

Congressional Closeup by William Jones

War debate flares up as Congress reconvenes

The Bush administration attempted to suppress congressional debate on the Persian Gulf crisis before the Jan. 15 deadline for military use of force, by agreeing to an eleventh-hour meeting between Iraqi Foreign Minister Tariq Aziz and Secretary of State James Baker. But the move backfired when debate flared up as the 102nd Congress convened Jan. 3.

Many congressmen were outraged over the dirty deal arranged by House and Senate leaders to postpone debate on the Gulf crisis. But, reflecting the concern of constituents over the war danger, the leadership did not authorize the usual recess taken until after the President's State of the Union address on Jan. 28.

House and Senate leaders, meeting with President Bush on Jan. 3, went back to Capitol Hill announcing that they would not debate the Gulf crisis until after the Jan. 9 Baker-Aziz meeting in Geneva, which suddenly became feasible to an otherwise recalcitrant White House.

Senate Majority Leader George Mitchell (D-Me.) indicated that resolutions on the Gulf would not be taken up until Jan. 23, at which point the United States might already be at war. Sen. Tom Harkin (D-Ia.), among others, refused to be muzzled. He presented a resolution, co-sponsored by Sens. Brock Adams (D-Wash.) and Quentin Burdick (D-N.D.), demanding that Bush get authorization from Congress before initiating offensive action.

In a heated exchange with Mitchell, Harkin objected to the unanimous-consent resolution which Mitchell had introduced to postpone debate on any anti-war resolutions. "Now is the time and here is the place to debate the con-

stitutional prerogatives of the President of the United States, not on Jan. 23, but now, before Jan. 15," Harkin said. "This Senator does not, in any way, believe that debating the issue of the constitutional powers of the presidency in any way undermines the United States of America. Never, never, never does it undermine the United States of America to assert our democratic principles and to debate the full meaning of the Constitution, especially the War Powers Act."

Harkin was supported by Senator Adams, who added that there was a difference between "debating whether or not the President has the power to commit offensive actions after they have started and blood has been shed and now when we have an opportunity to say." He called the issue of constitutional authorization "fundamental to the life of the people in this country."

President Bush hopes to circumvent the Constitution and avoid going to Congress for authorization, since he fears that such a debate, with the wave of anti-war opinion now sweeping the country, would not give him what he wants.

Hollings warns of 'new world disorder'

Sen. Ernest Hollings (D-S.C.) warned of a wave of terrorism in the wake of Mideast hostilities, in statements on the Senate floor on Jan. 3. "Such a wholesale slaughter of brother Arabs by infidels," Hollings said, referring to Joint Chiefs of Staff chairman Gen. Colin Powell's indication of "a sudden, massive, violent strike," "would totally break up the hollow coalition of Western and Arab states arrayed against Saddam. . . . Arab public

opinion would be united in revulsion and outrage. Every Arab terrorist, every fundamentalist mullah, every anti-American zealot, would take heart. Instead of a new world order, we will create a new world disorder."

Hollings also referred to the assurances given to Saddam Hussein by then U.S. Ambassador to Iraq April Glaspie, that the U.S. would not intervene in what it considered an Arab affair. Hollings said that "Saddam must have been surprised" by the reaction of President Bush following the invasion.

Hollings said he favors a surgical air strike if the sanctions do not force Iraq out of Kuwait, but warned against attempts to "impose a culture through the barrel of a gun." Hollings counseled the administration to "Arabize this conflict before we lose a single GI."

Kennedy attacks imperial 'King George'

Sen. Edward Kennedy (D-Mass.) warned that "the American people are far from united on the question of going to war against Iraq on the Jan. 15 timetable set by the President," in comments on the floor of the Senate on Jan. 3.

"President George Bush is not King George Bush," said Kennedy. "He does not have the unilateral authority to take this nation into war. By refusing to seek congressional authorization for offensive action, the President is acting unconstitutionally and irresponsibly. He may threaten Iraq with war in the Gulf, but he is also threatening America with our worst constitutional crisis since the Civil War.

"President Bush stubbornly insists that he needs no authorization from Congress to take the nation into war," he continued. "But saying so does not make it so. Perhaps the President can scrounge up a scholar or two to defend his indefensible position. But the overwhelming weight of the evidence is against him. And for good reason, because the President is wrong—dead wrong—and thousands of American soldiers may soon be dead because of him."

House rules change upsets Republicans

The budget austerity package agreed upon by the 101st Congress and the White House, was abruptly ruptured when House Democrats introduced a *pro forma* rules proposal giving the power of estimating the budget shortfall to the Congressional Budget Office and Congress's Joint Committee on Taxation. The estimates provide the basis to determine whether tax cuts or new spending programs will result in automatic spending reductions.

House Republicans and the White House considered the proposal a breach of the budget agreement, where, they claim, the estimates were to be provided by the Office of Management and Budget, an administrative organ under the direct control of the White House.

"It's insane," commented White House Chief of Staff John Sununu. "It's a clear violation of the agreement and of the bill Congress passed and the President signed into law." Bush lamented that the change was "neither fair nor right."

"The budget deal was supposed to last for five years," whined Minority Whip Rep. Newt Gingrich (R-Ga.).

"It's being broken on the first day Congress is sworn in."

Democrats, who distrust the OMB and have charged it with politicizing its fiscal estimates, defended the change, considering the CBO more "independent and objective." This move, and the release of the CBO's latest estimate that the budget deficit is \$50 billion more than the previous estimate, throws a monkey-wrench into the budget agreement of 1990.

Gonzalez says insurance system broke

Rep. Henry B. Gonzalez (D-Tex.), chairman of the House Banking Committee, noted in comments on the House floor on Jan. 3 that the federal insurance system is broke. "It is clear, as I have been saying," said Gonzalez, "that the two main insurance funds are broke. It is clear that that is dramatic evidence that the system has broken down, as some of us have been anticipating, predicting, and talking about for over 20 years."

Gonzalez said that "In the month of October, our country lost 173,000-plus jobs. In the month of November alone, we lost 287,000-plus jobs, so we may not be in a recession. We may be in what we would have always called a depression."

Gonzalez is calling for a complete overhaul of the system by which financial institutions are regulated. In a bill he has introduced, deposit insurance would be restricted to \$100,000 per account and would prohibit paying off multimillion-dollar accounts that are now insured for institutional investors.

The bill would also combine the several agencies responsible for insurance functions into a single Federal

Depository Institutions Regulatory Agency. Federally insured institutions would be restricted to the practices permitted to federally chartered institutions. Institutions that run lucrative offshore and other foreign operations would be required to pay premiums on deposits in those institutions. The function of chartering financial institutions would be made separate from the insurance function.

Adams warns of constitutional crisis

"Like it or not, the entire world has set its clocks to the administration's Jan. 15 deadline," said Sen. Brock Adams (D-Wash.), a guest speaker at the Cato Institute's seminar in Washington on the Persian Gulf crisis on Jan. 8. "For this reason, following introductory ceremonies, Senator [Tom] Harkin [D-Iowa] and I pressed the Senate to begin debate immediately on whether our nation should go to war in the Persian Gulf."

Pointing to the various occasions in the past 20 years when Presidents have taken the country to war without congressional approval, Adams noted that Congress, through its inaction, "has been complicit in the erosion of its rights. . . . Now in this new era, Congress has the opportunity to reassert those rights."

Adams noted that "President Bush appears to consider thwarting aggression in the Gulf more important than upholding the Constitution at home." With regard to Congress's power to declare war, Adams said, "If we fail to exercise our war-making powers now, we risk losing that right permanently."

Adams said he will oppose offensive U.S. military action.