Action Sheet: September 2020

We seek a world free of war and the threat of war

In May 2018, President Trump withdrew the United States from the international agreement that blocked Iran’s path to building nuclear weapons. Now, the administration is attempting to invoke a clause in that same treaty, which it is no longer party to, to escalate sanctions on Iran.

While much of the rest of the world is pursuing diplomacy, this administration has instead chosen to heighten tensions. Our work to build a drumbeat of congressional opposition to war with Iran is more important than ever.

Rep. Barbara Lee (CA-13) has attached three amendments to the Defense Appropriations Act that push back against the march to war. This legislation, which passed the House in July, includes the language from Rep. Ro Khanna’s (CA-17) No War Against Iran Act (H.R. 5543) and would repeal the 2002 Authorization for Use of Military Force (AUMF), which President Trump used earlier this year to justify the assassination of an Iranian military leader. The bill also repeals the 2001 AUMF.

With just two months before the elections, members of Congress are listening closely to what we say. We also expect important votes to be pushed to after the elections. For these reasons, there are two critically important actions for you to take: In September, we will continue to advocate for Rep. Lee’s Amendments to stay in the Defense Appropriations Act; and we will engage with candidates on the topic of ending endless wars.

Get the Facts: Ending the Endless Wars

Congressional Authority and the War Powers Resolution

As a Quaker organization, FCNL opposes all war. As a matter of public policy, we believe Congress must debate and vote before the president commits our military to lethal action and should regularly evaluate whether to continue ongoing U.S. wars. In fact, that’s what is required by the constitution.

Article I of the Constitution states that only Congress has the power to declare war. Congress has not authorized military action against Iran.
Article II of the Constitution names the president commander-in-chief. The executive branch has interpreted this to give the president the ability to use military force to repel sudden attacks against the United States, even without congressional authorization. The War Powers Act of 1973 provides the procedure that the president must follow when repelling imminent attacks and seeking congressional action on use of force. Diplomacy and international cooperation are the only paths to lasting security.

The United States and Iran

For the United States, the conflict with Iran started with the seizure of the U.S. Embassy in Tehran in 1979. For Iran, it started with the CIA’s overthrow of their elected government in the early 1950s. But the international nuclear deal with Iran in 2015 brought the two countries back into sustained diplomacy and blocked Iran’s path to building nuclear weapons.

In May 2018, President Trump withdrew from that international agreement. That withdrawal, combined with the United States abandoning diplomacy, started a new downward spiral in U.S.-Iranian relations. In 2019, the United States imposed an embargo on Iranian oil and Iran responded with military actions against oil tankers, drones, and Saudi oil facilities.

But the conflict has continued to escalate. In January 2020, a series of smaller skirmishes escalated when the United States assassinated a high-ranking Iranian military official, leading Iran to retaliate by attacking a U.S. military base in Iraq.

Congressional Action on Iran

In 2020, both the Senate and the House passed Sen. Tim Kaine’s (VA) S.J. Res 68, which directed “the removal of United States Armed Forces from hostilities against the Islamic Republic of Iran that have not been authorized by Congress.” In May 2020, S.J. Res 68 was vetoed by President Trump and the Senate failed to override the veto. But the drumbeat in Congress against war is growing.

Members of Congress have also introduced legislation that prohibits the use of funds for an unauthorized war against Iran. While neither the House nor Senate versions of the National Defense Authorization Act included language to prevent war with Iran, Rep. Lee was able to attach three important amendments to the Defense Appropriations Act. These amendments would repeal the 2001 AUMF and the 2002 Iraq AUMF, and prohibit the use of funds for an unauthorized war with Iran.

» Take Action

1. *Meet with your members and urge them to make a public statement* calling for Rep. Barbara Lee’s amendments to be included in the final Defense Appropriations Act. Suggested language for the statement below.

2. *Meet and engage with candidates to learn about their foreign policy platform.* Advocate for the prevention of a new war with Iran and for a repeal of the 2001 and 2002 AUMFs.
Public Statement Sample Language

"Tensions between the United States and Iran are on the rise due to the administration’s abandonment of the Iran Nuclear Deal, crippling economic sanctions, the assassination of Qassem Soleimani, and the president’s veto of the bipartisan Iran War Powers Resolution.

I strongly support three critical provisions in the House FY2021 Defense Appropriations Act, which make clear that President Trump has no authorization to launch attacks on Iran without approval from Congress. These provisions would also repeal outdated Authorizations for Use of Military Force (AUMFs), which three presidents have abused to justify nearly two decades of wars across the globe.

House and Senate Leadership must work to keep these important provisions in the final appropriations bill and do everything they can to prevent the United States from being dragged into another disastrous war in the Middle East."