

Congressional Closeup by Kathleen Klenetsky

House, Senate panels reject Saudi arms sale

Two key congressional panels have rejected the Reagan administration's plan to sell \$354 million in weapons to Saudi Arabia—despite urgent warnings by administration spokesmen that the sale is necessary, both to protect U.S. security interests, and to maintain Washington's credibility with moderate Arab states.

On April 23, the Republican-controlled Senate Foreign Relations Committee voted 11-6 in favor of a resolution sponsored by Sen. Alan Cranston (D-Calif.), blocking the sale. On the same day, the House Foreign Relations Committee approved a similar resolution introduced by another California Democrat, Rep. Mel Levine.

An administration spokesman had made a strong case for the sale prior to the votes. Richard Murphy, assistant secretary of state for the Middle East, told a House Foreign Affairs subcommittee April 22 that the arms would be used for the protection of Saudi oil fields, and to deter Iran from extending its war with Iraq to Saudi Arabia and other key oil-producing states of the Persian Gulf.

Countering foes of the sale, who claim that Saudi Arabia has been an obstacle to Mideast peace by refusing to recognize Israel, Murphy stressed that, "When it comes to maintaining a self-defense capability for other Arab states, we cannot be guided by a condition of those sales, that they have not signed a peace treaty with Israel."

"Are we going to be, as a nation, a credible security partner to the moderate states in the Arab world?" he asked.

Apparently not—at least not if

Congress can help it. Both houses are certain to reject the arms deal. While President Reagan has vowed to veto a rejection, it is considered possible, though not probable, that the Levine-Cranston forces can garner enough votes to override the President's veto.

House committee nixes covert aid to Savimbi

The House Foreign Affairs Committee dealt another blow to pro-Western forces in the Third World, when it voted 22-18 April 23 to prohibit covert aid to the anti-Soviet Angolan rebel forces led by Jonas Savimbi.

Legislation rejecting such aid was also voted up by the House Intelligence Committee, whose chairman, Rep. Lee Hamilton (D-Ind.), is the chief sponsor of the measure.

The Reagan administration has been supplying covert assistance to Savimbi's UNITA organization since early this year.

Hamilton's measure is aimed at changing procedures so that congressional approval for future covert aid would be required. But opponents of the bill say it is actually designed to terminate all American assistance to Savimbi.

Congressional sources have told *EIR* that if Hamilton's measure becomes law, "there's little chance we'd be able to keep military assistance flowing to Savimbi."

Rep. Henry Hyde (R-Mich.) charged that the bill is "Reagan-bashing" and "gratuitously encourages Soviet-Cuban aggression and elevates isolationism and paralysis as Democratic foreign policy."

Hamilton himself freely acknowledges that his bill could temporarily end the flow of assistance to Savimbi, but claims sure that Congress isn't excluded from decisions to extend American military assistance to partisan movements in other countries.

Senate to consider tax plan axing deductions

After weeks of sitting in limbo, tax "reform" appears to be back on track, after the Senate Finance Committee met in closed-door session April 24 to consider a new plan by panel chairman Bob Packwood (R-Ore.).

Packwood's proposal would end many current deductions, including those for state and local taxes, plus a slew of business tax breaks. It would also significantly reduce the amount that can be deducted in home mortgage interest—a move that's sure to send chills through the beleaguered housing industry.

About the only major deduction that would be retained, is that for medical expenses.

As far as tax rates are concerned, Packwood's plan calls for a two-tiered system: the low rate would be 15%; the top one, 25%. That contrasts with the current top rate of 50%; and the 35% rate proposed by the administration's tax reform plan.

Finance Committee members who attended the meeting said afterward that prospects for passage of tax-change legislation are now much brighter. "We were dead in the water on tax reform," said Sen. Lloyd Bentsen (D-Tex.), but now "the process is

alive. . . . I think [Packwood] is really trying to revive the concept of true tax reform. It was a pretty good meeting."

But Sen. Bill Bradley (D-N.J.), while calling the session "very productive," cautioned that "it is not going to be easy" to write a final bill.

Hollings to sue over SALT II

President Reagan's decision in late April to continue compliance with the unratified SALT II treaty, by dry docking two Poseidon submarines, drew kudos from the arms-control mafia on Capitol Hill, who had deployed en masse for over a month to ensure precisely such an outcome.

But at least one senator is so angry at the decision that he is now threatening to take the President to court. According to syndicated columnists Evans & Novak, writing in the April 25 *Washington Post*, Sen. Ernest Hollings (D-S.C.) plans to sue Reagan in federal court on grounds that continued compliance with the unratified treaty is unconstitutional.

Bill to fight food irradiation introduced

Liberal California Democrat Rep. Doug Bosco will soon introduce a bill to overturn a recent Food and Drug Administration decision to approve low-level irradiation to kill insects on fresh fruit and vegetables.

As *EIR* has documented, irradiation is an extremely safe technology which has been in existence for dec-

ades. According to a study published by the Fusion Energy Foundation, irradiation would be a tremendous boon to agricultural producers in that it could salvage the 25%-30% of food production that is lost annually in this country to spoilage.

Bosco claims that the FDA "doesn't really know what effect food irradiation has on human health." His measure would direct the Health and Human Services Department and the National Science Foundation to conduct a lengthy study of effects on human health, "including exposure of workers in irradiation plants."

The National Food Processors Association and the Coalition for Food Irradiation said Bosco's bill is unnecessary. "The process has stood up to more than 40 years of study and has proven to be safe and effective," said spokeswoman Ellen Green.

'Who's kidding whom' Dept: Hart pro-defense?

Sen. Gary Hart (D-Colo.), touted by some pundits as the front runner for the Democratic presidential nomination, is trying on all sorts of cosmetic makeovers lately, to see which ones sell best.

The latest one—and let's not all burst out laughing at once—is the "pro-defense" image. Like many of his fellow Democrats, the anti-SDI, anti-MX, pro-defense-cuts Hart has finally figured out that one of the chief reasons for Walter Mondale's resounding defeat in 1984 was the widespread perception that he and most Democrats are a bunch of pro-Moscow traitors bent on dismantling the country's defenses.

Hart is now going through all sorts of contortions to change all that—without much success. Along with longtime aide William Lind, Hart has just published a new book, *America Can Win: The Case for Military Reform*, which promotes Hart's long-time pet project, military "reform."

A joint operation of Georgetown's Center for Strategic and International Studies, the Heritage Foundation, and defense liberals on the Hill like Hart, military reform is simply a dimwitted justification for cutting back U.S. defense capabilities, especially in the high-technology area.

In a recent interview with *The New York Times*, Hart described the movement as a "band of intellectual and political guerrilla fighters" who operate by "ambushing the defense establishment with unexpected questions, unwelcome facts and innovative alternatives."

Hart says his book is designed to persuade the Democratic Party to adopt a "positive" posture on military policy. "The Democratic Party has lacked a defense policy, certainly a positive one, since Vietnam."

How hollow Hart's new "pro-defense" stance is, was underscored by his attack on the American air strike on Libya.

Correction

The Congressional Closeup appearing in the April 25 *EIR* mistakenly reported that Rep. Bill Cobey (R-N.C.) was the author of one letter chiding French President François Mitterrand for refusing to let the United States utilize French airspace for the Libyan raid, and another to Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher thanking her for her assistance. The actual author is Rep. Jim Kolbe (R-Ariz.)