

Executive Memorandum

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RUSH!

LIFT THE ARMS EMBARGO ON BOSNIA

The July 11 seizure of the Bosnian Muslim enclave of Srebrenica by Bosnian Serb forces has underscored the failure of the United Nations Protection Force (UNPROFOR) in Bosnia. UNPROFOR peacekeeping troops once again have been taken hostage, unable to defend themselves, let alone Bosnian civilians, against aggression by the Bosnian Serbs. The fall of Srebrenica, the first "safe area" to be declared by the U.N. in Bosnia, and the ongoing Serb assault against the Zepa safe area highlight the vulnerability of the four remaining safe areas in eastern Bosnia. As the fighting in Bosnia continues to escalate, it is time for the Clinton Administration to abandon its doomed policy on Bosnia, accept the inevitable withdrawal of the ineffectual U.N. peacekeeping mission there, and lift the ill-considered arms embargo on the Bosnian government.

Senate Majority Leader Robert Dole has proposed that the U.S. do just that. The Senate this week will vote on his bill, S. 21, co-sponsored with Senator Joseph Lieberman (D-CT), that will terminate the arms embargo after UNPROFOR withdraws or 12 weeks after it is requested to do so by the Bosnian government. The Clinton Administration has criticized Dole's proposal as risking expansion of the fighting, overlooking the fact that the fighting already has raged out of control despite the limp efforts of U.N. peacekeepers to contain it. The Administration stubbornly clings to the illusion that there is a peace to keep in Bosnia, when it is clear that both sides are spoiling for a fight.

The sad truth is that President Clinton's policy zigzags have made a tragic situation in Bosnia worse. By repeatedly promising resolute action, such as U.S. air strikes or the commitment of U.S. ground troops, and then retreating, Clinton has eroded U.S. credibility and undermined NATO cohesion without appreciably slowing the steady slide of U.N. peacekeeping forces into near-irrelevance. The increasingly truculent Bosnian Serbs have steadily undermined the U.N.'s three goals in Bosnia: to provide humanitarian aid to Bosnian civilians, to moderate the ferocity of the fighting, and to encourage a diplomatic settlement. Peace efforts have failed primarily because the Bosnian Serbs have concluded, based on their military superiority to date, that they have more to gain by fighting than by negotiating.

The Serbs have been aided by the arms embargo on Yugoslavia imposed by the U.N. in 1991. The arms embargo allowed the 80,000 man-Bosnian Serb militia, armed and supported by neighboring Serbia, to retain control of the territory that it has conquered, roughly 70 percent of Bosnia, in large part due to a near monopoly of heavy weapons. The Bosnian government can mobilize up to 200,000 men but has been unable to arm them because of the embargo. Less than one in three of its potential fighters has weapons, and it is outgunned by the smaller Serb force. Nevertheless, the increasingly effective Bosnian army has scored some military successes in recent months over Serb forces stretched thin along the 1,600-kilometer front. This has prompted the Serbs to step up their efforts to eliminate the isolated pro-government enclaves in eastern Bosnia so that they can consolidate their forces.

As the situation in Bosnia continues to deteriorate, the Clinton Administration should:

- ✓ **End the failed U.N. peacekeeping mission in Bosnia.** The 24,700-man UNPROFOR contingent clearly has lost its credibility with all Bosnian factions. Withdrawal would be better sooner than later. If a pull-out is to be

completed before winter snows clog the rugged Bosnian road network, a decision to withdraw must be made by the end of August.

- ✓ **Rule out the commitment of U.S. ground troops, except to extract UNPROFOR.** French President Jacques Chirac has asked President Clinton to deploy U.S. troops to reinforce the remaining U.N. safe areas. Clinton rejected this, but the Administration reportedly still is considering providing logistical support for U.N. troops in the safe areas that would involve the dispatch of heavy-lift and combat helicopters over Serb-held territory. This would be a dangerous mistake. It would raise the stakes of U.S. involvement without significantly changing the situation on the ground. If France and other nations involved in the failed peacekeeping effort unwisely choose to escalate their involvement, they should do so without counting on American backing. The U.S. has no vital interest at stake in Bosnia. U.S. troops therefore should be committed only in an emergency to save U.N. peacekeeping troops that are being withdrawn, not risked to help them prolong their ill-fated mission.

If called upon to fulfill President Clinton's promise to provide up to 25,000 U.S. troops as part of a 60,000-strong NATO force to extricate UNPROFOR, the U.S. should do so only if its troops are under exclusive NATO command, free from U.N. interference and equivocation. Moreover, U.S. troops should operate under rules of engagement which allow for massive retaliation, instead of half-hearted pinprick reprisals, if U.S. forces are attacked. Although the Bosnian Serbs probably will not seek to block the withdrawal of U.N. forces, they will seek to capture U.N. military equipment. No U.S. troops should be risked to retrieve equipment. Instead, the countries that contributed peacekeepers should warn the Serbs that they will provide the Bosnian government with three times the amount of military equipment that the Serbs seize during the withdrawal. Sadly, many of the problems related to a withdrawal are likely to come from Bosnian Muslims embittered by the U.N.'s failure to live up to their high expectations. The U.S. should warn the Bosnian government that any prospects for future cooperation will rest on its full cooperation during the withdrawal of U.N. forces. President Clinton should appear on national television to state clearly the limited and temporary nature of the U.S. military commitment and warn the warring Balkan factions against interfering with the extraction operation.

- ✓ **Lift the arms embargo on Bosnia.** After U.N. forces have been withdrawn, there should be no excuse for preventing the Bosnian government from arming itself in self-defense. The U.S. should terminate the embargo because it contravenes Bosnia's right of self-defense, a violation of Article 51 of the U.N. Charter. The U.S. and NATO then should consider arming the Bosnian government, but should rule out air strikes or logistical support that could entangle NATO in the war. Washington must be careful not to feed Bosnian hopes of increased U.S. backing, for that will encourage the Bosnian government to form unrealistic expectations that will make it less amenable to the hard compromises that will be required of both sides if there is to be a negotiated settlement.
- ✓ **Maintain economic sanctions against Serbia until it helps push through an acceptable settlement in Bosnia.** Economic sanctions and the arms embargo should not be lifted until Serbia has forced its proxies in Bosnia to accept a settlement that will return most of Bosnia to government control.

CONCLUSION

The withdrawal of U.N. forces and lifting of the arms embargo against Bosnia will lead to greater bloodshed in the short run. But the risks of this course of action are outweighed by the risks of continuing the current policy of bluster and retreat, which has led the U.N. "peacekeepers" to become impotent bystanders as war rages around them. By lifting the arms embargo, the U.S. can help the Bosnians to defend themselves without becoming inextricably bogged down in the Balkan quagmire. Moreover, by allowing the Bosnians to build their military strength and increase their ability to recover lost territory, the U.S. can help lay the groundwork for a viable political settlement in the long run.

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