

OCTOBER 10, 2002

SCHAKOWSKY: "WAR IS NOT JUST ANOTHER POLICY OPTION. IT MUST BE THE VERY LAST RESORT."

WASHINGTON, D.C. - U.S. Representative Jan Schakowsky (D-IL) was among 126 Democrats who voted against H.Con.Res. 114, a resolution giving the President the authority to launch a preemptive, unilateral attack on Iraq. Schakowsky joined 154 other members in support of an alternative proposal calling for collective international action to disarm Iraq.

"Saddam Hussein is an oppressive tyrant and his arsenal of weapons of mass destruction must go. However, it would be unprecedented and wrong for the United States to launch into a unilateral preemptive war before having exhausted all opportunities to disarm him through the United Nations and a broad international coalition.," Schakowsky said.

"War is not just another policy option. It must be the very last resort," Schakowsky added.

The alternative proposal would have given the President the authority to commit U.S. Armed Forces to eliminate Iraq's weapons of mass destruction in accordance with a new United Nations Security Council resolution. However, if the United Nations fails to act or adopts a resolution that the President deems insufficient, the President can then seek the authority from Congress to use force.

"After World War II, the United States took the lead in creating the United Nations for the purpose of extending the rule of law around the world in order to prevent future wars. That goal tough and often elusive, is even more compelling today in a shrinking world in which technology makes it possible to virtually destroy the planet," Schakowsky said.

She concluded, "The United States, the undisputed super power, has the opportunity to use its great strength to lead the nations of the world toward accepting the rule of law. Or we can, as the new Bush doctrine spells out, use our power to attack at will those who may in the future pose a threat. This dangerous and contagious idea of preemptive will usher in a new century of violence and even catastrophe.

Below is Schakowsky's statement that she delivered on the House floor on Tuesday night during debate on H.Con.Res. 114:

These are the letters and e-mails I have received from my district, about 5,000 of them. These are the ones that support authorizing the President to launch a preemptive, unilateral attack war on Iraq - 14 of them. The rest are saying no to war.

These are letters from veterans and teachers, mothers and fathers, Republicans and Democrats. In many different voices, they are all saying, "War is not just another policy option. It must be the very last resort."

These are serious and thoughtful letters from patriots who are deeply concerned not only about the security of the United States but the soul of the United States.

One constituent says, "Unilateral behavior is not the example we as Americans should display to the rest of the world. We should support and insure the United Nation's resolutions to the fullest. And if necessary we should lead in enforcing the United Nation's resolutions."

Another says: "The current administration:

- Has provided no convincing evidence that going to war with Iraq is necessary or is the only option the US has at this time.

- Has given no compelling reasons for what has changed in Iraq that compels us to declare war at this time.

- Has presented no evidence that they have a long term strategy for a post-Saddam Iraq

- Has presented no evidence that they have carefully considered the long-term impact of such a move on global relations or terrorist threats.

If the President does have the compelling evidence of imminent threat that my constituent wants, he has not shown it to the Congress. The President says that "the entire world has witnessed Iraq's 11-year history of defiance, deception and bad faith." If Saddam is such a grave threat, why has the Administration waited until this moment to make his case? And why, as recently as 1998, was Halliburton, the company headed then by VP Cheney, doing business with Iraq and helping them rebuild their oil fields?

Some of my constituents suggest that oil just might have something to do with this, and others think it has more to do with November 5 than September 11.

Many others raise the concern of the constituent who says, "There are far too many other things that need to be dealt with in our country today (including health care, the state of the economy, corporate corruption as well as a host of environmental and international issues) for us to make preemptive war."

The two things NEVER suggested in these letters are, first, that Saddam Hussein is anything other than an evil and merciless dictator, and second, that the United States should sit back and do nothing to disarm him. Yet the President, in his speech, dismissed those who oppose a preemptive strike, by saying, "We could wait and hope that Saddam does not give weapons to terrorists or develop a nuclear weapon to blackmail the world."

With all do respect, Mr. President, there are no waiters or hoppers in this pile or in this Congress. This is not about action vs inaction. As Chicago Tribune columnist, Steve Chapman, said, since Desert Storm, "No one has been appeasing him. On the contrary we've kept the Iraqi regime confined to a tight little cage. We've stationed thousands of troops in Kuwait, we have air bases in Saudi Arabia, and we generally keep an aircraft carrier within striking distance of Iraq at all times. In short, we've let Hussein know that if he ever sets one toe across any of his borders, we'll stomp him flatter than a straw hat on the interstate. The policy of containment, backed by nuclear deterrent, is the same policy the United States employed against the Soviet Union for 40 years with successful results."

A preemptive strike, in my view, puts America and the world in more danger, not less. CIA Director Tenet wrote, "Should Saddam conclude that a U.S.-led attack could not longer be deterred, he probably would become much less constrained in adopting terrorist actions." To me this means that Israel, our great ally in the Middle East, would become a target of those attacks. Saddam would likely unleash whatever chemical and biological weapons it may have on Israel. The Middle East could be in flames, and the Arab and Muslim world united against the U.S. and Israel. The careful coalition that the U.S. assembled to fight what IS an imminent threat, the terrorist threat of al Qaeda, would come apart. The United States would be at war, bearing all the costs and all the clean up, which could take many years, alone. We would be putting our young men and women in uniform, as many as 300,000 of them in harms way, in the way of very serious harm. Information provided by the General Accounting Office and the Inspector General of the DOD raises very serious questions about our ability to adequately protect our troops from chemical and biological weapons. Can we justify sending them off to war with protective suits that may have holes in them when there are viable alternatives?

After World War II, the United States took the lead in creating the United Nations for the purpose of extending the rule of law around the world in order to prevent future wars. That goal, though too often elusive, is even more compelling today in a shrinking world in which technology makes it possible to virtually destroy the planet. The United States, the undisputed super power, has the opportunity to use its great strength to lead the nations of the world toward accepting the rule of law. Or we can, as the new Bush doctrine spells out, use our power to attack at will those who may in the future pose a threat. This dangerous and contagious idea of preemptive will usher in a new century of violence and even catastrophe.

We should vote no on this resolution granting the President the power to go to war. But we can vote yes for more appropriate and more sensible options. The Gentleman from

North Carolina (Mr. Spratt) and the Gentlelady from California (Ms. Lee) have provided us with resolutions that allow us to address the threat from Iraq without first choosing war.