

Congress exists to provide oversight and scrutiny of the executive branch, not to cheer from the sidelines. I commend our servicemen for their performance last weekend, but I am deeply concerned about the Trump administration's lack of serious planning for the next phase. That is why this War Powers Resolution is necessary.

The Constitution vests the power to authorize war in Congress, not the President. President Trump has claimed this was just a law enforcement mission. That is absurd. No matter how he describes it, the President waged war on a foreign nation without authorization, without notification to Congress, and without any explanation to the American people about what this operation will cost or what success will look like. This is a profound constitutional failure, and it must be corrected.

I hope I am wrong about these dangers ahead. I hope this administration is right, and the transition in Venezuela proceeds smoothly. I hope that the Venezuelan people embrace this outcome and see their lives improve quickly. I hope the violent factions in Venezuela choose peace over conflict. I hope the economic recovery for the people of Venezuela justifies this enormous gamble. But as I said before, hope is not enough, and history suggests we should prepare for a far more difficult reality.

The question before us is whether Congress will fulfill its constitutional duty or whether we will abdicate our responsibility and allow this President to commit American military resources, credibility, and, potentially, American lives to an open-ended entanglement without authorization or accountability.

I urge my colleagues to support this resolution.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from California.

VENEZUELA

Mr. SCHIFF. Mr. President, for months, the Trump administration claimed that its campaign of blowing up boats in the Caribbean was about stopping drugs like deadly fentanyl coming to the United States—never mind that fentanyl doesn't really come from Venezuela; it comes from precursors made in China and is predominantly smuggled in through Mexico; never mind that there are well-established, well-practiced operations for interdicting the drugs and apprehending alleged drug traffickers, not killing them; never mind that we don't even have clarity on what was on these boats or who was on these boats and where they were headed. No. Even as the U.S. military amassed unprecedented military firepower off the coast of Caracas that included multiple warships, thousands of troops, and the largest aircraft carrier ever put to sea, the administration still claimed this was about drug boats.

You heard the administration say that time and time again to the public and to Congress until last weekend when the objective became clear: This was about Venezuela's oil, and if we could have that, we would leave the drug-running regime in place, albeit with its No. 2 corrupt leader instead of its No. 1, Nicolas Maduro.

The rightful leadership of Venezuela, Maria Corina Machado and her election surrogate Edmundo Gonzalez—the ones who won the last election there—would have no place, no role in the new government because this was no more about democracy than it was about drugs. It was about oil.

Just yesterday, the Secretary of Energy said that the United States intended to maintain significant control over Venezuela's oil industry, including by overseeing the sale of the country's production indefinitely—and Donald Trump has promised to use the revenue from these oil sales to create a fund that he would control. He is literally meeting with oil executives on Friday to try to divide up the spoils of this military campaign.

Now, some of my colleagues may believe that using the U.S. military to depose Nicolas Maduro and seize Venezuela's oil is well worth the risk to our troops and the danger of our becoming mired down in that country. I disagree, but if that were the case, let them seek an authorization from Congress to do so.

We have so many urgent problems that need addressing here at home with life being barely affordable for millions of Americans and the cost of living rising—with people struggling to cover the rent, with families barely able to afford the cost of groceries, to say nothing of the skyrocketing healthcare costs. But now, instead of putting Americans first, we are stepping into a foreign nation and promising to run it for the foreseeable future. An administration that had promised to end foreign wars has begun a new one. A President who had decried the use of force for regime change or to engage in nation building has just committed our country to both.

No doubt Russia and China see opportunity in this American about-face, with Russia to indict Ukrainian leaders and to seize them and with China to do the same in Taiwan. We are not only at risk of reestablishing the idea that might makes right and military conquest is acceptable in your sphere of influence, but there is the very real prospect of destabilizing a world order post-World War II that has made us safer and more prosperous.

Now, when it comes to Congress's role in checking this President, in asserting its war powers given to us by our Founders and the Framers of our Constitution, if we do not assert this power, we will lose it and not just to constrain this President but any President and for all time. The American people have said clearly and repeatedly they do not want us dragged into new

foreign wars, especially wars of our own making, and we have the power to make good on that instruction. We are a coequal branch of government and the only branch endowed with the power of the purse and the power to declare war or to refuse to do so.

But if we do not assert these powers, if we don't stand up not just for our branch of government but for the American people, there is no telling and no stopping what comes next because the administration has made it clear that Venezuela is the opening salvo. Will it be Cuba next or Colombia or Mexico or Greenland, for crying out loud?

This is the moment when we need to stand up and exercise our powers as part of the government that is closest to the people to make it clear that no President can commit our military forces absent an attack on our country or imminent threat of an invasion without the approval of Congress and certainly not to help industry chase new profits or revenue in oil or minerals around the globe. We have a duty to our constituents, to our Constitution, and to posterity. Let us uphold it. Vote yes on the resolution.

I yield the floor.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The senior assistant executive clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. RISCH. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

VENEZUELA

Mr. RISCH. Mr. President, fellow Senators, we are about to vote on a War Powers Resolution, which is becoming common around here—and way too common, as a matter of fact.

But I think the first thing we ought to talk about is what we are actually doing here, from a 30,000-foot standpoint, as far as what the resolution actually says. As usual, there is a lot of setup in here, but there are 2½ lines that say what we are trying to do here—not we, but what the other side is trying to do here.

It says:

Congress hereby directs the President to terminate the use of the United States Armed Forces for hostilities within or against Venezuela.

Let me say that again: We are directing “the President to terminate the use of . . . Armed Forces for hostilities within or against Venezuela.”

There isn't anybody that has any information that the President is using Armed Forces against Venezuela. He did for about 47 minutes this last weekend, but he is not in the process of doing this. And the resolution says that he should stop it. He is not doing it.

Now, if the resolution were drawn to say, “Mr. President, you can't do this

anymore," that would actually have some effect or attempt to have some effect. It would be unconstitutional, unenforceable. But to tell him not to do something or to stop doing something he is not doing is nonsense.

The effect of this is to slap the President of the United States in the face. That is the only effect that this vote can have. It can have no practical effect because it is trying to stop something that isn't going on.

So we are again here considering this War Powers Resolution to remove the troops from a foreign country where they do not exist. The War Powers Act was created as a way to address the continuing deployment of U.S. forces into hostilities—or in hostilities.

There is no continuing deployment of U.S. troop forces in hostilities. The War Powers Act was never designed to remove the President's article II right to defend the United States, its interests, or its citizens; nor, indeed, could the War Powers Act do that because the Constitution absolutely directs the President of the United States to use the military might of the United States to protect it.

Indeed, the constitutional power was given to the President. We cannot change that. It is the power that he has. This vote and similar votes before it are an abuse of the War Powers Act. There are no U.S. military forces in Venezuela.

The United States conducted a limited operation to remove an indicted narcoterrorist, Nicolas Maduro, from Venezuela and brought him to the United States to face justice for his crimes.

Now, was this a good thing to do? Well, of course, it was a good thing to do. Indeed, Democrats themselves have said that it was a good thing to do.

I want to read from three different Democrats who told us that this was a good thing to do. I am not going to name them. They can step up and take credit if they want to. These are three different Democrats.

The first one said:

Obviously, we know Maduro and his cronies do not want to go quietly into the night, but the United States needs to work with its partners and allies in the region to ratchet up pressure.

This was a Senator on August 2, 2024. The same Senator says, after Maduro was removed:

It is an illegal act of war to replace Maduro.

Another Senator said—and this was back in 2019:

If Trump cared about consistency, he would make the realist case for intervention in Venezuela (getting rid of Maduro is good for the United States).

This Senator called for intervention in Venezuela. Do you know what he says now, after the invasion?

The invasion of Venezuela has nothing to do with American security. Venezuela is not a security threat to the U.S.

That is what he says today.

Now, one of my favorites, this Senator said—and this was on February 5, 2020:

And the President brags about his Venezuela policy. Give us a break. He hasn't brought an end to the Maduro regime. The Maduro regime is more powerful today and more entrenched today than it was when the President began.

Well, the President changed that. He removed Maduro. Do you know what that same Senator says today?

This is reckless. And the American people are just, this morning, in fear of what's going to happen here.

That was January 4, 2026.

This is the height of hypocrisy. The purpose of this resolution is to slap the President in the face. It will do nothing that it purports to do because it can't stop something that isn't going on right now.

In addition, the President's actions in Venezuela are consistent with other Presidents' efforts to protect the American people from threats in our own backyard.

President George H. W. Bush authorized limited military operations to arrest Panama's Manuel Noriega and bring him to the United States to stand trial for drug-related charges, just as President Trump has done with Maduro. In that case, President Bush deployed more than 9,000 troops, and they fought for 2 weeks on the ground in Panama before they got their hands on Noriega. At that time, both Republican and Democrat leaders of the Senate praised this move.

Compare that to what happened here. There were only about 200 troops involved, and they were engaged for 47 minutes. And yet, all of a sudden, this is a horrendous problem.

When you are in the business of flying drugs into the United States—drugs that kill our children and hurt our country and destabilize our hemisphere—in violation of U.S. law, and when you invite Russia, China, and Iran to set up shop right in our backyard and do the things that they are doing, there is going to be a price to pay. Maduro is paying that price today.

But unlike the former President, President Trump demonstrated he is a man of action. He was decisive and did what he promised the American people he would do, and that is to keep them safe.

Now, Democrats are reversing their position on Maduro's removal to criticize the President.

The President's decision was the right call. Let's acknowledge that fact. Let's celebrate that fact. Let's resolve that the President of the United States is to be commended for what he did.

My fellow Senators, vote no on this resolution. This is nothing more than a slap in the face to the President of the United States. It cannot accomplish something that does not exist.

I yield the floor.

VENEZUELA

Mr. McCONNELL. Mr. President, I would like to make just a few brief observations ahead of the vote on Senator KAINE's War Powers Resolution.

The War Powers Act is not the law I would have written, and there are reasonable questions about its constitutionality. But it has been the law now for over 50 years. And it is important to remember what it was designed to prevent—and, even more importantly, what it wasn't.

Back in 1973, the goal was preventing another Vietnam. The idea was to impose guardrails against the large-scale, indefinite commitment of U.S. troops abroad. And in shutting that door, the law very intentionally reaffirmed our Founders' decision to leave another door open.

The law grants presidents clear authority for the limited use of military force. And of the many occasions over the years when colleagues on both sides of the aisle have invoked the War Powers Act to condemn such limited use of military force—by Presidents of both parties—I can't recall a single one in which Congress managed to change the facts and artificially constrain the Commander in Chief's authority.

This time is no different. The President was well within this authority in his decision to bring Nicolas Maduro to justice. How do we know? A number of ways:

First, plain statute: Notification of Congress within 48? Check. Withdrawal within 60 days? Try 60 minutes.

What is more, recent history provides clear precedent from Presidents of both parties. What authority did this operation exceed that President Obama or President Reagan did not exceed in operations in Libya? Or President Clinton in Kosovo? What makes this time different than President Biden's strikes in Syria or Yemen? Certainly, there is little daylight between the legality of this operation and the one President H.W. Bush undertook to apprehend Manuel Noriega in Panama.

You don't have to agree with a President's approach to national security policy to acknowledge his compliance with the law and his constitutional authority for the use of force, which makes the invocation of the War Powers Act such a tired and blunt instrument. For my part, I have consistently opposed resolutions like these aimed at constraining Presidents' constitutional authority. And I have done it on behalf of Presidents of both parties.

I am old enough to remember when, during President Obama's feckless dealings with Iran, no less than the future Democratic leader insisted that, "We should never take the military option off the table".

But every one of our colleagues remembers last summer when the frequent fliers of the War Powers Resolution reached yet again for their favorite tool after the President's decision to degrade Iran's nuclear program without putting a single American boot on the ground.

Of course, there are serious questions at hand to which the Senate and the American people should expect serious answers from the Commander in Chief.