



Trump Backers Who Cheered An End To 'Endless Wars' Face Prospect Of Military Action

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BY KIRK SIEGLER

Many conservatives cheered President Trump's State of the Union pledge to end America's "endless wars." How do they feel about military action against Iran and sending troops back to the Middle East?

AUDIE CORNISH, HOST: In last year's State of the Union address, President Trump famously vowed to end America's endless wars and start bringing troops home from Afghanistan and the Middle East. That drew praise from many conservatives. But over the past few days, Trump has ordered thousands of troops back to the Middle East, and some of his supporters say he shouldn't go further without congressional approval. NPR's Kirk Siegler reports.

JIM RISCH: God bless the president of the United States.

KIRK SIEGLER: Idaho is one of the most conservative states in the nation. President Trump is hugely popular here, which was easy to tell when Idaho Senator Jim Risch, chair of the Foreign Relations Committee, dropped by the state GOP meeting over the weekend.

RISCH: This president, I can tell you, is not a warmonger. Remember when he came here...

SIEGLER: One man in the audience whose ears perked up at that was Dan McKnight. He's a Marine Corps and Army veteran who was injured in Afghanistan and recently founded a Meridian, Idaho-based group called Bring Our Troops Home.

DAN MCKNIGHT: I think he's also a strong president when it comes to national defense. He will not allow Americans to be killed or attacked. But he understands that the endless wars are frivolous, and they're - run their course and it's time to bring them to an end.

SIEGLER: McKnight introduced a resolution asking fellow Republicans here to support, quote, "the president's efforts to bring our troops home." He thinks cooler heads will prevail and there won't be a full-blown war with Iran. But he says it's time to revisit the law passed after 9/11 that gives presidents the authority to use military force against terrorists without congressional approval.

MCKNIGHT: Even though our guy's in the White House - President Trump's the leader of our party - if we don't rein in his power

when we're in control, what will happen when the other party has the reins?

SIEGLER: McKnight's resolution reaffirmed that only Congress can declare war. And under the Constitution, the president has to consult with Congress first. A majority of Idaho GOP activists narrowly supported it. Despite pledging to end endless wars, President Trump has sent thousands of additional troops to the Middle East since last May.

DAN CALDWELL: Unfortunately, his actions in some cases has not matched his rhetoric.

SIEGLER: Dan Caldwell is a senior adviser with the conservative Concerned Veterans for America. Caldwell says the president should ignore pressure from neoconservatives in Washington, whose foreign policy led us to what he calls the mess in the Middle East.

CALDWELL: All those policies have made us less safe and destabilized the region more and are what, ultimately, President Trump ran against in 2016. These are the very same people that he called out in the 2016 election as being wrong on foreign policy.

SIEGLER: Still, Caldwell says Trump's foreign policy overall has been much less disastrous than his two previous predecessors. And this worldview is widely held among the president's base, especially in conservative, more rural corners of the country. Janalee Tobias is a Trump organizer and GOP activist in Utah. She says the best way to stop endless wars is to take out the enemy commanders at the top.

JANALEE TOBIAS: You have to destroy their capacity to wage war on a battlefield. Killing commanders is the way to do that. Everybody wants to get the guys at the top.

SIEGLER: Tobias says the president acted narrowly by ordering the killing of Qassem Soleimani, which she thinks will make America safer. Kirk Siegler, NPR News, Boise.

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