

REMOVAL OF NAME OF MEMBER  
AS COSPONSOR OF H.R. 3156

Mr. COOKSEY. Mr. Speaker, I ask unanimous consent that my name be removed as a cosponsor of H.R. 3156.

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mr. GUTKNECHT). Is there objection to the request of the gentleman from Louisiana?

There was no objection.

REPUBLIC OF TURKEY SEEKING  
U.S. APPROVAL

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under the Speaker's announced policy of January 7, 1997, the gentleman from New Jersey (Mr. PALLONE) is recognized for 60 minutes as the designee of the minority leader.

Mr. PALLONE. Mr. Speaker, I do not plan to use very much of the hour this evening, probably about 15 or 20 minutes.

My topic relates to foreign affairs and U.S. relations with two countries that I feel very close to. One is Armenia. I happen to cochair the Armenia Caucus in the House of Representatives. And also India, another country where I cochair our Members' caucus that we have with approximately 100 Members, in the case of the India Caucus, and I think 65 or so in the Armenia Caucus.

I would like to turn first to the situation in Armenia. I should say really threats, if you will, to the Republic of Armenia, and also the Republic of Nagorno Karabagh that are coming, once again, from its neighbors.

I would like to specifically address a very troubling situation involving the possible transfer of sophisticated U.S. arms to Azerbaijan, an unstable and undemocratic regime. There have recently been press reports suggesting that the Republic of Turkey, another neighbor of Armenia, is seeking U.S. approval to sell F-16 fighter planes, assembled in Turkey, but based on a U.S. license, to the Republic of Azerbaijan.

According to the press reports, the idea of arms sale emerged during talks between government officials from the two countries regarding a Turkey-Azerbaijan defense agreement.

Mr. Speaker, for the transfer of the F-16's to take place, Turkey would have to seek permission from the United States and also of NATO. I have come to the House floor tonight to ask my colleagues to join me in urging our administration to reject any such proposal and discourage Turkey's growing role as an arms supplier to such volatile regions as the Transcaucasus and the Middle East.

In the next few days, I will be seeking signatures for letters to our President and other key national security officials in opposition to the Turkish sale of F-16's to Azerbaijan. Indeed, Mr. Speaker, it is inconceivable to me, and I think to most of the American people that our military, diplomatic, and intelligence agencies would even contemplate such a proposal.

While all the facts about the F-16 deal are still somewhat in dispute, these recent reports are the latest indication of a growing military and political alliance between Turkey and Azerbaijan, a very troubling development in terms of peace, stability, and democracy in this strategically important Caucasus region.

Both Turkey and Azerbaijan continue to maintain blockades of their neighbor, Armenia. These blockades, which are both illegal and immoral, have made it extremely difficult for much-needed emergency food, medicine, and energy supplies to reach the people in Armenia, including supplies sent by the American people.

In addition, Azerbaijan continues to refuse to compromise on negotiations to achieve a settlement over the Nagorno Karabagh conflict. Nagorno Karabagh is a region that has been primarily populated by Armenians for centuries, which has proclaimed its independence about 10 years ago, but which continues to be claimed by Azerbaijan. As a matter of fact, Azerbaijan also continues to maintain a blockade of Nagorno Karabagh, causing significant human hardship there as well.

Mr. Speaker, when I was in the region earlier this year in the Caucasus, in the frontline area of Karabagh, which was the target of constant sniper fire from Azerbaijani forces, I became aware of a very disturbing fact, which I would like to point out this evening.

The equipment that was being used by the Azerbaijani forces, from the weapons right down to the uniforms, were American and NATO supplies, provided to Turkey and then funneled to Azerbaijan.

Of course, Turkey, as we know, is a NATO ally, despite the fact that, unlike the other NATO countries of North America and Western Europe, Turkey is a country with numerous restrictions on democratic and civil liberties and a terrible human rights record.

But while Turkey is a NATO member, Azerbaijan is not, and it should not be receiving American military equipment, particularly not anything as sophisticated and dangerous as F-16 aircraft. Turkey should not be supplying such equipment to other nations.

Mr. Speaker, Azerbaijan is not exactly one of the democratic success stories of the former Soviet Union. In fact, the leader of Azerbaijan, Heydar Aliyev, is a former Communist Party boss who seized power in a coup and has led an authoritarian regime ever since. He has not permitted opposition political organizations or a free media.

More shocking, while oil wealth begins to pour into the Azeri capital of Baku, President Aliyev has done nothing to relieve the suffering of his own people in the countryside of Azerbaijan. Yet, it is precisely the huge oil wealth and Azeri territory in the Caspian Sea that has led Western Governments, including, I am sorry to say, our own government, to tolerate and promote this antidemocratic regime.

The combination of the oil resources in Azerbaijan and Turkey's position as a NATO member have led to excessive tolerance, in my opinion, on the part of our State Department for these two regimes and their growing military partnership.

I just hope, Mr. Speaker, and this is the last thing I would like to say tonight on this subject, is I just hope that the proposed Turkish-Azerbaijani F-16 sale will be where we finally draw the line in our support for this undemocratic regime and the dangerous situation that the F-16s might pose if this sale were ever allowed.

Now, Mr. Speaker, if I could, I would like to switch now and talk again briefly about the situation in India. I would like to make a very positive statement, if I could, about the recent visit to India by some of our U.S. officials representing the President. I speak today specifically about U.S. Ambassador to the United Nations, Mr. Bill Richardson, a former colleague of ours in the House of Representatives; Assistant Secretary of State for South Asia, Mr. Karl Inderfurth; and Director for South Asia in the National Security Council, Mr. Bruce Reidel, who recently made a very successful trip to India.

Indian and American officials associated with the trip have stated that the meetings were conducted with exceptional warmth, which can only indicate that U.S.-India relations have never been stronger.

I wanted to say, Mr. Speaker, that Ambassador Richardson and Secretary Inderfurth have traveled to South Asia in preparation for President Clinton's trip to the subcontinent, which was scheduled for this fall. As you know, President Clinton's trip to South Asia will be the first by an American President that has taken place in over 20 years.

These meetings were not intended to produce high-level agreements, but they gave senior administration officials the opportunity to meet with senior officials from the newly elected Indian government. The government in India changed hands. It was an election in March, and a new government took office in early April. Numerous issues were discussed with our U.S. officials and the new government, and I am pleased to see that the talks were very positive.

I wanted to talk about some of the issues that were discussed, because I think they are important. The U.S. delegation spent much of its time encouraging the reassertion of dialogue between India and Pakistan. This was something that the previous Prime Minister Gujral had encouraged quite a bit.

Talks between these South Asian neighbors had abruptly ended in September just prior to the new election cycle when both countries failed to resolve their differences over Kashmir. Fortunately, soon after Ambassador Richardson and Secretary Inderfurth