

House votes against war on Yugoslavia

by Carl Osgood

In a series of votes on April 28, the U.S. House of Representatives passed a bill to prohibit the use of U.S. ground forces in Yugoslavia without the authorization of Congress, and it rejected a resolution supporting the continuation of the current air campaign. The House also failed to pass a resolution calling for the withdrawal of all U.S. forces from Yugoslavia within 30 days, and a fourth resolution declaring war on Yugoslavia. The debate revealed a split between those who want a serious discussion of the Kosovo crisis and how the United States should respond, and those obsessed with a "get-Clinton" agenda.

Consideration of the Balkans crisis was triggered when Tom Campbell (R-Calif.) introduced the war-declaration and troop-withdrawal resolutions on April 12. At the time, he said that the reason for introducing the resolutions was to "ensure that the people's representatives in Congress have a vote on the merits of both of these." Otherwise, he warned, the war would continue without Congress ever having had a role in the process, "as the Constitution requires." Campbell explained to reporters that his strategy was to use the War Powers Act of 1973, which requires a vote on such resolutions, and to sue the Clinton administration in Federal court if the declaration of war were to fail.

Once Campbell had introduced his resolutions, the resolution authorizing the air war, which passed the Senate on March 23, and the bill placing restrictions on the use of ground troops, offered by Bill Goodling (R-Pa.) and Tillie Fowler (R-Fla.), were introduced.

All four measures were brought to the floor under a single rule which split the House along partisan lines. Tony Hall (D-Ohio) complained, "What we have here is a grab bag of conflicting, contradictory, and confusing resolutions about the war in Yugoslavia which stand little chance of enactment." The rule was passed on a party-line vote of 213-210. However, on the measures themselves, significant numbers of members of both parties crossed party lines.

Certain Republicans used the debate as a forum to attack the Clinton administration. Most notable among these was Majority Whip Tom DeLay (R-Tex.), the man who led the impeachment attack on the President. At one point, DeLay announced his opposition to the use of ground troops in Kosovo, and attacked Clinton as responsible for the declining readiness levels of U.S. military forces. "Despite these growing military deficiencies," he said, "the administration is con-

sidering sending ground forces for an open-ended peacekeeping mission that would further erode military readiness." Later, DeLay characterized the current military action as "Clinton's bombing campaign," ignoring the British hand not only in crafting the current policy, but also in attempting to escalate it into a ground war.

The British role did not go unnoticed, however. Bill McCollum (R-Fla.) asked if the United States has "embraced a new NATO policy as described by British Prime Minister Tony Blair, that NATO will not permit ever in the future human rights atrocities and ethnic cleansing of a dictatorship anywhere on the continent of Europe?" Don Manzullo (R-Ill.) also referred to Blair, but then, using newspaper headlines from the NATO summit a few days before, suggested that Clinton is moving closer to Blair's position on use of ground troops, even though the outcome of the summit was clearly the opposite.

Otherwise, most of the debate centered on what kind of message would be sent to U.S. allies, U.S. military personnel, and Serbian President Slobodan Milosevic. One issue, was whether the refugee crisis was exacerbated by the NATO bombing, or could be laid at Milosevic's door. Those such as DeLay, laid the sole blame on President Clinton. Some Democrats, such as Ed Markey (D-Mass.), argued that the ground troops option must be left open "in case the air campaign proves unsuccessful." John Olver (D-Mass.) told the House that he believed that if NATO had responded in 1991 when Milosevic attacked Vukovar, Croatia, "We would not have witnessed the agony of Bosnia with 200,000 killed and 2 million displaced from their homes," and therefore, any constraint against NATO acting now could not be tolerated.

'We must pursue peace'

Not all the arguments were based on support for, or opposition to the President. Dennis Kucinich (D-Ohio) said, "We must win the peace. We cannot win peace through war. The failure of the bombing campaign is proof. We can win peace through negotiation, through diplomacy. We must pursue peace as vigorously as we would pursue war." He warned that if the Senate resolution authorizing the air war were passed, "we will have given a license to expand an undeclared war."

The Goodling/Fowler bill passed by a vote of 249-180, with 45 Democrats for and 16 Republicans against, and the Senate resolution failed by a tie vote of 213-213, with 31 Republicans supporting it and 26 Democrats voting against it. The declaration of war resolution only garnered two votes in support, and the vote on Campbell's troop withdrawal resolution failed by a vote of 290-139. House Speaker Dennis Hastert (R-Ill.) was criticized for failing to lobby for the Senate resolution (which he voted for), the contention being that if he had lobbied for it, to counter DeLay's lobbying against it, it might have passed.

The Senate has yet to follow up on the House action.