''Marjorie, we must go to war in Syria.'' I never hear that request from anyone who voted for me.

As a matter of fact, the veterans in my district say: We are sick and tired of foreign wars. We are fed up with it, and too many of our American military have died in foreign lands serving their foreign borders and their foreign causes.

I thank my colleague, MATT GAETZ, for introducing this resolution, and I strongly encourage all of my colleagues to support it.

Mr. MCCAUL. Mr. Speaker, I yield such time as he may consume to the gentleman from South Carolina (Mr. WILSON), a member of the Foreign Affairs Committee.

Mr. WILSON of South Carolina. Mr. Speaker, I rise in opposition to H. Con. Res. 21.

Stopping the resurgence of ISIS now, before more attacks on American families, is critical. My appreciation of military service is as a 31-year Army veteran myself, but I am particularly grateful that I have had four sons: Alan, who served in Iraq; Addison, who served in Iraq; Julian, who served in Egypt; and my youngest son, Hunter, who did a tour in Afghanistan. So I know personally the significance of military service.

I think of the last 20 years that our military, because of 9/11, has stopped attacks in the United States. So this strength must be maintained.

At the height of ISIS' reign of terror, Operation Inherent Resolve was formally launched in October of 2015 to counter the terrorist network's rapid expansion in Iraq and Syria. Upon defeat of the physical caliphate in Baghouz in 2019, the United States conducted a drawdown of forces.

Currently, there are approximately 900 U.S. soldiers in northeast Syria. The remaining troops assist the Syrian Democratic forces in deterrence of continued terrorist threats from Iranian-backed terror organizations and maintenance of facilities containing—amazing; this is incredible; the American people need to know—10,000 hardened ISIS prisoners who are dedicated and trained mass murderers, along with thousands of their radicalized family members.

While the American-led coalition was successful, the threat of ISIS and the extremism in the region remain. Reporting indicates that ISIS is making significant efforts to reorganize in Syria and Iraq. Iranian-backed terrorists, who back up the murderous regime of Bashar al-Assad, also continue attacks on U.S. forces at Al-Tanf and pose a tremendous destabilizing effect. Upon withdrawal, terrorists would also have unfettered access to the Omar oil field.

A full withdrawal of the efficient forces remaining would completely open the region to the resurgence of ISIS and other terrorist organizations whose mission is the destruction of American families.

Such a threat to American national security would warrant intervention. Uprooting the small contingent of troops who have successfully maintained order to the extent possible would simply ensure that we will be returning to a much larger, more complex problem at a higher cost and threat to Americans worldwide.

The resolution, we know, is well-intended, but deterrence is cheaper and more effective than facilitating a full-scale response after the fact. We don't need to repeat 9/11. Peace is best maintained through strength.

Mr. MEEKS. Mr. Speaker, I yield 2 minutes to the gentleman from Colorado (Mr. CROW).

Mr. CROW. Mr. Speaker, I rise today in opposition to H. Con. Res. 21.

Now, I have been one of the most vocal proponents in this Congress on reasserting congressional authority in matters of war and peace, because the Constitution delegates to this body the decision to debate and decide when to send our men and women into harm's way.

Now, Congress after Congress has abdicated that authority to both Republican and Democratic administrations. Yes, it is time to pull it back, and it is time to reassert our authority and to have the debates that have been long overdue for many, many years. I join my bipartisan colleagues in that endeavor, because it is a right, true, and just endeavor, and we owe our constituents nothing less.

There is a good way to do it, and there is a wrong way to do it. I rise in opposition to this concurrent resolution, because it is the wrong way to do it for three reasons.

Many of us have spent the morning in the Foreign Affairs Committee rehashing the disaster of the 20 years in Afghanistan and hearing about the moral stain of our partners and allies that we have left behind in Afghanistan. I am not willing to make that mistake again, of saying that we will leave behind the Kurds and the Syrian Democratic forces and our other partners who have fought side-by-side with us in years past and again today.

Number two, the dangers that ISIS poses to the American people are well documented, and we are not prepared yet to abdicate and turn our back on that threat.

Number three, any military person knows that retrograde operations or withdrawal operations are the riskiest operations that you can conduct. Setting an arbitrary timeline on a retrograde that is not tied to defined benchmarks or operational requirements is the wrong way to do it and puts our men and women at risk.

Mr. Speaker, I urge my colleagues to oppose this measure.

Mr. GAETZ. Mr. Speaker, before yielding to my colleague, I would observe that we have done a lot for the Kurds: $1.5 billion. We can love the Kurds, but it is not a marriage. It is not until death do we part. It seems as though the Kurds have made book with Assad and that that would provide a structure for them to continue to exist.

Mr. Speaker, I yield 4 minutes to the gentleman from Florida (Mr. MILLS), a patriotic American who served in our military, who served in Iraq and Syria, a member of the House Armed Services Committee and my colleague.

Mr. MILLS. Mr. Speaker, the 2001 and 2002 Authorizations for Use of Military Force licensed the executive branch to conduct broad military operations, and Congress has disregarded its constitutional oversight powers as a result. Repealing these outdated AUMFs restores Congress' constitutional check on executive fiat.

The United States military forces are present in the Middle East pursuant to an Authorization for Use of Military Force that was enacted more than 20 years ago. At that time, Congress did not conceive that these authorizations would sanction an endless military commitment.

The United States is not the world's policeman, and it is incredibly unwise to promote this level of involvement in international disputes. However, Democrat and Republican Presidents alike have abused the powers of war granted under the 2001 and 2002 AUMFs, and Congress must act to reign back the executive branch's war authorities.

Further, continuing to dump trillions of dollars into these endless wars is irresponsible, runs contrary to American economic and security interests, and unnecessarily places American lives in jeopardy.

It is clear that the basis for the AUMFs currently in force have long expired, and Congress must fulfill its constitutional responsibility and ensure we are conducting proper oversight of the executive branch's military operations.

Now, I hear my colleagues on the left talking about leaving the Kurds and withdrawals, but yet, I note these are the exact same individuals that their party argues that it was time to withdraw from Afghanistan and leave our allies and Americans behind, something I know about, since I am the only Member of Congress who actually conducted the first overland rescue of Americans out of Afghanistan after they were left behind.

I also note that these are the same people saying that pulling away is going to increase ISIS' presence. Is this not the exact same government that said that nation building was a great strategy for Iraq? Is this not the same government who utilized and helped to implement the 2005 Iraq Constitution that implemented Article 76 that sets forth a sectarian democracy giving rise to Iran's political stronghold?

I have spent 7 years of my life in Iraq, almost 3 years in Afghanistan, Kosovo, Pakistan, northern Somalia, been blown up twice in 2006, a Bronze Star recipient, and a proud combat veteran. I can tell you that in the 20-plus years that we served in Iraq and Afghanistan, had it been a counterterrorism operation or counterinsurgency strategy, I could have fully gotten behind that. But we continue to play political football, and that is exactly what the dangers of AUMFs are. They allow people to basically do carte blanche with warfare, and that is not the intent.

In fact, I would argue that we have already lost the advantage, and we should be refocusing our efforts on what is happening at our southern border, where just a day ago, we had two Americans who were killed by what I would consider to be a worthy adversary, which is the cartels.

So we sit here today, and I am not going to talk about the arguments of the $86 billion that we left behind when we talk about the ISIS buildup.

Let's talk about the ISIS buildup. What about ISIS-Khorasan? What about the Haqqani network? What about the Taliban, who has $86 billion in weapons, armament, defense products, millions of dollars of pallets of cash? They are now the closest to being a true caliph with an actual sovereignty in its borders and a recognized government. That is who we need to be concerned with.

When I went to Afghanistan, I thought it was to help to fight from this becoming a safe haven of terrorism. Instead, we have actually promoted, funded, trained, and actually made it a safe haven of terrorism.

The American people are not about endless wars. The American people are about us being involved in things that we have control over. Unfortunately, due to the political football and the fact that it was the suits, not the boots, making the decisions, we have no clear military objective, and that is why this has continued to be a failure.

Mr. McCAUL. Mr. Speaker, I yield myself such time as I may consume.

Mr. Speaker, let me just say to my colleague, who serves with me on the Foreign Affairs Committee, we are a lot in agreement. I think the 2001 AUMF is outdated, and it should have been sunsetted. Congress has a constitutional responsibility to address this. Now, as chairman, that is my intention, and I hope to work with the gentleman on this.

But the point is, this is a privileged resolution under the War Powers Act 5(c), section (c), that basically says if U.S. forces are engaged in hostilities without authorization, such forces shall be removed by the President, if directed by a congressional concurrent resolution.

We have authorization here, and it is the 2001 AUMF. We may not like that. We can debate whether we need to update this thing, and I think we do. The ranking member and I have had these discussions, as well. But that is really the centerpiece of what we are talking about on this privileged resolution.

So when this is all said and done, I hope we can perhaps work on updating this outdated authorized use of military force to what is the modern-day threat.

Mr. Speaker, I yield such time as he may consume to the gentleman from New York (Mr. LAWLER).

□ 1445

Mr. LAWLER. Mr. Speaker, before I begin, I acknowledge and thank my colleague, the gentleman from Florida, for his service and for his insights, which are invaluable to our committee and the work that we are doing. I thank him.

Mr. Speaker, I rise in opposition to H. Con. Res. 21, which would remove the United States Armed Forces from Syria.

While the situation in the Middle East remains complicated and volatile, we must not forget the critical role that the United States plays in furthering peace and combating international terrorism in the region.

As the chairman just pointed out, the use of military force is authorized under the 2001 agreement. We must fulfill our obligations in rooting out al-Qaida and its direct successors in ISIS.

As a resident of New York who was in his fifth day of freshman year of high school on September 11, I will never forget the events of that day, what occurred and the aftermath of it, and our obligation to combat and confront terrorism wherever it rears its head.

ISIS may no longer hold territory, but they are still a threat. They were responsible for 72 terrorist attacks in Iraq and Syria in the last quarter of 2022 alone. Just last month, U.S. Forces killed a senior ISIS leader in Syria.

ISIS once held territory the size of Great Britain, but thanks to our ongoing efforts, it no longer does. A complete withdrawal of U.S. Forces, however, will have the same disastrous consequences as our rapid withdrawal from Afghanistan, a topic on which our committee is holding a hearing today. Without U.S. Forces in Syria, our enemies will return; they will regrow; and they will come after our allies and, potentially, the United States.

While I appreciate and support the desire to prevent any further loss of American life and limb, there is no doubt in my mind that if we let international terrorist groups run rampant in Syria and throughout the Middle East, especially in the wake of a devastating natural disaster that the

country just experienced, we are abdicating our responsibility to keep the American people safe from harm.

Not only that but by maintaining our troop presence in Syria, we can continue to support our allies in the region and work toward a more stable and peaceful Middle East, including supporting and growing the Abraham Accords.

Of course, we must always prioritize the safety and well-being of our military personnel, and any decision to maintain a true presence in Syria must be carefully considered and strategically planned. The Biden administration must be cognizant of this fact and not allow our true presence in Syria to go the way of the disastrous Afghanistan withdrawal.

I agree with my colleagues about the need to reevaluate and look at the AUMFs, reform the process, and move forward, but we need to do so in a deliberative manner. This is not the way to go about it. For those reasons, I cannot in good conscience support this.

Mr. Speaker, it is my hope that this body will reject this resolution and allow our committee to do the work that it needs to do to reform this process.

Mr. MEEKS. Mr. Speaker, I yield 1 minute to the gentleman from Massachusetts (Mr. MOULTON).

Mr. MOULTON. Mr. Speaker, the safety and security of the United States over 21 years since 9/11 is no accident. It is due to the sweat, toil, and blood of thousands of young Americans.

Many Americans have enjoyed the fruits of this labor with not contributing anything to the cost. As a veteran of the war on terror myself, I stand here today and, from the bottom of my heart, genuinely wish I could tell you, Mr. Speaker, that I could tell my colleagues: ''Mission accomplished. We can go home.'' I truly wish I could say that, but the mission is not accomplished yet. It is not finished. There is still work to do, which our troops in Syria carry on today.

ISIS remains the deadliest terrorist threat in the world. The work that these troops do day in and day out is a relatively small investment in our security and the security of our allies.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The time of the gentleman has expired.

Mr. MEEKS. Mr. Speaker, I yield an additional 30 seconds to the gentleman from Massachusetts.

Mr. MOULTON. Mr. Speaker, I share the general consensus that we should re-debate the AUMF. That is Congress' job. I have voted for measures similar to this in the past that will force that debate. We should force Congress to debate the AUMF, but we should not force our troops to withdraw.

Mr. GAETZ. Mr. Speaker, Republicans and Democrats alike have been citing the 2001 AUMF. It is important to note that there are Americans fighting in Syria today who were not born when the 2011 AUMF was approved. About 9 out of every 10 of us in the House of Representatives weren't here to vote on it.

Mr. Speaker, I yield 4 minutes to the gentleman from Arizona (Mr. BIGGS).

Mr. BIGGS. Mr. Speaker, I thank the gentleman from Florida (Mr. GAETZ) for sponsoring this legislation.

Mr. Speaker, there is no legal authority for the U.S. to be involved in the Syrian civil war. There is no authority.

Section 5(c) of the War Powers Act does not say, and I am quoting the chairman now, it does not say, ''without authorization.'' That is not the language. The language says, ''specific statutory authorization.'' You either declare war or you have specific statutory authority.

Do you know what that 2001 AUMF says? It says those who ''aided the terrorist attacks that occurred on September 11, 2001.'' It doesn't say ''ISIS.'' It doesn't say ''Syria.'' It is talking about the events of 2001, as the gentleman from Florida just referenced.

It is a quaint idea to say we are going to rely on that 2001 AUMF. I thought they were going to say they were relying on the 2002 AUMF. Either way, neither one works. You don't have authority, and you are going to be there and put U.S. soldiers in harm's way. This is a civil war.

One Syrian analyst said this recently: ''Until we see the externals confront each other directly rather than on the Syrian ground, I don't see an actual end to the Syrian conflict.''

Do you know who the externals are? The U.S., the Russians, and Iran. That is the externals, and we have no authority to be one of those externals. The analyst went on to say this is a proxy war. That is what is happening. It is another U.S.-Russia proxy war.

When the Syrian civil war began with protests during the Arab Spring of 2011, U.S. President Obama went to the regime in Syria and said: ''The future of Syria must be determined by its people, but President Bashar al-Assad is standing in the way. For the sake of the Syrian people, the time has come for President Assad to step aside.''

Is that our objective—regime change? Is that what it is? No. We don't know what the objective is. You can't even define what the exit ramp is.

Assad responded that time by fueling the civil war, the exacerbation of that problem, and it has just grown. Now, you have us with our allies the Turks and our allies the Kurds. They are fighting against each other. They don't want each other.

ISIS, in 2019, was declared to be defeated. Even the inspector general recently said they don't have an ability to cause damage and fear and harm in the homeland.

The result is, in the last 13 years, the U.S. has spent more than $15 billion on humanitarian aid, and we don't even know what we have spent in Department of Defense costs. Do you know why? Because they are grouping it with what is going on in Iraq. We tried to obtain information. How much have we spent? Nobody will tell us.

When General Milley says—by the way, he was the architect of that disastrous Afghanistan retreat, and he is a believer in a ''however long, no matter the cost'' approach in Ukraine. He insists we prolong our involvement in the civil war in Syria in order to help our allies.

General Milley, who are our allies? Is it the Kurds? Is it the Turks? Who is it? Is it the Assad regime?

He can't tell you. No one can tell you.

All of this is being done, though, without legal authority. It is time for us to stop fighting proxy wars. It is time for us not to say next time we will take care of these AUMFs. We have had time. This is the time to get rid of them. I urge us to vote for this.

Mr. MCCAUL. Mr. Speaker, I reserve the balance of my time.

Mr. MEEKS. Mr. Speaker, I yield 1 minute to the gentlewoman from Virginia (Ms. SPANBERGER).

Ms. SPANBERGER. Mr. Speaker, I stand here today as a Member of Congress who has proudly worked to fight and defeat terrorism as a CIA officer. I worked with my colleagues to protect the lives of the American people, our servicemembers, and our interests around the world.

I fully agree that we need to revisit our Authorizations for Use of Military Force. I have worked with Members of Congress, including the esteemed gentleman from Florida (Mr. GAETZ), to raise this issue. I am proud to see that we are actually seeing progress toward the repeal of the 1991 and 2002 AUMFs. That is encouraging.

However, that does not mean that we should abandon ongoing operations that keep the United States safe that are authorized under the 2001 AUMF. Should we discuss it? Should we debate it? Should we look toward reforming it? Perhaps. Should we order the men and women in uniform to come home over the next few months? Absolutely not.

We should not encourage a resurgence of ISIS. We should not abandon our work with the Kurdish fighters on the front lines. We should understand the implications for the long-term stability of the Middle East and the actions we take here today.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The time of the gentlewoman has expired.

Mr. MEEKS. Mr. Speaker, I yield an additional 30 seconds to the gentlewoman from Virginia.

Ms. SPANBERGER. Mr. Speaker, for these reasons, I oppose the resolution to withdraw quickly from Syria, and I look forward to earnest, bipartisan, forward-looking conversations about how we can reassert our constitutional role and protect our ongoing work to defeat terrorism and keep the homeland safe.

Mr. GAETZ. Mr. Speaker, Syria is such a mess. We are sometimes funding both sides in the same battle.

Mr. Speaker, I include in the RECORD an L.A. Times piece titled: ''In Syria, militias armed by the Pentagon fight those armed by the CIA.''

[From the L.A. Times, Mar. 27, 2016]

IN SYRIA, MILITIAS ARMED BY THE PENTAGON FIGHT THOSE ARMED BY THE CIA

(By Nabih Bulos, W.J. Hennigan, Brian Bennett)

Syrian militias armed by different parts of the U.S. war machine have begun to fight each other on the plains between the besieged city of Aleppo and the Turkish border, highlighting how little control U.S. intelligence officers and military planners have over the groups they have financed and trained in the bitter five-year-old civil war.

The fighting has intensified over the last two months, as CIA-armed units and Pentagon-armed ones have repeatedly shot at each other while maneuvering through contested territory on the northern outskirts of Aleppo, U.S. officials and rebel leaders have confirmed.

In mid-February, a CIA-armed militia called Fursan al Haq, or Knights of Righteousness, was run out of the town of Marea, about 20 miles north of Aleppo, by Pentagon-backed Syrian Democratic Forces moving in from Kurdish-controlled areas to the east.

''Any faction that attacks us, regardless from where it gets its support, we will fight it,'' Maj. Fares Bayoush, a leader of Fursan al Haq, said in an interview.

Rebel fighters described similar clashes in the town of Azaz, a key transit point for fighters and supplies between Aleppo and the Turkish border, and on March 3 in the Aleppo neighborhood of Sheikh Maqsud.

The attacks by one U.S.-backed group against another come amid continued heavy fighting in Syria and illustrate the difficulty facing U.S. efforts to coordinate among dozens of armed groups that are trying to overthrow the government of President Bashar Assad, fight the Islamic State militant group and battle one another all at the same time.

''It is an enormous challenge,'' said Rep. Adam Schiff (D-Burbank), the top Democrat on the House Intelligence Committee, who described the clashes between U.S.-supported groups as ''a fairly new phenomenon.''

''It is part of the three-dimensional chess that is the Syrian battlefield,'' he said.

The area in northern Syria around Aleppo, the country's second-largest city, features not only a war between the Assad government and its opponents, but also periodic battles against Islamic State militants, who control much of eastern Syria and also some territory to the northwest of the city, and long-standing tensions among the ethnic groups that inhabit the area, Arabs, Kurds and Turkmen.

''This is a complicated, multi-sided war where our options are severely limited,'' said a U.S. official, who wasn't authorized to speak publicly on the matter. ''We know we need a partner on the ground. We can't defeat ISIL without that part of the equation, so we keep trying to forge those relationships.'' ISIL is an acronym for Islamic State.

President Obama this month authorized a new Pentagon plan to train and arm Syrian rebel fighters, relaunching a program that was suspended in the fall after a string of embarrassing setbacks which included recruits being ambushed and handing over much of their U.S.-issued ammunition and trucks to an Al Qaeda affiliate.

Amid the setbacks, the Pentagon late last year deployed about 50 special operations forces to Kurdish-held areas in northeastern Syria to better coordinate with local militias and help ensure U.S.-backed rebel groups aren't fighting one another. But such skirmishes have become routine.

Last year, the Pentagon helped create a new military coalition, the Syrian Democratic Forces. The goal was to arm the group and prepare it to take territory away from the Islamic State in eastern Syria and to provide information for U.S. airstrikes.

The group is dominated by Kurdish outfits known as People's Protection Units or YPG. A few Arab units have joined the force in order to prevent it from looking like an invading Kurdish army, and it has received airdrops of weapons and supplies and assistance from U.S. Special Forces.

Gen. Joseph Votel, now commander of U.S. Special Operations Command and the incoming head of Central Command, said this month that about 80 percent of the fighters in the Syrian Democratic Forces were Kurdish. The U.S. backing for a heavily Kurdish armed force has been a point of tension with the Turkish government, which has a long history of crushing Kurdish rebellions and doesn't want to see Kurdish units control more of its southern border.

The CIA, meanwhile, has its own operations center inside Turkey from which it has been directing aid to rebel groups in Syria, providing them with TOW antitank missiles from Saudi Arabian weapons stockpiles.

While the Pentagon's actions are part of an overt effort by the U.S. and its allies against Islamic State, the CIA's backing of militias is part of a separate covert U.S. effort aimed at keeping pressure on the Assad government in hopes of prodding the Syrian leader to the negotiating table.

At first, the two different sets of fighters were primarily operating in widely separated areas of Syria—the Pentagon-backed Syrian Democratic Forces in the northeastern part of the country and the CIA-backed groups farther west. But over the last several months, Russian airstrikes against anti-Assad fighters in northwestern Syria have weakened them. That created an opening which allowed the Kurdish-led groups to expand their zone of control to the outskirts of Aleppo, bringing them into more frequent conflict with the CIA-backed outfits.

''Fighting over territory in Aleppo demonstrates how difficult it is for the U.S. to manage these really localized and in some cases entrenched conflicts,'' said Nicholas A. Heras, an expert on the Syrian civil war at the Center for a New American Security, a think tank in Washington. ''Preventing clashes is one of the constant topics in the joint operations room with Turkey.''

Over the course of the Syrian civil war, the town of Marea has been on the front line of Islamic State's attempts to advance across Aleppo province toward the rest of northern Syria.

On Feb. 18, the Syrian Democratic Forces attacked the town. A fighter with the Suqour Al-Jabal brigade, a group with links to the CIA, said intelligence officers of the U.S.-led coalition fighting Islamic State know their group has clashed with the Pentagon-trained militias.

''The MOM knows we fight them,'' he said, referring to the joint operations center in southern Turkey, using an abbreviation for its name in Turkish, Musterek Operasyon Merkezi. ''We'll fight all who aim to divide Syria or harm its people.'' The fighter spoke on condition of anonymity.

Marea is home to many of the original Islamist fighters who took up arms against Assad during the Arab Spring in 2011. It has long been a crucial way station for supplies and fighters coming from Turkey into Aleppo.

''Attempts by Syrian Democratic Forces to take Marea was a great betrayal and was viewed as a further example of a Kurdish conspiracy to force them from Arab and Turkmen lands,'' Heras said.

The clashes brought the U.S. and Turkish officials to ''loggerheads,'' he added. After diplomatic pressure from the U.S., the militia withdrew to the outskirts of the town as a sign of good faith, he said.

But continued fighting among different U.S.-backed groups may be inevitable, experts on the region said.

''Once they cross the border into Syria, you lose a substantial amount of control or ability to control their actions,'' Jeffrey White, a former Defense Intelligence Agency official, said in a telephone interview. ''You certainly have the potential for it becoming a larger problem as people fight for territory and control of the northern border area in Aleppo.

Mr. GAETZ. Mr. Speaker, I yield 2 minutes to the gentlewoman from Florida (Mrs. LUNA), a veteran and also a military spouse of one of our brave patriots who fought in Syria.

Mrs. LUNA. Mr. Speaker, I will start out by saying ISIS has been destroyed. A few hundred troops will not stop the next terrorist dot-com, and that is never going to end. I am, frankly, tired of hearing the sentiment on both sides that if we do not fight them there, they will come here. There are way too many countries to apply that logic.

If we are so concerned, then why is the majority of the U.S. Government stagnant on the southern border where it matters. Terrorists are literally walking in.

Better yet, if that is a true concern, then why did we leave billions of dollars in equipment during a botched withdrawal in Afghanistan? Do you really think terrorist dot-coms aren't going to use that equipment like ISIS did?

Peace is accomplished through superior firepower, strong leadership, and a plan, not blunders of failed foreign policy literally repeating itself.

We have zero strategic advantage and zero reason to be in Syria. In fact, they don't even want us there.

Al-Assad and Putin are tight. If you check out some of Russia's naval warships, they are actually hanging out in the western port of Syria. What we need to be focusing on is a bigger issue like China.

Syria is a very dangerous place for us to be leaving a few hundred Americans. We are better off sending those troops to places like South America, where we can build stronger and useful allies who will actually work with us.

Make no mistake, if we take China at their word, a near-peer fight is coming. It will require 100 percent of our military and more than the American people are going to pay for it. That is why I support this resolution.

Mr. Speaker, if I can also add, to those of my colleagues that had mentioned the Kurds, our NATO ally Türkiye, who is not the best NATO ally, might I add, has deemed them a terrorist organization. After the takeback of Mosul, we actually turned our back on them after promising to recognize them as a nation at the United Nations.

□ 1500

Mr. MEEKS. Mr. Speaker, I yield 1 minute to the gentlewoman from Texas (Ms. JACKSON LEE).

Ms. JACKSON LEE. Mr. Speaker, first of all, let me thank the ranking member of the committee and the chairman of the committee, and my colleague from the Judiciary Committee, the gentleman from Florida, because this is a thoughtful initiative dealing with a question that Congress must confront, and that is the AUMF in its totality. We have had it since 2001, and I believe that is an important discussion.

I would like to distinguish, however, what I think is an area that does not warrant the removal of 900 of our troops. It is a tough area. It is an area in Syria where if you talk to Syrian Americans, Mr. Speaker, they want the people of Syria to be protected.

In my meetings with the President of Syria so many years ago, I had hoped for a new vision with Syria. I had hoped for an ally with Syrians.

Syrian Americans want democracy. In this instance, we are on the border in a very tough location, and I have to look at the humanitarian question. I have to look at the issue of the protection of women and children as well as the Kurds. The Kurds have no one but us, and the opposition has a strong ally as well.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The time of the gentlewoman has expired.

Mr. MEEKS. Mr. Speaker, I yield an additional 30 seconds to the gentlewoman from Texas.

Ms. JACKSON LEE. I recognize the fact that we all want peace, but in this instance—also in the midst of the crisis of the earthquake—we knew the stories and heard the stories that the Syrians in that area were not getting help because of the conflict and fighting. That is tragic that we allow people to be desperate and need humanitarian aid because they cannot get the protection they need.

It is important for the stability of that area, for the protection of women and children, and to save lives that at this time we do not withdraw our troops.

Mr. Speaker, I ask my colleagues to oppose the underlying legislation and to respect the gentleman for the discussion that I think we should have.

Mr. GAETZ. Mr. Speaker, may I inquire as to my remaining time.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The gentleman from Florida has 5 minutes remaining.

Mr. GAETZ. Mr. Speaker, I reserve the balance of my time.

Mr. MCCAUL. Mr. Speaker, I continue to reserve the balance of my time.

Mr. MEEKS. Mr. Speaker, I reserve the balance of my time.

Mr. GAETZ. Mr. Speaker, I would ask my colleagues how many more remaining speakers they have and are they prepared to close?

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The gentleman from Texas has 2 minutes remaining.

The gentleman from New York has 7½ minutes remaining.

The gentleman from Florida has 5 minutes remaining.

Mr. MEEKS. Mr. Speaker, I am prepared to close.

Mr. GAETZ. Mr. Speaker, I yield myself the balance of my time.

Mr. Speaker, much of the discussion today has revolved around whether or not withdrawing from Syria will ignite some new ISIS caliphate. We have pointed out time and again to inspector general reports saying that is unlikely.

I am not entirely sure that our having troops in Syria deters ISIS more than it is a recruiting tool for ISIS.

Moreover, President Trump said that if Russia wanted to kill ISIS, then we should let them. I think there is wisdom in that.

Both Assad and Turkiye are in stronger positions today to put downward pressure on ISIS. Maybe if we weren't giving weapons to people shooting at Assad, then Assad would have every incentive to be able to engage ISIS in a way to ensure that it doesn't come back.

We have to also acknowledge Syria and Iraq are the two countries on the planet Earth where we have done the most to fund ISIS. We give weapons to these so-called moderate rebels—which I actually thought was an oxymoron—and it turns out that they are not so moderate. Sometimes the rebels we fund to go fight Assad turn around and raise the ISIS flag.

So it is quite silly to be saying we have to withdraw to stop ISIS when it is our very presence in Syria in some cases that has been the best gift to ISIS.

There are groups like al-Nusra and associated entities that are like our frenemies when they are in Syria, and then they cross over the border into Iraq and they become full-fledged jihadists posing a so-called threat to the homeland. There are 1,500 different groups in Syria, so today's friend is tomorrow's ISIS.

There is no real clear delineation as to what the enduring defeat of ISIS means.

Do we have to keep 900 Americans in Syria until the last heartbeat stops of the last person who holds some sympathy for ISIS?

I would certainly hope not. It would mean we would have to be there forever.

Israel has made their deal with Russia to be protected, the Kurds have made their peace with Assad to be protected, and what we see among this quagmire is that there is really not a role for the United States of America in Syria.

We are not a Middle Eastern power. We have tried this time and again to build a democracy out of sand, blood, and Arab militias, and time and again the work we do does not reduce chaos. Oftentimes it causes chaos, the very chaos that then subsequently leads to terrorism.

My colleagues and my staff who have served in Syria and my constituents tell me that often these anti-ISIS raids are just raids of local thugs and drug dealers who have some cousin that is in ISIS, and it is not appropriate to put Americans at risk.

Often our Americans are guarding these oil fields where the Iranians are sending Kamikaze drones, and I am shocked that we have not had escalatory accidents or even more casualties for our U.S. servicemembers.

So if this is all one big Georgetown School of Foreign Service essay exam about great power competition in Syria, then you go tell that to the parents of the Americans who have to sleep tonight in Syria, and who have to guard oil fields with Iranian drones coming at them, that they are necessary to preserve the balance of power. That is not true.

The Kurds have an opportunity to pave their path. Let's pave ours. And if we are so worried about threats to the homeland, how about we actually focus on our true point of vulnerability, which is not the emergence of some caliphate, it is the fact that terrorists are crossing our southern border on a daily, weekly, and monthly basis. We seem far less concerned about that than we undeniably should be.

Mr. Speaker, I ask my colleagues to support this resolution to reassert Congress' power to speak on these matters of war and peace. So often we come to the floor and we debate frivolities. This is one of the most important things we can be talking about: how we use the credibility of our fellow Americans, how we spend America's treasure, and how we spill the blood of our bravest patriots.

We have stained the deserts in the Middle East with enough American blood. It is time to bring our servicemembers home.

Mr. Speaker, I encourage my colleagues to support the resolution, and I yield back the balance of my time.

Mr. MEEKS. Mr. Speaker, I yield myself the balance of my time to close.

Mr. Speaker, there is one thing that is clear from this debate that I think we all can agree upon: We need to debate and look at AUMFs and that Congress must assert its authority that the Constitution has given us. I think that that is something that we can all agree and work together on.

Chairman MCCAUL and I had these conversations last year in the last Congress, and we will continue to have them on the House Foreign Affairs Committee, I am sure, because it is important.

For me, the toughest votes that I have had as a Member of Congress is to determine whether or not we should send our women and men into combat. So I should not now, because it is a tough vote, yield that to anyone because it is my responsibility and our responsibility as Members of Congress to make that decision.

I, again, call on Members to oppose this measure as such a forced premature end to our presence and joint

efforts in northeast Syria because this not only threatens to give ISIS an opportunity to resurge and again use Syria as a launchpad for attacks throughout the region and beyond, but it also leaves our Syrian partners out to dry.

Any withdrawal of U.S. forces must be done in close coordination with our coalition allies and partners because our courageous Syrian opposition friends need to be a part of this, and we need to talk to them in a manner that ensures our national security.

I hope my colleagues will join me as I oppose this resolution and look forward to a future debate on AUMF issues.

Mr. Speaker, I yield back the balance of my time.

Mr. McCAUL. Mr. Speaker, I yield myself the balance of my time.

Mr. Speaker, let me say, it has been a good debate. There is nothing more important in this body than issues of war and peace and what we have been talking about today.

I was a counterterrorism Federal prosecutor after 9/11 and the chairman of the Homeland Security Committee when ISIS and the caliphate were at their strength with external operations and, yes, the southern border and the threat that that poses. We can talk about the merits some more, and I appreciate this discussion.

But at the heart of this under the War Powers Resolution privilege is, and I am quoting directly: '' . . . that United States Armed Forces are engaged in hostilities . . . without a declaration of war or specific statutory authorization, such forces shall be removed by the President if the Congress so directs. . . . ''

The authority is there, and if you look under the AUMF of 2001 '' . . . to prevent any future acts of international terrorism. . . . ''

I want to close with what President Trump said. I was a part of this decision with him on June 9, 2020. He said:

> Since October 7, 2001, United States Armed Forces have conducted counterterrorism operations against al-Qaida. Since August of 2014, they have targeted the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria, otherwise known as ISIS, formerly known as al-Qaida in Iraq.
>
> These ongoing operations have been successful in seriously degrading ISIS capabilities in Syria and Iraq.

If we want to start having a debate without repealing and replacing the 2001 AUMF, then I would just argue to my colleagues that that would be the productive route to fix this issue of whether the United States should be present in the Middle East at all.

And to close, our Afghanistan hearing, what a mess we have left behind and what a threat that has become, as well.

Mr. Speaker, I urge my colleagues to oppose this, and I yield back the balance of my time.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. All time for debate has expired. Pursuant to the order of the House of today, the previous question is ordered on the concurrent resolution.

The question is on adoption of the concurrent resolution.

The question was taken; and the Speaker pro tempore announced that the noes appeared to have it.

Mr. GAETZ. Mr. Speaker, on that I demand the yeas and nays.

The yeas and nays were ordered.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to clause 8 of rule XX, further proceedings on this question will be postponed.

□ 1515

PROTECTING SPEECH FROM GOVERNMENT INTERFERENCE ACT

GENERAL LEAVE

Mr. COMER. Mr. Speaker, I ask unanimous consent that all Members have 5 legislative days to revise and extend their remarks and insert extraneous material on H.R. 140.

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mr. GROTHMAN). Is there objection to the request of the gentleman from Kentucky?

There was no objection.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to House Resolution 199 and rule XVIII, the Chair declares the House in the Committee of the Whole House on the state of the Union for consideration of H.R. 140.

The Chair appoints the gentleman from Nebraska (Mr. FLOOD) to preside over the Committee of the Whole.

□ 1515

IN THE COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE

Accordingly, the House resolved itself into the Committee of the Whole House on the state of the Union for the consideration of the bill (H.R. 140) to amend title 5, United States Code, to prohibit Federal employees from advocating for censorship of viewpoints in their official capacity, and for other purposes, with Mr. FLOOD in the chair.

The Clerk read the title of the bill.

The CHAIR. Pursuant to the rule, the bill is considered read the first time.

General debate shall be confined to the bill and shall not exceed 1 hour equally divided and controlled by the chair and ranking minority member of the Committee on Oversight and Accountability or their respective designees.

The gentleman from Kentucky (Mr. COMER) and the gentleman from New York (Mr. GOLDMAN) each will control 30 minutes.

The Chair recognizes the gentleman from Kentucky (Mr. COMER).

Mr. COMER. Mr. Chair, I yield myself such time as I may consume.

Mr. Chair, I rise in support of H.R. 140, the Protecting Speech from Government Interference Act. This legislation is clearly needed.

During the Oversight and Accountability Committee's February 8 hearing on protecting speech from government interference and social media bias, the Oversight and Accountability Committee learned just how easy it was for the Federal Government to influence a private company to accomplish what it constitutionally cannot, and that is limit the free exercise of speech.

At the hearing, we heard hours of witness testimony that revealed the extent to which Federal employees have repeatedly and consistently communicated with social media platforms to censor and suppress the lawful speech of Americans.

The hearing exposed just how much the Biden administration attempted to normalize a policy of Federal censorship. Biden administration officials have publicly called upon and privately coordinated with private-sector social media companies to ban specific accounts viewed as politically inconvenient.

During our February 8 hearing, one of our witnesses, a former FBI official and former Twitter employee, called for Federal legislation that would reasonably and effectively limit government interactions with private-sector platforms.

I agree with him. It is inappropriate and dangerous for the Federal Government to decide what lawful speech is allowed on a private-sector platform.

My bill, the Protecting Speech from Government Interference Act, makes this type of behavior an unlawful activity for Federal officials to engage in, subjecting those who attempt to censor the lawful speech of Americans to disciplinary actions and monetary penalties.

The Federal Government should not be able to decide what lawful speech is allowed. We have the First Amendment for a very good reason. Federal officials, no matter their rank or resources, must be prohibited from coercing the private sector to suppress certain information or limit the ability of citizens to freely express their own views on a private-sector internet platform.

Former White House Press Secretary Jen Psaki, for example, should not have been free to use her official authority to openly call for Facebook or any other social media company to ban specific accounts or types of speech from its platform. That was not an appropriate use of the authorities or resources of a senior executive branch official.

Further, Federal employees should not feel empowered to infringe on the independence of private entities by pressuring them to complicate or change their community guidelines and content modernization policies.

If the Biden administration needs to express its policy positions or political preferences, it has immense communication resources of its own through which to engage in the public square and offer its information and arguments.

If the administration feels it is losing the policy argument and the public's