

The Heritage Foundation **Backgrounder**

214 Massachusetts Avenue, N.E. Washington, D.C. 20002-4999 (202) 546-4400

UPDATE

12/15/95

Number 267

CLINTON'S BOSNIA VENTURE THREATENS WHAT IT IS SUPPOSED TO UPHOLD—THE ATLANTIC ALLIANCE

(Updating *Backgrounder* No. 1012, "Don't Let Bosnia Destroy NATO," December 28, 1994.)

A year ago, The Heritage Foundation warned that the North Atlantic Treaty Organization's credibility was being severely damaged by subordination of its Bosnian peace enforcement efforts to an impotent and ineffective United Nations (UNPROFOR) command structure. At the same time, Heritage warned that misguided attempts to salvage NATO's credibility by "Americanizing" the Balkan conflict could destroy the alliance, because it would impose a responsibility which NATO was not designed to handle.¹

Today, as a result of the Dayton peace agreement, the Bosnia war is being Americanized. Advance parties of U.S. and allied troops already are in Bosnia or on their way. Now that the formal peace agreement has been signed in Paris, the U.S. First Armored Division will begin moving from Germany into northeast Bosnia. In all, some 60,000 NATO troops, including upwards of 20,000 Americans and contingents from 11 non-NATO countries, will take part in the Bosnian Implementation Force (IFOR). This number does not include the even larger logistical "tail," as well as naval and air units, that will be dedicated to supporting U.S. elements on the ground.

This massive deployment of American ground forces for a peacekeeping mission—one in which there is no emergency, no threat to U.S. lives, and no immediate national security interest at stake—is unprecedented. Nevertheless, it is going forward. On December 13 the Senate offered qualified and grudging support for the troops and mission in Bosnia, while the House backed the troops but opposed the President's policy.

Deploying 20,000 U.S. troops to IFOR is highly risky and unnecessary. But the Clinton Administration painted the United States into a corner with ill-considered promises of ground troops and by making U.S. participation in the peacekeeping force a condition of the Dayton peace framework. Once these commitments were on the table, the Administration found it necessary to invoke the sanctity of U.S. commitments, America's credibility and prestige, and the continued strength of the Atlantic alliance in order to sell the deployment to Congress. For these reasons, Congress had no choice but to offer its support at least for U.S. troops in Bosnia.

¹ Kim R. Holmes and Lawrence T. DiRita, "Don't Let Bosnia Destroy NATO," Heritage Foundation *Backgrounder* No. 1012, December 28, 1994.

The IFOR commitment, entered into hastily and without thoughtful analysis, is, in the words of former Secretary of State Henry Kissinger, an example of a vital national interest which has been "self-created."² But this is the hand that has been dealt, and the U.S. must play it out as best it can. Though there are risks in going into Bosnia, the Clinton Administration's intellectual confusion and incompetent statecraft have set up a situation in which there also are penalties if America turns its back on NATO and the allies at this stage. The U.S. has to weigh the actual and certain damage of renegeing on its promises against the potential and uncertain damage if the mission should fail at some future point. Presented with a wholly unnecessary *fait accompli*, the Congress now must support American troops while expressing strong reservations about the Bosnia mission, laying down markers for its success or failure, and establishing some clear guidelines for implementation of the peace plan.

The President once again has led the nation into a foreign policy *cul de sac* with no good choices. American and allied soldiers in IFOR may lose their lives, all in the name of "preserving NATO." Since public opposition to the U.S. role in IFOR is both broad and deep, the Administration's Bosnian sales pitch may well result in loss of public support for the NATO alliance as IFOR casualties mount.

As the U.S. wades deeper into this proverbial quagmire, it is time to look at past mistakes and future risks. The nation's leaders must make sure this mission does not turn into another Somalia episode, destroying the very things it is supposed to uphold—U.S. leadership, credibility, prestige, the sanctity of U.S. commitments, and especially the health of the Western alliance.

Correcting the Administration's Mistakes

The Clinton Administration has made some serious mistakes in its policy on Bosnia. The President and Congress should correct these mistakes in the coming days and weeks.

Mistake #1: Linking the Implementation Force to NATO

The President must stop making IFOR a test case for NATO, and the Administration must begin to anticipate what will happen to public support for NATO as a result of this policy linkage if the Bosnia mission results in the loss of U.S. soldiers and a premature withdrawal. Such an outcome would be far more destructive of NATO than a U.S. refusal to commit ground troops to IFOR at the outset. NATO is more important to the U.S. than IFOR, and American public support for NATO must transcend the ups and downs of this peace implementation mission.

Mistake #2: De Facto Changes in the North Atlantic Treaty

Having experienced the failure of the UNPROFOR command arrangement, the Administration refused to deploy U.S. troops to Bosnia under the United Nations. This was a wise move. Only a tried and true military command structure, one in which the U.S. is the dominant military partner, is acceptable for U.S. troops in potential danger. Putting IFOR under NATO was the only practical choice.

However, in sending troops on a peace enforcement mission to Bosnia under NATO, the Administration has turned the North Atlantic Treaty into something other than a mutual defense treaty. Article 5 of the treaty explicitly makes NATO a defensive alliance: An attack upon one is an attack upon all. It does not authorize out-of-area peacekeeping operations.

The Administration must begin to address the impact of unilaterally stretching the fabric of the Atlantic alliance beyond what it will bear. If the North Atlantic Treaty is going to be converted into something other than a mutual defense treaty that leads to more Bosnia-like missions in the future, then the

2 Henry Kissinger, "Bosnia: Reasons for Care," *The Washington Post*, December 10, 1995, p. C9.

American people (as well as the other 15 member nations of NATO) have the right to approve. In America's case, approval should come through the advise-and-consent treaty prerogative of the U.S. Senate under the Constitution.

Mistake # 3: Confusion Over Ends and Means

NATO has never been an end in itself, but a means to achieve the collective defense of its members. As such, it is still immensely important and worth preserving. However, since the threat and the historical conditions which gave birth to NATO have changed dramatically, NATO cannot expect to remain the same and still be relevant to the security needs of Europe and the strategic interests of the United States. Those needs still exist, even if in different form, and must be articulated clearly by the President and his national security leadership. By invoking NATO to justify an unpopular IFOR mission, the Administration has confused this equation and made NATO the end in itself. That argument will not be sustainable if things in Bosnia go wrong. If the IFOR mission fails, it will be seen as a failure of NATO. Questions then will be raised about the efficacy and necessity of NATO. As a result, perhaps America's most important military alliance will have been put in jeopardy.

Mistake #4: Neglecting the Selection of NATO's Secretary General

The Administration either acquiesced in, or actively participated in, the short-sighted decision to pick Spanish Foreign Minister Javier Solana as NATO's new Secretary General. Solana, a leading Spanish Socialist, opposed Spain's entry into NATO and was active in trying to expel the U.S. from NATO air bases in Spain. While he may have experienced a "confirmation conversion," American supporters of NATO are entitled to be skeptical of the selection of a man with marginal qualifications and whose country is not part of NATO's integrated command structure, especially at what is perhaps the most critical moment in NATO's recent history.

The Administration is willing to send 20,000 U.S. soldiers into potential combat "in order to preserve NATO," but it was not willing to insist on—or even recruit, if necessary—a highly qualified and credible Secretary General from a country which is part of the integrated military command. It is too late now to make another choice, but it is not too late for the United States to demand that the new Secretary General:

- ✓ **Respect** the essential military nature of NATO as a defensive alliance. Efforts to get NATO involved in "nation building" and other civilian activities should be resisted, while attempts formally to change NATO's charter to deal with peacekeeping and other quasi-military missions should be discouraged;
- ✓ **Assert** NATO's primacy in the implementation of the Bosnia peace accord to insure that refugee matters and nation-building activity by the U.N. and the Organization for Security and Cooperations in Europe do not interfere with military operations under NATO;
- ✓ **Defer** to NATO's Supreme Military Commander in all matters related to IFOR military operations; and
- ✓ **Support** robust rules of engagement and aggressive force protection measures.

Mistake #5: Turning the U.S. Armed Services into a Constabulary Force

The principal mission of the U.S. armed forces is to fight and win America's wars. This mission requires continuous, arduous, and dedicated training. In contrast, the Clinton Administration has demonstrated a peculiar propensity toward using U.S. military forces for peacekeeping, peace enforcement, humanitarian, and other non-traditional missions while neglecting to provide the resources and commitment needed to keep them in the best fighting trim. In effect, the Administration, led by a commander

in chief notoriously inexperienced in foreign and defense policy, is in danger of turning America's combat-ready forces into a constabulary force and NATO into a regional policing organization. If NATO is to remain viable, its primary mission must remain self-defense and deterrence, not peacekeeping and peace enforcement.

One of the greatest concerns of U.S. Army commanders being deployed to Bosnia is the inevitable erosion of their units' combat skills, which demand constant and rigorous training to keep honed. The U.S. deployment to Bosnia requires the great majority of the ground combat strength of U.S. forces in Europe. Upon returning to their bases in Germany from Bosnia, these troops will need many months to retrain and regain the warfighting skills that will atrophy during the IFOR mission. This effectively puts the U.S. Army in Europe out of the warfighting business for at least two years. The problem was highlighted recently in a General Accounting Office report charting the deleterious and alarming effects of peace operations on combat readiness.³ After a year in Bosnia on peacekeeping duty, the U.S. First Armored Division, now arguably the best, most combat-ready heavy division in the world, will no longer be at a state of readiness to perform its warfighting mission should a crisis erupt in another part of the world.

“Inoculating” NATO Against Failure in Bosnia

In addition to correcting these mistakes, there are several steps the Administration and Congress should take to inoculate NATO against the possible failure of IFOR. The ambiguities and contradictions inherent in the peace accord and the military plan have exposed the contrary and clashing ambitions of the allies. The Administration must end the rhetorical oversell, begin a serious assessment of these inherent deficiencies, and develop strategies to deal with them as they become evident on the ground. Above all, the U.S. should take the lead in assuring that the cracks now appearing in NATO's approach to IFOR will not widen as this poorly planned mission proceeds. The first priority is to ensure a political and military unity of effort among the NATO allies.

Getting Political Unity Among the Allies. America and Europe have fundamentally different policy approaches to the Bosnian problem that transcend the provisions of the peace accord initialed in Dayton. The first and most obvious disagreement is over goals, end-states, and commitment. America's European allies, having been on the ground in the former Yugoslavia for the better part of the four-year war, understand that a long-term commitment is needed to address this enigmatic and intractable conflict. In the face of extended European commitment to the long-term rehabilitation of war-torn Bosnian society, the Clinton Administration has proposed a plan that has U.S. troops redeploying within nine or ten months. It is obvious to the European allies that, for the U.S., the “exit strategy is the mission. That is, the mission is to show up and leave, not to stay until the goals are fully achieved.”⁴

According to the timetable laid out in the Dayton peace accords, the period when U.S. troops will be ready to redeploy will be the most crucial and fragile period in the peace implementation plan. It is at this time that the critical issues of disarmament, refugee resettlement, elections, and the political formation of an elaborate central Bosnian government all will be coming to the fore. It is also at this time that the U.S. commitment will be waning.

The second policy disagreement concerns arming and training the Bosnian Muslims, a policy the European NATO partners have resisted vigorously throughout the conflict. If the expected scenario is played out, nine or ten months into this operation, American troops will be redeploying and European forces will

3 U.S. General Accounting Office, “Peace Operations: Effect of Training, Equipment, and Other Factors on Unit Capability,” GAO/NSIAD-96-14, October 1995, pp. 28-39.

4 Thomas L. Friedman, “The Clinton Gamble,” *The New York Times*, December 6, 1995, p. A23.

be manning the buffer zone and assisting in nation-building while the U.S. is sponsoring the arming and training of the Bosnian army. The International Institute of Strategic Studies in London recently noted that this “will not only undermine the impartiality which IFOR is now insisting on, but it will certainly encourage, if that was ever needed, Croat and Serb forces to maintain their own arsenals.”⁵

Clearly, such fundamental policy disagreements need to be addressed thoroughly before more soldiers set foot on the ground. Otherwise, much as disagreement over disarmament did in Somalia, the issue will work to split the alliance and bring down the mission. America and her allies have a peace accord and a peace implementation plan. They do not have full agreement on a final political settlement, intermediate and long-term objectives, criteria for success, and a road map to get there.

Getting Military Unity Among the Allies. NATO is one of the few military alliances with a consistent, reliable, and rehearsed common doctrine as well as standard operating procedures. However, this common doctrine is no assurance of a common approach to the military aspects of the peace implementation mission. It is a challenge in any multinational mission to ensure that a common tactical and operational approach is used by all forces. This challenge increases by leaps and bounds in a mission that has ill-defined goals, objectives, and end-states. As noted above, the Bosnia implementation plan is not well-defined enough to ensure a unified and common approach to operations.

In the U.N. operation in Somalia, the forces involved operated under standard rules of engagement and a common operational plan, and yet there were great differences in interpreting military actions in this peace-enforcement mission. In Somalia, the U.S. had its most significant differences with another NATO ally—Italy—and even demanded the United Nations fire the Italian military commander after he publicly criticized the American contingent’s aggressive approach to operations. Common doctrine in a contentious mission by no means guarantees unity of effort. A disagreement over tactics and operations easily can lead to a splintering of the mission.

In Bosnia, the U.S., French, British, Russian, and 19 other military contingents (both NATO and non-NATO) also will interpret the mission and rules of engagement differently. America’s European allies tend to operate with much greater restraint and patience as a result of their long experience with these types of missions. They eschew both the emphasis on disproportionate and overwhelming force by the U.S.⁶ and the wanton use of force by the Russians in conflicts such as Chechnya. In fact, a recent British military report emphasized that “American doctrine currently lacks the subtlety required for internal conflict and is in danger of being associated with an inexact and counter-productive use of force.”⁷ The European allies are not nearly as impatient or intolerant of casualties as the U.S. and are willing to bear far greater restraints for longer periods of time in these types of missions.

NATO Expansion. One of the most profound ways the Administration can inoculate NATO against failure in Bosnia is to embark upon a coherent and thoughtful program of NATO expansion. This will give the alliance new life and energy, and will reassert its role as a mutual security treaty by integrating the new democratic states of East and Central Europe.

NATO has been the foundation of European security for 45 years, possibly the most successful such alliance in history. The U.S. should support a renewed and enlarged NATO because it guarantees an American presence on the European continent and a “seat at the table” in the world’s most vital, productive region.

5 International Institute of Strategic Studies, “Dayton: A Comprehensive Peace for Bosnia-Herzegovina?” *Strategic Comments*, December 1995.

6 President Clinton stated in his national address of November 27 that U.S. forces, when attacked, would “fight fire with fire; and then some.”

7 Richard Smith, *The Requirement for the UN to Develop an Internationally Recognized Doctrine for the Use of Force in Intra-State Conflict*, Strategic and Combat Studies Institute, UK, 1994, p. 21.

The United States has clear, abiding, and vital interests in Europe. Europe is the soil where America's deepest roots are found. America is bound to Europe by innumerable links of trade, finance, communications, and technology exchange; ties of history, culture, and shared values; and nearly five decades of mutual security arrangements.

A free and stable Europe has always been essential to the United States. In the 20th century, the U.S. has intervened in two bloody world wars to prevent the domination of Europe by aggressive dictatorships. Moreover, America paid a high price for 45 years of Cold War to prevent the domination of Europe and the Eurasian landmass by communist imperialism. This involvement and stabilizing presence have made the U.S. in effect a European power. Americans cannot cut themselves off from Europe without doing harm to the U.S. as a world power, and as a people.

Europe cannot remain stable and prosperous, to the mutual benefit of the U.S. and the European allies, if its post-Cold War boundary is drawn along the borders of Germany and Austria. Such an artificial division would leave a power vacuum in East Central Europe and consign millions of people who share America's democratic values and aspirations to an uncertain fate. A new European security framework will not hold up unless it reflects the realities of the political upheaval that marked the end of the Soviet Union and Warsaw Pact. That new reality includes the re-orienting of former East Bloc states toward the West.

There are other reasons to enlarge NATO—for example, to lessen internal tensions between members and facilitate the resolution of conflicts—but the U.S. must not lose sight of the fact that NATO has been successful because it was a defensive alliance. Turning it into something else could weaken it fatally. At the very least, changing the nature of NATO, as the Administration is doing in Bosnia, requires debate in Congress. Unless America understands that NATO's underlying and abiding purpose remains to defend Europe, the burdens of the alliance over time will cause NATO to crumble.

Conclusion

Because the Bosnian peace implementation plan is weak and ambiguous in many of its military provisions, there is a great possibility that several major policy imbroglios could develop between the U.S. and its NATO allies. As British strategist William Shawcross recently noted in *The Times* of London, "A real danger is that, although the Dayton agreement provides a chance to end the war, its complexities, its contradictions and the different if not conflicting ambitions of the Allies mean that it, too, may be seen to fail. That would be an even more serious failure than that of the UN. It would be the defeat of NATO, and of the Western Alliance."⁸

What Congress Should Do

Deep opposition to the IFOR deployment exists in both political parties and in both houses of Congress. But at this stage, the 104th Congress has been unwilling to challenge the President's constitutional prerogatives as commander in chief, either by a statutory prohibition of U.S. participation in IFOR or by cutting off funds, both of which are within Congress's power. Once American forces are deployed on missions where hostile action is possible, Congress usually is reluctant to endanger them or undermine their success by making the mission the object of a domestic political struggle. The Administration, counting on this traditional support for the troops, was confident its Bosnia *fait accompli* would survive congressional action.

On December 13, the Senate voted 69-30 in favor of the Dole-McCain resolution, which supports the men and women in uniform but "does not endorse the President's decision ...[or] the agreement reached in Dayton," according to Majority Leader Dole. The House, which had voted to cut off funds for the Bosnia

8 William Shawcross, "Allied Bickering Exposes Flaws in Bosnia Accord," *The Times* (London), December 5, 1995.

mission, was even more forceful, voting 287-141 to condemn the mission while expressing support for the troops being deployed. This tepid endorsement provides political distance for Members of Congress should the President's Bosnian intervention result in catastrophic failure.

But expressing support for the troops while criticizing the Dayton plan and IFOR's mission does not end Congress's responsibility. Congress simply cannot wash its hands of the issue and cede all responsibility to a President who has shown such ineptness in foreign and defense policy. If Members believe the IFOR mission is dangerously flawed, they have a responsibility to continue their efforts to mitigate the dangers. This would demonstrate actual and not just rhetorical support for the troops facing possible death or injury in Bosnia.

How should Congress respond to the Administration's *fait accompli*? First, Congress should continue to exercise its oversight responsibility by reviewing the mistakes that led to the "boxing in" of the United States so that no choice was left but to proceed with such a risky and unnecessary venture. Second, it should assess the ambiguities and deficiencies in the Bosnia peace plan that could jeopardize success — and thus harm NATO and U.S. credibility.⁹ Third, it should consider future legislation building on the momentum and principles established in the December 13 House and Senate votes and designed to achieve the following:

- ① **Lay down additional markers by which success or failure can be measured.** This would help prevent "mission creep" and provide further basis for an exit strategy.
- ② **Establish some basic guidelines for implementing the agreement.** This could include such do's and don'ts as: a) avoid trying coercively to disarm unthreatening factions; b) refuse to get involved in nation-building or to police civilian activities; c) avoid trying to guarantee either the return of refugees or certain outcomes in elections; d) resist the temptation to launch military operations in search of alleged war criminals; and e) use overwhelming force when challenged.
- ③ **Express strong support for NATO and NATO expansion.** The President has implied that opposition to the Dayton plan is tantamount to weakening the credibility of America's commitment to NATO. Congress should make it clear that this is not true. In no way should the reservations of Congress be interpreted as doubting the validity or credibility of NATO. A vote of confidence in NATO and for expanding the alliance not only would help to deflect the President's unfair and unwise depiction of doubters as isolationists or opponents of NATO, but also would help to inoculate NATO against the fallout of the possible failure in Bosnia that so many in Congress fully expect.

Opposing IFOR is not equivalent to isolationism or opposition to NATO. In fact, it may turn out to be the Clinton Administration's misguided adventurism that destroys NATO. The President has embarked upon a hazardous course for good or ill; he alone is now responsible to the American people for what happens. But he needs to be reminded, even as Americans defer to his role as commander in chief, that U.S. credibility and prestige are too valuable to be squandered or debased by improper use.

Thomas Moore
Deputy Director
Foreign Policy and Defense Studies

John Hillen
Policy Analyst

⁹ See John Hillen, "Questioning the Bosnia Peace Plan," Heritage Foundation *Backgrounders* No. 1062, November 30, 1995.

