

Bob Dole



NEWS

U.S. SENATOR FOR KANSAS

FROM:

SENATE REPUBLICAN LEADER

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STROBE TALBOTT NOMINATION

Washington -- Senate Republican Leader Bob Dole today made the following remarks on the Senate floor regarding the nomination of Strobe Talbott to be Deputy Secretary of State:

Until last week, I was prepared to reluctantly support the President's nominee for Deputy Secretary of State, Strobe Talbott, but with serious reservations. However, I have decided a strong signal needs to be sent -- enough promotions for Strobe Talbott.

There is no doubt that Strobe Talbott has an impressive background -- he is well-educated, well-traveled, and has had a prolific career as a journalist. However, my concerns rest with Mr. Talbott's perspective on U.S. foreign policy matters -- specifically his judgment on how best to promote U.S. interests. In light of the widespread speculation that Ambassador Talbott is well on his way to becoming Secretary of State, our vote this afternoon is even more importance.

During the cold war, Mr. Talbott was critical of tough minded policies toward the Soviet Union. He argued that a hard-nosed approach would be ineffective and counter-productive. Yet now that the cold war is over, we learn from top soviet military leadership that the strong U.S. defense posture -- including programs like the Strategic Defense Initiative initiated during the Reagan administration -- had a significant impact on the demise of the Soviet Union.

It is also clear that it paid off to expose the Soviet regime for what it was -- illegitimate, totalitarian and imperialistic -- regardless of how much these characterizations offended the Soviet leadership. Despite Mr. Talbott's protestations, the clear statement of U.S. principles heartened aspiring Democrats throughout the Soviet bloc.

Ambassador Talbott tries to have it both ways. He opposed tough policies during the cold war, and then wrote that "the doves in the great debate of the last forty years were right all along" once the tough policies paid off. Twelve years ago, President Reagan spoke of leaving the Soviet system on "the ash heap of history." Talbott criticized that bold -- and prophetic -- remark as "bear-baiting." In my view, it was precisely because the West was resolute -- and unafraid to speak and act clearly -- that the Soviet system has been left on the ash heap of history.

There is no doubt that the U.S. relationship with Russia is a central element of our foreign policy. And, Mr. Talbott has learned a great deal about Russia over the years. However, Russia is not our only interest. It seems to me that Mr. Talbott must be reminded of that fact.

Over the past few months Russia has been casting silent vetoes over U.S. foreign policy options. I am concerned that Mr. Talbott has been the leading advocate within the Administration for yielding to Russia's wishes.

I do not want to be misunderstood. I am a strong supporter of President Yeltsin and his reform program. The Congress has backed up its support for Russian reform with a substantial aid package. However, I am opposed to developing U.S. foreign policy options according to the expected response from hardliners in russia. U.S. interests should guide U.S. foreign policy, not the potential reaction of Yeltsin critics. At the NATO summit, the United States rejected the pleas from Poland, Hungary and the Czech Republic to join NATO and instead offered the Partnership

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for Peace. Reportedly, Mr. Talbott played a critical role in resisting the move toward establishing criteria for expanded NATO membership because of Russian objections. President Yeltsin changed his position on expanding NATO after the military sided with him in his showdown with the parliament; he is probably trying to keep the military leadership on his side -- and that is understandable.

The Administration is also considering supporting Russian military actions in former Soviet Republics under the banner of United Nations peacekeeping. I asked Ambassador Talbott several questions for the record on this issue. His responses do not satisfy my concerns. For example, Ambassador Talbott writes that the "Russian role must be desired by all parties" before the U.S. would vote "yes" at the U.N. But I hope Ambassador Talbott recalls that the Soviets were "invited" into Hungary in 1956, Czechoslovakia in 1968, and Afghanistan in 1979. Giving the overwhelming power and presence of Russia in the so-called "near abroad," the freedom of countries like Georgia, Tajikistan and others to "desire" Russian peacekeeping is in serious question. This Administration has enough problems on its peacekeeping platter without indulging and legitimizing Russian neo-imperialism.

The U.S. response to Yeltsin's domestic pressure should not be abandoning the right course, but reassuring President Yeltsin as we reassured President Gorbachev when Germany was reunited and Eastern Germany joined NATO as part of that process. The best way to strengthen the hand of hardliners is to remain silent toward their policies.

This Russia tilt is evident in U.S. policy toward Bosnia. The United States has bent over backward to accommodate Russia -- which staunchly opposes tough action against its close ally, Serbia -- despite the fact that Serbia is the aggressor. While I support NATO's latest decision, it is more than just even-handed, it favors the Serbian position. And Russia's involvement is destined to make the situation even more favorable to the Bosnian Serbs.

The United States must not only expect reform in Russia's domestic policy, but in its foreign policy, as well.

Finally, many of Ambassador Talbott's writings about the Middle East reveal a clear anti-Israel bias. He has shown virtually no regard for Israel's legitimate security concerns. He has compared Israel to Saddam Hussien's Iraq. He has disparaged Jewish-Americans. He has repeatedly seen the worst in Israel and the best in hard-line Arab states. At his committee hearing, we heard of a classic confirmation conversion when Ambassador Talbott disavowed these writings. But his disavowal does not put the concerns shared by many Americans to rest.

Because of my misgivings, I will vote against confirming Ambassador Talbott as Deputy Secretary of State. While I believe in the right of the President to have the nominees of his or her choice, I do believe the Senate has a right to work its will on potential nominees. President Clinton may share Ambassador Talbott's views -- on the Middle East, on the cold war, and on policy toward Russia. If he does, we in the Senate will consider and debate Administration policies based on those views in the coming months. And we will monitor Ambassador Talbott's performance and policies toward Russia, Bosnia, Israel and the rest of the world if he is confirmed -- as I expect he will be.

However, I will vote against Ambassador Talbott because of my concerns over his past views -- only some of which have been renounced -- and because I believe he is not the right person for this, or any more senior, position.

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