

# The No-Nukes Party

The Mondale Democrats are alive and well in the U.S. Senate. **BY DANIEL MCKIVERGAN**

SUPPOSE A FEW YEARS FROM NOW, a nation hostile to the United States and its allies is manufacturing biological, chemical, or nuclear weapons in a super-hardened bunker deep underground. And suppose the miscreant nation has ties to terrorist organizations dedicated to killing as many Americans as they can. The U.S. president judges the facility a major national security threat and asks the military to come up with options for taking out the complex should force be necessary.

Just such a scenario—and our lack of any real solution to the problem—is what prompted Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld to seek to include language in the 2004 Defense Authorization bill that would repeal a 10-year-old ban on all “research and development which could lead to the production by the United States of a new low-yield nuclear weapon, including a precision low-yield warhead.” Lifting the ban would allow the Pentagon to study the effects of using a low-yield nuclear deep-earth penetrating weapon against a bunker complex, as well as the feasibility of using conventional munitions. “The threat,” Joint Chiefs chairman Richard Myers said last week, “in many cases is going underground.”

Moreover, as Myers also explained, hitting a chemical or biological bunker with a conventional weapon may have a disastrous impact in some circumstances. Anthrax spores, say, or chemical compounds that would be destroyed by the gamma rays and high heat of a low-yield nuclear device might actually be spread in the aftermath of a conventional attack.

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Most Republicans undoubtedly agreed with Rumsfeld that it’s only prudent “to look at a variety of different ways, conceivably, to develop the ability to reach a deeply buried target.” Not so Senate Democrats. When the defense authorization bill reached the Senate floor last week, Democrats launched a well-organized assault on the proposal with arguments reminiscent of the 1980s, when a nuclear freeze was all the rage in Democratic circles.

Senators Dianne Feinstein and Ted Kennedy led the charge by offering an amendment to keep the ban in place. They argued that repealing it would have no military benefit, which must have been news to Air Force chief of staff John Jumper, who told the Senate Armed Services Committee that repealing the ban “is required in order to evaluate all potential options to meet current and emerging combatant commanders’ requirements.”

The senators argued, too, that repealing the ban would be the height of proliferation hypocrisy. “We are telling others not to develop nuclear weapons,” said Feinstein, yet we are behaving as if it were “all right for us to go out and begin to develop weapons.” The fact that nations like Iran and North Korea have been pursuing nuclear weapons despite the existence of the ban seems lost on Feinstein, as does the silliness of believing that keeping the ban will encourage tyrants like Kim Jong Il to forgo their nuclear ambitions.

If anything, Rumsfeld argued last week, “to the extent the United States is prohibited from studying the use of such weapons, for example, for a deep earth penetrator, the effect in the world is that it tells the world that they’re wise to invest in going underground.”

Finally, the Democratic senators argued that President Bush’s national security doctrine in general was destabilizing and would encourage a renewed nuclear arms race.

Astonishingly, the entire Democratic caucus—with the notable exceptions of Georgia’s Zell Miller, Ben Nelson of Nebraska, and Indiana’s Evan Bayh—supported the Feinstein-Kennedy amendment, which all but one Republican, Lincoln Chafee of Rhode Island, opposed. Not only did Democrats vote for it, but a parade of them trooped to the Senate floor to deliver remarks that sounded as if they’d been lifted from a Walter Mondale campaign speech attacking President Reagan’s ultimately successful nuclear policy toward the Soviet Union.

While Feinstein found the administration’s position “chilling and even diabolical,” Ted Kennedy said his colleagues had to make a simple calculation in deciding whether or not to vote for the Democratic amendment: “You’re either for nuclear war, or you’re not.” Illinois’s Dick Durbin said the bill is a “declaration that the United States is prepared to launch a nuclear arms race in the world again.” “Perilous” is how Russ Feingold of Wisconsin characterized the president’s policy; “crazy” and “dangerously destabilizing” were the choice words of Minnesota’s Mark Dayton.

Ironically, the day after the vote on Feinstein-Kennedy, former Gore campaign manager Donna Brazile and Clinton State Department official Timothy Bergreen wrote in a *Wall Street Journal* column that Americans “believe that we Democrats are weak and indecisive when it comes to standing up to dictators and terrorists, and when it comes to the primary responsibility of government: defending the nation.” “What Would Scoop Do?” was the title of their op-ed. My guess is that Scoop Jackson—who, they wrote, was “the Democratic mentor of some of today’s most prominent Republican hawks”—would have voted a little differently on Feinstein-Kennedy from, say, Joe Biden, Chris Dodd, Carl Levin, Tom Daschle, Joe Lieberman, and just about every other Democrat in the Senate. ♦