

Matthew Hoh: Can Congress Stop a Middle East War?

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#Nima

The piece that you wrote on your Substack, I wouldn't bring it up here. And I think it's so important—let me just bring it up here. Yeah. It's about how you wrote that 80% of the American public want the war to end, not simply a ceasefire. You mentioned the ceasefire between Iran and the United States, if that's the case. And the best Congress can do is pass a non-binding, performative gesture. What do you mean by that, Matt? What is your understanding? I know that you're talking about the war, the way Congress somehow tried to make some sort of obstacles for Donald Trump not to get back to war, which you said is a non-binding, sort of performative move on their part. What is your understanding of that?

#Guest

Well, so both, you know, and thank you for having me back with you, Nima. Both the U.S. House of Representatives and the U.S. Senate have now passed War Powers Resolutions, almost all with Democratic Party support, although there have been a few Republicans who have crossed over and supported it. The War Powers Resolution was enacted by Congress in 1973 following the Vietnam War, and it's supposedly meant to check the president's ability to carry out war. It's never successfully been utilized. It's only actually ever been passed one time—that was in 2019, when the U.S. Congress passed the War Powers Resolution to try and check the American role in Yemen. Donald Trump vetoed that, and that was the end of the War Powers Resolution.

The War Powers Resolution has two paths. It could either go through what's called a joint resolution, which is what we saw in 2019, where that bill—essentially, this resolution—goes to the White House for the president to sign into law. Now, of course, people are saying, if the president is opposed to this, why would he ever sign it into law? And that's exactly the case. So you have a War Powers Resolution that would, through a joint resolution, require a veto-proof resolution, which you're not going to get. And then the other route is to go through what's called a concurrent resolution, which does not go to the president for a signature but is just passed by Congress. And so this is unconstitutional in the sense of being a law.

Even though Congress in 1973 said that a concurrent resolution the president would have to obey, as far as I know, there's no court ruling supporting that. Concurrent resolutions apply only to matters of Congress. Concurrent resolutions are what Congress uses to set its schedule or to put forward a sense of Congress—essentially putting out a statement, if you will, a resolution. So you've never had a concurrent resolution passed as part of the War Powers Act before. You don't have any case history, any court decisions that say, yes, the president has to follow this. In fact, you have the contrary, where it's well understood that concurrent resolutions have no effect on the executive branch.

And then you have the other aspect of this, that there's no enforcement mechanism. What will be done? The president's just gonna ignore it. Maybe he'll respond to it, but most likely not. So what happens then? How does Congress enforce this? You know, this is why the War Powers Act has always been performative. It's always been a gesture. It has never been utilized to keep the United States out of war, to remove the United States from war, to limit the American president's ability to carry out warfare. So it really is a performative gesture here. And I think that's all it was ever intended to be. It was never meant to assert congressional powers, to say, hey, no, the Constitution states that Congress declares war.

This is the authority given to Congress by the Constitution, not to the president. And so, you know, I think it's always been this way for Congress to try and cover its ass and demonstrate that they're opposed to war without actually getting their hands dirty, or this getting messy, or the actual Congress standing up to the executive. And that's what we'll see here. You know, in fact, too, I think a lot of people are bothered by this as well. They pass this thing after the war is over. I mean, sort of the past. I mean, I think this is why Congress is the least respected institution in the United States, because they do this, and then they beat their chest, and then they trumpet about it, and then they go on MSNBC and crow about it. Right? And, you know, it's all performance, all empty.

It's all meaningless. At the same time, too, just a few days ago, we saw the Pentagon say, hey, we're going to need 80 billion dollars to cover this war, to pay for what we just spent pursuing this failed, this lost war. And, you know, Congress—are they going to actually live by their War Powers Resolution? Are they going to live by the fact that they said this war was unauthorized, that it was illegal, it was unconstitutional, that it was also unwise and counterproductive? Are they going to live by that and not pay for it? Or are they going to pay for it? And I think we all know the answer to it. So even the Democrats who are championing this as them standing up to Donald Trump, as them standing up to an unjust, illegal, unconstitutional war—when it comes to it, watch them line up to vote for the war.

You know, and so, you know, that's the reality of what Washington, D.C. is like. That's the reality of what the opposition party in Washington, D.C. is like. But more importantly, this is the reality of what the American government is also like. There is no ability for Congress to check the power of the executive, particularly when it comes to issues of war and peace.

They're only—the only—uh, leverage they have, the only hand they have in this, the only cards they have, as the president likes to say, are funding. And you've not ever seen Congress demonstrate a willingness to utilize that power that they have, the power of the purse, to restrain the executive. People will point to Vietnam and the defunding of the Vietnamese government in 1975, yes, but American troops had left two years prior. You know, we never saw any effort, say, during the Iraq wars or the Afghan wars by the United States Congress to limit funding or to take away funding for those wars as a means of ending those wars—simply not. And I think, you know, the Iraq war is illustrative of this. You saw in 2006 the Democratic Party coming into power in Congress, and the Democrats wanting the war to go on because they felt that if the war was still going on in 2008, that would be better for their electoral chances in terms of taking the White House.

I can tell you that's the same thing with this Democratic Party now in 2026—the idea that they want the war to continue in some way, shape, or form so that they can use it for their political benefit. And if the war doesn't continue—we've talked about this—then what you'll see is a Democratic Party, not the Democrats who just won in New York City, by the way, right, but the Democratic Party, the DNC, the DSCC, the DCCC, the Democratic Party organs, the establishment Democrats—the Hakeem Jeffrieses and the Chuck Schumers and the Nancy Pelosis and the Steny Hoyers, and so on and so forth. You'll see them argue against a peace deal that Donald Trump has made with Iran, this MOU, if it's converted into an actual final agreement.

We will see the Democrats oppose that because they feel that they can then use that politically by opposing the president's deal. They will have the support of the Israel lobby. They hope to see that President Trump's candidates in the November midterms—the America Firsters—the Israel lobby will pull funding from them, or not support them, or attack them, and will support pro-Israel Democrats. That's the way the Democratic Party wants to play this. Either the war continues and it's ruinous, or they obstruct and they fight and they try to politically benefit by aligning with the Israel lobby to try and stop any type of agreement.

#Nima

Matt, what do you make of the situation in Lebanon? We have J.D. Vance talking about it and saying that there is a new mechanism between Iran and the United States to manage this case of Lebanon. And basically, he says Iran is gonna control Hezbollah, we're gonna control Israel, or maybe something of that sort, because he didn't mention that directly, but the essence, the outcome of what he said somehow is this. And then you see the president of Lebanon coming out and saying, no, there is no peace until Israel fully withdraws from the southern part of Lebanon. So the guy—we know the guy is not that much in power—and he basically talks the way Washington is asking him to talk, or something of that sort. What is your understanding of the situation in the southern part of Lebanon?

#Guest

I was not expecting that from President Aoun at all. Certainly no Lebanon expert, so people can say, hey, no, he said this type of thing before. I don't think he has. My understanding of him was, as you laid out there, Nima, someone who was going to go along with the Americans and the Israelis as the best means for him keeping his power. But certainly, you know, Lebanon is so crucial here. It is the active front of this war, you know. This is where Donald Trump's legacy will fall apart if this war resumes. Donald Trump, I think, has—I think Donald Trump wants this war to be his legacy, and he will spend the next two and a half years protecting this agreement, this deal, this MOU, this peace, whatever you want to call it. And that means getting the Israelis under control. But for the Iranians as well, they have to, you know, they of course will speak as to wanting to see victory in Lebanon on their terms, right?

The expulsion of the Israeli occupation. Uh, but they also have to be, you know, smart enough, if you will, to understand the limits of their leverage here. Uh, and so I think what you'll see is, uh, the other thing too is, I think for the Iranians, uh, Nima, um, look, they're not a regional power. They're a world power. They've demonstrated that. And if you're a world power, you have to be able to exert your influence in other parts. You know, this is in the region, of course. But for the Iranians, it's not enough, I think, to just demonstrate that they were able to defend their sovereignty, that they were able to deter attacks against their country, that they're able to win in a war involving their borders, but also to have that role far away, to have that role in another country.

That's how you have to demonstrate that you are a regional power, that you are a world power. You have to have that type of role. And with that role then comes this idea of making choices and making concessions, if you will. And so I think what the concession in Lebanon will look like is—and nobody get me wrong, this is not what I want to see—but I think what the concession will look like is that Lebanon looks like it was prior to March of 2026, that that ceasefire, that force of a ceasefire that went from November of '24 through March of '26 in Lebanon, will be the status quo, that Israel will largely evacuate from parts of Lebanon. And I think you see the Israelis are already now talking in terms of security zones and buffers.

And we have this thing about pilot zones, and the Lebanese army is going to backfill the Israeli army. I think that's what you're going to see. And so you're going to see the Israelis potentially give up their ground positions within southern Lebanon at great political cost, great political angst, great hysteria within Israel, but getting in return the ability to carry out an occupation by fire, right, to occupy and control southern Lebanon through the use of drones, surveillance, manned aircraft, what have you. So essentially, southern Lebanon, while there's no Israeli troops there, is in many ways essentially a free-fire zone for the IDF. That's unfortunately how I think it is going to be played by the various sides as a win for everybody.

These are the concessions everyone will make in order to get the deal to go through. I think this is what Donald Trump and the White House are going to try and force on the Israelis. I think maybe the sweetener for the Israelis is that, hey, you can continue to do what you want to do in Palestine with our help, right? So essentially trading an occupation away in Lebanon for allowing you to do as

you want with your occupation, your ethnic cleansing, your genocide in Gaza, your annexation of the West Bank. I think that's the tradeoff that may occur there. But it certainly is, you know, not pretty. It's ugly. But it is that upon which you have this MOU and its success depending upon. And, you know, like I said, that's not what I want to see, but I think that's what ultimately will play out.

#Nima

Do you think that if that is the case, we're going to see Israeli people getting back to their homes in the northern part of Israel, or are they going to have the same sort of problem?

#Guest

I think the Israelis will go back to them. I think that would be part of it. There will not be attacks outside of southern Lebanon, that the war, the conflict, will be confined to it, and it will be a war of robots, a war of drones. We've seen some really interesting developments, by the way, with Hezbollah's air defense capabilities. So while I say, hey, it's going to go back to the way it looked, you know, November 24th through March 26th, I want to take back what I said about the Israelis having a free-fire zone. Essentially, that will be the Israeli rule of engagement — they'll kill whoever they want.

But their freedom to operate will not be in any way, shape, or form the same way that they were able to operate previously, that the Hezbollah air defenses — that, again, we're now seeing examples of — will be utilized to down those Israeli drones. And we may even see Hezbollah start to utilize the first-person view anti-drone drones, you know, the fighter drones, the drones that go up there to knock down other drones. And so I think that's what you could potentially see over southern Lebanon. Now, that's catastrophic, that's ruinous, it's terrible for the people of southern Lebanon, for what, more than a million people who live there, you know? I mean, but I think unfortunately that's going to be the bargain that's struck, you know, because I think any fires that go into Israel will be justification for the Israelis to then attack outside of southern Lebanon. Right.

And it's in the same way that any fires and any Israeli attacks north of southern Lebanon will be justification not for, you know, attacks by Hezbollah into northern Israel, which may occur, but for the Iranians to close the Straits of Hormuz. And I think that will be how this thing is agreed to — that this will be the modus vivendi, you know. And it's not what I want to see, it's not what certainly I think most Iranians want to see, it's not what the Lebanese want to see. But I think that essentially is the deal that will come through, and both sides will get to say that either there's a reality withdrawal, or no, no, we didn't need to be there physically on the ground — we have the security zone, and we're hammering Hezbollah whenever they stick their head out of the ground, et cetera, et cetera, et cetera.

#Nima

Matt, do you see Benjamin Netanyahu on his way out of power?

#Guest

You know, did I see a poll? He's dropped. Donald Trump dropped 30% in Israeli public opinion. I don't think he's going to become the next prime minister as he said he might. But wouldn't that be something? I tell you, Nima, if Donald Trump was a Netflix television show, I would watch every episode. I've said this before, but, like, can you imagine, like, next season is about him going to Israel to become the prime minister? You know what I mean? Unfortunately, it's not fiction. It's reality. I don't know.

I mean, gosh, I'm blanking now in terms of Netanyahu's numbers, but he has dropped, of course, in popularity. Certainly, the polling I saw that came out in the last week, in terms of the Israeli public's view on this war — on this war as a failure, on Netanyahu's leadership — you know, across all metrics, was very negative towards Netanyahu. And I want to say as well, a poll I saw that Eisenkot would beat Netanyahu, that Eisenkot would be the PM. But I'm not sure of the veracity; I'd have to look that up. But certainly, this has hurt Benjamin Netanyahu quite a bit. Benjamin Netanyahu is in this position where the entire country seems to be united against the decision he feels he's being forced to make by the Americans.

And we'll see whether or not Donald Trump actually exerts the leverage that he can exert on Netanyahu in order to meet Donald Trump's own interests. Trump has no loyalty to the Republican Party. He doesn't have any loyalty to Israel. He's got no loyalty to Miriam Adelson and the donors, particularly since he's not going to run for reelection anymore. Donald Trump's only loyalty is to himself. And so this is why we may see the United States actually utilize the power, the control, the leverage that it has over Israel. As J.D. Vance described it, we're the senior partner here, they're the junior partner, we're the superpower.

So, you know, this empire-vassal relationship may actually be exposed due to the, you know, the whims and the self-interested needs of our mad emperor. But, you know, certainly, yeah, the pressure on Netanyahu is intense. You know, Israeli commentators continuously say they've never seen the Israeli public united before as they are on the opposition to the ceasefire or ending the war in Lebanon. And, of course, we fully understand where Netanyahu's governing coalition is on all of this. I mean, the elections are coming up in a few months. But, you know, imagine if the elections weren't for another year. This would collapse his government if something like this went forward.