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Planning a European-Led Force

By JOHN HILLEN

The decision by the President to commit over 35,000 U.S. troops to backstop the Dayton peace agreement in autumn 1995 was remarkable given the domestic controversy over the mission and the sad history of intervention in the Balkans in the past. Nonetheless, American leadership of the NATO Implementation Force (IFOR) was key to both the deployment during 1996 and keeping a tight lid on further military action by the various factions in Bosnia.

However, eighteen months on, NATO is still firmly mired in Bosnia with no end in sight. Moreover, despite numerous pronouncements from Secretary of Defense William Cohen about an imminent U.S. exit in 1998, there are no plans, political or military, for making the transition from the U.S.-led Stabilization Force (SFOR) to a European-led peacekeeping force (EFOR). Although a conversion to a predominantly European force is broadly supported by both parties in Congress, American allies in Europe have clearly communicated their reluctance to take the lead.

The need for the United States to plan for a hand-off to a European-led

John Hillen is a fellow for national security at the Council on Foreign Relations and author of *Blue Helmets: The Strategy of U.N. Military Operations* (forthcoming).

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force is manifested on two levels. On the micro level, the situation in Bosnia underscores the fact that while a general peace has been maintained under both IFOR and SFOR, there is little evidence that it is sustainable without the continued presence of a robust international force. On the macro level, the strain on an ever shrinking and globally engaged U.S. military demands a smaller commitment by Washington to a regional security mission such as continued peacekeeping in Bosnia. More-

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over, the growing differences in security interests and military capabilities between the United States and its European allies suggest a better division of labor between a global superpower and its partners.

If, as Secretary Cohen said during his confirmation hearing, America should send "a signal and strong message to our European friends [that] we are not going to be there . . . that it's time for them to assume responsibility [in Bosnia] . . . and that we are not going to make an unlimited commitment to that region," then EFOR planning should begin now. It is certainly in the realm of the possible, and developments such as the NATO combined joint task force (CJTF) were intended precisely for this sort of contingency. To not undertake planning on the political and military level not only denies the realities of Bosnia but flies in the face of several geopolitical and security trends that make changing the balance of responsibility in all future Bosnias a U.S. strategic necessity.

Bosnia 1997

IFOR was a military success in that it prevented the resumption of a destructive conflict but a political failure in that it did not pave the way for the multi-ethnic Bosnia envisaged by the Dayton accords. This is rooted in the fact that the political and military provisions of the agreement always worked at cross purposes. The IFOR mission was to separate Serb, Croat, and Muslim forces while the political

goal of Dayton was to unify Bosnia into a multi-ethnic state with shared political, economic, and judiciary institutions. These goals were irreconcilable unless IFOR acted to forcibly promote unification—such as stringently enforcing the right of refugees to return to their homes.

Instead IFOR, mindful of the "mission creep" that beset operations in Somalia, sensibly stuck to an achievable military goal—keeping various factions apart by imposing a zone of separation. In addition, undertaking a controversial mission in an election year meant that self-preservation and casualty-avoidance were of concern to U.S. strategists. This resulted in a passive and risk-averse strategy that earned U.S. forces in IFOR the nickname of "the turtles" for their emphasis on force protection and unwillingness to take chances.

U.S. forces suffered only one death from hostile incidents, but their operations left IFOR well short of the political conditions that could bring about the administration's oft-stated goal of a December 20, 1996 exit date. Indeed, the elections of September 1996, in which over 80 percent of Bosnians voted in solid ethnic blocs and few refugees crossed lines to cast votes in their pre-war districts, merely confirmed the de facto victory of separation over unification. By claiming with ballots what they had fought for with bullets, Bosnians effectively killed the Dayton accords, or at best kicked the can down the road for the SFOR political component to resolve in 1997 or 1998.

Under these circumstances, it was self-evident that the international community would have to maintain a presence in some strength in Bosnia. SFOR was envisaged as a smaller IFOR with the same basic mission: to keep the sides from renewed fighting while fostering a climate of peace and stability conducive to reunification. Given the elusiveness of that goal, which seemingly has far more support from outsiders than Bosnians, it is more

likely that SFOR and succeeding forces will settle into a Cyprus-type peacekeeping mission. By the end of the SFOR mission in 1998, the outside world may decide that it is worth an international effort to keep peace in Bosnia for years to come even if this means supporting de facto separation. If that is the outcome, the unique and decisive role played by the United States over the last few years must come to an end. If Bosnia is to be a ward of the international community, then Secretary Cohen's statement about who should take responsibility for heavy lifting in a protracted peace operation should be put into action.

The U.S. Role

On the macro level, there are even more compelling reasons for rethinking U.S. leadership in Bosnia over the past two years. In particular, the confluence of several geopolitical and security trends demands a reappraisal of the role of the United States in regional alliances and the "one-size-fits-all" approach to calling on NATO as the solution to every European security dilemma.

The first trend, the strategic strain on the Armed Forces, was stressed by Secretary Cohen during his first week at the Pentagon when he indicated that the demand for American involvement far exceeds our resources. In fact, in attempts to close the supply-demand gap, the military—almost 40 percent smaller than in 1991—is operating at its most frenetic pace since Vietnam. The services routinely exceed targeted and budgeted operational tempos, especially in frequently deployed units. As a result, exercises have been scaled back, combat readiness has suffered in many units, and problems with morale, quality of life, recruitment, and retention are on the rise.

The procurement account, down some 70 percent the past decade, has yet to rebound from what the Congressional Budget Office terms a "procurement holiday." The FY98 budget shows, despite a long-promised increase, a decline in procurement dollars for the fourth consecutive year. Operations in Bosnia, originally estimated to cost \$1–2 billion in autumn

Italian army
Leopard 1 tanks.



U.S. Air Force

1995, are now forecast to exceed \$6 billion through FY98, forcing the Pentagon to defer maintenance, change or cut training, and fleece the budget for operations and maintenance funds. Meantime, assets like quarter-century old C-130s fly in and out of Bosnia at twice their normal rate while replacements are pushed farther back in the procurement pipeline. Protracted operations such as Bosnia prevent the services from recapitalizing for eventualities that may have greater defense consequences than peacekeeping.

The second trend that militates in favor of reduced commitment to a prolonged operation in Bosnia is the evolving divergence in military competencies between America and Europe.

For the most part, the United States is becoming the only allied power that can organize or lead significant combat operations. This predominance has come about principally because of the stringent fiscal standards that European Union nations must meet to be eligible for monetary integration. Since only Ireland and Luxembourg currently meet those standards, our chief NATO allies have been busy cutting defense since the Cold War by an average of 35 percent. European R&D accounts are half the percentage of that in the U.S. defense budget; and even procurement funds are more scarce in Europe than the starved recapitalization dollars in the U.S. budget. More importantly, European cuts are most keenly felt in critical areas such as power projection and sustainable combat power.

This pattern of European defense spending over the last six years has left

the United States the only NATO member with such capabilities as large aircraft carriers, long-range strike aircraft, fielded stealth technology, space-based C⁴I satellites and sensors, advanced aerial surveillance and reconnaissance systems, global lift, strategic logistics assets, and advanced weaponry based on the nascent revolution in military affairs. In Bosnia, 46 of 48 satellites which have been used by IFOR and SFOR for C⁴I functions belonged to the United States.

Moreover, doctrinal and organizational shifts in emphasis among allies are profound—from larger forces for territorial defense and combat operations to much smaller forces for peacekeeping and military operations other than war (MOOTW). As the Canadian defense minister recently said, “I am a peacekeeper, not a warrior” (Canada

has only 21,500 active members in its land forces). This new military reality leaves the United States increasingly alone in the ability to form and direct a Desert Storm type operation—a warfighting enterprise in which it provided 70 percent of ground troops, 76 percent of combat aircraft, two out of three warships, all six aircraft carriers, and over 90 percent of the advanced C4I and support systems. Despite talk of a growing European defense identity, this imbalance seems likely to become even more tilted in America's favor.

Instead of bemoaning divergence in military competencies between itself and its European allies, the United States should take advantage of this evolution. If the overall effect of an al-

lesser threats like a Bosnia affect the interests of alliance partners very differently

liance is intended to be more than the sum of its parts, then it makes sense that the roles and responsibilities of differing members should be matched to their capabilities and interests. Thus rendering to the peacekeepers what is theirs and to the warfighters what is theirs not only reflects a shift in military capabilities but a third geopolitical trend. National interests today are achieved very differently even among close allies and thus inspire very different levels of will and sacrifice. Unlike the Soviet threat that provided a centripetal force to hold NATO together, Bosnia never inspired an "all for one and one for all" call for action from members.

Lesser security threats like a Bosnia affect the interests of alliance partners very differently. While Saddam Hussein's 1990 invasion of Kuwait proved threatening enough to temporarily unify a disparate 31-member coalition, his September 1996 actions against the Kurds did not. In fact, the U.S. cruise missile response of last year only found support from Britain and Germany and was condemned or not supported by Turkey, France, and Saudi Arabia. This is natural in a world of diverse threats and should be exploited by encouraging those with the greatest

interest to assume the lion's share of intervention burdens. To pretend that a heavily enforced peace in Bosnia for ten or twenty years is as much in the interest of America as Europe is fatuous. The United States is involved in European security as the leader of NATO to protect its immutable vital interests on that continent—to prevent Europe from being dominated by a hostile power or bloc. America should serve as a balancer and defender of last resort in Europe—not a gendarme for its ethnic squabbles.

However, the United States became indefinitely committed to Bosnia through a circuitous logic that exposed the lack of flexibility in NATO and European security architecture: Bosnia is a European security problem, NATO is Europe's only credible military organ, the United States is the leader of NATO, thus it must lead the Bosnian mission. This approach makes no distinction between threats large or small, interests vital or non-essential, or strategic responsibilities local or global. Despite profound changes in Europe's economic, political, and military circumstances, its security architecture seems stuck on Cold War autopilot. For instance, at the onset of the recent Albanian crisis, the Italian press commented little on what Italy and other G-7 European powers should do. Instead, editorial writers chastised the United States and Russia for failing to show any initiative. One-size-fits-all strategies may have worked for Europe over the last fifty years, but the many calls for a reappraisal of the U.S. role in Bosnia point to the need for a more flexible approach—what British racing enthusiasts might call "horses for courses"—in the post-Cold War era.

Exit Strategy—CJTF and EFOR

If America is to alleviate strategic strain, concentrate on the global security tasks only its forces can accomplish, and ensure that its European sacrifices reflect national interests and military capabilities in the post-Cold War era, then it must press for a new bargain in Bosnia. Specifically, the

United States must begin planning for a transition to EFOR in 1998, a European-led force that could operate with limited but critical U.S. support. Given the unlikely prospect of a short-term solution in Bosnia and finite U.S. patience for an extended American presence, handing off Bosnia to a credible European force with the forbearance and resolve to see the task through would be the most sustainable and achievable goal for a superpower.

The vehicle for this transition can be found in the NATO combined joint task force (CJTF). A U.S. initiative, the concept was conceived in 1993 and after much negotiation was approved in June 1996. CJTF will allow for a mix and match of "separable but not separate" NATO units that can be led by either an American or European commander, a force structure dominated by either the United States or Europe, or even a smaller CJTF put together under the auspices of a reinforced Western European Union (WEU) or Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE). The U.S. ambassador to NATO, Robert Hunter, has called CJTF "the first significant change in the way the Alliance does business since 1966." This is because the concept introduces the sort of operational flexibility NATO will need to address a range of post-Cold War security problems in Europe—a flexibility that can accurately reflect both national interest and military capability in each member country's strategic responsibilities. Moreover, a functioning CJTF will have the practical effect of stiffening the political resolve of Europeans in their ability to handle small crisis management, humanitarian relief, and peace operations in the region (such as the Albanian mission).

To create EFOR, CJTF must be taken off the drawing board and put into practice instead of atrophying in a planning cell at Mons (EFOR evolution is represented in the accompanying figure). IFOR and SFOR have been CJTFs in all but name. The move to EFOR will require a change in the American role from leader and dominant partner to supporting player with unique and decisive capabilities. EFOR might well be much smaller than SFOR and backstopped by the United States

Spanish navy AV-8S
Matador.



U.S. Navy (John Leenhouts)

in areas such as Civil Affairs, intelligence, logistics, air and sea support, communications, and transport. Given the embryonic state of European security and defense identity and the condition of organizations like WEU and OSCE, the first iteration of EFOR will

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have to be “stood-up” under the aegis of NATO. However, it is possible that OSCE and WEU could mature to a point at which they could field a small

Bosnian peacekeeping mission in the future, thereby releasing NATO from a burden that should have only been temporary duty for a U.S.-led alliance of collective defense.

Bosnia has shown that post-Cold War Europe needs a variety of institutional alternatives for a range of security issues. The imperatives are that institutions should complement each other, overlap

in responsibility, and above all accurately reflect the different interests and capabilities of each member. For the United States this means an enduring interest in ensuring that Europe is not dominated by a hostile power or bloc—even if the threat is not immediate. A U.S.-led NATO focused on collective defense and deterrence is the best insurance against such a threat. Attempting to turn the American role in NATO into a long-term commitment to peace operations in Bosnia has exposed the foible of trying to insert a square peg in a round hole.

Instead, the United States must, through mechanisms like CJTF, encourage development of round pegs like WEU and OSCE through which prosperous partners can take the lead in smaller collective security missions. If the United States does not offer strong leadership in this enterprise,

then Europeans will be content to depend on a U.S.-led NATO response for every security issue that arises on the continent. Eventually the American people will become disillusioned with a security role that does not accurately reflect post-Cold War interests and capabilities of the United States or its partners. Already, many voices on both the left and right have called for a total end to the American commitment to European security.

Reappraisals of the U.S. role in European security often evoke panicky responses at home and abroad. However, this reaction tends to make American leadership not a means but an end. If the situation in Europe is so inflexible that it precludes development of a supporting security system—and holds America permanently responsible for peacekeeping in Europe—then this proposition should be reexamined. Supporting efforts by regional allies can free those farther up the security hierarchy for problems that only they have the power to solve.¹

European allies cannot replace the United States in the larger tasks of regional or global security. Moreover, these allies are allowing their capabilities to support such endeavors to decrease. It therefore is incumbent on the United States and its partners to build a credible supporting system for any future Bosnias. Planning for a transition to EFOR should start taking advantage of divergent interests and capabilities and foster a wider sense of responsibility for security affairs. Such a system would not be built to shirk international responsibilities but create means to complement the unique and demanding U.S. role of deterring major conflicts in Europe and other parts of the globe.

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Evolution of Bosnia Force

IFOR (1996)

- 53,000 troop U.S.-led NATO task force
- 16,000 U.S. troops in Bosnia
- 15–18,000 U.S. troops supporting in Hungary/Croatia/Italy/Adriatic Sea

SFOR (1997–98)

- 31,000 troop U.S.-led NATO task force
- 8,500 U.S. troops in Bosnia
- 10–15,000 U.S. troops supporting

EFOR (1998–?)

- 12,000 troop European-led CJTF
- <1,000 U.S. troops in Bosnia
- <4,000 U.S. troops supporting

NOTES

¹ See John Hillen, “Superpowers Don’t Do Windows,” *Orbis*, vol. 41, no. 2 (Spring 1997), pp. 241–57.