

just returned from a delegation trip to Belgrade. This delegation met with the entire Serbian high command, including extensive meetings with Milosevic himself. The Duma leaders felt confident that they (as friends of Milosevic) could get him to agree with these conditions.

The following week, I wrote to my Duma counterpart, Vladimir Ryzhkov (Deputy Speaker of the Duma, who would lead the Duma delegation) and made four requests of him. First, that an official invitation be extended in writing from the Duma, including the names of the entire Duma delegation. Second, that the trip to Belgrade include a face to face meeting with Milosevic himself. Third, that the Duma set up a meeting with the American POWs. Lastly, that the Duma delegation agree to accompany our delegation to a Kosovar refugee camp of our choosing.

On April 21, Deputy Ryzhkov wrote to me, with agreement on all issues.

THE DUMA VIEWPOINT

There are many reasons why the Russians were so proactive and engaging on such a crucial issue. First, these Duma leaders, many of whom are young, well-informed and realistic about the U.S. and the west, represent the future of Russia. The tottering, unpopular and reactive Yeltsin regime represents the past. Unfortunately, this Administration has embraced Yeltsin with all the misplaced fervor with which its predecessor embraced Gorbachev. Then as now, we cling to the current regime to the detriment of our relations with other emerging power centers in Russia.

In addition, these Duma leaders are extremely wary of the rising nationalist fervor that the conflict in Kosovo has triggered in Russia. The perception that Russia is unimportant to the Kosovo operation does not sit well with Russians accustomed to superpower status. The Duma leadership is worried that Yeltsin will respond to this nationalism by taking drastic actions that could further isolate Russia from the west.

It is therefore in Russia's interest to have this conflict over quickly. The Duma leaders are realists, however. They understand that NATO has the upper hand and will only end the conflict on terms of its own choosing. That is why they are willing to support an end to the conflict largely on NATO's terms.

ATTEMPTING TO WORK WITH THE ADMINISTRATION

Given this major breakthrough in the official Russian position, I immediately attempted to win Administration support for the joint effort. During that same week, I spoke with Leon Feurth of the Vice President's staff and NSC staff member Carlos Pascual.

During that same week, I briefed by phone CIA Director George Tenet and Ambassador Steve Sestanovich, the State Department official in charge of Russia and the Newly Independent States.

With this agreement in hand, I began to brief key Democrats to urge that they enlist the Administration's support. After several calls to National Security Adviser Sandy

Berger went unreturned, Congressman Hoyer set up a face to face meeting with Deputy Secretary of State Strobe Talbott on April 22. That meeting lasted more than two hours. At that meeting Congressman Hoyer and I made clear that our goal and the Administration's goal was the same—to get Milosevic to agree to NATO's conditions. Period. We would not be there to negotiate. Our presence was critical only to demonstrate to Milosevic that Russia and the U.S. were united on this critical issue.

That same day, I briefed Speaker Hastert and Majority Leader Armev. The Speaker agreed to authorize the trip if the Administration did not object.

That evening, Deputy Secretary Talbott called to inform me that after discussions with the Secretary of State and the Secretary of Defense, the Administration would not support the joint delegation. I feel strongly that the Clinton-Gore team allowed a tremendous opportunity to slip through its fingers.

NEXT STEPS FOR U.S.-RUSSIAN COOPERATION ON KOSOVO

I cannot understand why the Administration would reject out of hand an offer by the Russians to help NATO achieve its goals. After spending the better part of a week urging the Russians to act constructively, our government rebuffed a good-faith effort by some of the top leaders in Russia to help end the crisis on NATO's terms. To say that I am puzzled would be an understatement.

Many Republicans and Democrats want to stay the course with the Russians. In fact, the Administration itself supported the idea of the two delegations meeting in a neutral country to work out a joint agreement which could then be presented to Milosevic.

I am inclined to pursue this option—and so are our Russian counterparts. To that end, I would like to form a special House Working Group on U.S.-Russian Cooperation on Kosovo to pursue specific initiatives to help us resolve the Kosovo crisis without a ground campaign. If you would like to join me in this effort, please contact me or Erin Coyle in my office at 5-2011.

Sincerely,

CURT WELDON,
Member of Congress.

I would encourage my good friend to invite those from his side and I will invite those from my side to join us in this effort. I think not only can we play a role in engaging the Duma to show them that we appreciate their good work, but hopefully to find a commonality between us. But I think by doing this, we send the signal to both the administration and other nations that we want to find a way to resolve this conflict that leaves respect for all of us and for NATO.

I called some of the NATO governments today, Greece, Italy, Germany. I told you about the Ukraine statement of President Kuchma, trying to ascertain what their feelings are. Surprisingly, many of our allies also want to

retain the strength and dignity of NATO but also want to see the kind of efforts that we are doing succeed. They do not want to see this under any circumstance result in a ground war that causes significant loss of life and could well lead to a world conflict because of the potential confrontation of the U.S. with Russia. I think we are on the right track. We know where we are going. This is not some radical effort. I could have gone over to Belgrade on Sunday. I did not have to have the permission of our government.

DUMA-CONGRESS PEACE PLAN ON KOSOVO

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mrs. BIGGERT). Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from Hawaii (Mr. ABERCROMBIE) is recognized for 5 minutes.

Mr. ABERCROMBIE. Madam Speaker, I yield to the gentleman from Pennsylvania.

Mr. WELDON of Pennsylvania. I thank my colleague and friend for yielding.

I would just say that we could have gone that route. We could have gone into Belgrade. We could have done that as other people have done and as people are doing right now. Jesse Jackson, I understand, is over there right now without the support of this government. We did not do that. We chose the constructive route. We will continue that route.

I just want to say in closing, I want to thank my friend and colleague for his effort, because he has received criticism on his side as I have on mine. In the end we know we are doing the right thing.

RECESS

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to clause 12 of rule I, the Chair declares the House in recess subject to the call of the Chair.

Accordingly (at 10 o'clock and 5 minutes p.m.), the House stood in recess subject to the call of the Chair.

□ 2347

AFTER RECESS

The recess having expired, the House was called to order by the Speaker pro tempore (Mr. LINDER) at 11 o'clock and 47 minutes p.m.