

US CONGRESS

Senators, Too, Are Tying Trump's Hands on Iran

WORLD

25_06_2026



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If foreign policy analysts are and remain stunned by the ease with which Trump signed a Memorandum of Understanding with Iran—containing clauses that literally sell out U.S. demands—it is perhaps because they underestimate the fierce battle currently underway in Congress.

On June 23, following the vote in the House, the Senate—with its Republican

majority—also passed the text of the resolution on the president’s “War Powers.” This is not an actual law; it is not binding, but it requires consultation with Congress before deciding on military action. In effect, it is a measure that would prevent Trump from resuming military operations against Iran, even if Iran were to refuse to negotiate or fail to comply with the terms of the memorandum of understanding. This resolution is following a process that began well before Trump signed the first agreement with Tehran’s arch-enemy in Versailles. So we can only imagine the internal pressure on the president, which, needless to say, adds to the blatant opposition to the conflict from a significant portion of his administration, including Vice President JD Vance (it is no coincidence that he is the one personally negotiating with the regime in Tehran).

The resolution on the president’s war powers passed with a unanimous vote from Democratic senators, plus four Republican dissenters who helped flip the majority: Bill Cassidy (Louisiana), Susan Collins (Maine), Lisa Murkowski (Alaska), and Rand Paul (Kentucky). Only Paul’s vote can be described as ideological: Paul, just like his more famous father Ron, is a libertarian and a staunch isolationist. Lisa Murkowski has long been a leading figure among anti-Trump Republican senators, and her clashes with the president are now countless. Susan Collins was a staunch supporter of intervention in Iran and defended the president’s decision. But now that the 60-day period under the 1973 “War Powers Act”—during which the president may take emergency action in a conflict even without seeking congressional approval—has expired, she believes the ball must now be back in the legislature’s court. Finally, Bill Cassidy has also joined the group of internal dissenters, though it is unclear whether this is due to political conviction or electoral/personal reasons: Trump, considering him insufficiently loyal, did not support him in the primary election for his re-nomination in Louisiana and effectively caused his defeat.

The harshest clash occurred with Cassidy during the lunch with senators organized by Trump on June 24. The president, in his usual mocking manner, reportedly ridiculed him in public for failing to win reelection in Louisiana. As the argument continued, Cassidy stood up. “You haven’t told the American people what’s going on,” he said he told Trump. “It was supposed to last four weeks, but it lasted four months.”

But the resolution on Iran and the president’s war powers is part of a much broader (and much tougher) debate on domestic policy.

In fact, Trump is primarily concerned with ensuring that Republicans win the November elections. And he is convinced that they cannot win unless the package of electoral reform measures known as the “Save America Act” is passed—a law that would require

voters to present valid identification at the polls. But for such an important bill—one that would shift the balance of power between the federal government and individual states (until now, states have set their own election rules)—a qualified majority of 60 out of 100 votes in the Senate is required. The Republicans, though in the majority, hold only 53 seats, and no Democrat is willing to vote to prevent a citizen from entering a polling place to vote without identification. They consider it an act of racism.

Since Republicans view the “Save America Act” as a lost cause and do not support proposals to change Senate voting rules, Trump, in retaliation, has refused to sign a bipartisan bill on the deregulation of building codes, which both parties consider important for reviving the sector. And so, an increasingly bitter clash between the president and his senators is also spilling over into foreign policy, with members of the legislature growing increasingly open in their impatience with their “father-master” and thus more ready to tie his hands on Iran.