

Pressure on Clinton to move against Serbia

by William Jones

President Bill Clinton is under increasing pressure to take tougher measures to stop the genocide being conducted by Serbian forces in Bosnia. Although none too eager to tackle such a major foreign policy crisis in the first 100 days of his presidency, Clinton nevertheless can ill afford to continue a do-nothing policy. During April, more and more voices in Washington and abroad have been raised demanding that the President take action. Even Britain's Dame Margaret Thatcher, whose policies helped ignite the Balkan tinderbox, and European Community negotiator Lord David Owen, co-author of the notorious Vance-Owen plan for carving Bosnia up into ethnic cantons, called for tougher action against the Serbs.

At the end of April, the U.N. Security Council imposed harsher sanctions on Serbia, a measure which has allowed the opponents of military action to argue that forceful action *has* been taken, and that therefore one must simply wait to let the sanctions take effect. But this view is by no means universal.

Western policies 'an utter failure'

Pressure in the Congress has been building for some time. Rep. Frank McCloskey (D-Ind.), who has been leading an effort to get the administration to take action to stop the Serbian genocide, has mobilized considerable support for his ideas. In a letter dated April 21, McCloskey was joined by 46 other congressmen in urging the President to recognize the "genocidal nature of the Milosevic regime," to lift the arms embargo on Bosnia, and to use NATO air power to "enforce the will and conscience of the international community."

Among the signers were members of the House leadership, key members of the House Foreign Affairs Committee and the House Armed Services Committee, Chairman of the House Intelligence Committee Dan Glickman (D-Kan.), and David Obey (D-Wis.), chairman of the Appropriations subcommittee on Foreign Operations, Export Financing, and Related Programs. McCloskey indicated that many in the House who did not sign the letter said that they would support the President should he press for more aggressive action. "There is growing sentiment in the Congress," said McCloskey, "that western policies have been an utter failure. Genocide at any time, including at the end of the 20th century, is intolerable."

Similar thoughts were expressed by Sen. Joseph Biden (D-Del.), chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Commit-

tee, in an interview with the CBS television program "Face the Nation" on April 25. Biden demanded tougher action, accusing the Serbs of conducting a "war of aggression" and perpetrating genocide. Biden also called for the use of a NATO force, with mostly U.S. planes, to strike at Serbian positions. "If nothing changes," said Biden, the Bosnian Serbs "aren't about to come to the table." Biden said he did not want the involvement of U.S. ground troops, but rather the use of air strikes to take out Serbian artillery. "This can change the equation on the ground," said Biden.

Bipartisan support grows

On the Republican side of the aisle, where many of the same legislators who cheered the bombing of Iraq "back to the Stone Age" have been dragging their feet on military action against Serbia, a shift is apparent. Reflecting anxieties at the Pentagon about a possible Vietnam-style "quagmire," they have begun to turn in favor of some solution involving lifting the arms embargo and the limited use of air power. Senate Minority Leader Robert Dole (R-Kan.) and Sen. Richard Lugar (R-Ind.) have long been proponents of getting tough with the Serbs. If Clinton decided on some limited military response, he would no doubt find bipartisan support.

The debate has been heated within the administration itself. On April 23, the *New York Times* reported that 12 State Department specialists, all with some professional connection to the Balkans, drafted a petition to Secretary of State Warren Christopher that called for military action against the Serbs. This highly unusual measure put pressure on the President and the secretary of state, who has perhaps been one of the more cautious voices in the Clinton cabinet discussions. Madeleine Albright, the U.S. ambassador to the United Nations, according to the *New York Times*, sent a memorandum to the White House urging air strikes to protect the predominantly Muslim towns and cities under siege in Bosnia.

The administration seems to feel that the United States could act on its own under existing United Nations authority. This would obviate the need for obtaining a formal go-ahead from America's European partners, who themselves failed to reach any agreement on the issue when European foreign ministers met in Denmark on April 24 to discuss the Bosnia situation. According to sources, those leaning toward military action within the Clinton cabinet include Vice President Al Gore, National Security Adviser Anthony Lake, and Secretary of Defense Les Aspin. Clinton met with congressional leaders at the White House on April 27 to assess the degree of support he would have on Capitol Hill for such action.

But time is growing short. The Serbian dismemberment of the nation of Bosnia-Herzegovina has been continuing for months. The President must act on his own authority, not seek endlessly for "consensus." If he doesn't act quickly, there will be few options left for him to choose.