

Bush Administration 'Dr. Strangeloves' Take a Hit

by Jeffrey Steinberg

In the latest sign of resistance to the mad imperial-utopian war schemes of the Bush Administration, a bipartisan group of House Armed Services Committee members has blocked the deployment of mini-nuclear weapons, thus stalling a decade-old scheme of Vice President Dick Cheney, Deputy Defense Secretary Paul Wolfowitz, and other Administration "Dr. Strangeloves," to make nuclear war "thinkable" and "doable." The Cheney-Wolfowitz drive to include nuclear weapons in the arsenal of offensive weapons, under the new preventive war doctrine, was exposed by *EIR* of March 7.

On May 14, the House Armed Services Committee voted to retain the ban on the development, testing, and deployment of so-called "mini-nukes," nuclear weapons with a yield of below five kilotons of TNT. The ban had first been voted by Congress in 1993, as part of the Fiscal Year 1994 Defense Authorization, in what became known as the Spratt-Furse Amendment.

In early March 2003, the Bush Administration submitted its FY 2004 defense budget proposal to Congress, which contained a single sentence, asking lawmakers to "rescind the prohibition on research and development of low-yield nuclear weapons."

Rep. John Spratt (D-S.C.), the co-author of the Spratt-Furse Amendment, responded to the Administration's mini-nuke revival in a March 9 interview with the London *Guardian*, telling Julian Borger, "Some in the administration and in Congress seem to think that the US can move the world in one direction while Washington moves in another—that we can continue to prevail on other countries not to develop nuclear weapons, while we develop new tactical applications for such weapons, and possibly resume nuclear testing."

Vote in the House Armed Services Committee

The House Armed Services Committee's May 14 vote to maintain the Spratt-Furse ban came as the result of a compromise between two leading Committee members, Republican Curt Weldon (Pa.) and second ranking Democrat Spratt. Under the compromise, the defense authorization bill will include funding for research on mini-nukes at several U.S. government weapons labs, but retains the ban on development, testing, and acquisition—a major setback for Cheney, Wolfowitz and other Bush Administration nuclear warhawks,

who have been pressing for the United States to develop and field a new generation of mini-nuclear weapons, suitable for use against Third World countries.

Representative Weldon, the architect of the compromise language, told the *San Francisco Chronicle*, in a May 15 interview, "The administration is not real happy with this. The key thing for me," he admitted, "is to legitimize the basic research" on low-yield nuclear weapons." Under the Weldon-Spratt compromise, the Congress would also commission an 18-month study by a 12-member panel of experts, on the overall nuclear weapons requirements of the United States. "That's the most important thing we've done here," Weldon said, referring to the commissioning of the panel.

Spratt had a different view. In a statement issued after the bipartisan vote banning development and deployment of mini-nukes, Spratt stated, "The action in the House sends an important message: that the United States is not backsliding towards development of new battlefield nuclear weapons." He was backed by fellow Committee member Rep. Ellen Tauscher (D-Calif.), who told the *San Francisco Chronicle*, "We still have a long way to go, but we're trying to do something better under very tough conditions," a reference to Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld's persistent drive to get authorization for the deployment of a new generation of low-yield nuclear weapons. "People should shudder when they hear about" the Bush Administration plans for a new nuclear weapons arsenal, Tauscher added.

Fight Is Not Over

On May 9, the Senate Armed Services Committee, voting on party lines, passed the Administration's request to lift the ban and fund research and development of battlefield nuclear weapons. This means that the issue of the mini-nuke ban will be battled out in House-Senate conference, once the separate authorization bills pass both Houses.

The Senate Armed Services Committee vote had been preceded by intense debate, with Sen. Edward Kennedy (D-Mass.) vowing to take the fight to the floor of the Senate, and denouncing President Bush as a "nuclear bully." Sen. Jack Reed (D-R.I.) had called the Administration's push to develop a new generation of tactical nuclear weapons "a dangerous departure" from a half-century of efforts to reduce the threat of nuclear weapons proliferation. Ranking Committee Democrat Carl Levin (Mich.) warned that the mini-nuke push would undermine the entire effort at nuclear weapons non-proliferation, declaring that "We're driving recklessly down a road we're telling other people not to walk on."

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