

Obama Ignores Democracy, pursues Minority Agenda

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Congress calls on Obama to bring troops home -- Republicans file suit over Libyan War

WASHINGTON: War-weary members of Congress have challenged Barack Obama on two fronts, asking a court to put an end to US involvement in the attack on Libya and calling for a big reduction of American troops in Afghanistan from next month.



The two actions, both with bipartisan support, came with the Libya campaign mired in its 13th week and just days before Mr Obama lays out his plan for the much-anticipated decrease in forces from Afghanistan.

Their agitation reflects growing disquiet in America over the breadth of US military commitments abroad, as well as the escalating financial burden. Opinion polls suggest seven out of 10 Americans want the US to bring troops home, with most unconvinced of the need for involvement in Libya.

A group of 10 members of Congress said they were suing Mr Obama and the Defence Secretary, Robert Gates, for having bypassed Capitol Hill under the cloak of UN and NATO authorisation for US military strikes against Muammar Gaddafi's regime. They have asked a district court judge in Washington to issue an order suspending the military action unless the administration seeks congressional approval to continue.

The move came a day after the Republican speaker of the House of Representatives, John Boehner, warned Mr Obama that a 90-day deadline for seeking approval, mandated by a Vietnam-era law, was due to expire, and demanded he explain the legal grounds for America's continued involvement.

But even before the group launched its court action, the White House issued a 38-page defence of its Libya campaign in which it rejected the concerns of lawmakers. It said America's strictly limited role meant it was not the type of escalating conflict that would require approval from Congress or an end to fighting under the War Powers Resolution, passed in 1973 in response to the Vietnam War.

Further, the "US operations do not involve sustained fighting or active exchanges of fire with hostile forces, nor do they involve US ground troops."

The White House drew on classified as well as unclassified material in its package, including copies

of "32 update reports sent to 1600 congressional staffers over the past several months" along with projections that put the daily cost of its involvement at \$US10 million (\$9.5 million).

The first two months of the campaign, during which US fighter jets helped establish the UN-sanctioned no-fly zone, cost \$US716 million. The cost will top \$US1 billion by September at the current level of operations.

Last week, with NATO openly canvassing the end of Colonel Gaddafi, Mr Gates talked of a renewed coalition commitment that hinted at intensified US involvement in a bid to help NATO finish the job. "There will be more assets," he said. "The United States is committed to this. We're in this thing with our allies to the finish."

Meanwhile, a letter signed by 27 Senators that called for "a sizeable and sustained" pull-back from Afghanistan appeared aimed at shaping the President's thinking as he seeks to deliver on his promise to start scaling back operations there from July.

The group of Senators, from across the political spectrum, said the exit strategy should include combat troops first, putting them at odds with Mr Gates who has argued initial withdrawals should be confined to support units.

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