Censure the President's Bosnian Expedition

December 21, 1995 by Phyllis Schlafly

"To sin by silence makes cowards of us all." Where is the Republicans' call for the censure, or even the impeachment, of President Clinton for his unconstitutional, unauthorized, unfunded and unwise ordering of American troops into a foreign war in the former Yugoslavia?

All right, let's be fair. In Richard Holbrooke's words, it's only half a war. What he said was, "it's half way between war and peace." Clinton has already carried out air strikes against one side.

Article II, Section 2 of the United States Constitution states: "The President shall be Commander in Chief of the Army and Navy of the United States, and of the Militia of the several States, when called into the actual service of the United States."

The two commas in that sentence make it clear that "when called into the actual service of the United States" is a modifier of both "the Army and Navy", and "the Militia." And Congress hasn't called them into service. Our so-eloquently-written Constitution says what it means and means what it says.

The notion that the President himself, as Commander in Chief of the Army and Navy, may dispatch our army and navy wherever and whenever he wishes is heretical not only to the text but to the whole scheme of our Constitution and the intent of its authors.

Article I, Section 8 of the Constitution is even more specific about the military power: "The Congress shall have power . . . To declare war . . . To raise and support armies, but no appropriation of money to that use shall be for a longer term than two years; To provide and maintain a Navy; To make rules for the government and regulation of the land and naval forces."

Congress's exclusive power to get us into war does not permit the President to get us in half a war. Congress should refuse the appropriations and make rules and regulations to prohibit sending U.S. soldiers into Bosnia.

It makes no difference whether or not NATO approves it. The issue is whether Congress and the American people approve it -- and they don't.

If there ever was an example of why the American people are disgusted with and fearful of government, and why they support Term Limits, it is Senator John McCain's saying on national television last week that his calls from his constituents are 100 to one against the President sending troops into Bosnia, but he supports the President anyway. Whatever happened to democracy and self-government?

It's no argument to say that other Presidents have sent U.S. troops abroad without a declaration of war by Congress. In the first place, it's not OK to commit an unconstitutional act just because someone else did it, too.

In the second place, in most of those other cases the President enjoyed a Congress of the same party, and the minority party was powerless to overturn his actions.

Thirdly, in those other incidents, the President had some sort of Congressional or emergency authority for his decision, or he was acting to defend American lives or vital interests. In Bosnia, there isn't even a fig leaf of authority to cover his naked abuse of power.

The only debate we hear on television pro-and-con programs concerns the "exit strategy" -- whether or not Clinton has a plan to get our troops out of Bosnia next year. That's not the issue. We should be attacking the plan to send them into Bosnia this year.

The issue is not how many, if any, U.S. soldiers will be killed. The issue is sending them there at all. It's possible that there may be no casualties right away since, in this 500-year-old war, the combatants usually take a Christmas break in the bitter cold months and then resume when the weather is more favorable to fighting.

All the whining palaver we hear about "we must support the troops" is disingenuous and dangerous. The best way we can support our troops is to bring them home and save them from walking across foreign fields where four to eight million mines are concealed.

We are told that we have to accept Clinton's actions because "it's a done deal -- the troops are already moving into Bosnia." Well, Congress should undo the deal! Have the troops turn around and come back. Cut off the money. Are we living in some kind of a dictatorship?

We are told that such an action would embarrass Clinton in front of our NATO allies. Clinton's already embarrassed about so many things that one more won't make any difference.

NATO itself has no authority to engage in a "peacekeeping" mission, much less a local war. NATO's charter empowered it only to resist an invasion of Western Europe by the Soviets.

It is a tragic abdication of leadership for Senate Majority Leader Bob Dole to support Clinton's unconstitutional act, and it is appalling to think that a man who is so impervious to the wishes of the American people might be nominated by the Republican Party for the presidency. Bob Dole should be replaced as Senate Majority Leader by a man who is courageously speaking out against Clinton's Bosnian expedition, Senator Trent Lott.

If the Republican Party stands for anything, it must stand for American sovereignty and for a government that respects the U.S. Constitution.