Whose Side is Congress On?

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The first week of August, the liberal Democrats in the U.S. Senate indulged in some pacifist euphoria and voted to cripple our Strategic Defense Initiative (SDI) by cutting out one-fourth of its money ($4.7 billion cut to $3.6 billion). After all, Mikhail Gorbachev is our friend now and Communism isn't a threat any more, so we can cut back on military defenses and start spending the “peace dividend.”

Or so they thought. But the very same week, Saddam Hussein moved into Kuwait, and six days later the U.S. 82nd Airborne Division began landing in Saudi Arabia. In the words of the old popular song, “What a difference a day makes.”

President Bush has as much as said that he hopes someone will rid the world of Saddam. Not only is he a well-armed, aggressive, and dangerous enemy, but Westerners find him unpredictable. He has used chemical weapons before, and may do so again.

So why don’t we just bomb Iraq's military targets? why didn't we take them out before Saddam cushioned those targets with layers of American and British hostages as a human shield?

The answer to that is, we don't dare, and the reason we don't dare is that we don't have any missile defenses. If we made a preemptive strike at Iraq's targets, and he hit back with his chemical-tipped missiles, our losses would be horrible.

Oh, sure, we could then nuke Saddam,' but that wouldn't save the victims of the chemical weapons already used. That's the total difference between being able to defend yourself and only being able to retaliate against the bad guy.

Iraq has chemical weapons, including mustard gas, cyanide, and nerve gas (including Tabun and Sarin). A small drop of the nerve gas Sarin can cause death in two to 30 minutes after being absorbed through the lungs and skin.

Iraq can fire chemical weapons from both aircraft and artillery. According to recently published reports, artillery shells with chemical warheads can distribute a

quart of chemical agent as far as 30 feet in diameter, destroying and panicking unprotected troops, even if armored.

The rubber suits and masks we've seen on television can give some but not complete protection, and against some but not all chemical weapons which Iraq is known to possess. Providing this protection to American troops would mean they would suffer wearing these unpleasant suits in 120-degree heat, and only at the cost of making our soldiers less effective.

The Iraqis have a missile with a range of 375 miles called an Al-Hussein which can carry a chemical warhead and reach the Saudi capital city of Riyadh, as well as Saudi oil. If the Iraqis choose to use that kind of weapon, they could kill hundreds of locals and U.S. troops.

Ever since President, Reagan launched the SDI concept in l983, the debate has centered about the issue of defending 240 million Americans against a massive Soviet attack, which the naysayers argued would be ineffective because some Soviet missiles would surely leak thorough. Now Saddam has shown us the need for another kind of missile defense system.

What we need in today's crisis is theater missile defense interceptors which can shoot down Saddam's Al-Hussein missiles tipped with chemical weapons. Without that capability, we don't dare to provoke him into using weapons against which we have no defense.

But the Senate liberals slashed away at the small part of our military budget which is devoted to building defenses against missiles. They even eliminated funds for the most important part' of SDI, the development and testing of Brilliant Pebbles, which could give us a near-term, effective, and layered defense.

Brilliant Pebbles can knock out enemy missiles early in flight, before their multiple warheads have separated. The tests on Brilliant Pebbles have all been positive, and new breakthroughs are steadily bringing down the overall cost.

The Senate liberals, however, want. SDI only where it Serves pork- barrel goals to make jobs for constituents. They are refusing to give SDI enough funding to allow President Bush to make a deployment decision in the next decade.

Fortunately, Israel is developing a defensive system called the Arow, and on August 9 conducted a successful test of its launch and propulsion systems. Maybe

being closer to the Hitler of the 1990s, Israel understands why survival requires defensive as well as offensive capabilities .