Action Sheet: May 2020

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

While the COVID-19 pandemic rages on, the administration continues to sabre-rattle in a manner that could easily escalate into war. Tensions between the United States and Iran have not eased, and the people of Iran are still suffering from the crippling effects of sanctions. Congress needs to make it clear: threats of war are not the answer.

Advocacy Teams have played a central role this year in persuading Congress to take a stand against war with Iran, but we must not let up. Our witness and advocacy, even virtually, encourage our members of Congress to be brave.

In May, Advocacy Teams will continue to lobby our members to bend towards justice and peace. Teams will reach out and invite new friends to lobby with them and expand the coalition for peace.

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.

The administration’s escalation of threats with Iran is destabilizing and dangerous. Diplomacy and international cooperation are the only paths to lasting security. Congress has the authority to explicitly reject war with Iran and insist on diplomacy.
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 at a moment when the Quds Force and its militias were focused on fighting the Islamic State in direct coordination with the U.S. military. 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.

Congressional Action on Iran

In 2019, the House responded to this deteriorating situation by passing the bipartisan Khanna-Gaetz amendment to the National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA), which denied funding for any U.S. military attack against Iran. However, that language was not included in the final NDAA signed by the president in late December.

In January 2020, the United States assassinated a high-ranking Iranian military official, leading Iran to retaliate by attacking a U.S. military base in Iraq. Following these attacks, the House passed a War Powers Resolution on Iran (H. Con. Res 83), and in the Senate, Sen. Tim Kaine’s (VA) resolution (S.J. Res 68) passed with a bipartisan majority. In March, the House also passed S.J. Res 68.

These bills direct “the removal of United States Armed Forces from hostilities against the Islamic Republic of Iran that have not been authorized by Congress.” Additional legislation is moving to repeal the 2002 Iraq AUMF, which the administration has cited as authorizing action against Iran if it stems from Iraq.

In addition to asserting its constitutional war powers, Congress can prohibit the use of funds for an unauthorized war against Iran. The No War Against Iran Act (H.R. 5543/S. 3159) prohibits “the obligation or expenditure of federal funds for any use of military force in or against Iran unless Congress has either declared war or enacted specific statutory authorization for such use.”

» Take Action

Arrange virtual lobby visits with your members of Congress.

- Go to fcnl.org/virtuallobbying to set up virtual lobby visits with your members of Congress and build support of the No War Against Iran Act (H.R. 5543/S. 3159).
- Check in with your team with this goals and objectives document. What actions haven’t you taken in a while? Are there new people you can invite to lobby with you?