

Congress gives Bush power to attack Iraq

October 11th, 2002

By Lynn Sweet

Chicago Sun-Times

WASHINGTON--Congress has handed President Bush the power to attack Iraq, in a pair of historic votes that put in play a new foreign policy doctrine sanctioning the U.S. use of preemptive military force.

The resolution was approved by the Senate early today on a vote of 77-23. Thursday, the House approved it 296-133.

Now that Bush has won what he wanted from Congress--the ability for the United States to unilaterally attack Iraq--attention shifts to the United Nations. The resolution allows Bush to act with or without UN approval.

"The U.S. position is making progress at the UN," said Sen. John McCain (R-Ariz.) during floor debate, "precisely because of our determination."

"The talks are progressing," State Department spokesman Richard Boucher said Thursday.

"The work continues. We've been in touch with other governments to continue to work on elements of a UN resolution."

But the real action in the UN over a new resolution with tough ground rules for intrusive weapons inspections was not taking place in New York. It is in the capitals of the four other countries besides the United States--Britain, France, China and Russia--who have veto power in the UN Security Council and are its permanent members.

Iraq does not want a new resolution. The stepped-up UN diplomacy comes with no specific timetable or U.S. deadline for the UN to act. Bush's UN speech Sept. 12 urged action in a matter of days and weeks, not months.

In New York, UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan was asked whether he was involved in talks with the five nations. He said he was not and did not believe it to be his role.

Britain backs the United States, while the other three nations are doing a diplomatic dance.

France's suggestion for a two-step resolution was rejected by the United States.

From the Senate floor Thursday, McCain argued that China, Russia and France all have motives for not wanting to back the United States on Iraq to buttress his position that the United States must not defer any authority to the UN.

"Russia is owed billions from its ill-advised arms deals with Saddam Hussein's Iraq," he said.

China, with its own "serious proliferation activities" and repression of its own people, "does not add any moral stature to our position." France "has armed Saddam Hussein for years."

"The House of Representatives has spoken clearly to the world and to the United Nations Security Council: The gathering threat of Iraq must be confronted fully and finally," Bush said immediately after the House vote.

Affirmation for Bush came as the partisan divisions over war in Iraq became sharply apparent in the vote, coming less than a month before congressional elections. In the House, yes votes were provided by 215 Republicans and 81 Democrats. The no votes were cast by 126

Democrats, one independent and only six Republicans.

A further political fault line erupted as the no votes in the House were made by almost every black and Hispanic member, most of whom are Democrats.

The vote follows a year of transformation for Bush and his global war against terror triggered by the Sept. 11, 2001, attacks where four hijacked jets targeted New York and Washington.

The United States sent troops to Afghanistan a year ago this week, and while soldiers rooted out strongholds of al-Qaida forces and their Taliban hosts, the drumbeat to tackle Iraq started in Washington. By the summer, Bush's administration hawks prevailed, and the White House started to broaden the war against terror to include Iraq and Saddam's weapons of mass destruction.

During the summer, the "Bush Doctrine" emerged, a post-Sept. 11 foreign policy whereby the United States stands ready to launch a preemptive strike against a threat to it.

Under pressure from Congress, Bush sent resolutions to Capitol Hill asking for authorization and traveled to New York on Sept. 12 where he told the UN General Assembly Saddam's regime was a "grave and gathering danger" and cranked up pressure on the world body to enforce its own resolutions against Iraq.

While some in Congress wanted the UN to act first, Bush resisted and was able to muster bipartisan support for his resolution, including all four House and Senate leaders. Senate Majority Leader Tom Daschle (D-S.D.) on Thursday morning ended a guessing game when he said he would vote for the Bush resolution.

"I know today is a moment of great responsibility," said House Minority Leader Richard Gephardt (D-Mo.) from the floor.

House International Relations Committee Chairman Henry J. Hyde (R-Ill.), who managed the GOP side of the floor debate, making a rhetorical point, asked if an attack were imminent. No one, he said, predicted attacks on Pearl Harbor or the World Trade Center.

"The world looks to us for leadership. The world looks to us for strength and resolve," said Hyde. "We make no demands for territory or commercial advantage. All we want is a peaceful world. ... By supporting the president, we send a message to the forces of conquest and chaos that America, the West, isn't as decadent as they think. Support the president."

Still, the ranks of House dissenters grew from the original 19 who started to organize against the resolution a few weeks ago to the 133 who voted no Thursday.

"So I hope the story today won't be this is a huge, overwhelming victory for the president of the United States and for war, because it is not," said Rep. Jan Schakowsky (D-Ill.), a key organizer of the opposition to the resolution. "I think what we did was surprise some people today. This is against overwhelming conventional wisdom that 'oh, everybody's going to be with the president.'"

Over in the Senate, Sen. Robert Byrd (D-W.Va.), an elder statesman of the chamber known for his oratory and mastery of Senate rules, spent most of the day in what he said he knew was a futile battle against the Bush resolution. Byrd threatened, but eventually declined, to launch a filibuster against the resolution.

"This is my 50th year in Congress. I never would have thought that I'd find a Senate which would lack the backbone to stand up against this stampede, stampede, this rush to war," Byrd said.

Sen. Richard Durbin (D-Ill.) voted against the resolution, while Sen. Peter Fitzgerald (R-Ill.) voted in favor of it.

The Illinois House delegation split mainly along party lines. All 10 Republicans and two

Democrats voted yes. The two Democratic yes votes were Rod Blagojevich, running for governor, and David Phelps, locked in a big re-election race against Rep. John Shimkus (R-Ill.). Also voting yes were Speaker J. Dennis Hastert, Hyde, Judy Biggert, Phil Crane, Tim Johnson, Mark Steven Kirk, Ray LaHood, Don Manzullo, Shimkus and Jerry Weller.

Voting against the resolution were Schakowsky, Jerry Costello, Danny Davis, Lane Evans, Luis Gutierrez, Jesse Jackson Jr., William Lipinski and Bobby Rush.