

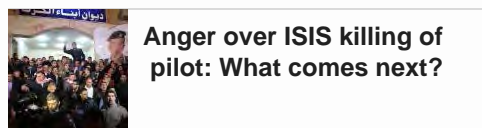
# Lawmakers decry White House ISIS pitch

By **Dana Bash** and **Alexandra Jaffe**, CNN

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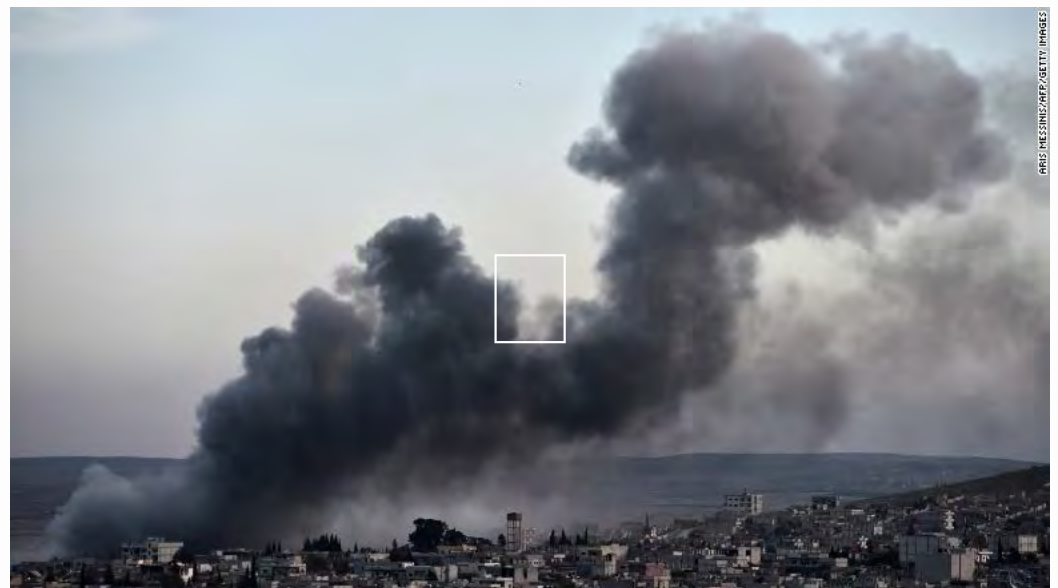
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**Washington (CNN)**—Lawmakers on both sides of the aisle expressed concern on Tuesday, as details of the Obama administration's long-awaited request to authorize the use of military force against ISIS spread through the halls of Congress.

Early reaction from senators indicated that President Barack Obama may be caught in a Catch-22 of sorts, torn between Democrats worried about giving him too much power, and Republicans leery of constraining him.

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It's clear that despite bipartisan desire for Congress to debate and pass the war authority measure, or AUMF, coming up with specifics that will please enough lawmakers in both parties to actually pass will not be easy.

The White House is requesting that Congress formally approve the plan -- enhancing Obama's legal authority to combat the terror group -- which he's been doing under authorizations that originated in the wake of the Sept. 11, 2001, attacks.

The new measure is expected to be limited to three years and focused on combating just ISIS. It would also repeal a 2002 measure that approved military action in Iraq, while leaving a 2001 authorization to fight al Qaeda intact. Senators are expecting to receive the text of the latest AUMF on Thursday.

White House officials, including the President's chief counsel Neil Eggleston, joined Senate Democrats' weekly policy lunch to give a closed-door briefing on what to expect.

Several Democratic senators coming out of the briefing told CNN there was concern expressed during the lunch about the language the administration is proposing when it comes to the role of U.S. ground troops. The AUMF is expected to include a provision barring "enduring offensive ground operations."

"That to me is the crux of our debate. What does it mean? How long and how big is enduring?" said Sen. Dick Durbin of Illinois, the Senate's No. 2 Democrat.

"We have some legitimate questions as to whether we open this up with a loophole that could lead to another major war," he said.

Maine Sen. Angus King, an independent who caucuses with Democrats, said the term was meant to restrict the size and aims of the military presence the U.S. would deploy against ISIS.

"It's an attempt to distinguish between, for example, special forces going in for a particular purpose, for a few days, or defensive forces defending an American facility, versus long-term deployment of ground troops," he said. "It's going to take some discussion to determine whether it's the right term."

Some Senate Democrats said flat-out they weren't satisfied with the language to begin with. Connecticut's Chris Murphy said the restriction was too vague.

"For many of us it's going to be tough to swallow restrictions on ground troops that [don't] seem to be much of a restriction at all," he said. "This would have to be changed dramatically for me to support it."

And Democratic Sen. Barbara Mikulski, of Maryland, complained of the

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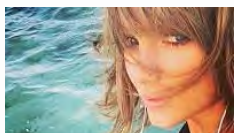


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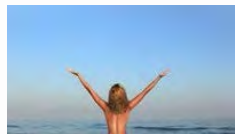
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**Obama soon to ask Congress for ISIS war authority**

same.

"I don't know what the word 'enduring' means. I'm very apprehensive about a vague, foggy word and enduring is not in the eyes of the beholder," she said.

Obama -- first elected president on a campaign to withdraw troops from Iraq -- has consistently tried to limit U.S. military engagement in the Middle East throughout his presidency.

But Republicans argue the emerging contours of the AUMF indicate the President is tying his own hands too much, setting a dangerous precedent.

Sen. John McCain said he was fine with the three-year limit, but blasted the rest of the administration's proposal as "totally not acceptable, and unconstitutional in my view," because he said it may constrain the possible actions the President can take to combat ISIS.

"If we want to curtail the action of the commander-in-chief than we can do it through the appropriations process -- not through acting to dictate what actions the President of the United States can take militarily," he said.

McCain, who chairs the Senate Armed Services Committee, said he made his position known to the White House on this issue.

"It has never happened, it has never happened and never will, as long as I'm able to breathe," McCain said of restricting the actions of future presidents.

McCain said he was working with Senate Foreign Relations Committee Chairman Bob Corker, adding that his committee may also weigh in on the measure.

South Carolina Sen. Lindsey Graham said he had spoken with the White House earlier Tuesday and his sticking point was the scope of the authorization, as he understood it, which he said wouldn't allow the U.S. to protect its forces against attacks by Syrian President Bashar al-Assad.

"If you train the Free Syrian Army -- one, we'll never train enough of them to matter at this rate [and two], they go in on the ground just to fight ISIL, Assad will attack them, because one day they'll come [Assad's] way," Graham said.

Graham said if the war authority "doesn't allow us to counter Assad's air power, then we'll fail."

Even Democrat Robert Menendez of New Jersey, who wants restrictions on ground troops, acknowledged it is highly unusual for a president to request military authority that restricts his own powers.

"Part of the feedback they're getting is that, from some members, unless

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that is further defined, that will be seen as too big a statement to ultimately embrace because -- forget about Barack Obama -- there will be a new president in two years and this authorization will go into that new presidency," he said as he left the White House briefing.

But the timing on the eventual vote remains murky, as the White House has promised to take into consideration lawmakers' concerns before it finalizes the text of the AUMF.

"The final text of the AUMF and timing for delivery will not be locked until we are able to complete these robust consultations and consider all of the feedback we have received," a source familiar with the White House's outreach to Capitol Hill said.

CNN's Jim Acosta, Ted Barrett, Deirdre Walsh, Athena Jones and Eric Bradner contributed to this report.

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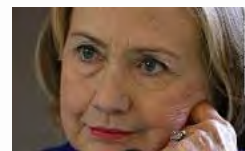
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