

America's Bosnia Policy: THE WORK AHEAD

The success of American diplomacy in Bosnia could not even have been imagined a year ago. Last July, Srebrenica had fallen to Bosnian Serb forces, throwing NATO into serious crisis, and the United Nations humanitarian operation was rapidly unraveling. Now, thanks to the U.S.-negotiated Dayton accord and IFOR—the NATO-led implementation force, Operation Joint Endeavor—the fighting has stopped, armies are demobilizing, and Bosnia-wide elections will be held in September. But this achievement is more vulnerable than it appears. With IFOR's successful completion of the military ceasefire, the Bosnia operation is at a turning point. Now the civilian and internal security tasks must take center stage. So far, the minimal political condition of a durable peace is missing: an agreed outcome to the political quarrels that caused the war, or a strategy to achieve one now.¹

The extraordinary effort, goodwill, and resources being spent to implement the accord are occurring without any coherent design for how to achieve a stable outcome. It is said that the Dayton accord establishes a *process* by which Bosnians can reverse the current reality of partition with elections and economic reconstruction and restore a multiethnic, unitary Bosnia. But in fact there is only one option that holds any possibility of long-term success—a recognition of the right of all three nations of Bosnia to territorial self-governance (its current political partition) and, at the same time, of their strategic,

cultural, and economic interdependencies that require them to cooperate if each is to survive. This outcome of progressive reintegration will not occur on its own. Outsiders must design and execute an integrated strategy that enables Bosnians to live in one state and brings peace.

No negotiated settlement to civil war succeeds without effective implementation. Whatever outcome results in Bosnia will largely depend on the actions taken in the coming months by the implementing powers. The Dayton accord and American leadership could still fail. Absent an explicit choice of political outcome and an integrated strategy to achieve it, Operation Joint Endeavor will unravel as it becomes driven ever more by events on the ground and as unresolved quarrels among NATO allies resurface.

The loss that such a reversal would entail is incalculable. IFOR has successfully overseen the separation of Bosnian Serb and Bosniac-Bosnian Croat forces and substantial demobilization. It has collected or destroyed all their heavy weapons, transferred territories, managed the news, and opened the way for economic reconstruction and elections. The 32-country IFOR has brought France back to NATO, launched the Combined Joint Task Force, integrated Russian soldiers into the American division, and become a trial run for all former Warsaw Pact countries aspiring to NATO

By

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¹ An analysis of the Dayton accord, of the first five months of the peace implementation operation, and of upcoming problems and unfinished business can be found in the author's *Implementing Peace in Bosnia and Herzegovina: A Post-Dayton Primer and Memorandum of Warning*, Brookings Discussion Papers, the Foreign Policy Studies Program, the Brookings Institution, May 1996.

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membership. The goals attached to this operation are of such consequence—for American leadership, for a new, transformed, and credible NATO, for European security arrangements adapted to post-cold war circumstances, and for preventing a resumption of war, its explosion in Kosovo and Macedonia, and the possibility yet of a wider Balkan war—that it cannot afford to fail.

THE PROBLEM

Throughout the Bosnian war, Americans and Europeans have been preoccupied with territory—who controlled what percent, whether the maps at the heart of all eight peace plans rewarded aggression and appeased the Serbs, how to get Bosnian Serbs to give up land, and whether a strategic balance had been created between them and a putative alliance of Croats and Muslims. Because the Dayton map appears to have settled the territorial issues with a 51-49 split of the land, most observers believe the war is over. But for the three ruling parties of Bosnia, territory was always a subsidiary question—a means to the end of national sovereignty for each and recognition of their states by the international community.

Unwilling to impose a solution on the parties that would reverse the war's partition of Bosnia and equally unwilling to abandon international norms—for example that borders cannot be changed by force or war crimes rewarded—that require commitment to a multiethnic, single state, the Dayton accord chose both. As a result, it does not provide the minimal condition for translating the parties' signatures into peace: an end to the uncertainty over the political future of Bosnia. Is there one Bosnia? a Bosnia partitioned into two entities by a no-man's land (the interentity boundary line) between the Muslim-Croat federation and the Serb republic? a Bosnia absorbed by neighboring Croatia and the federal republic of Yugoslavia according to a more strategically defensible border, with Muslims dispersed between the two? or a Bosnia dissolved into three separate nation-states as was the former Yugoslavia and as current reality presents? If it is three states, will two of them—the Croatian Republic of Herzeg-Bosnia and the Republic of Srpska—take advantage of the clause in the Dayton constitution to choose "special relationships" (confederation) with their neighbors, Croatia and the federal republic of Yugoslavia, rather than confederate with the Bosniac third? If so, what are the international borders of the new nation-state formed by these Bosnian Muslims and how will they

be drawn? Will the United States' government make good on its commitment to provide security guarantees to that state?

Because the Dayton accord does not finish the job, the peace operation cannot depend, as it must to succeed, on the political will of the parties involved. All three parties are still intent on the incompatible objectives that led to war. To the extent that they support the accord and its implementation, they are not all supporting the same aspects and goals. IFOR and the Office of the High Representative, Carl Bildt, declare that their mandate is to restore a unitary, multiethnic state, but the compromises within the Dayton accord and the speed demanded by its deadlines and a twelve-month IFOR "exit strategy" have strengthened the forces of separation and hardened the lines of partition. Without a viable and realistic strategy for reintegration, they can only perpetuate the uncertainty and stalemate. The vast majority of Bosnian citizens will continue to follow the dictates of the political party that claims to represent their national interests, rights, and even survival because they do not yet know what the political future holds. Partition or a renewal of war become the only possible outcomes.

The ambiguity puts IFOR in a no-win situation. If they do *not* push Dayton's integrationist goal, forcing Bosnian Croats and Bosnian Serbs to accept a unitary state, then Bosnian Muslims will view the operation as a failure and withdraw cooperation, calling on external powers for support. If they *do* push integration, Bosnian Croats and Bosnian Serbs will view the threat to their right to self-determination as hostile and pro-Muslim acts, in violation of the Dayton accord, and withdraw cooperation. If IFOR soldiers respond by defining their mandate and responsibilities narrowly, the majority of Bosnian citizens and public opinion in the countries with troops in IFOR accuse them of doing nothing. And without a political settlement or a reassurance of continued international military presence after IFOR leaves while the political contest plays out, no party will abandon military preparations or reduce armed concentrations around points of territorial vulnerability and contest.

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rest entirely on a political scenario that IFOR and its civilian counterpart cannot win: expelling Bosnian Serb leaders, Radovan Karadžić and Ratko Mladić, and electing a government that can govern and sustain the ceasefire without IFOR. Most Serbs in Bosnia agree on their rights to national power and self-governance; the more they think their political autonomy is still at risk, the more they agree with Karadžić on tactics. The more outsiders go after the two men, the more it obliges Serbs to be loyal and persuades them that they do indeed need their own state and defense. But independently of Karadžić, the Dayton accord itself is achieving the separation he seeks: enforcing a no-man's land between the Serb republic and the rest of Bosnia, training and equipping a Bosniac-Bosnian Croat federation army to fight the Serbs, and denying economic assistance to Serb communities

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until Karadžić and Mladić are at the Hague. At the same time, this political scenario (and the Dayton accord itself) cannot succeed without an effective Bosniac-Bosnian Croat federation. Yet the forced pace of integration in federation territory has removed all pretense from the unresolved conflicts over political control between Bosnian Croats and Bosnian Muslims.

The outcome of September elections will be the same, whatever the fate of Radovan Karadžić. Under current conditions, elections can only ratify the political and territorial victory of the three nationalist parties. They cannot create a symbolic center around which supporters of peace from all three communities might mobilize nor can they produce a functioning government for all of Bosnia. But according to the Dayton implementers, the gap between the military tasks of separating forces and the civilian tasks of reconciliation, repatriation, and reconstruction cannot be filled until such a government exists. If outsiders try to force multiethnic reconciliation before Bosnians themselves are ready and before local institutions provide a minimum of psychological and physical security to those willing to take risks, the NATO-led operation will only further antagonize the population and become the

enemy. IFOR soldiers have already been targeted by disgruntled citizens. The political strategy of the Bosniac party to recapture control of the Serb Republic by sending Muslim refugees and displaced-persons back home has trapped the soldiers in the civilian tasks and political quarrels that IFOR is not configured to resolve. And violent incidents will inevitably increase as elections draw near.

IFOR is now scheduled to begin its withdrawal on December 14, in the midst of winter, without any plan for filling the resulting security vacuum, and at the very moment that the arbitration decision is to be rendered over the most sensitive territorial question (control of Brčko and the northeast corridor). If there is no follow-on force, all three armies will rush to capture vulnerable points in the zone of separation and retake their weapons. War could resume over Brčko. And the inability of the three parties to form a functioning central government after the elections will inhibit any reconstruction program and foreign investment.

An even worse scenario from the point of view of international norms and the goal of Dayton is possible. The Bosnian government may be tempted to repeat the Croatian solution of 1995. The outsiders' refusal to choose a single political outcome in Bosnia while deploying peacekeeping troops recreates the situation in Croatia after the ceasefire of January 1992: a political stalemate, peacekeeping forces (albeit this time with more robust rules of engagement and equipment) sent to separate the parties while a political solution somehow *emerges*, and external powers that have "taken sides" with the current officeholder in Zagreb/Sarajevo by assisting his political agenda and allowing time and arms to build up his army though his objective is as nationalist as his enemies'. The Croatian solution of May-August 1995 was a resumption of war for the "reintegration of territories" and the expulsion or exodus of minorities by force. It led directly to the failure of the U.N. peace mission, retreating under hostile fire. Bosnian Muslims cannot succeed at such a strategy: they are not working with the same conditions of overwhelming military force against a single, weak opponent; the federation would immediately collapse; and international support for Sarajevo would not be unwavering, but would divide between the Muslims and the Croats. This reality, however, does not deter some powerful factions within the Sarajevo leadership from entertaining the thought.

Meanwhile, the disagreements that have plagued

American and European efforts since 1990 to resolve the Yugoslav crisis and end the Bosnian war continue. The intra-alliance quarrels are fundamental. The Pentagon has insisted on a sharp separation between the military and civilian aspects of the operation and blames Europeans for delays in the civilian operation while Europeans insist that the cause of the delays has been this unsustainable separation and American delays on economic funds. Europeans are angry at private deals with the Bosnian Muslims made by the American negotiators at Dayton, and Americans accuse British and French approaches to Serbs of undermining the accord. The European policy of regional arms control conflicts bitterly with the American policy to "build-up" the federation army under a congressionally mandated "train and equip" program. The continuing American focus on the Croat-Muslim federation and isolation of the Bosnian Serbs runs headlong into European insistence that economic reconstruction must occur throughout Bosnian territory if the goal is peace and a single country. And because the Dayton accord does not identify a single executive authority to resolve disagreements and take responsibility, these policy differences play out in personality conflicts and contests over authority. Although muted by the collective hope that the war is over, the quarrels resurface with every difficulty on the ground, and the atmosphere of mutual recrimination that worsens daily suggests that the NATO alliance could still come unstuck if the Bosnia operation goes seriously wrong.

WHAT IS TO BE DONE?

The military tasks that IFOR was sent to supervise have largely been completed. It is time to declare Dayton a success and to begin the design of a strategy and mission to transform the current ceasefire and political stalemate into a durable peace. The responsible outside powers (above all, the United States) have three options. They can recognize the *de facto* partition; they can build a multiethnic Bosnia; or they can design a strategy for peace and stability in the region that allows Bosnians themselves to decide the final political outcome but without renewed violence. Leaving the operation to evolve on its own will not work.

Option one, **partition**, is extremely costly politically, for it means derecognizing Bosnia in its current borders and betraying the moral goals of Dayton, of the Clinton administration, and of American global leadership. It could also be the most costly option in the long run, for it is unlikely to be accompanied

with groundwork to counteract its likely destabilizing effects elsewhere (starting, in the region, with Kosovo). Despite the arguments made by realists that no Bosnian election can reverse the fait accompli of population movements and that four years of war and unimaginable atrocities have left a legacy of hatred that makes repatriation and reintegration impossible, partition produces the most unstable outcome. Partition's advantages are that it permits an early withdrawal of IFOR and the lowest foreign commitment of time and money for post-conflict reconstruction. But war will resume unless this policy of default is accompanied by some revisions of the Dayton map, international willingness to accept more population transfers and little chance of repatriating refugees, and security guarantees for a Muslim nation-state.

Option two, a **multiethnic Bosnia**, appears to be the least costly alternative politically because it is the declared goal of Dayton and of the deployment of U.S. soldiers. But it is the most costly financially. Serious nation-building in support of a minority (the Bosnian Muslims and their loyal supporters) against almost half the population will require a subtle but decisive foreign occupation, a minimum of five years' military presence in Bosnia in support of that administration, and a massive infusion of economic aid. Removing a handful of radical leaders will not be sufficient because most Bosnian Serbs and Bosnian Croats will oppose what they perceive to be a project for a unitary state under Muslim domination and their loss of rights to self-governance while cooperation from the current Bosnian Muslim leadership on a multiethnic project is unlikely. There is, in fact, insufficient political will in Washington and in Europe to achieve this option.

Option three is a **strategy of staged reintegration** that removes uncertainty about national rights while enabling the three nations of Bosnia to live in one state. It combines the reality of partition and goals of the three warring parties for national power with the only outcome that gives any prospect of long-term regional stability. There is no reason why a Bosnia partitioned into three areas cannot gradually evolve from three nationally controlled parastates to three regions of a democracy with open borders, but this evolution must be staged, beginning with an end to the mixed messages from outsiders about what they expect and will accept. External powers are unwilling to do what is necessary to reverse the current partition—which *de facto* is independent governance by Bosnian Serbs and Bosnian Croats—but they continue to deny the right of national self-determination in principle. And in insisting on the

goal of a single Bosnian state, outsiders give false hopes to the Sarajevo leadership and fail to see that Bosnian Muslims have also established themselves as a separate community with rights to independent governance and feel in need of protection.

The war will not be over until outsiders first grant the political rights of all three communities to govern themselves and then redirect the efforts of IFOR and civilian organizations toward supporting Bosnians' mutual interests in and requirements for cooperation. Removing the uncertainty about national rights will deprive radical nationalists of the basis for their influence. It will also permit the international indictments for war crimes, now serving a political agenda, to resume their proper judicial role of justice and deterrence. And it will allow focus on the fact that partition is also not viable—that majorities in Croatia and in Serbia will oppose union, respectively, with Bosnian Croats or Bosnian Serbs, whom they see as Bosnians with a different culture and poorer economies, and that none of the three nations of Bosnia can survive if they do not interact and cooperate.

At that point, the second element necessary to end the war can begin: the formation of communities within these three territories that are capable of supplanting the IFOR-led joint military and civilian commissions with functioning governments, of resuming open communication and trade across the current lines of military confrontation, and of replacing IFOR with in-group policing. The security problem in Bosnia is not a matter of military aggression, unless the intervening powers treat it as such and accept separate states. If there is to be one country, security is a matter of individual rights and protections—freedom of movement, civil rights, basic services, reliable police forces and courts, and protection against growing disorder, banditry, looting, roaming criminal gangs, drunken armed soldiers running amuck, state terror, and discrimination against individual citizens caught in a minority position. The best way to reduce the power of radical nationalists is to force them to deal with the problems of their *own* communities and their constituents' demands which cannot be satisfied by blaming outsiders or leaders of other communities.

The strategy of staged reintegration is the most realistic option in the long run because the ethnic

division of the country does not correspond to its economic regions. Cross-ethnic alliances and non-ethnically based cooperation are necessary for the viability of each unit and the survival of a significant number of localities, including Tuzla, Banja Luka, Sarajevo, Bihać, Goražde, and eastern Herzegovina. Bosnians still have a historical legacy of adaptability to realities they did not choose, and many maintained their tradition of coexistence, neighborliness regardless of ethnic identity, and mutual tolerance during the war.

In moving to the second stage of peace implementation during the summer of 1996—consolidating the ceasefire with a strategy to end the war—the international operation must begin by downplaying the importance of the scheduled September elections for the political future of Bosnia. The OSCE Commission headed by Robert Frowick should seek to transform the elections into a ceremonial celebration of peace that all three communities could share and the installation of a transitional regime, making clear that they are only the first of a normal electoral process. Special parliamentary seats could even be created to represent groups and interests that are currently excluded by the electoral rules but that represent *Bosnian national interests*, such as the seats once reserved for university towns in the British parliament. The governmental elections could be accompanied by other elections to begin the creation of pan-Bosnian civic organizations and address the issues of greatest concern to Bosnians of all communities, such as jobs. For example, a commission for economic assistance and development could be elected of delegates representing local communities (of businesses and civic groups such as women's organizations that are emerging outside the party structure); it could tender competitions for reconstruction funds that reward local projects for regional development and cooperation and concurrently engage Bosnian citizens in reconstruction, improve its quality, and indirectly displace the monopoly of the three nationalist parties over foreign aid. The Frowick mission could convene an assembly of constitutional experts from all communities to propose amendments to the Dayton constitution for consideration by the newly elected parliament, and it could oversee the rules and eligibility for the permanent Election Commission to be set up by the parties² so as to

² Annex 3, Article V, of the Dayton/Paris Agreement.

safeguard against a triparty condominium over future elections and violation of the OSCE principles to hold free elections at reasonable intervals.

In supplementing the initial peace accord with imaginative use of their authority for implementation, Operation Joint Endeavor, the Office of the High Representative, and the UN mission (UNMIBH) should integrate their activities in such a way as to give support to local initiatives for employment, inter-communal business ventures, civil rights (such as property adjudications), and policing against crime and restrictions of free movement, while not challenging citizens' political loyalties. The most sensitive task in this transitional period will be to provide the common authority the country lacks without becoming a permanent fixture. Particularly difficult will be to overcome the bureaucratic requirements of the International Monetary Fund, the World Bank, the European Union, the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development, and other official organizations leading the economic reconstruction effort that prevent action without governmental counterparts. The Dayton constitution creates a political system that entrenches ethnic power and representation and is highly vulnerable to stalemate, fiscal crises and monetary instability, and disintegrative tendencies. Bosnia has no symbolic center or political leader. Economic revival cannot be held hostage to the parties' ability to obstruct a functioning common government nor can it substitute an economic partition. In time, the more powerful forces of migration, demographic change, a market economy integrated into Europe, and political competition will decide the political character of Bosnia and Herzegovina, but in the meantime, there can be peace.

Such a strategy makes it abundantly clear, moreover, that stability cannot develop until Bosnia's place in the region and in Europe is defined. Will it be promised membership in European institutions after a specified period of time, if it meets conditions for membership, or will it be left in the limbo created in 1991 when Slovenia and Croatia were recognized as separate states and Yugoslavia dissolved? Contained rather than incorporated, Bosnia cannot be other than a strategic buffer—not a viable country—between favored Croatia and disfavored Serbia in an unstable Balkan borderland still divided by an outer wall of sanctions and an encircling American

strategy for the southern Balkans.

Whichever option the international peace operation chooses, however, and particularly if it makes no choice, the peace process in Bosnia requires the presence of an international military force beyond twelve months. A smaller but still robust NATO force, with American participation on the ground, is essential to prevent the resumption of war. All groups still perceive themselves to be minorities at risk, and politicians competing for votes in a decisive election will not avoid antagonistic rhetoric or create institutions that soothe the trauma of war. The sooner this force is planned and its mandate defined, the sooner strategists can design an appropriate civilian operation and the sooner the international community can in fact be rid of the Balkan crisis. The longer the delay in acknowledging that the primary political questions have not been resolved and that peace will not emerge without an explicit *strategy*, the more the likelihood of mission failure—characterized by stalemate, mounting frustration, a longer presence of foreign forces, and a possible resumption of war.

THE WRONG DEBATES

It is easy to view the primary impediment to successful implementation in Bosnia as the non-compliance of the warring parties and the continuing power of radicals such as Radovan Karadžić. But such a view is only an admission that the implementing powers lack political motivation to take control of the process. The real obstacles lie in Western capitals, above all Washington. Success in the early months has removed the pressure from public opinion, while those who shared in the diplomatic achievement of Dayton are understandably loyal and defensive against suggestions that more may need to be done. Meanwhile, the lines of public debate on Bosnia have not adjusted to the reality created by Dayton and its implementation; battle lines drawn while the war was raging have become the chief obstacles to waging peace.

The primary public debate, one that reverberates most in the country at large, is still over whether the United States should be in Bosnia at all. Despite the massive deployment of American troops, there remains substantial opposition to American engagement in internal conflicts and places not considered of clear,

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vital national interest. Vocal and organized opponents of any engagement at all, most visibly on the right wing of the Republican party but not only there, will seize on casualty figures and any hint of an operation going wrong to demand its end. Republican centrists, including Robert Dole, have been forced to muffle their opposition or appear unpatriotic and disloyal to American soldiers, but they still hold to the view that the better policy is to arm the Bosnian Muslims to defend themselves and leave. Even in the Democratic party mainstream, however, there are strong voices questioning not international engagement in general but the significance of Bosnia to American national interests.

The administration solution to this debate has been one of the sources of greatest trouble. By limiting the IFOR engagement to twelve months, giving priority to avoiding casualties by defining the military mandate as narrowly as possible, and hoping that trouble will erupt only after IFOR leaves, the administration is prevented from focusing on the mission itself and what is necessary to achieve it successfully. Critical examination of the kind of post-IFOR force and mandate needed to protect the peace that was so difficult to achieve must occur now as an integral part of an overall political-military strategy and before Bosnian elections preempt good alternatives, but the necessary public discussion is stifled by those who can talk only of withdrawing troops and by those who seek to avoid political risks in an election year.

The second debate, over the purpose of American involvement and the criteria of success, is trapped in the four-year-old policy battle between realists and moralists. Realists argue that the country has been partitioned and that the goal of a multiethnic Bosnia is a pretense that interferes with the primary goal of ending the war and the humanitarian tragedy. Moralists condemn the Dayton agreement for appeasing aggressors, legitimating war crimes, and destroying a legitimate state. Aiming to reassert the obligation of the international community to defend principles of justice against aggression and genocide, they have turned this criticism onto IFOR for not giving priority to the work of the war crimes tribunal. But this debate also obscures the issue. The current partition is not a stable outcome that will prevent more violence, and the focus on punishment will not restore a multiethnic Bosnia. Without a strategy that gets beyond this "either-or" contest to a realistic political process, there can be no stable or just peace.

The third debate has been over who is responsible

for Bosnia. The view that this is really *Europe's* problem and that Europe is not pulling its weight for its own security, particularly with the end of the cold war, is deeply felt by many Americans. The Clinton administration, on the other hand, has reaffirmed the policy of preceding administrations that European security is a vital American interest and that NATO is the core of European security. This issue is also not an "either-or," but as posed, it obscures the need for coordination and cooperation among the allies, particularly if the objective is to diminish the American role over time while restoring credibility to NATO.

In the short run, both President Clinton and candidate Dole have found a solution to the need for election-year fireworks, while protecting the Bosnia operation, in their proxy war over the Clinton administration involvement in Iranian arms smuggling to the Bosnian Muslims. Republicans in both houses of Congress have set up no less than six separate investigations and committed more than \$1 million for the purpose, while administration officials have not stonewalled but proclaimed that they did nothing illegal, that Iranian influence in Bosnia began under the Bush administration, and that the Republicans are simply engaged in a "pay-back" for the Iran-Contra scandal. The serious quarrels between the United States and Europe have also been diffused temporarily by focusing blame on the warring parties. Ignoring all evidence about third-party intervention in ending civil wars—that negotiated agreements do not succeed unless outsiders establish the conditions for effective implementation, above all some international military presence that signals commitment to the peace process and enables people to disarm and repair lost trust—the allies have found consensus in disillusionment with the parties. As if anticipating failure, they insist that if the Bosnians don't want peace, outsiders certainly can't bring it to them.

None of these debates—over intervention or outcomes or who is responsible—addresses the primary question in Bosnia: what the political outcome is and how to build a process that secures peace. The Dayton process cannot remain hostage to American presidential elections or old debates. To succeed, policy cannot wait for the outcome of the September elections in Bosnia or the November elections in the United States. As the intervention in Somalia demonstrated, both presidential candidates have to be concerned about what will unfold largely after November 5. But in this case, the costs of delay and failure are immeasurably higher.