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U.S. STRATEGY IN BOSNIA: TAKING THE NEXT STEP

BY

**LIEUTENANT COLONEL JERRY P. BROWN
United States Army**

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by

Lieutenant Colonel Jerry P. Brown

United States Army

Colonel John Brinsfield

Project Advisor

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U.S. ARMY WAR COLLEGE

Carlisle Barracks, Pennsylvania 17013

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ABSTRACT

AUTHOR: Jerry P. Brown, LTC, USA

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If the U.S. goal in Bosnia is regional stability, then national leaders could profitably examine a few relevant historical examples to use as models for viable U.S. policy. Post-World War II Germany, Korea, Haiti and the Persian Gulf provide excellent examples of previous U.S. commitments in regions where the U.S. national interest of regional stability was considered to be in jeopardy. In each of these places, the United States made long term commitments of its most vital national resources to ensure stability. If stability in the Balkan region is indeed a U.S. national interest, it will take a similar commitment in Bosnia to secure a lasting peace. This Strategic Research Project uses historical examples as basis for recommending a viable U.S. policy in Bosnia.

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U.S. STRATEGY IN BOSNIA: TAKING THE NEXT STEP

In late October 1995, the Presidents of Bosnia, Serbia, and Croatia met in Dayton, Ohio, with officials of the U.S. Government. Their purpose was to bring an end to the civil war in Bosnia-Herzegovina and to develop a strategy for a lasting peace. Although they confronted many obstacles, an agreement was initialed on the last day of negotiations.

Yet none of the warring factions felt good about the agreement they had signed. Each party felt it gave up more than it should have. But since there was so much international pressure to bring an end to the conflict, all parties conceded more than they desired in order to be seen as contributing to the peace process.

The prestige of the United States brought these warring factions to the negotiating table. It will take a comparable U.S. investment to ensure the peace is a lasting one. Many of the coalition partners who comprise the Implementation Force (IFOR) refused to participate unless the United States assumed the leading role. They are also on record as saying they will participate in

peacekeeping only as long as the United States is participating. If this is true, then the success or failure of this peace endeavor will continuously depend on the U.S. role. Whether the U.S. wants it or not, the ball is in America's hands.

Despite America's leading role, current U. S. policy in Bosnia-Herzegovina was flawed from the start. It cannot lead to a permanent peace. That the original commitment of one year has already been extended an additional 18 months should not come as a surprise. Anyone who has studied the history of the region could have predicted this. That the American people were led to believe otherwise is surprising.

U.S. policy in Bosnia-Herzegovina should be based on U.S. national interest in the region. The U.S. should indicate forthrightly what that interest is and develop a strategy for securing it. Since countries today are more interdependent than ever before, U.S. national interest in the region is certainly to guarantee the stability of Europe. The U.S. should be doing everything possible to secure that stability. And it should start by educating

the American public as to why that stability is important to them.

Thus a different approach toward U.S. commitment in Bosnia-Herzegovina is needed. A review of some of the history of the region shows how the region got to where it is today. More importantly, it shows what must happen to ensure a lasting peace.

HISTORY OF ETHNIC VIOLENCE

Ethnic violence in the former Yugoslavia has gone on for centuries. Numerous peace settlements imposed by outsiders who happen to be the dominant forces in the region at a given time have yet to address or resolve the underlying reasons for the conflicts. Inhabitants of the region have never been satisfied with previous settlements, just as they are not now satisfied with the Dayton Accords of 1995.

To understand the inhabitants of the Balkans one must first recognize that their history has been dominated by violence. For them, violence has become an accepted way of

life. The death and destruction caused by two World Wars (roughly two generations of Yugoslavs, almost four million people, were virtually wiped out) have de-sensitized the inhabitants to what Americans would call "crimes against humanity."

The history of the violence has been passed from one generation to the next: reprisals are often sought by a son or daughter for something that happened to a grandfather or grandmother long before the avengers were born. And it doesn't matter if the only crime of the recipient of the revenge was having come from the wrong gene pool. The inhabitants of the region speak of their acts or deeds in terms of history. They will actually justify an action because of something that occurred in 1994, 1944, or 1917.

U.S. INVOLVEMENT IN BOSNIA-HERZEGOVINA

The rationale for U.S. involvement in the Balkan conflict is difficult for the average American to understand and even more difficult for policy-makers to

articulate. President Clinton committed U.S. forces in a substantial way in November 1995 after agonizing over the crisis for almost three years. Since the end of the Cold War, the case for continued presence of American soldiers in Europe has become more difficult to make. Justifying the need for NATO when there is no perceived post-Cold War threat to U.S. vital national interest has proven to be an even greater challenge. Yet the President committed 20,000 soldiers to a peace Implementation Force (IFOR) for the Balkan region with an accompanying promise that the troops would be brought home in approximately one year (DEC '96).

U.S. objectives as outlined in the President's National Security Strategy of Engagement and Enlargement are clear:

- Sustain a political settlement in Bosnia that preserves the country's territorial integrity and provides a viable future for all its people.

- Prevent the spread of the conflict into a broader Balkan war that could threaten both allies and the stability of new democratic states in Central and Eastern Europe.

-Stem the destabilizing flow of refugees from the conflict.

-Halt the slaughter of innocents.

-Help to support NATO's central role in Europe while maintaining our role in shaping Europe's security architecture.¹

Previous wars in the Balkans have always spread to other parts of Europe. The potential for U.S. allies (Greece and Turkey, for example) to be dragged into the conflict on different sides is very real. The international community has managed to contain the conflict thus far within the boundaries of the former Yugoslavia. If it can be resolved altogether, everybody wins.

UNRESOLVED CONTENTIOUS ISSUES

For everyone to win, a number of contentious issues will have to be settled. The most significant are the control of Brcko and the Posavina Corridor, the return of refugees and displaced persons to their rightful homes, equipping and training the Bosnian-Croatian Federation Army, and selecting the leadership of the political institutions.

The city of Brcko and the Posavina Corridor lie astride vital lines of communication between the eastern

and western portions of the Republica Srpska (the area partitioned for the Bosnian Serbs during the Dayton Accords). If the Bosnian-Croatian Federation gains control of the area, they could potentially cut the Republica Srpska in two. Conversely, the city of Brcko sits on the key north-south lines of communication that connect the heartland of Bosnia-Herzegovina with central Europe and the lower Danube basin. Serb control of these areas could result in an economic stranglehold over the Bosnian-Croatian Federation.²

Four years of war have dislocated large segments of Bosnian society and turned nearly half the pre-war population of 4.4 million into refugees or displaced persons.³ Getting them back to their homes safely is no small task. Complicating the process is the fact that some will have to relocate to totally new environments, which requires freedom of movement--a condition not yet prevalent throughout the country. No one knows for sure when this will become a reality.

Another very sensitive part of the agreement is the requirement to equip and train the Bosnian-Croatian Federation Military forces in order to establish a regional balance of power. This endeavor has been stymied by numerous obstacles. European allies and partners are opposed to the program.⁴ United States funding and assistance have been held up because of concerns about Iranian involvement in Bosnia. Likewise, promised financial support from Islamic nations has stalled because

of concerns that the Bosnian-Croatian Federation will collapse, giving way to renewed violent anarchy.

But the most significant issue concerns establishing political institutions to protect minority rights and selecting leaders who will ensure that they are being run properly. Although recent elections have been successfully conducted, the jury is still out as to whether the new leaders will be accepted and whether they will be able to establish the necessary cooperation among ethnic groups in order to build sufficient trust and confidence for orderly governance.

U.S. POLICY OBSTACLES

Although promising, the end of the Cold War has created new challenges for the international community. Intrinsically weak governments are no longer held together by superpower sponsors and therefore far more likely to succumb to internal economic and political crises. Since world opinion will not allow the international community to sit back while failing states collapse, the United States can expect to be involved in even more interventions in the future than it has in the past. As the world's only superpower during this post-Cold War period, both economically as well as politically, the

United States must be an "ethical standard-bearer" as well as a main provider. This means helping even marginal states like Somalia. The quirks of sovereignty (however relaxed the working definition becomes) will often proscribe U.N. authorization of justifiable military intervention through the Security Council, whether or not there is a standing U.N. army at the ready. The United States should be prepared to step in. But once the spadework of pacification has been accomplished, only maintenance and development of the beneficiary's self-sufficiency make the cost worth the investment. The United States, however, can no longer afford these investments. Although it can and should contribute development aid and perhaps provide residual military assistance, the operating costs of nation building should be borne by the world as a whole, through the corporate medium of the United Nations.⁵

U.S. problems in helping to resolve the conflict in Bosnia-Herzegovina are two-fold: 1) the original promise by the President to the American public and the members of our Armed Forces that the troops would be brought home in a year, and 2) the need for Congressional approval for any

continued commitment in the region, since there is no pot of money set aside to conduct these types of operations and since Congress has opposed the commitment.

Some kind of redeployment will have to occur; otherwise the President will face a barrage of criticism. A case can be made for continued involvement if the U.S. commitment is only a small contingent to an international force with a different charter such as the recently formed stabilization force (SFOR). Either way, the issue of financing the deployment will have to be resolved, since the Department of Defense has not included Peacekeeping Operations as routinely planned and funded military activities in the Defense Budget.

The peace recently brokered by the U.S. is a fragile one. If not for American involvement, there would be no commitment toward peace by either U.S. Allies or the warring factions. Many of America's Allies have said that they will participate only if the Americans are involved. The warring factions refused to participate in peace negotiations unless the Americans were hosting them.

If the U.S. had departed the region on schedule, most experts thought "three general outcomes were possible: peaceful resolution, limited violence, or a return to war."⁶ History suggests that a return to war would be the inevitable outcome because most of the issues that started the conflict have not been resolved. Development of political institutions that will safeguard the minority rights of the various ethnic and religious groups is the most effective long-term solution to this conflict.

HISTORICAL EXAMPLES TO USE AS MODELS

Nations, like people, are subject to two basic impetuses: prudential interests and moral concerns. The United State's prudential interests overseas include defense of the realm and its inhabitants, access to oil, secure lines of communication, and the stability of trading partners--what General John Shalikashvili, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, deemed "core interests" on *Nightline*. Often in countries like the United States or other democracies, they are determined by a representative body such as Congress, Parliament or an

electorate. These are interests that most Americans recognize as necessary to preserve the United State's very sovereignty, its status as a nation. President Clinton tried to acclimate the American people to military intervention in Haiti by portraying such a measure as classically prudential. The interests he said Haiti's unrest implicated included drug interdiction, the preservation of democracy within the immediate sphere of influence, the protection of Americans living in Haiti and relatives of Haitian-Americans still there, and forestalling a panicky, massive, and disruptive influx of refugees.⁷

When American forces are committed anywhere in the world, there are generally compelling reasons to do so. Occasionally these reasons are not readily apparent to American citizens. Nonetheless, most Americans realize that when their soldiers deploy there is a national interest at stake.

The reason for going into Bosnia was to help assure a stable Europe. This is not the first time the U.S. has stepped forward in a big way to help facilitate stability

in the world, especially when the instability will indirectly affect the United States. Post-World War II Europe, Korea, the Persian Gulf and Haiti are excellent examples of the United States investing considerable resources to secure stability.

What is missing with the commitment to Bosnia is something the American people had plenty of in the four examples previously mentioned--a clear understanding of what the U.S. interests are. National leaders cannot simply tell the American people that the U.S. is in Bosnia to ensure that there is stability in the region. They must also be able to articulate what an unstable Europe could mean to the average citizen.

When Secretary of State George C. Marshall delivered his famous address during commencement ceremonies at Harvard on June 5, 1947, which subsequently became the framework for the Marshall plan, he described in clear, simple, and direct terms what inaction would mean to the world. He declared that "It is logical that the United States should do whatever it is able to do to assist in the return of normal economic health to the world, without

which there can be no political stability and no assured peace. Our policy is directed not against any country or doctrine but against hunger, poverty, desperation, and chaos." He went on to explain in great detail just how bad things were and what the U.S. as a country must be ready to do. He did this with the permission and backing of the President; then, along with other government agencies, the State Department immediately launched an information campaign to further educate American citizens.

Before long the "American" community supported the effort because they understood what was at stake. Surveys taken of respected community leaders across the country showed that Americans were willing to make sacrifices at home to support the Marshall Plan for Europe. Consider the results of a couple of survey questions asked of respected community leaders as the Marshall Plan was being launched.

I. At the commencement exercises of Harvard University, on June 5, 1947, Secretary Marshall proclaimed: "It is logical that the United States should do whatever it is able to do to assist in the return of normal economic health in the world, without which there can be no political stability and no assured peace. Our policy is directed not against any country or doctrine but against hunger, poverty, desperation, and chaos. Its purpose should

be the revival of a working economy in the world so as to permit the emergence of political and social conditions in which free institutions can exist."

Do you agree with these observations?

YES..... 95%
 UNCERTAIN..... 2%
 NO..... 3%

Answers by professions or occupations:

	YES	UNCERTAIN	NO	
TOTAL				
BUSINESSMEN.....	92	3	5	100
EDUCATORS.....	98	1	1	100
LAWYERS.....	98	1	1	100
EDITORS.....	99	0	1	100
OTHERS.....	94	0	6	100

II. It has been suggested that, in order to help revive the European economy, the United States provide Europe with roughly twenty billion dollars' worth of assistance during the next four years. One of the unknowns in this connection is the effect such long-term assistance would have upon our domestic economy. Presumably many consumer and production controls would have to be instituted or extended:

A. Would you be willing to put up with necessary controls, if there should appear to be reasonable

assurance that an American aid program, on the scale suggested, would lead to revival of the European economy?

YES.....	80%
UNCERTAIN.....	4%
NO.....	16%

(The questionnaire was drawn up before any agency of the United States proposed a specific amount of aid; hence the use above of "roughly twenty billion dollars' worth of assistance" was cited as a possible upper limit.)⁸

When the time came to make a long term commitment to an area important to the U.S., Americans supported it because they understood the value of the commitment. The leaders made sure the citizens understood what a stable Europe meant to them.

Although not as successful as the Marshall plan, the Korean Armistice achieved similar results in terms of commitment by the American people. Regardless of how the war was fought or who won which battle, Americans understood who the aggressors were, why U.S. soldiers were

fighting there, and why it was necessary to keep them there after the agreement was signed.

What makes the Korean example even more interesting is that most national leaders were not interested in keeping American forces in Korea prior to the breakout of hostilities and were considering bringing them home. Kenneth Allard described the general feeling in the U.S. in 1949-50:

One complication for the United States was that the military establishment did not believe that South Korea could or should be defended. In January, 1949, General MacArthur interpreted his mission as not requiring him to secure or make plans to secure southern Korea: and in June the position of the Joint Chiefs of Staff was that 'Korea is of little strategic value to the United States'. When war broke out a year later, the US Defense Department had no contingency plan for US intervention in the event of invasion of the South. In an important speech on 12 January 1950, Secretary of State Dean Acheson had spoken of a US 'defensive perimeter' running along the Aleutian Islands (between Alaska and Soviet Asia) to Japan, and then along the Ryukyu Islands to the Philippines. Other areas in the Pacific, presumably including South Korea, could not be guaranteed against military attack: they would have to rely initially on their own efforts and then upon 'the commitments of the entire civilized world under the Charter of the United Nations'. Acheson had spoken from notes rather than from a written text, and he was only proclaiming what had been official US policy for a year - though he did so in unusually explicit terms. The speech was later to assume considerable political

significance, and Averell Harriman considered that it was `one of the things which made Stalin...believe that we would not intervene militarily.⁹

Nearly 50 years later, U.S. soldiers are still there. Yet, rarely does one hear of an outcry about bringing Americans home from Korea. Why? Because Americans believed then and many still do that the spread of communism in the region will create instability. An educated American public understood why U.S. soldiers needed to deploy and why those forces have remained in Korea.

More recently U.S. soldiers participated in Desert Shield/Desert Storm, Somalia and Haiti. In each, the reasons for deployment were clearly articulated to the American people. However, only in the case of the Persian Gulf was the U.S. national interest of regional stability the primary reason. Boat people out of Haiti may have caused some headaches in Florida, but one could argue quite convincingly that the average Kansas farmer was probably not much interested in their plight.

Although most Americans were aware of the death and starvation in Somalia and other African countries thanks

to CNN, most knew they could just turn off the television and the crisis would not affect them. Besides, Somalia was just one of many countries in Africa with the same problem. Many Americans believed it just wasn't their responsibility to solve these widespread problems. Thus, little support existed for deploying American soldiers in relief, and even fewer Americans felt the issue was worth a single soldier's life.

But when instability in a particular region can adversely affect Americans, support can be found for committing U.S. soldiers for as long as it takes. Americans simply have to be told what is at stake. U.S. soldiers were deployed into the Gulf in the summer of 1990 and have suffered a number of casualties since then. U.S. pilots have been roughed up and showcased on IRAQI television, soldiers killed during the re-taking of Kuwait, two blackhawk helicopters shot down by friendly aircraft, 19 soldiers killed during a terrorist attack, and other losses. You would think that such incidents would produce an outcry with demands that U.S. forces be brought home from these foreign countries. Why has there not been significant protest of U.S. policy that has led

to such losses? Probably because Americans are convinced that stability in that region is important to them. They believe that their soldiers need to be there to protect *U.S. interests*. National leaders have convinced them of this. Yet it only took a few casualties and one soldier dragged through the streets in Somalia before there was an outcry for the return of U.S. soldiers to America, even though stability in that country was no more than a dream of a starving population.

Clearly, there are numerous examples of the U.S. taking the right course when it is in their national interest to do so. National leaders simply have to explain to the American people what is at stake. Historically, the American people have been willing to go the distance when they perceived the value of the policy objectives.

Bosnia is probably one of the most difficult challenges the U.S. has had to face. But it is not unique; the U.S. is not facing something different for the very first time. Many U.S. foreign policy challenges are unique. What is different is how well the government

educates its citizens and the level of commitment the government gives to the problem. The U.S. is right for being in Bosnia. But U.S. efforts will not stabilize the region in one to three years. There have been too many atrocities against too many people for the hatred to disappear in the short term. Instead of suggesting that we can stabilize the region in one to three years, we should be talking one to three generations.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Whether intervention is unilateral or U.N.-sanctioned, peace once made should be maintained over the long term. Although the ultimate responsibility is that of the indigenous government, failed and failing states need time in order to generate workable institutions. In *Foreign Policy*, Helman and Ratner proposed graduated levels of U.N. "conservatorship": governance assistance for failing states like, say, Zaire or Georgia; delegation of governmental authority to the United Nations for failed states like Somalia; and, if more oversight is required, international trusteeship. Such a system would require

substantial amendment of the U.N. Charter, which does not consider the first two forms of supervision and states that trusteeship does not apply to territories which have become members of the United Nations.¹⁰

Long-term solutions in Bosnia will require finding a way for the inhabitants to resolve a wide range of complex issues arising from differences in language, religion, ethnic origin, and culture. History shows that no approach to governing the region will be credible unless it accommodates substantial diversity. Only a fundamental break from the past--distant, as well as recent--offers the possibility of a viable long-term solution. Long-term solutions cannot be realized in one to three years.

America should continue its involvement in the Balkan region because peace in the region is in its national interest. A long-term commitment by the international community offers the best chance for continued peace in the region. An international police force (that bears a striking resemblance to the IFOR/SFOR) should be in place before the IFOR/SFOR is allowed to redeploy.

If the U.S. disengages before the mission is complete, U.S. credibility throughout the world, not just in the Balkans or Europe, could be undermined. The "demonstration effect" of failure could encourage other states or groups to test U.S. resolve. Such an outcome would likewise affect the credibility of the United Nations and NATO, two institutions that loom large in the U.S. global security architecture.

Through NATO, the U.S. should assist the international community in the development of an international police force to move into the Balkan region in relief of IFOR/SFOR. The force should not be put on a timeline; it should be committed for an indefinite period to allow adequate time for indigenous government agencies to evolve. Post-World War II Germany provides a realistic model of the kind of long term commitment the U.S. must be prepared to make if it wants to ensure lasting stability in the region.

ENDNOTES

1 President William J. Clinton, A National Security Strategy of Engagement and Enlargement (Washington, D.C.: The White House, 1995), p.35.

2 Raymond Bonner, "To G.I.'s, Disputed Corridor Will Test Path to Peace," The New York Times, Dec 18, 1995, A3.

3 William T. Johnsen, U.S. Participation in IFOR: A Marathon, Not a Sprint (U.S. Army War College, 1996), p.5.

4 Kelly Couturier, "Bosnian-Croat Army has few backers," The Washington Post, March 16, 1996, p.24.

5 Jonathan Stevenson, Losing Mogadishu, (Naval Institute Press, 1995), p.144.

6 Johnsen, U.S. Participation in IFOR, p.vii.

7 Stevenson, Losing Mogadishu, p.149.

8 Joseph Barber, ed., The Marshall Plan As American Policy (Council on Foreign Relations, 1948), p.7.

9 Sydney D. Bailey, The Korean Armistice. (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1992). p.8.

10 Stevenson, Losing Mogadishu, p.144

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