

## CLINTON FAILS TO MAKE THE CASE FOR AMERICAN TROOPS IN BOSNIA

The Clinton Administration's plan to use 25,000 American troops to implement a Bosnian peace accord is being exposed as a haphazard and risky enterprise. In hearings on Capitol Hill last week, members of the Senate and House questioned the political and military rationale behind the Bosnia peace plan deployment. These questions focused on the mission's political goals, its military objectives, the probability of success, the risks entailed, and the support of the American people. Robert McNamara recently noted in his memoirs that the Kennedy and Johnson Administrations failed to address these fundamental issues in the early debates over Vietnam. It appears that the Clinton Administration is ready to fall into the same trap.

The Clinton plan puts the cart before the horse. Instead of making a troop commitment that is tailored to support a specific and workable peace accord, President Clinton made a commitment for 25,000 U.S. ground troops before he knew what the peace accord would entail — an arbitrary pledge over two years ago. This backwards strategy forces a political plan onto an abstract military force requirement. Members of Congress were correct to question why the Administration is attempting to force 25,000 U.S. ground troops onto a plan that does not yet exist. In addition, the congressional hearings last week made it clear that the Clinton troop request is a mission looking for a purpose. These hearings raised many prescient questions and issues that remain neither answered nor resolved:

- ❶ **What are the objectives, and how does America know when they have been achieved?** The American "Implementation Force" has no clearly defined and attainable military goals and no specific criteria by which the U.S. commanders can measure their success. The Clinton plan fails to address military objectives and commits American forces to static picket duty in an interpositional buffer zone. The American forces are supposed to sit there and "monitor" infractions of the peace accord. General Lewis MacKenzie, a Canadian who commanded the first United Nations troops in Sarajevo, told Members of Congress last week that, of all the various national contingents, U.S. troops would be the primary targets for disgruntled belligerents. He also told the House National Security Committee that while the Administration may try to portray the Implementation Force as a neutral "peacekeeping" presence, the United States will be perceived as the enemy by one side in the conflict. He re-emphasized the danger to U.S. forces by adding that if he were an American military officer, he "wouldn't touch this mission with a ten-foot pole."
- ❷ **There is no exit strategy.** Precisely because American forces do not have well-defined and achievable military goals, "mission creep" is inherent in the Clinton peace plan. With the Administration under enormous pressure to succeed after deploying 25,000 troops, President Clinton will be sorely tempted to escalate American military efforts when faced with the inevitable resistance of the warring factions. To forestall this, the Administration plan calls for a time-driven scenario in which the American forces will be pulled out in twelve months. Almost all the Members of Congress recognized that this is a purely political decision and were extremely skeptical when General John Shalikashvili defended this timetable for unexplained "operational reasons." This is shameless political grandstanding on the part of President Clinton, and Congress rightly called his bluff. As former Assistant Secretary of Defense Richard Perle testified, "An exit date is not an exit strategy."

③ **The Clinton team has anticipated and planned for a best-case scenario.** Military planning, down to the lowest levels, always takes into account worst-case scenarios. Military leaders must plan for what to do when anything or everything goes wrong. Because this plan represents an ill-defined mission taking place in the volatile Balkans, there is every reason to believe that unexpected events will be a fixture. Senators were rightly astounded when Secretary of Defense William Perry stated that he “could not conceive of circumstances where troops would stay longer” than the one-year target date. This comment exposed the political and military naiveté that permeates the Clinton Administration. There are no contingency plans to address a scenario other than the fanciful best-case scenario anticipated by the Administration. Should there be anything less than cooperation by the Bosnian parties, America would be forced either to cut and run or to reinforce troops in Bosnia and escalate military efforts to make the peace plan succeed. The testimony of General MacKenzie made it clear that, despite Secretary Perry’s optimism, American troops will have a rough time of it in Bosnia.

The Administration plan to deploy American ground forces has much to answer for, especially in regard to the fundamental questions that policymakers must address when contemplating the deployment of American combat troops into dangerous environments. The Clinton team did not provide satisfactory answers to Congress, either on these fundamental issues or on a host of other questions about the mission. The Administration has not clearly articulated its political and military goals in Bosnia. As Secretary of State Warren Christopher himself admitted after the hearings, “No, we haven’t yet made the case.” Most important, the Administration has not explained why the U.S. needs to send 25,000 ground troops to Bosnia and how a 12-month deployment can make a decisive contribution to a lasting peace in Bosnia.

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