

Presidential War Powers

Since the second world war, the United States has not engaged in an "official war" declared by congress. Since FDR gave his day that will live in infamy speech, congress has not officially declared war. However, since then, America has engaged in eight large-scale military intentions and countless special forces operations and airstrikes. What these conflicts have in common is that they were all sanctioned by the decree of the president. Presidential use of military force has become so common that the American public has become numb to it. Presidents have become so comfortable with their title as "commander in chief" that, in effect, the U.S. military has become the personal militia of the executive branch.

Just a mere five years after the cessation of hostilities in the pacific theatre of world war two, President Truman, without congressional approval or consultation, ordered the U.S. air force and naval assets to help South Korean forces repeal the North Korean invasion force. This terse order set precedent for future U.S. presidents to use U.S. military power without abandon for decades to come. Truman's decision to aid the South Koreans was reprehensible and an overreach of the executive branch's authority. A simple stroke of Trumans' pen committed America to a three-year-long war that killed over 35,000 Americans and mane over 100,000. Sadly this leisurely use of U.S. troops would be continued in Vietnam, Grenada, Panama, and other countries. This laundry list of U.S. invasions makes the perfect case of why the U.S. president's war powers are far too broad.

The whole point in having congress vote to authorize military activities and declare war was to ensure that the tremendous power of the U.S. military. Be reserved and sparsely used only when all other alternatives have been exhausted. When congress vote to declare war, you must convince hundreds of individuals that war is the right move. However, the president

effectively has the same power as congress to use military power without having to lobby for approval. Presidents who choose to exercise their war powers without congressional approval also usually face little to no recourse for their actions. Also, since the office of the president consists of one sole person. They can easily be manipulated into starting a war by a select few, such as war profiteers who work for defense companies who have a vested interest in the war. At his fingertips, the president of the United States can invade any country within hours and destroy the earth with nuclear warheads. This access to unlimited and fearsome power is quite intoxicating and can lead to an over-liberal use of American troops and weapons.

One could make the argument that the president needs the power and latitude to be able to respond to national security threats. Presidential discretion for use of force would make sense if a flotilla of foreign ships were gathering off the west coast. But the use of U.S. military power has been used exclusively for offensive action on foreign soil. However, the U.S. does hold an alarming amount of U.S. military installations abroad and embassies, as well as a large contingent of citizens traveling, working and living abroad. These unique circumstances do present the need for the president to have some personal discretion to protect America's foreign interests and citizens abroad. However, the president should not have such broad military force; at his sole discretion, he could invade a country on a whim.

A perfect example of overreach and unjust use of American force solely at the hand of the U.S. president was Operation Just Cause, the code-name for the invasion of Panama ordered by President George Herbert Walker Bush. The purpose of invading the tiny Central American country was to dispose of the anti-American narco dictator Manual Noriega. Noriega was a former asset of Bush's former employer, the Central Intelligence Agency. Bush met fierce condemnation by the U.N. and members of congress. Even with such disdain, Bush went through with his invasion. With a mere stroke of a pen, Bush was able to initiate to mobilize

multiple divisions of the Army and U.S. marine corps and squadrons of the U.S. air force and task-forces of the U.S. navy. Within a month, the invasion Bush ordered of a sovereign country left over a hundred Panamanians dead and tens of thousands homeless. All of this wanton destruction and senseless loss of life was caused by one person, President Bush. Perhaps if the president were forced to go through congress to conduct the invasion, he would have abandoned it altogether, realizing he could not garner enough support. The Panama invasion is a prime example of just how quickly a president without any congressional approval or oversight can invade a country with unrestricted military power. It's for these reasons that the sword of presidential war powers must be sheathed.

