

Last week we once again heard numerous voices calling for intervention in Libya. Most say the US should establish a “no-fly” zone over Libya, pretending that it is a benign, virtually cost-free action, and the least we could do to assist those trying to oust the Gaddafi regime. Let us be clear about one thing: for the US to establish a “no fly” zone over all or part of Libya would constitute an act of war against Libya. Establishing any kind of military presence in the sovereign territory of Libya will require committing troops to engage in combat against the Libyan air force, as well as anti-aircraft systems. The administration has stated that nothing is off the table as they discuss US responses to the unrest. This sort of talk is alarming on so many levels. Does this mean a nuclear strike is on the table? Apparently so.

In this case, I would like to make sure we actually follow the black letter of the law provided in the Constitution that explicitly grants Congress the sole authority to declare war. This week I will introduce a concurrent resolution in the House to remind my colleagues and the administration that Congress alone, not the president, decides when to go to war. It is alarming how casually the administration talks about initiating acts of war, as though Article 1 Section 8 of the Constitution does not exist. Frankly, it is not up to the President whether or not we intervene in Libya, or set up “no-fly” zones, or send troops. At least, it is not if we follow the Constitution. Even by the loose standards of the War Powers Resolution, which cedes far too much power to the president, he would have no authority to engage in hostilities because we have not been attacked – not by Gaddafi, and not by the rebels. This is not our fight. If the administration wants to make it our fight, let them make their case before Congress and put it to a vote. I would strongly oppose such a measure, but that is the proper way to proceed.

Constitutional questions aside, Congress also needs to consider the interests of the American people. Again, we have not been attacked. Whatever we may think about the Gaddafi regime, we must recognize that the current turmoil in Libya represents an attempted coup d’etat in a foreign country. Neither the coup leaders nor the regime pose an imminent threat to the United States and therefore, as much as we abhor violence and loss of life, this is simply none of our business. How can we commit our men and women in uniform to a dangerous military operation in Libya when they swore an oath to protect and defend the Constitution? We must also understand that our intervention will undermine the legitimacy of whatever government prevails in Libya. Especially if it is a bad government, it will be seen as our puppet and further radicalize people in the region against us. These are terrible reasons to put our soldiers’ lives at risk.

Finally we need to consider the economic cost. We don’t have the money for more military interventions overseas. We don’t have the money for our current military interventions overseas. We have to rely on the Fed’s printing presses and our ability to borrow from China to fund these wars. That alone should put an end to any discussion about getting involved in Libya’s civil war.