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## War Power Abuse Makes Iran Conflict More Likely

By Thomas Hedges,

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Rep. Walter Jones, R-N.C., along with retired military officers Col. Lawrence Wilkerson and Lt. Col. Anthony Shaffer as well as former Associate Deputy Attorney General Bruce Fein denounced President Barack Obama at a news conference Sept. 21 for overstepping his authority in wartime and warned that unless war powers are restored to Congress, the country could soon be involved in a battle with Iran.

The resolution comes at a time when tensions among Iran, the United States and Israel have intensified and could lead to what Col. Wilkerson described as an eruption of catastrophic violence in the Middle East.

Resolution HRC107, written by Jones and supported by 13 House members, is the latest attempt to restore one of the fundamental constitutional powers to Congress.

The retired military officers and congressman told a small gathering of reporters that the unchecked power of the imperial presidency, which began in earnest under the Truman administration, has expanded its authority under Obama to order the assassination of U.S. citizens and wage proxy wars in Libya, Pakistan, Yemen and Somalia without seeking congressional approval. They said they fear that unless this power is restored to Congress the country could find itself in a conflict with Iran.

“The most recent disclosures in The New York Times, not at all refuted by the Obama administration, show that the president claims and exercises authority to surveil every ... individual on the planet,” Fein said. “If he says, ‘You’re an imminent danger to the United States,’ you get vaporized. Predator drone. Any judicial review? No. Any congressional review? No. Any disclosure of the profile of the intelligence that justifies the finding you’re one of the terrorists we’re going to vaporize? No.”

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This is “a combination of legislative, executive, judicial power, plus being executioner, all in one man!”

Fein described the pursuit of ceaseless military expansion and conquest as a “macho thrill.” The British, he pointed out, also expanded their empire beyond its ability to sustain itself, a pattern the United States was now repeating. He said that empires eventually grow beyond the control of the public or politicians.

The congressman and former officials argued that the power to declare and wage war must be wrested from the hands of the president and restored to Congress.

“This is a natural evolution of power,” Wilkerson said. “This is what was going to happen as soon as Harry Truman, on the 26th of July, put his signature to the 1947 National Security Act. George Marshall looked at the president, perhaps the most iconic military figure other than George Washington in American history ... and said, ‘Mr. President, I fear we have militarized the decision-making process.’ ”

Wilkerson was Colin Powell’s chief of staff when Powell, then secretary of state, delivered his Iraq address to the United Nations in 2003. He helped Powell with the presentation, making the case for war. He now says that the speech was “the lowest point in my life.”

He has become one of the nation’s harshest critics of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan and says that a system that permits an imperial presidency to declare war is “tantamount to tyranny.” He said that in the last decade, the United States has killed well over 300,000 people, although the country faces “no existential threat.”

“Those 300,000 killings,” Fein said, “are murder. Because *legal* war makes what’s customarily murder, legal. But if you’re not at war legally, those are homicides.”

The retired military officers said they estimated that a war with Iran would plunge the United States into a conflict that would last at least a decade and cost about \$3 trillion.

Wilkerson, who spent 31 years in the military, warned that a war with Iran could spread beyond the Middle East: “I could paint you a scenario where we start a NATO no-fly zone over Syria, and wind up, in a year or two, with a general regional war, and then, within a year or two of that,

possibly lots of big players fighting each other, first through surrogates, and then their own troops.

“I wouldn’t be surprised to see the Russians ... begin to sell their most sophisticated air defense missiles to Syria. Then they’re going to start shooting down NATO airplanes; not one or two, but lots of them.”

Wilkerson likened the current era to the years before World War I, adding grimly that the primary difference is that today countries have nuclear arsenals.

“Every empire in human history is gone,” he said. “Whether it’s the empire of the Khans, or the Thousand-Year Reich of Adolf Hitler. They’re gone. Nowhere in the world is it written in stone that the American empire is an exception.”

Wilkerson said the implosion of the American empire would create chaos and anarchy.

“We’re doing our level best to create that chaos and anarchy right now,” he said.