

# Senate votes to lift Bosnian arms embargo

by William Jones

The U.S. Senate on May 12 passed two resolutions calling for lifting the arms embargo against Bosnia and Hercegovina. With one calling for unilateral U.S. action and the other urging a collective decision by the NATO allies, it is apparent that disagreements persist in the Senate on how to proceed. But with the failure of the latest "peace plan," and disunity among the United States, Russia, and the European Union, President Clinton must realize that "the buck stops here." He must understand his own obligation to make that tough, unilateral, decision to allow the Bosnians to defend themselves against Serbian aggression.

One Senate resolution was authored by Majority Leader George Mitchell (D-Me.) and another by Minority Leader Bob Dole (R-Kan.). The Dole amendment calls on the United States to unilaterally lift its arms embargo against the government of Bosnia and Hercegovina, something that the Clinton administration has been extremely reticent to do. Already in January, the Senate voted to adopt a sense-of-the-Senate amendment to the State Department authorization bill, calling on the President to lift the U.S. embargo against Bosnia and Hercegovina.

The Mitchell amendment was an attempt to blunt Dole's call for unilateral U.S. moves, but, although mobilizing considerable support, it failed to prevent passage of the Dole resolution. The Mitchell amendment calls on the administration "to seek immediately the agreement of NATO allies" to lift the embargo, but barring that, the United States should then lift the embargo unilaterally. In defending his amendment, Mitchell said, "We require collective action. We need the involvement of others. We can't solve every problem in the world by ourselves."

Both amendments passed 50-49, with eight senators voting in favor of both and six voting against both. Thirteen Democrats joined 37 Republicans in support of the Dole amendment. The increasing concern was indicated by Sen. Joseph Lieberman (D-Conn.), one of the sponsors of the bill: "The premise of the arms embargo was to keep arms from flowing into the former Yugoslavia, as part of an overall policy to avoid war there," he said. "This policy has failed."

Despite their contradictory features, the two amendments undoubtedly did send a message of Senate support for lifting the arms embargo, a message which was clearly registered by the White House. "The President certainly understands the Senate's sentiment in this regard," said White House

Press Secretary Dee Dee Meyers. Senator Dole called the passage of the two amendments "a big, giant step to lifting the embargo."

## Legislation in the House

Similar legislation was introduced in the House of Representatives by Rep. Frank McCloskey (D-Ind.), House Democratic Whip David Bonior (D-Mich.), and ranking Republican on the the House Foreign Affairs Committee Ben Gilman (R-N.Y.). The bill, entitled the "Bosnia and Hercegovina Self-Defense Act of 1994," is an amendment to the Armed Services appropriations bill.

The McCloskey legislation calls on the President to provide military assistance to the government of Bosnia and Hercegovina "upon receipt from that government of a request for assistance in exercising its right of self-defense under Article 51 of the U.N. Charter." There will undoubtedly be something more of a fight to get this one through the House, however. House Speaker Tom Foley (D-Wash.) commented, "I wouldn't suggest it's on the fast track." Supporters of the bill, however, say that they have a good shot at getting the legislation passed.

## Opposition from Europe

The difficulty in convincing the other western nations to lift the arms embargo was clearly manifest immediately as the Senate voted on the amendments. The most strident opposition continues to come from Britain and France. French Foreign Minister Alain Juppé, who was in Washington for an official visit on May 15, commented on the two proposals: "It seems almost to me the worst solution. It's not an effective one. It's a kind of desperate solution because if we—if the Security Council—because it must be its decision—lifts the arms embargo, what will happen the day after? First, the withdrawal of the Unprofor [U.N. "peacekeepers" in Bosnia] on the ground; second, the end of the humanitarian relief for population; third, the resumption of fighting; and fourth, help called by Muslims [sic] to other countries and possibly to the American government and European governments, and so that means more fighting, more war, more wounded people. We must avoid that, and that's why I am still very attached to the political track and diplomatic track."

The following day it was announced that the United States had rallied behind a European plan that would give the Bosnian Serbs 49% of the country, and the Bosnian Croats and Muslims 51%. This met with immediate skepticism from the Bosnian government, which understandably saw it as acceptance of Serb gains as a result of their aggression. The Bosnian-Croatian federation is demanding 58% of the national territory. Nor are the Serbs happy with the agreement. They, in turn, are demanding 64-68% of the territory of Bosnia-Hercegovina. They now command 70% of the territory, which they have succeeded in occupying by force of arms.