
THE HILL

Week Ahead: Will Obama veto a military policy bill?

By John T. Bennett - 12/12/11

President Obama might have to decide this week whether to veto the Defense authorization bill over language on detainees opposed by the White House.

It would be a politically risky move for Obama, as political animals of all stripes view the defense measure as a must-pass because it is so important to the troops.

House and Senate conferees have been at work behind closed doors for a week hammering out several sticking points, including Senate-backed provisions that target the Central Bank of Iran and alter terrorist-detainee practices.

Sources from both chambers are confident they will send a final bill to Obama early this week, with compromise versions of both plans.

The White House has said advisers would recommend Obama veto the bill over the detainee provisions, but it remains to be seen whether the commander in chief would actually take that advice with troops in harm's way — and as his reelection campaign revs up.

Before Obama makes his decision about the Pentagon policy bill, he will hold what observers are calling a key meeting Monday morning at the White House with Iraqi Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki. Following private meetings, the duo will be joined by Vice President Biden for a joint press conference.

Even as Congress attempts to pass several non-defense bills before its scheduled holiday break, members will continue efforts to avoid \$600 billion in additional defense cuts.

It is increasingly apparent that an end-of-the-month deadline will pass for Congress to strike a deal on \$1.2 trillion in federal cuts, meaning lawmakers will have to find a way to void the Defense cuts after they return in January.

Most of that action will occur behind closed doors.

Nuclear arms are in the news again, with tensions flaring up between the United States and Russia. That could add interest to a Monday joint appearance by Senate Foreign Relations Committee ranking member Dick Lugar (R-Ind.) and former Sen. Sam Nunn (D-Ga.), authors of an eponymous nuclear arms-reduction law. On Monday at the Newseum, they'll discuss progress on their legislation 20 years after its passage.

On Tuesday, al-Maliki delivers remarks at a U.S. Chamber of Commerce luncheon.

The same day, just a few miles away, several key security hawks will headline a Foreign Policy Initiative forum titled: "Maintaining America's Global Responsibilities in an Age of Austerity." It comes as the Pentagon faces \$600 billion in cuts to planned spending over a decade.

The GOP dominates the agenda. Sen. Marco Rubio (Fla.), former Minnesota Gov. Tim Pawlenty, Sen. Kelly Ayotte (N.H.), Sen. Lindsey Graham (S.C.) and House Select Intelligence Committee Chairman Mike Rogers (Mich.), all Republicans, will deliver remarks and meet with reporters.

Also Tuesday, House Armed Services Committee member Chris Gibson (R-N.Y.) delivers remarks at the Cato Institute on the War Powers Act in the wake of the Libya military intervention. Some lawmakers argued the Obama administration failed to comply with that law by sending the U.S. military to support that NATO-led mission.

Finally, national security leaders past and present, lawmakers, industry executives and security-sector wonks will gather for an Atlantic Council-sponsored gala Tuesday evening to honor Brent Scowcroft's 64-year career.

Scowcroft was national security adviser to Presidents Ford and George H.W. Bush, and served as President Nixon's military assistant. He most recently helped President Obama form his national security team. Commissioned in 1947 as an officer in the Army Air Forces, which became the U.S. Air Force later that year, he rose to the rank of lieutenant general.

Former Defense Secretary and CIA Director Robert Gates, in his first major Washington appearance since leaving the Pentagon earlier this year, will deliver the keynote address.