

Under the United States Constitution, only Congress has the power to initiate war.

BY AZIZHUQ

It is hard to begrudge those who welcome the weakening of Iranian theocrats who have gunned down many of their own citizens – some estimates suggest as many as 30,000 in recent months. Yet the aerial assault on Iran launched by the United States and Israel signals a period of undisciplined and potentially unlawful violence that may prove difficult to contain.

Americans, and their allies, should look beyond today's unpopular targets and consider how such force might be used tomorrow. Under a President seemingly indifferent to facts or legal constraint, the prospect is unsettling: state violence could be deployed not only abroad against tyrannical regimes, but also at home against those branded domestic "enemies".

An awkward coincidence underscores danger. On the same day bombs reportedly began falling on Tehran, *The Washington Post* reported that the White House was considering a unilateral Executive Order asserting federal control over how and when Americans vote in the forthcoming November mid-term elections. Citing alleged Chinese interference, the draft order would impose new limits on voting rights in the name of national security. Critics argue that such changes could advantage Republicans in their bid to retain control of Congress.

The President has not confirmed plans

How bombing Iran may blow back on America

POLITICAL PRESSURE

Historically focused on border control, US has increasingly involved the deployment of heavily armed federal agents into Democratic-led cities. Critics argue that this shift effectively repurposes foreign-facing coercive authority into a tool of domestic political pressure. The deaths of two protesters, Renee Good and Alex Pretti, during enforcement operations intensified those concerns.

for such an order. But he also kept quiet about his intentions towards Iran during his State of the Union address only days earlier. With opinion polls suggesting Democrats lead by roughly six percentage points, the political incentives are obvious.

Efforts to shore up Republican control through mid-cycle redistricting have also faltered. A proposed gerrymander in Texas triggered a robust Democratic response in California, while heavily Republican Indiana declined to redraw its own districts. Combined with fears of a looming stock-market correction, the White House faces mounting pressure ahead of the elections.

Yet presidents lack constitutional or statutory authority to take steps such as



President Donald Trump of United States of America. PHOTO/REUTERS

banning mail-in ballots or mandating voter identification nationwide. Article I of the Constitution assigns primary responsibility for congressional election rules to the states, subject to congressional oversight. Although House Republicans have passed the SAVE Act, which includes a voter-ID requirement, it has not become law.

Concern is warranted because the presidency operates with especially weak legal constraints in matters of national security – the very rationale invoked for both the Iran strikes and the mooted election order. Under the US Constitution, only Congress has the power to initiate war. Internationally, Article 2 of the

United Nations Charter restricts the use of force. Nonetheless, the administration proceeded.

The evidentiary basis for the attacks has also been questioned. *The New York Times* described the justifications as "unsupported and exaggerated". More bluntly, critics contend that the President believes he can misrepresent facts to justify military action with potentially catastrophic consequences.

That approach has domestic implications. The administration has repeatedly transformed claims of broad authority in foreign affairs into assertions of power over American citizens.

Shortly after returning to office, the President directed Attorney General Pam Bondi to disregard legislation banning TikTok – a law Congress had enacted following earlier pressure from him. Bondi complied, invoking unspecified "core presidential national security and foreign affairs powers". The result was to reshape the American social-media landscape and pave the way for potential acquisition of the platform by political allies.

Similarly, federal law allows the Executive to designate foreign organisations as terrorist groups, a power rooted in immigration statutes. Yet last September the President issued an Executive Order extending such designations to domestic "anti-fascist" groups. Since then, officials including Homeland Security Secretary Kristi Noem have labelled civilian protest-

ers "domestic terrorists".

These precedents suggest a willingness to stretch national-security powers into instruments of domestic governance. The proposed Election Order would represent a further step in that direction.

Success abroad may only embolden further action at home. If the Iran conflict endures, bombings and reprisals could provide a ready-made justification for additional domestic measures framed as emergency responses.

So far, neither Congress nor the courts have consistently curtailed such expansions of executive authority. Judicial intervention failed to block the TikTok manoeuvre, the terrorist designations, or the deployment of federal agents. It remains uncertain whether the other branches would resist an election-related order grounded in national-security claims.

In a recent tariffs ruling, Chief Justice John Roberts rejected the notion that a presidential power escapes judicial review simply because it concerns foreign affairs. Even so, the Supreme Court has been less protective of voting rights than of economic structures such as free trade or the independence of the Federal Reserve.

Today, a national-security emergency has been invoked against Iran's theocratic rulers. Few will mourn their loss of power. But history suggests that powers claimed in crises rarely remain confined to their original targets. What begins as a blade directed at foreign despots may, in time, be turned inward.

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