

The Chart Page

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Wars and Rumors of Wars

The Constitution gives Congress the power to “declare war.” Yet, while the US has resorted to arms many times, lawmakers actually have declared war—formally—only five times. As this page shows, the most recent occasion was some 65 years ago, in World War II. Three declarations were in the 19th century. In reality, Congress has been three times more likely to approve

use of force without declaring war. It has on 15 occasions authorized “non-declared” wars—explicitly, implicitly, or on a contingent basis. The first time was in 1798 and the most recent in 2002. Moreover, the President on 10 occasions has committed US troops to overseas combat with no prior approval from Congress at all, as is shown in the final column.

America’s Many Routes to Armed Conflict

Declarations of War	Explicit Authorization of Force	Implicit Authorization of Force
Britain, 1812	Quasi-War, 1798	Spain, 1898
Mexico, 1846	Tripoli, 1802	Mexico, 1914
Spain, 1898	Algeria, 1815	Cuba, 1962
Germany and Austria-Hungary, 1917	Civil War, 1861	Vietnam, 1964
Japan, Germany, Bulgaria, Hungary, and Romania, 1941-42	Lebanon, 1983	
	9/11 attackers, 2001	

Contingent Authorization	Conflicts without Formal Authorization
Paraguay, 1858	Philippines, 1899-1902
Formosa, 1955	Mexico, 1916
Middle East, 1956	Korea, 1950-53
Gulf War, 1991	Dominican Republic, 1965
Iraq, 2002	Grenada, 1983
	Panama, 1989
	Somalia, 1992-94
	Haiti, 1994
	Bosnia, 1995
	Kosovo, 1999

Source: *Congress at War: The Politics of Conflict Since 1789*, by Charles A. Stevenson, 2007, The National Defense University Press-Potomac Books, Inc.