

## Khomeiniacs make last stand in U.S. Senate

by Nicholas F. Benton

Ignoring a spate of public opinion polls showing an overwhelming support by the American population for the highly effective operations of the U.S. military in the Arabian Gulf, the Democratic leadership of the Senate, led by Majority Leader Sen. Robert Byrd (D-W.Va.) and Armed Services Committee chairman Sen. Sam Nunn (D-Ga.), and supported by liberal Republicans like Sen. Lowell Weicker (R-Conn.), pushed Sept. 25 to pass an amendment to the defense appropriations bill forcing an end to the U.S. effort to protect the freedom of navigation in the Gulf by terminating the re-flagging of Kuwaiti tankers.

It is by no means certain, however, that "Ayatollah" Byrd and his fellow senatorial mullahs have the votes to carry this amendment.

The amendment is a slight modification of the 1973 War Powers Act, a law passed in the Vietnam era over a veto by then-President Nixon. It has been denounced as unconstitutional by every President since, including President Reagan and, most emphatically, his Secretary of Defense Caspar Weinberger. Like the War Powers Act, the amendment introduced by Senator Byrd takes military command decision-making out of the hands of the President and puts it into the hands of Congress.

The Byrd amendment was introduced while Secretary of Defense Caspar Weinberger was in the Gulf, meeting with the commanders of the U.S. forces there. It followed by three days the successful U.S. helicopter assault on an Iranian ship "caught red-handed," according to Pentagon officials, laying mines in the Gulf's international sea lanes.

Before leaving, Weinberger remarked on Cable Network News that any action by Congress to "tie the President's hands" in the Gulf is not only unconstitutional, but "I think it would be inconceivable for the Congress to act so strongly against the national interest as to cast uncertainty in the minds of our own people and the minds of Iran and others, and our

allies, who are contributing substantially to this effort, as to whether we were going to continue."

Responding to the Byrd amendment, White House spokesman Marlin Fitzwater promised reporters that President Reagan would veto the bill if it passed. He added, "Iran must be as overjoyed at the prospect for passage. . . . It could have the ultimate effect of achieving the Ayatollah's purposes of forcing the United States entirely out of the Persian Gulf and the Gulf of Oman, places our Navy has sailed freely for 40 years."

### In lock step with Soviet lead

The timing of efforts to impose congressional restraints on the Weinberger-authored U.S. Persian Gulf policy reveals that it is being done in deference as much to Soviet interests as to those of Khomeini. This is not surprising, since among the primary motivations given by Weinberger this summer for the instigation of the new U.S. "re-flagging" policy in the Gulf was not only to bring an end to the Iran-Iraq war, but also to prevent the Gulf from becoming "a Soviet lake."

The first attempt by the Senate to wrest control of the Gulf policy away from the President in order to pull out U.S. forces occurred Sept. 18, when an effort to invoke the War Powers Act initiated by Senator Weicker failed by a 50-41 vote. That happened to be the same day the administration first announced a firm deadline for Iranian compliance with the United Nations ceasefire resolution, meaning that international pressure would soon be on the Soviets to support an arms embargo against Iran.

Then on Sept. 23, Soviet Foreign Minister Eduard Shevardnadze, in New York for the U.N. General Assembly meeting, blamed U.S. military presence in the Gulf for the inability to end the Iran-Iraq war, and made an unserious proposal for the replacement of U.S. forces with a tanker escort provided by the United Nations (one obvious problem with this

being that the U.N. has no navy).

the Byrd amendment was introduced, Shevardnadze specifically rejected the idea of an arms embargo against Iran in a private meeting with U.S. Secretary of State George Shultz.

Thus, in much the same manner that Senator Nunn, in particular, has led the effort in Congress to impose the same restraints on the U.S. Strategic Defense Initiative that the Soviets want, congressmen seeking to impose the War Powers Act or its variant, the Byrd amendment, to remove U.S. military presence in the Persian Gulf, are following the Soviet lead in lock step.

Sen. Dale Bumpers (D-Ark.)—whose leader of the pro-Soviet lobby “Peace Links”—stated, “I’d rather fall on my sword and go down in flames than do nothing,” if that’s what it would take to make the Soviets happy by forcing the U.S. out of the Gulf.

Bumpers’s words may be more prophetic than he thinks. Not only does the Byrd amendment stand no chance of surviving a presidential veto if it is passed, but the wrath of the American population itself will be felt against every politician who tries to weaken the expression of U.S. military strength against such universal butchers as Khomeini and his silent backers, the Soviets. With a presidential election year coming up, that wrath will express itself at the ballot box.

It is clear that Weinberger is confident of strong public support for his Gulf policy, which could escalate into a swift demolition of Iranian forces and a toppling of the wicked Khomeini regime. Currently among presidential candidates, only Democratic contender Lyndon LaRouche has been rallying Americans to support a full-scale U.S. knock-out of Iran at the earliest chance.

### **Defense chief’s media offensive**

Weinberger went on a swift media offensive in support of the Gulf policy, appearing for separate interviews on NBC, ABC, CNN, and PBS on the eve of his departure for the Gulf.

On PBS’s MacNeil-Lehrer Report Sept. 22 he explained his views on the unconstitutionality of the War Powers Act. “The War Powers Act is an unconstitutional invasion of the President’s powers to take the kind of action that you have to take immediately without waiting for committee discussion and without waiting for long debates and things of that kind,” he said. “We have to move, move rapidly in these areas in this kind of world, and the War Powers Act is an attempt by the Congress—we think unconstitutional, as every President, Democrat or Republican, has felt since it was enacted—to interfere with and undermine the powers to conduct foreign affairs and be Commander-and-Chief that the Constitution has given the President ever since the Constitution was written 200 years ago.”

Weinberger noted that he has done “even more than the War Powers Act requires” to keep Congress informed of developments in the Gulf. President Reagan also did this with a letter sent to congressional leaders shortly after the U.S.

helicopter attack on the Iranian mine-laying vessel.

In his letter, Reagan gave a chronological narrative of events after the Iranian Air Force was observed engaging in mine-laying near U.S. forces in international waters, and added, “Limited defensive actions have been taken in accordance with international law and pursuant to my constitutional authority with respect to the conduct of foreign relations and as Commander-in-Chief. While being mindful of the historical differences between the legislative and executive branches of government with respect to the interpretation and constitutionality of certain of the provisions of the War Powers Resolution, I nevertheless am providing this report in a spirit of mutual cooperation toward a common goal.”

“We aren’t trying to keep anything from Congress,” Weinberger said in his PBS interview. “We are trying to give them full information and full consultation, but we cannot abdicate the powers that the President has been given by the Constitution and we cannot delegate to the Congress these powers. . . . You cannot tell the world that the Congress has the authority to pull American forces out on 60 days notice or anything of that kind, because that gives an enormous lever to people like the Iranians. It gives the Iranians something that they want to have that they can’t win. . . . It is the Congress, in effect, telling the Iranians they can have what they want.”

### **The time to act**

When PBS’s Jim Lehrer ignored Weinberger’s remarks and continued to goad him on why the administration had not complied with the War Powers Act, much as the White House press corps had done relentlessly at Fitzwater’s briefings every day for a week, Weinberger underscored his point: “I am telling you, sir, that we are doing more than the War Powers Act in the way of notification and consultation with Congress, but we cannot accede to or grant the constitutionality or the validity of a statute that every President has felt to be unconstitutional . . . and would place a hamper on American ability to act that is not placed there by any other country,” he said. “It’s, in a sense, tying one hand behind your back and saying to the Iranians or anyone else, ‘Come on, and do your worst, because we are telling you right now, nobody can do anything about it until there’s been a debate.’ ”

He added, “Look, for example, how long it has taken for us to decide that we should modernize our strategic triad of defenses. Fifteen years we have been debating whether or not we should put an MX in. The Soviets have put in four systems in that time. These are things that, yes, you should debate . . . but there are other things that require action—quick, immediate—and that is the kind of action we took, and I might say, highly effective action. I think that the Navy is to be, and the Army and helicopters, enormously complimented and credited with very effective, very decisive, really brilliant action in a very difficult situation.”