

FIFTH DISTRICT REPORT
BY CONGRESSMAN PAUL TSONGAS

THE VOTE AGAINST THE ENDING OF THE TURKISH ARMS BAN

Late last week the Congress rejected a bill supported by the Administration that would have ended the U.S. arms embargo against Turkey. The bill was defeated 223 to 206.

The vote was even closer than the final total indicates. As the 15-minute electronic roll call came to an end, the vote see-sawed, then finally settled at the 17 ballot margin. The emotional speeches on the House floor, the pressure-packed final vote, and the uncharacteristic cheer that arose from the House gallery revealed the importance of the issue to all concerned.

In fact, the week had been punctuated by White House lobbying sessions, Congressional briefings, and a large volume of mail from constituents. The White House breakfast session that I attended turned out to be a last ditch attempt to change members of Congress' minds on this issue. The President, Vice President, Secretary of State, and Secretary of Defense spoke for the bill to end the embargo. At the meeting, I indicated my disappointment with the Administration's failure to seek concessions from Turkey. Unfortunately, there was no willingness to compromise, only attempts to dictate foreign policy. This attitude will now have to change. I am hopeful that this will push the Administration and Turkey towards the realization that immediate steps must be taken to work out a solution in Cyprus before the arms ban will be lifted.

The Issues Involved

The decision on the bill to end the arms embargo was not a matter of American foreign policy favoring Turkey or Greece. There were three fundamental questions that this issue posed.

The first issue was whether our government would uphold its own laws. Two foreign aid acts specifically declare that no arms shall be furnished to any country except for defensive purposes. When Turkish troops invaded Cyprus one year ago they used American weapons. This was a clear violation of U.S. law. When the Administration failed to enforce the law by suspending arms sales, the Congress imposed an arms embargo. Secretary of State Kissinger has repeatedly undermined the effectiveness of the military aid ban with public and private assurances to the Turks that the ban could be lifted without concessions being offered. This resulted in a stalemate on attempts to resolve the Cyprus situation. Congress' vote last week was consistent with the rule of law.

Secondly, the vote gave notice to foreign governments that the U.S. will not be blackmailed into policy changes. The question was whether the U.S. would be coerced by the threats of a foreign government. The Congress clearly stated that solutions to serious problems are not fostered by coercion.

Thirdly, the Congress properly asserted its Constitutional authority in foreign affairs. In recent months, Congress has played a significant role in ending this country's involvement in Southeast Asia, denied favored nation status to the Soviet Union because of emigration policies, and now rejected new arms to Turkey. Rather than interfering with Executive privileges, the Legislative branch has properly exercised the principle of checks and balances.

The final rejection of the Administration supported bill came after the White House rejected a number of efforts at compromise. During the past few weeks, the President and Secretary of State Kissinger prepared a fraudulent compromise that offered no change in policy. Turkey was not required to make any concessions. There was no guarantee that serious negotiations would be initiated in Cyprus. I am afraid that this is another example of the President's political confrontation policies that result only in Congressional rejection of Administration proposals or Presidential vetoes of Congressional initiatives.

I am hopeful that the United States can eventually restore good relations with both Greece and Turkey. However, any attempts towards these goals must be consistent with our own laws and own ideals.