

U.S. Senate Committee Votes to Repeal Iraq War Authorization

WASHINGTON (Middle East Eye) – The U.S. Senate Foreign Relations Committee has voted to advance a bill aimed at repealing the 2002 authorization that greenlit the U.S. invasion of Iraq.

The committee approved the measure, led by Democrat Tim Kaine and Republican Todd Young, with a 13-8 vote. It would repeal both the 2002 Authorization for the Use of Military Force (AUMF), as well as the longer-standing 1991 AUMF.

“This is about ending endless wars and reasserting Congress’ Constitutional role in matters of war, peace, and diplomacy,” Kaine said on Twitter.

The vote in the Foreign Relations Committee comes after the House had voted in favor of repealing the 2002 AUMF in 2021. It also comes days before the anniversary of the U.S. invasion of Iraq in March 2003.

It will now head to the Senate floor for a vote and appears to



U.S. troops stand at the Qayyarah air base before a planned U.S. pullout, on 26 March 2020.

have support from Senate leadership. Senate majority leader Chuck Schumer last week said that “we need to put the Iraq War behind us once and for all”.

“And doing that means we should repeal the legal authority that initiated the war to begin with.”

In December 2021, the Biden administration announced an end to

the U.S. combat mission in Iraq, but rather than withdrawing the 2,500 American troops from the country, Washington said they would be transitioning to an “advise and assist” mission.

Anti-war groups have been campaigning to end the Iraq AUMF for years, and are calling on the Senate to quickly put the bill to a

vote.

“The legal authority that greenlit that catastrophe, the 2002 AUMF, should have been repealed years ago,” Eric Eikenberry, government relations director at Win Without War, said in a statement given to MEE.

“Repealing the 2002 AUMF is not just about tying up bureaucratic loose ends. As many members learned the hard way during the previous administration, an unchecked executive is a threat to our democracy.”

Still, the measure would not repeal the wider-ranging 2001 AUMF passed in the wake of the 9/11 attacks.

The open-ended nature of the 2001 AUMF has allowed multiple presidents to wage wars allegedly against a number of groups, including Al-Qaeda, the Taliban, al-Shabab, and Daesh.

It has been applied in countries including Afghanistan, Iraq, Syria, Libya, Somalia, and Yemen.

Scholar: We Can No Longer Affirm Truth, Reject Wrongdoing in Saudi Arabia

RIYADH (Dispatches) – Saudi scholar Emad al-Moubayed has said he fled the kingdom because “all doors closed for the affirmation of truth and rejection of wrongdoing.”

Posting a video on Twitter, the former sheikh of the King Abdulaziz Mosque in Dammam, said: “I wished I could speak on my pulpit, in my mosque, among the people, but if I had continued on this then I would have suffered the same fate as my fellow scholars, preachers and orators, I would have suffered imprisonment, abuse and unfair trials,” in reference to clerics including Salman Ouda who have languished in jail since 2017.

Al-Moubayed explained that migration is part of Islam and is an option for those who are “unable to apply the

religion of Allah Almighty or spread Allah’s religion, or when one fears being subjected to harm and pain.”

He called on other scholars and preachers to leave Saudi Arabia. “Oh good people in my country, if you are not able to express the truth within the country, and I know that you are suffering due to evils that are happening, so if you are not able to clarify the truth, you do not have options other than migration following the example of prophets, companions and the righteous who preceded you.”

Al-Moubayed had previously posted a video on Twitter warning against drastic social reforms in Saudi Arabia enacted over recent years. He called on the authorities to “fear God” in implementing social changes which

are “erasing the Islamic faith, and replacing the identity of Islam with other identities”.

Ever since Mohammed bin Salman became Saudi Arabia’s crown prince and de facto leader in 2017, the kingdom has arrested dozens of activists, bloggers, intellectuals, and others perceived as political opponents, showing almost zero tolerance for dissent even in the face of international condemnations of the crackdown.

As a result, Islamic scholars have been executed, women’s rights campaigners have been put behind bars and tortured, and freedom of expression, association, and belief continue to be denied.

In January 2016, Saudi authorities executed Shia cleric Sheikh Nimr Baq-

ir al-Nimr, who was an outspoken critic of the Riyadh regime. Nimr had been arrested in Qatif in 2012.

Saudi Arabia’s Eastern Province has been the scene of peaceful demonstrations since February 2011. Protesters have been demanding reforms, freedom of expression, the release of political prisoners, and an end to economic and religious discrimination against the region.

The protests have been met with a heavy-handed crackdown, with regime forces increasing security measures across the province.

In yet another indication of Saudi Arabia’s blatant disregard for human rights and speech freedom, the regime in Riyadh has executed an imprisoned political activist from the Shia-majority Eastern Province.

Detainee Released From Guantanamo After 21 Years

RIYADH (Al Jazeera) – The United States has released a Saudi engineer who was imprisoned for more than 20 years at Guantanamo Bay military prison despite never being charged with suspected crimes following the September 11, 2001 attacks on the U.S.

The U.S. Department of Defense said that Ghassan al-Sharbi, 48, was returned to Saudi Arabia after a review board determined in February 2022 that his detention “was no longer necessary to protect against a continuing significant threat to the national security of the United States”.

Al-Sharbi was transferred to Saudi Arabia “subject to the implementation of a comprehensive set of security measures including monitoring, travel restrictions and continued information sharing,” the defence department said in a statement.

The Pentagon’s Periodic Review Board ruled in 2022 that al-Sharbi had no leadership or facilitator position in Al-Qaeda and was compliant in detention. It also said he had unspecified “physical and mental health issues”.

The U.S. said al-Sharbi had fled to Pakistan after the September 11 attacks and had re-

ceived training in bomb-making. He was arrested there the next year, allegedly tortured in custody and sent to the Guantanamo prison camp.

The US military had weighed charges against al-Sharbi and several others but dropped them in 2008. Though never charged with a crime, he was also not approved for release and the U.S. continued to hold al-Sharbi as an enemy fighter.

Al-Sharbi was initially targeted because he had studied at an aeronautical university in Arizona and had attended flight school with two of the Al-Qaeda hijack-

ers involved in the 2001 attacks.

He becomes at least the fourth Guantanamo detainee released and sent to another country so far this year.

The US Navy’s base at Guantanamo Bay, Cuba, held about 600 prisoners at its peak in 2003. With al-Sharbi’s transfer, it now holds 31 detainees, including 17 people considered eligible for transfer if a stable country can be found to accept them, the defence department said.

Human rights organizations have long called for the Guantanamo prison camp to be shut down.

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China, for us, is an important and valued partner in many areas. We have excellent working relationships across many sectors. But we have said and repeat this, always, we will look towards our own interests. And we will look for them in the west and in the east.”

IRNA quoted Shamkhani as calling the talks “clear, transparent, comprehensive and constructive.”

“Removing misunderstandings and the future-oriented views in relations between Tehran and Riyadh will definitely lead to improving regional stability and security, as well as increasing cooperation among Persian Gulf nations and the world of Is-

lam for managing current challenges,” Shamkhani was quoted as saying.

In addition to resuming diplomatic relations and reopening their embassies and missions in each other’s countries, Iran and Saudi Arabia agreed to affirm “the respect for the sovereignty of states and the non-interference in internal affairs of states.”

They also agreed that the foreign ministers of both countries would meet to implement this and improve bilateral relations, and that previous cooperation accords — namely a “Security Cooperation Agreement” from 2001 and a “General Agreement for Cooperation” from 1998 covering the fields of trade, economy, sports, technology, science, culture, sports and youth — would be upheld.

“The three countries expressed their

keenness to exert all efforts towards enhancing regional and international peace and security,” the Saudi statement said.

The Saudi statement also expressed thanks to Riyadh’s neighbors Iraq and Oman, which it said had hosted “rounds of dialogue that took place between both sides during the years 2021-2022.”

Oman’s foreign ministry welcomed the Friday development on Twitter, expressing hope that it will “contribute to strengthening the pillars of security and stability in the region and consolidating positive and constructive cooperation that benefits all peoples of the region and the world,” according to a Google translation.

The breakthrough is very positive news for the region, said Anna Jacobs, senior Persian Gulf analyst at the International

Crisis Group.

“It’s hugely positive news,” she said, which signals that there has been enough dialogue “to start some serious confidence building measures and agree to this roadmap to restore full diplomatic relations. The news also suggests we are likely to see some positive movement on the Yemen ceasefire.”

The development “shows that Saudi-Iran dialogue has succeeded after many years, and it’s succeeded with support from regional powers like Iraq and Oman, but also global powers like China,” Jacobs told CNBC.

The agreement also illustrates that China has stepped up its role in the region in new ways, particularly in mediation, Jacobs added. “For China, this is a huge win.”

Adnan Tabatabai – CEO of the Center for Applied Research in Partnership with the Orient, a Germany-based think tank – told Al Jazeera that China has a big interest in not seeing the regional security situation “descend into chaos”, such as “in 2019, when the waterways of Hormuz were the sites of different explosions and attacks”.

“There are inherent interests for the Chinese to try and use the leverage that they have towards both Tehran and Riyadh to make some efforts to balance these relations and finalize what the Iraqis and Omanis had in fact started,” Tabatabai said.

Referring to the U.S. playing no role in this agreement, Tabatabai said from at least the fall of 2019 onwards, there is also some disappointment and some increasing skepticism inside Saudi Arabia towards the role of the U.S. in that region.

“The security umbrella is no longer an actual idea that the U.S. was supposed to build for Saudi Arabia and its allies, so there was a need also sensed in Saudi Arabia to think in a different way about how it can secure its territory, borders and interests.”

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in honoring their commitments to compensate for the U.S. pullout from the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), noted the diplomat, adding that the Europeans have been instead following the U.S.’ illegal sanctions against Iran.

Proof of their inaction, according to the spokesman, is that they did not provide any financial resources or long-term lines of credit to the instrument.

Founded in late January 2019, the Instrument in Support of Trade Exchanges (INSTEX) was a non-dollar direct payment channel that aimed to keep the nuclear deal with world powers alive, but it did not become operational effectively as it faced pressure from the United States.

The first and only registered transaction under the system was conducted in March 2020, when medical supplies were delivered to the Islamic Republic amid the coronavirus pandemic.

The system was launched after Iran complained that the European countries had failed to maintain trade with the country as mandated under the nuclear deal, and bowed instead to Washington’s pressure.

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Police fired tear gas to disperse the crowds and arrested several people during “a day of resistance” protests which were timed to coincided with Austin’s arrival and prime minister Benjamin Netanyahu’s trip abroad.

Austin had to hastily reschedule the visit due to a surge in street protests against Netanyahu’s plan to overhaul the judiciary which is putting Israel on an extremist path.

The Pentagon chief met Netanyahu at the airport for more than an hour and was due to hold talks with his Israeli counterpart Yoav Galant, reports said.

Austin had originally been due to arrive on Wednesday and stay overnight in Tel Aviv, where the Zionist regime’s war ministry is based. But those plans were changed due to traffic disruptions from protests.

Netanyahu was flown to the airport early in the morning by a helicopter in order to avoid the protesters. He was due to leave Ben Gurion airport for a two-day visit to Rome on Thursday afternoon.

Police minister Itamar Ben-Gvir was at the airport coordinating the response to the protests. Mounted police moved into the area in an attempt to move the protesters.

Elsewhere, protesters in Tel Aviv headed towards Ayalon highway, where police were on standby with water cannons. The highway has been a key flashpoint between demonstrators and police in recent weeks.

The occupied territories have been rocked by the biggest wave of protests for more than a decade, with hundreds of thousands of Israelis joining weekly demonstrations against changes they regard as a fundamental threat to the entity, with

several figures warning that the worsening strife might lead to its disintegration.

In a sign of the widening scope of public anger, a group of reservists from an elite air force squadron said this week that they would not take part in training flights.

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The diplomatic mission, however, did not specify the exact time that the deal was reached, nor the time Russia would deliver the fighter jets to Iran. It gave no more details about the deal as they are classified.

45 NGOs...

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conflict, and prevent future diplomacy.”

The U.S. diplomat had recently said “Israel can and should do whatever they need to deal with [Iran] and we’ve got their back.”

The Zionist regime has on numerous occasions threatened to carry out attacks against Iranian facilities and infrastructure, claiming that Iran was close to building nuclear weapons.

The NGOs further asked Biden to express “opposition to the military option known, publicly and privately,” warning that any aggression by the occupying regime of Israel would lead to a broader regional war. “Publicly or even privately offering unconditional U.S. support for unspecified military action by Israel, or any ally, sets an extremely dangerous precedent and risks further escalation,” they wrote.

“Ambassador Nides’ loose talk raises concerns that the administration may again ignore Congress’ constitutional role, and the public’s clear preference, by rushing into a conflict over which the people and their representatives have no say,” they added.

They said that it is “confounding that Ambassador Nides implied that Israel’s unilateral decision-making would bind U.S. foreign policy. The United States should never outsource its foreign policy to other states – to do so would be highly irresponsible and an abdication of the government’s responsibility to protect the American people.”

There are reports that the Biden administration has drawn closer to the occupying regime of Israel in recent weeks, conducting large-scale joint military exercises with the regime.

The Zionist regime, which possesses nuclear weapons and has refused to sign the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT), has made various covert attempts in recent years to sabotage Iran’s peaceful nuclear program by assassinating Iranian scientists and carrying out cowardly attacks on Iran’s nuclear facilities.

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enhanced cooperation and expediting the resolution of outstanding safeguards issues.

After the visit, Grossi apparently walked back on his remarks about reaching a good agreement with Iran on the settlement of outstanding issues.

Naziri Asl slammed repeated statements by certain countries urging Iran to implement its commitments as per the 2015 nuclear agreement, formally known as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), which was unilaterally abandoned by the United States three years after its conclusion.

These countries have not only deliberately mixed up Iran’s voluntary commitments with its legal commitments, but they have also made their utmost efforts to hide the very real fact that the JCPOA has other parties and annexes that must be implemented by its signatories without further delay, he said.

Naziri Asl was apparently referring to a statement to the IAEA Board of Governors’ meeting this week by the three European signatories to the JCPOA – France, Germany and the UK – which accused Iran of “unabated and dangerous nuclear escalation.”

Iran rejected the claim, asserting that there has been “no deviation” in its peaceful nuclear activities.