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## America's use of force

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July may be the month that will determine if the United States will be a nation always at war. Well, almost always.

In a week or two, the Senate is expected to vote on repealing the 2001 Authorisation for the Use of Military Force (AUMF) that licensed the war in Iraq.

Expect a repeal-replace debate. The votes to repeal the AUMF may meet with as many votes to replace it. The House of Representatives was not without "nays". Be that as it may, the Congress should repeal, not replace. It shouldn't just stop there.

There are other AUMFs that must go under the Congress' axe. Here is why. The US Constitution says going to war is a decision for the Congress to make, not the president.

Yet, president after president have gone to war for the flimsiest of reasons. Even the Nobel Peace Prize winner, former president Barack Obama, dropped 26,000 bombs on seven countries in the assessment of the Cato Institute, a US think tank.

Obama wasn't the "Mr Nice Guy" that many think he was. He certainly wasn't to Gene Healy of the think tank: "He left office as the first two-term president in American history to have been at war every single day of his presidency." Harsh but true.

Replacement of one AUMF with another comes with its own dangers. What may appear to the Congress to be a new AUMF that has higher limits may be used by ill-meaning executives as it was done with the 2001 AUMF from George W. Bush onwards.

In the hands of warmongering Bush and presidents of the ilk, AUMF of whatever form will be a licence to turn Waziristan into a wasteland. Laws or resolutions by the Congress are, after all, constructions of language.

An ideologue of a president will seize upon every phrase or sentence that lends itself to imprecision to mean what he wants it to mean as Bush did in 2001.

The US invaded Afghanistan 20 years ago to ostensibly bomb al-Qaeda off. If the world's strongest military power can't wipe out "terrorists" in two decades, then it must say a lot about American might. And more importantly, about America's motive for the invasion of Afghanistan.

Like Iraq's weapons of mass destruction that have yet to be found, Afghanistan's "terrorists" conveniently remain elusive. Notwithstanding this, AUMFs are piling up on the table of the Congress, according to the Cato Institute. Some name enemies and countries as they please.

If this isn't enough, the AUMFs allow the president to wage war against new enemies and countries. A recipe for disaster as happened under the 2001 AUMF.

If Bush could find the language to go to war when there was none, a president similarly inclined will find it that much easier when there is explicit language allowing him to do so.

Such AUMFs defeat the very purpose of getting the Congress to repeal them in the first place. Consider the 2011 AUMF again.

However the Pentagon looks at "9/11", it wasn't an imminent threat to America that the Constitution envisages to be necessary to go to war.

Who does the US go to war with? What are imminent threats though, if not to the US, at least to the rest of the world that doesn't share the values of the US, are American presidents and a docile Congress.