

Bush's Gulf war has paper-thin backing

by Kathleen Klenetsky

Although you would never know it if you depended on the major U.S. media for your information, support for President Bush's war-mongering in the Mideast is ebbing.

"When nearly 20% of the U.S. Congress comes out publicly opposing the use of force in the Gulf, then you know that Bush's policy is unpopular," remarked one Washington observer, referring to an Oct. 26 statement, signed by 81 members of the House of Representatives, which expressed "grave concern about the possibility of war in the Middle East." The statement continued, "We are emphatically opposed to any offensive military action."

Although not a word about this important challenge to the President's Persian Gulf policy has appeared in any major U.S. newspaper, or on any network news—to our knowledge, *EIR* is the only nationally circulated news organ that has reported it—its significance has not gone unnoticed in Western Europe, where it has garnered front-page coverage.

On Oct. 30, the London *Independent* ran a page-one story on the statement, headlined "Warning to Bush as anti-war sentiment in Congress grows." "The U.S. Congress has delivered its first serious warning to President George Bush," the article reported, noting that the number of signatures shows "a significant increase in anti-war sentiment in Congress."

The *Independent* was right on the mark. Not far into October, Rep. Ron Dellums (D-Calif.), one of the signers of the Oct. 26 declaration, wrote an open letter to President Bush urging him to seek a peaceful solution to the Mideast crisis. Only 33 of his colleagues signed that letter, which, while expressing opposition to a military option in the Gulf, was less strongly worded than the statement signed just weeks later by nearly triple that number.

That increase directly reflects the growth in anti-war sentiment among Americans in general, stemming not only from disenchantment with Operation Desert Shield itself, but also from a mushrooming lack of confidence in the judgment and competence of the Commander-in-Chief. A growing proportion of Americans simply do not trust George Bush, especially when it comes to life-and-death decisions. The possibility that Bush may be too "stressed out" to handle the crisis was raised by columnists Evans and Novak in their cable television broadcast Nov. 3. They pointed to Bush's bizarre statement that Saddam Hussein was worse than Hitler as evidence that the President has lost his balance.

Leading senators, among them, Republican Bob Dole (Kan.) and Democrat Dennis DeConcini (Ariz.), have pri-

vately confided that support for Bush's Mideast adventure "runs a mile wide and an inch deep."

Bush's attempt to whip up a war frenzy in the country has not been helped by reports that the Pentagon secretly estimates that upwards of 30,000 American soldiers could die in the first three weeks of a Gulf conflict. According to syndicated columnist Jack Anderson, the Defense Department's "most realistic estimate" is that 15,000 Americans would die in the first 20 days of fighting—an incredible toll, nearly one-third the total number of Americans killed in the Vietnam War.

Death toll

It is widely expected that as soon as American soldiers start being shipped home in body bags, the paper-thin backing for Bush's adventure will quickly turn into popular outrage. As Anderson pointed out in his column, Air Force chief of staff Michael Dugan predicted, shortly before he was fired, that "The American people will support this operation until body bags come home."

Even Gen. Norman Schwarzkopf, commander of U.S. forces in Saudi Arabia, has warned that a war in the Gulf could "last a long, long time and kill an awful lot of people," and would be "exactly the same" for the soldiers fighting it, as was the war in Vietnam. Schwarzkopf made his comments in an interview with the *Atlanta Journal-Constitution* during the last week of October.

There is a growing recognition that Bush is simply a patrician blue-stocking, who doesn't give a hoot about those outside his elite Establishment circle. Former Texas legislator Maury Maverick, writing in the San Antonio *Express News* several weeks ago, reflected this when he pointed out that the burden of a Gulf war would fall on poor Catholics—especially Hispanics—on blacks, and on poor white Baptists, who make up the majority of the U.S. Armed Forces. This is "discrimination," Maverick charged, and it is "being done by a combination of two of the most powerful and wealthy elements in the country: The Wall Street Episcopalian-Presbyterian crowd, ready for other people's sons to die for cheap oil, and by the flint-rock brittle portion of American Zionists, who are corrupting Judaism."

There is also a deepening concern among some military-related circles that a Mideast war will turn into a Vietnam-style fiasco. James Webb, who served as secretary of the Navy in the Reagan administration, told ABC News's "Nightline" broadcast Oct. 18, that he had "deep reservations" about Operation Desert Shield, and warned that if Bush uses the American troops offensively in the Gulf, he will be "walking into a quagmire." He warned that if the U.S. goes to war in the Mideast, it could produce lethal consequences, among them, an all-out Arab-Israeli war, an Iran takeover of Iraq, and/or the reestablishment of Soviet power in the Gulf area, "after we've been trying to keep them out for 40 years."