NATO Reluctant Peacemaker

Timothy J. Birch

Follow this and additional works at: https://irl.umsl.edu/cis

Part of the International and Area Studies Commons

Recommended Citation
Available at: https://irl.umsl.edu/cis/80

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by IRL @ UMSL. It has been accepted for inclusion in UMSL Global by an authorized administrator of IRL @ UMSL. For more information, please contact marvinh@umsl.edu.
Occasional Paper No. 9606
December, 1996

Occasional Papers

The Center for International Studies of the University of Missouri-St. Louis issues Occasional Papers at irregular intervals from ongoing research projects, thereby providing a viable means for communicating tentative results. Comments on these papers, therefore, are particularly welcome. Occasional Papers should not be reproduced or quoted at length without the consent of the author or of the Center for International Studies.

NATO: Reluctant Peacemaker

Timothy J. Birch
NATO: RELUCTANT PEACEMAKER

TIMOTHY J. BIRCH
Research Associate
Center for International Studies,
University of Missouri-St. Louis
St. Louis, MO 63121-4499
NATO: Reluctant Peacemaker

Timothy J. Birch
Center for International Studies, UMSL

Introduction

The disintegration of Yugoslavia, and the ethnopolitical conflicts in the successor states, created a challenge which for four years defied solution by the international community. Early diplomatic failures by the European Community (later known as the European Union, or EU), combined with the inadequacies of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), forced the Yugoslav issue onto the agenda of the United Nations (UN). Lacking adequate military and surveillance capabilities, the UN in turn came to rely upon European military organizations—the Western European Union (WEU) and North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO)—to assist with peacekeeping and to enforce the arms embargo imposed upon Bosnia-Herzegovina.

The mission of the UN Protection Force (UNPROFOR) was sustained by NATO assets almost from its inception. Moreover, NATO carried out several military operations into 1995 under UN sanction. Nevertheless, by the beginning of 1995 it seemed that NATO, along with the UN, had failed in the Balkans. Senior American Republicans in particular gave vent to their frustrations, while the French government denounced American reluctance to share the peacekeeping burden. Ultimately, the American-sponsored Dayton Accords, which were pushed through in the summer of 1995, enabled NATO to step in and enforce peace. However, for many, and not least the Bosnian people, NATO’s intervention was somewhat late in coming. This paper attempts to analyze the reasons for this tardiness, and seeks to tease out some of the implications of NATO’s performance in Bosnia for the alliance’s new security roles in Europe.
Three lines of investigation will be pursued. First, NATO's adaptation to the post-Cold War European security environment is described in an attempt to provide a yardstick by which to measure actual behavior against expressed principles and real capabilities. Second, the chapter will describe NATO's operational involvement in Bosnia-Herzegovina, focusing in particular upon the latter part of 1994. It is suggested that NATO adopted a strategy which was intended to impose a form of “double containment” on the fighting in former Yugoslavia: on one hand, containment of the intensity of the conflict, particularly around UN “safe areas” and, on the other, clear demarcation of the geographically and politically acceptable locus of violence. The third and final section attempts to diagnose the causes of NATO's pre-Dayton reluctance to intervene more forcefully, understood here as overt military intervention in numbers on the ground. Five factors are suggested as contributing to this hesitancy: missed opportunities in 1991 and 1992; the nature of the fighting and the related question of maintaining NATO's neutrality; the pivotal positions of Britain and France in both the UN operation and within NATO, which amplified the institutional misunderstandings between these two organizations; intra-alliance disagreement concerning the relative moral culpability of the parties involved in the war; and, finally, Great Power diplomatic rivalry, which was superimposed on an already complex local conflict.

(I) NATO's New Strategic Concept

NATO adapted to the post-Cold War environment by developing a “contingency paradigm” for military preparedness, while also retaining a residual mobilization capacity. NATO has identified a variety of challenges which are known by type, but not by source. Many of these challenges will emanate from regions beyond the territories of member states. The alliance had some experience with out-of-area operations before the collapse of the USSR, but so-called Article Four missions had often proven contentious, and NATO procedures for handling them were ad-hoc and imperfectly institutionalized. The end of the Cold War thus brought on a need for doctrinal review.
In July of 1990, NATO ministers established a Strategy Review Group (SRG), and France, at first absent from the SRG, ultimately participated in its work from February of 1991. By May, the North Atlantic Council (NAC) had agreed to a new force posture, and most NATO assets are no longer ensconced on the inner-German border. Main Defense and Augmentation units have been earmarked for the mobilization role, while Rapid Reaction Forces (RRF) have been slated to perform the crisis-management task. In developing the reaction forces, NATO leaders emphasized three principles: multinationality in unit composition; flexibility, or the ability to tailor forces to the demands imposed by a given conflict or crisis; and mobility, at both the tactical and strategic levels. The Rapid Reaction Forces have their own air components, planning staffs, and a Mobile Combined Air Operations Center which is deployable to any area of the world. The RRF can also draw ground units from a force pool of eight divisions which vary by type, including heavy mechanized formations and lighter units suitable for deployment in inhospitable terrain. Additional air and maritime resources can be assigned to the RRF to create self-contained "composite" forces.

Reaction forces can be placed under the direction of any one of the three regional ground commands, Allied Forces South, Central, and North. Reflecting changes in allied threat assessment, AFSOUTH, traditionally the poor relative of NATO's commands, was assigned 33% or better of the infrastructure budget from 1985-1991 and continues to be a high-priority asset. Naval reorganization has also been effected, and two commands now exist: STANAVFORMED (Standing Naval Forces, Mediterranean) and STANAVFORANT (Standing Naval Forces, Atlantic). The former, as revealed by its activities in the second Gulf War and former Yugoslavia, has been slated for crisis management throughout Europe, the Mediterranean, and possibly also the Middle East.

At the Rome Summit in November of 1991, four security functions were identified as tasks for the
Western Alliance:

1. Providing a foundation for a stable security environment in Europe, based on the growth of democratic institutions and pacific settlement of disputes.

2. Serving, under Article 4 of the North Atlantic Treaty, as a transatlantic forum for allied consultations on any issues that affect the vital interests of individual members or the group.

3. Deterring and defending against military threats to member states.

4. Preserving the strategic balance in Europe against the residual threat posed by the FSU.

In addition, in 1992 NATO committed itself to OSCE peacekeeping and peacemaking operations on a "case-by-case" basis, a supplement to its activities in the North Atlantic Cooperation Council (NACC) and the Partnership for Peace (PfP). A similar commitment has been made to the UN. Indeed, the Defense Planning Committee (DPC), meeting in December of 1992, directed NATO’s military authorities to "identify specific measures ... which will enhance NATO’s peacekeeping capabilities and which will be refined through the force planning process". Several measures have been implemented. A peacekeeping office has been established at NATO headquarters, and a program on peacekeeping cooperation with former Warsaw Treaty Organization members was also adopted by NACC in June of 1993. Additionally, the alliance’s January 1994 endorsement of the Combined Joint Task Force (CJTF) concept and the subsequent deployment of IFOR, reveal that NATO is making progress in handling multinational military operations. Although procedures for peacekeeping operations had not been firmed up by the beginning of 1994, NATO had by that time the objective capabilities to impose order in former Yugoslavia, albeit at probable great cost in blood and treasure. What was lacking, and had been since blood was first spilled in Croatia, was the political will to end the conflict by force of arms.
II) Policies and Behavior: Containment vs Commitment

NATO's appearance on the Balkan stage came rather late in the day. Initially, the alliance was kept on the sidelines, as EU political machinery was employed in an unsuccessful attempt to foster peace in the region. The UN and the Europeans were in the vanguard of the diplomatic offensive until eclipsed by the Americans, and most NATO members were reluctant to deploy ground combat forces in the numbers required to enforce peace until a corresponding commitment was made by the Clinton administration. NATO's behavior was therefore conditioned by these limiting factors.

Until IFOR arrived on the scene, NATO enforced policies developed in other fora. Five roles were undertaken by the alliance: enforcement of the UN-sponsored arms embargo; monitoring and enforcing the no-flight zone over Bosnia; providing air support for UN contingents in designated "safe areas"; punishing violations of the weapons exclusion regimes around the safe areas; and, signalled by the presence of American Marines, providing a back-up to the "trip wire" deployment in the Former Yugoslav Republic Of Macedonia (FYROM, established under UN Security Council resolution 795 of December 11, 1992). These measures were complemented by a UN-sponsored regime on the storage and placement of heavy weapons around the safe areas. Cumulatively, the package was designed to dampen the intensity of violence while also signalling the west's commitment to containing the geographical extent of the fighting.

The WEU was the first European security institution to offer its services to the UN. Meeting in Bonn on November 19, 1991, WEU ministers pledged to create "humanitarian corridors" to provide relief for the peoples of Croatia and backed up this move with a naval patrol of the Adriatic sea. On July 10, 1992, NATO followed suit, agreeing to enforce UN-imposed sanctions by means of combined air and sea operations in the Adriatic, though initially without the legal authority to stop vessels suspected of violating sanctions. Coordinated NATO/WEU patrols commenced from August.
Foreign Ministers of NATO accepted enforcement of the UN-sponsored flight ban over Bosnia and Herzegovina in December 1992.\textsuperscript{21} NATO and the WEU also offered 6,000 and 5,000 troops respectively in September for protection of UN humanitarian convoys, and agreed to implement sanctions against Serbia and Montenegro.\textsuperscript{22} The allies subsequently assigned NATO's multinational AWACS force to the no-fly zones, and provided tactical air cover for UNPROFOR units in UN-protected safe areas (which were increased to six in number by Security Council resolution 824 of May 6, 1993).\textsuperscript{23} NATO's Northern Army Group (NORTHAG) provided the staff and equipment for UNPROFOR's Bosnia-Herzegovina command H.Q. at Kiseljak.

NATO began enforcement of the no-fly zone in April 1993 under UN Security Council resolution 816. Further, NATO's Military Committee developed a document, "Operational Options for Air Strikes in Bosnia-Herzegovina" pursuant to a NAC directive of August 2, 1993. The plan addressed targeting identification and the modalities of UN/NATO command arrangements.\textsuperscript{24} While NATO retained operational control over its assets, UNPROFOR ground commanders were empowered to call for air support. No raids occurred in 1993. NATO appeared ready to conduct strikes around Sarajevo late that year, but ultimately deferred to the UN which cited hazards to UNPROFOR forces in the area.\textsuperscript{25}

NATO's first bledding occurred on February 28, 1994, when four Serbian aircraft were shot down by American F-16C fighters. NATO continued to patrol the exclusion zones and safe areas, but did not undertake further combat operations until the spring of 1994 in response to the Serbian drive on the Muslim enclave of Gorazde. Air power was applied sporadically throughout the spring and summer, but the highest profile air attacks were conducted around the Bihac pocket in November of 1994. Ultimately, this series of strikes did little to stem the tide of Serbian conquest, although it did have the effect of enhancing tensions within the Western Alliance. In consequence, and also as a result of
NATO's deference to UN authority, air operations over Bihac were temporarily scaled down in late November and early December. Nevertheless, the tempo of NATO's operations had in fact quickened over the course of 1994.

This situation resulted from the implementation of tougher rules of engagement which had been quietly agreed to with the United Nations. NATO air attacks were carried out in Bosnia and Croatia in response to a Serbian missile attack on British Sea Harriers on November 22. In retaliation for the strikes, Bosnian Serbs took several hundred hostages, threatened war against the UN, and attempted to reclaim heavy weapons from UN-supervised depots. These Serbian actions had the effect of raising questions about the viability of a continued UN presence on the ground. Britain and France threatened withdrawal of the UN force in December in an effort to prod the warring parties into accepting a ceasefire. Further, the U.S. indicated that it was willing to contribute the lion's share of a NATO rescue force, signalled by the movement of 2,000 U.S. Marines into the Adriatic on November 26.

David Gompert was probably correct when he argued that "spotty use of NATO air power" would only achieve token results. By the end of 1994, the allies had failed to deter Serbian advances in Bihac, as they had failed in Gorazde earlier that year. Moreover, bickering within the allied camp was at a furious pitch during the last two months of 1994, as the Clinton administration, bowing to congressional pressure, unilaterally abandoned enforcement of the arms embargo in opposition to most European countries, whose leaderships considered the embargo to be an essential tool for moderating the intensity of the fighting. Senator Dole's attacks on Britain and France late in November further soured trans-Atlantic relationships. Both Dole and representative Newt Gingrich were in the vanguard of the movement calling for implementation of the so-called "lift and strike" policy against the Serbs.
However, the European allies refused to back an American plan for use of air power to shore up the Muslims, as they had in January of 1993. With cracks appearing in the cohesion of the alliance, American officials attempted to fall back into line with the Europeans. Defense Secretary Perry announced on November 27 that the Serbs’ gains were not reversible by military action, and with this in mind Perry was attempting to dampen congressional pressure for complete abandonment of the arms embargo on Bosnia. An American official was also dispatched to Europe during the last week of November to deny French allegations that the U.S. was covertly arming the Bosnian Muslims. By November 28, the Clinton administration had dropped talk of further military action, recognizing that solidarity with NATO required the use of diplomatic channels to push the Serbs towards acceptance of the five-nation “Contact Group” plan. These attempts to unify western policy revealed the extent to which all parties in the Bosnian war preferred to maintain the UN deployment rather than risk an all-out war.

Thus, by the end of 1994, the alliance was able to present a unified face to the world, but questions concerning the alliance’s unity of purpose in Bosnia persisted. The ceasefire negotiated by former President Carter seemed, even at the time of the agreement, to be little more than a concession to the Balkan winter, and intractable differences among Serbs, Muslims and Bosnian Croats concerning the Contact Group’s plan accounted for the violence which resumed in 1995 and which finally culminated in the Dayton peace accord and full NATO commitment.

(III) The Limits of Intervention

Pre-Dayton NATO appeared to be ineffective in Bosnia, both in terms of ending the conflict and deterring further Serbian aggression. Yet it would be a mistake to regard NATO as an architect of the carnage. NATO inherited a mess created by other players, was obliged to enforce an infeasible UN
policy, and was hamstrung in doing so by internal squabbling, regional political complications, and consistent Russian opposition to increased western military commitment. These facts merit some consideration, for they may well be representative of the sorts of problems NATO encounters in the future when attempting to perform the crisis management role.

Missed Opportunities

The opportunity to head off widespread violence in former Yugoslavia was probably lost by the beginning of 1992. In 1990 and 1991, the Bush administration deferred to the Europeans who saw in the Yugoslav situation an opportunity to demonstrate the foreign policy clout of the EU. Trans-Atlantic communication took place within the framework of U.S.-EU channels, rather than within the institutional machinery offered by NATO. However, the EU proved incapable of ending the Croatian conflict, and in fact took steps which encouraged other republics to break away from the federal center.

Lacking a credible “stick” in the form of an interventionary force, Europe was unable to back up its diplomatic overtures and promises of aid throughout 1990 and 1991. France had called for military intervention in the summer of 1991 under the aegis of the WEU, but Britain balked on the grounds that the French merely wished to showcase the European alliance at the expense of NATO. From that point on, the onus was on attempting to find a diplomatic solution. Arms embargoes were put in place in 1991, and aid packages were frozen as an inducement to Yugoslavian unity. Fighting was intense in Croatia late in 1991 but the U.S. and Europeans were reluctant to recognize the republic (as well as Slovenia) before granting similar status to Bosnia-Herzegovina. Unfortunately, the German government broke ranks, Chancellor Kohl promising, on November 27, 1991, to recognize Slovenia and Croatia “before Christmas.” The UN Security Council, meeting on December 15, voted to send a number of observers in preparation for a peacekeeping mission to Croatia while urging UN members to
do nothing to exacerbate the situation, a point aimed at Germany.\textsuperscript{43} However, Germany chose to recognize the independence of Slovenia and Croatia on December 23, having closed air and road links with Serbia earlier in the month. Bosnia-Herzegovina, Croatia, FYROM and Slovenia all requested recognition from the EU on December 24, while ethnic Albanians in the Kosovo asked for EU recognition on the 23rd. Jarred by the unilateral German action, the EU recognized Slovenia and Croatia on January 15, but withheld the same from Bosnia-Herzegovina and FYROM.\textsuperscript{44} The risk of ethnic conflict in Bosnia was considered too great for the EU to grant recognition, but the referendum held in February of 1992 (which was boycotted by the Serbs) prompted President Izetbegovic to declare Bosnia's independence. Predictably, fighting erupted in short order and the Bosnian government called for a UN peacekeeping presence which was agreed to in principle on April 28. By the time that NATO came to be involved in the situation, it was stuck with enforcement of a set of patchy policy directives issued by the UN.

Thus, we may conclude three things from the opening gambits in the Yugoslav tragedy. First, an effective peacekeeping presence (as opposed to the pre-Dayton military requirement for peacemaking) could only have been undertaken before the conflict had spread to Bosnia. Had the WEU or NATO been able to station forces in Croatia while there was a lull in the fighting it might have been possible to ensure permanent cessation of hostilities. Bosnia, on the other hand, presented a thornier problem. Nevertheless, a substantial commitment of ground troops on the eve of the February 1992 referendum, suitably emplaced in those areas likely to be scenes of mortal combat (essentially the territories known as UN "safe areas") could have deterred widespread fighting if combined with a strong commitment to oppose any intervention by the Serbian-dominated Yugoslav National Army.

Second, the Europeans effectively guaranteed that ethnic resentments would be translated into forceful attempts to achieve political objectives, for the act of recognition in essence rewarded such behavior.
Acting thus, the Europeans, against the better judgment of the U.S., UN and indeed many of their own senior politicians, failed to deflate the power of ethnicity as a “strategy of survival” for Serbs, Muslims and Croats alike.45

Third, once it had become clear that the power to end the conflict exceeded the capacity of any other international organization, it was important that NATO make clear that its ability to successfully interpose itself between the warring parties was adversely affected by the nature of the conflict (discussed below) and the fact that NATO was locked into a UN policy package not of its own making. The rhetorical pounding that NATO took in the last two months of 1994 was avoidable if the facts of the matter had been soberly presented to alliance publics. Simply stated, the war in Bosnia, no matter how regrettable, appeared to be too complex to allow for effective military intervention, and given this, full commitment of NATO’s forces and prestige ran the risk of breaking the back of the alliance for uncertain benefits.

The Nature of the Conflict

For NATO and the western powers, the key question concerned whom to intervene against. In the view of this writer, once NATO had made clear its reluctance to employ a substantial peacemaking force, the alliance had two choices. First, air power could have been applied expressly to restore the military balance between Bosnia’s government and the rebellious Serbs. The Europeans feared that this course of action would have embroiled NATO in an anti-Serbian campaign in a war which was seen in Muslim quarters as an inter-state conflict but which was presented by the Serbs as a civil war. Alternatively, NATO could have committed itself to punishing certain forms of behavior, regardless of the ethnicity of the perpetrators. Had this been the policy, however, the alliance would have run the risk of retaliation from all parties, while, in either scenario, increasing hazards to the UNPROFOR
contingents nominally under the protection of NATO. Neither choice was acceptable to the Europeans, while the Americans saw no rationale for the second course of action. The truth of the matter, however, is that air power alone can neither win wars nor end them. Someone has to be in control on the ground.

The nature of the Bosnian conflict, however, made it difficult for the allies to agree on a NATO ground intervention, especially one not involving American troops. First, the war featured fluctuating alliances among the principal ethnic groups. For example, a Joint Defense Committee for Bosnia-Herzegovina and Croatia was established in 1992. However, later in the year this alliance was compromised by a ceasefire agreement between Bosnian Croats and Radovan Karadzic’s Bosnian Serbs.46 By April of 1993, the two sides were fighting each other, while relations between Croatia and the rump Yugoslavia, principally Serbia, showed signs of improvement. The Muslims, furthermore, were not a coherent entity, as revealed by the fact that a rebel Muslim group fought with the Serbs in Bihac.

Second, the power of ethnic identity led to widespread commission of appalling atrocities.47 Serbian terror has been well documented, but the Muslims also engaged in odious acts, apparently for broader political reasons. The UN, on November 10, 1994, accused Bosnian Muslims of shelling their own people in Sarajevo to elicit western sympathy for NATO air strikes in support of the Bosnian government.48 Some UN officials, who spoke on condition of anonymity, asserted that the February 1994 massacre in Sarajevo, which claimed 68 lives, was also attributable to the Bosnian government.49

Third, the situation was all the more problematic because it was far from clear that fighting was effectively directed from known political centers. Serbian president Slobodan Milosevic was obliged,
for example, to abandon the Bosnian Serbs in August of 1994 because he could not control their behavior and he blamed Serbs from Krajina for the NATO air raid on Udbina air field.\textsuperscript{50}

The battlelines were as complex as the ethnic picture. Several regions within Bosnia were contested by Croats, Serbs and Muslims on the basis of ancestral claim. Bosnian Serbs and Muslims alike eyed Sarajevo as potential capitals for their prospective states, while Muslim claims to eastern territories such as Srebrenica and, further to the north, Tuzla, conflicted with Serbian desires to establish a swath of contiguous territories from Serbia proper through to Krajina. The UN, which established safe areas in these contested regions, was unable to keep the peace in all of them, and with tenuous communication links often found that sizeable chunks of its forces were cut off one from another. The demands of peacekeeping under these conditions therefore imposed formidable logistical burdens on the UN Protection Force. Had NATO adopted the role of peacemaker, it would have experienced similar problems while possibly being heavily shelled by one or more of the parties to the conflict, an unappealing prospect.

The Pivotal Positions of Britain and France

The British and French contributed substantial forces to the UN mission, furnished UNPROFOR with senior commanders, and participated in NATO’s air patrols. However, these overlapping commitments had an adverse effect on relations between the UN and NATO. Senator Dole, who in November called for the UN to “get off NATO’s back and let NATO take care of Serbian aggression,” was in reality castigating the British and French for their reluctance to approve stepped-up NATO air strikes.\textsuperscript{51} In effect, this product of Anglo-French sensitivity to casualties gave the Serbs a virtual veto over NATO policy.

Fear of casualties also led the two European powers to oppose suspension of the arms embargo. Indeed,
maintenance of the arms ban cannot properly be thought of as a UN policy, since the General Assembly
called for its suspension on November 3, 1994. Although Bosnian leader Izetbegovic characterized Paris
and London as “Serbia’s protectors,” the European allies’ concern, at least in so far as it was expressed
publicly, extended no further than the safety of their personnel and the continued viability of the
UNPROFOR mission.52 And the supposed rift between the UN and NATO was in fact a dispute which
originated, in the main, within the allied camp and which showed itself most clearly over the
question of air strikes in Bihac pocket.

The UN, echoing British and French policy, emphasized the importance of negotiation with the Serbs
and NATO officials confirmed that they had been asked to scale down air patrols and strikes in
response to a Serbian threat of total war against UNPROFOR.53 UN military commanders
subsequently came under fire for not approving a supposedly sufficient number of NATO air strikes
around Bihac, even though ground spotters were in place.54 Some, including Izetbegovic, asserted that
Lieutenant-General Sir Michael Rose and his French counterpart, Bertrand de Lapresle, were
implementing an Anglo-French policy which sought the destruction of Muslim authority in Bosnia, thus
obviating the possibility of a Muslim state in Europe. General de Lapresle, who asked NATO to spare
Serbian fighter-bombers in the raid on Udbina, was concerned primarily to demonstrate that neither
the UN nor NATO was joining the war in opposition to the Serbs, even though then NATO Secretary-
General Willy Claes had gone on record as calling for strikes against Serb forces. However, such
assurances did not mollify the Bosnian government.

The simultaneous commitment of British and French forces to UNPROFOR and NATO therefor
amplified the misunderstandings between the Atlantic Alliance and the UN, and raised suspicions
within the Bosnian government. Further, as the next section makes clear, there were serious
disagreements within the allied camp over the Bosnian war, and these also contributed to NATO's inability to quell the violence.

**Diagnosing the Bosnian War: The Allies Disagree**

Britain and France took a more nuanced view of the conflict in Bosnia than that which prevailed in Washington, tending to recognize that moral responsibility was shared by Serbs, Muslims and Croats alike, a position more akin to the view held in Moscow than that held in the American capital. Additionally, the Europeans tended to argue that the war in Bosnia was a civil conflict, and therefore one which did not call for NATO's interposition between the armed forces of two sovereign states. Diplomacy, aimed at Zagreb and Belgrade as well as Sarajevo, was their priority, occasionally backed up by air power.

Late in 1992, the United Kingdom expressed reservations over intervention. The U.S., at about the same time, called for preventive bombardment of Serbian positions, though the two governments put the best face on things by agreeing to support the UN flight ban on December 20th. This disagreement, and the related question of increased commitment on the ground, continued to strain alliance relationships to the end of 1994. EU Foreign Ministers, meeting in November, argued that at least 100,000 NATO troops would be needed to enforce peace in Bosnia. Without an American commitment, however, such an army could not be raised.

American officials, in contrast, tended to place the majority of blame on the Serbs, who were viewed as initiating a war of aggression against a sovereign state. The Americans, therefore, sought to restore the military balance as a precursor to political negotiations, and in effect this is precisely what happened in the run-up to Dayton. However, prior to that time, American leaders, including Bush and Clinton as
well as prominent congressional figures such as Senator Nunn, opposed American ground intervention, preferring to use NATO air power to shore up the Muslims immediately while lifting the embargo and assisting in the training of the Muslim forces to improve their long-term prospects. The Europeans, led by France, criticized the American perspective for being simplistic and somewhat hypocritical. There were, for example, no American criticisms of the Bosnian V Corps offensive in Bihac, although Britain and France both publicly condemned the operation as an act of aggression.57

Furthermore, to the European allies, U.S. criticisms were not constructive without a commitment of ground troops. Former British Foreign Minister Douglas Hurd argued that peace would “not be achieved by fostering illusions about what NATO air power can achieve,” an obvious reference to the lift-and-strike lobby in Washington.58 Hurd’s French counterpart, Alain Juppe, was more explicit when he denounced “governments that want to give us lessons when they have not lifted a little finger to put even one man on the ground.”59 Such statements were typical at the time. France attacked the American decision to withdraw from the arms embargo, implied that American posturing had encouraged the Muslims to launch their ill-starred Bihac offensive, and, as noted above, sought assurances that the U.S. was not covertly arming the Muslims.60 However, American officials refused to comment on reports that intelligence information was provided to the Bosnian government, and it is now known that the U.S. did indeed help to arrange arms shipments to the Muslims.61 An American proposal to extend the weapons exclusion zone around Bihac also met with a French rebuff. Ambassador to NATO Jacques Blot argued that this was fine in principle, so long as the United States supplied the necessary additional troops.62 The French barb was sharper for the fact that it was coupled with criticism of American sensitivity to casualties. French officials cited the Pentagon’s extreme caution, which “bordered on paranoia,” at the time of the Udbina air raid, while one-time UN commander Phillipe Morillon suggested that the Americans were paying a political price for their low-cost victory in the Gulf War.63 In response, some American officials argued that Britain and France had often
agreed to tougher action in NATO meetings, but had vetoed strikes through their commanders on the
ground, an opinion with which the Bosnian Muslim government concurred. Ultimately, of course,
the “lift and strike” policy was vindicated, but at the end of 1994 analysts rightly pointed out that
western governments felt that the Bosnian conflict did not justify taking the kinds of risks that were
run during the Cold War.

Alliance cohesion was further undermined by an increasingly apparent divergence of post-Cold War
national and regional interests between Europe and the United States. The Europeans probably did not,
and do not, want a Muslim state in Europe. Although this line of reasoning is somewhat bitter to
contemplate (for it implies that some European powers were prepared to allow the destruction of the
Muslims in the field) there are reasons to believe that a Muslim-controlled Bosnia is not in Europe’s
long-term interest. Theoretically, a Muslim state could serve as a conduit for the transmission of
Islamic terrorism into Europe. However, the United States tended to side with the Bosnian Muslims in
an apparent attempt to show solidarity with moderate Islamic regimes worldwide.

NATO eventually weathered this storm, but questions pertaining to American security guarantees in
Europe were raised. France, which has long been in the forefront of efforts to ground European defense
institutions firmly within the EU, was extremely, and predictably, vocal on this score. Alain Juppe,
speaking in November of 1994, argued that “the conflict in Bosnia has shown the necessity to move
beyond NATO and American guarantees,” a sentiment echoed by WEU Secretary-General Sir Dudley
Smith. To what degree the Europeans will follow through on this rhetoric and move piecemeal
towards full autonomy remains to be seen: France is patching up her relationship with NATO, and
WEU lacks key capabilities but “fundamental rethinking cannot be excluded.”
In addition to the trans-Atlantic dispute, there was considerable disagreement within Europe. Germany, enjoying substantial diplomatic weight in Zagreb, was critical of the Serbs, but for historical reasons remained aloof from participation on the ground. Bonn also appeared to be leaning towards the U.S. and expressed sympathy for the Bosnian Muslims. Britain and France, seeking to balance German influence in Croatia, chose to work with Serbia’s Slobodan Milosevic through diplomatic channels as a reward for Milosevic’s criticisms of the Bosnian Serbs. Turkey and Greece were also at odds over the correct approach to the Bosnian war and the disintegration of Yugoslavia more generally. The Greeks, who reject the notion of an independent Macedonia, were criticized by EU Foreign Ministers in Brussels on December 8, 1992, for shipping oil to Serbia while withholding it from FYROM. Turkey, which has sympathies towards Bosnia’s Muslims, was ready to respond to the Bosnian government’s call for military intervention on June 17, 1992, but Turkey’s historic enmity towards the Serbs dictated that her forces be kept out of the region.

Appeasing the Russian Bear

One other factor helps explain NATO’s vacillation. Russian sympathies have traditionally rested with the Serbs, and western governments were unwilling to antagonize the eastern power at a time when the Western Alliance is seeking to expand. Russia was invariably critical of attempts to portray Serbs as the aggressors, and opposed employment of NATO in a military capacity in Bosnia until it was clear that IFOR would have a Russian component. Russia argued against lifting the arms embargo on Bosnia and pushed the allies to cooperate with Milosevic in efforts to obtain a ceasefire, in part at least as a consequence of a long-standing desire to lift sanctions against Serbia. Russian membership in the Contact Group gave added weight to her opinion, and Moscow consistently blocked moves proposed in international fora which were seen as unfair to the Serbs. For example, Russia refused to sign on to a UN Security Council resolution calling for a ban on shipping fuel for Serbia into Serb-held
territories, and Moscow opposed OSCE resolutions which were critical of the Serbs. Additionally, Russian officials castigated the UN, objecting to the absence of Security Council criticism of the Bosnian V corps' offensive around Bihac.

Conclusion: NATO and Crisis Management After Dayton

Much changed in the Balkans over the middle to latter part of 1995. The collapse of the Srebrenica and Zepa pockets went some way towards removing the political constraints on stepped-up NATO air and ground action against the Serbs. Ultimately, NATO strikes changed the military balance on the ground, showed the Serbs in particular that an easy and quick victory was not in the offing, and had the effect of making the Serbian leadership more amenable to a negotiated settlement. The Dayton Peace accord, pushed through under considerable American pressure, created a shaky political settlement whose primary importance lay in the fact that it contained a rationale for an American presence in Bosnia. IFOR, given a one year peacekeeping mission rather than being asked to perform an onerous peacemaking role, deployed around 60,000 soldiers, of whom a third were Americans drawn from the 1st Armored Division. Alongside sizable British and French contingents, IFOR also contains a Russian component, an essential move given Russian political sensitivities in the region. Aside from some limited low-intensity violence and continued questions concerning the duration of IFOR's deployment and the long-term viability of the peace plan itself, the mission to date appears to have been successfully prosecuted. However, an earlier deployment would doubtless have saved many lives and bolstered NATO's credibility.

As analyzed here, the Western Alliance, from 1992 to the middle of 1995, was unable to fulfill its commitment to crisis management due to internal disagreement over what could be achieved politically by a military organization. Although there is evidence of divergent European perspectives on the war, the principal fissure was trans-Atlantic in nature. During the Cold War, NATO was able to survive
internal crises, such as Suez (1956) and the war on Cyprus (1974), because the Soviet threat offered a compelling rationale for continued cohesion: simply stated, there was nowhere else to turn. In the absence of the Soviet threat, and amid all the rumbling concerning the European Security and Defense Identity (ESDI), we may reasonably ask if the alliance has a bright future playing the role of fire brigade across the European continent.

The answer to that question will be determined in part by how well NATO holds up under the weight of its next challenge. First, NATO must improve its ability to develop a unified perspective through alliance political machinery. Clearly, in the initial period of hostilities, trans-Atlantic communication was poor. The EU states, as noted above, worked at cross-purposes, while France and Britain failed to provide the level of leadership required to stifle dissent within the allied camp. The United States, again as noted above, was content to leave the Yugoslav crisis to the Europeans: given the different sympathies which prevailed in various European capitals, and the inability of the EU to quash them, this was a mistake. More importantly, the decision to leave the work of peace promotion to the Europeans was questionable because the EU members lacked a credible interventionary capability. WEU is at present a paper tiger, and does not possess many of the elements which are required for successful overt military intervention. Doctrinally, the “out-of-area” bogeyman was put to rest by NATO at the end of 1991, but it took four years, assertive American leadership (admittedly late in the day), and an operational commitment to establish a real-life precedent for military operations of this type. However, if the Bosnian case is at all representative of what may be lurking in the shadows of the future, the allies will need to create a formula whereby NATO can act in the absence of American leadership on a given problem. This is perhaps the most important lesson which western powers can glean from the Yugoslav civil wars.
Willy Claes, NATO's former Secretary-General, correctly argued that "we can't wait for the U.S. to take the lead every time there is a crisis," for the scale of America's commitment to European defense is bound to wane in the absence of the USSR. A strengthened European pillar within NATO would better enable European powers to cooperate militarily with the U.S. in situations such as the second Gulf War, and would also allow Europe to solve its own problems without doing excessive damage to the Western Alliance. The development of the Combined Joint Task Force (CJTF) concept, endorsed by the alliance in January of 1994, may help in this connection. CJTFs theoretically allow sub-groups of NATO, especially the WEU, to make use of alliance assets without direct American operational participation. Moreover, Britain, which currently holds the WEU Presidency, is focusing attention on bolstering WEU crisis response capabilities to ensure more effective employment of NATO assets. Without doubt, problems remain: further refinements to the concept are required, while complications pertaining to NATO's voting formula, CJTF headquarters and logistics units, host-nation support, and lines of political authority, have yet to be entirely resolved. These considerations aside, CJTFs should help the allies avoid a repetition of the Bosnian debacle, for such failures will eventually corrode the foundations of NATO.

Other lessons can also be teased from the Bosnian war. As argued above, the Americans and Europeans disagreed on several key issues, but there was also disagreement within the European camp. If Europe is to take the lead on future crisis responses, it is important that the EU provide a forum wherein common positions are developed and implemented. Irresponsible actions on the part of Germany, for example, undercut the appearance of European unity in the Yugoslav case, and such a situation should be prevented in future. The French proposal to use the European Council (the senior intergovernmental EU institution) as WEU's task-master, while admittedly not having much of a chance of being implemented at the 1996 Intergovernmental Conferences, is nevertheless constructive.
Finally, if the CJTF concept is correctly implemented, and if the Europeans can devise an institutional formula for the development of common positions, the response time for a military intervention will be shortened. One can assert that the tardiness of the west's response to the disintegration of Yugoslavia resulted in a lengthier, more intense armed conflict in Bosnia. If civil wars are to be controlled and extinguished, much less prevented, the allies will have to deploy early and in strength. Further political and military reform is therefore essential, not only for NATO itself, but also for the credibility of the west's declared commitment to extending stability, market economies, and democracy across the entire Eurasian landmass.

Notes


2. In the fighting around Bihac, for example, Russian Foreign Minister Kozyrev claimed that "the Muslim side launched its latest offensive with the clear intention of involving NATO and other third forces in fighting on its side." Quoted in *The Financial Times*, 25 November, 1994, p. 1.


4. Military roles run the gamut from sporadic counter-terrorism operations, through low-intensity conflicts all the way up to conflicts of the scale and intensity of the second Gulf War. Deterrence and defense of member-states' territories in practice will also include dissuasion of ballistic missile attack, presumably from the south as well as from the east.


12. Legge, op. cit., p. 16.


15. Legge, op. cit., p. 16.


19. Keesings 38, nos. 7-8 (July-August 1992): 39012. Authority to search ships was not granted by the UN until November 16.

20. See "Statement on 15th July by the Secretary-General on monitoring by NATO forces of compliance with the UN embargo on Serbia and Montenegro," NATO Review 40, no. 4 (August 1992): 8. Also, see the joint statement issued by the NAC and the Council of WEU following their meeting of June 8, 1993. This document is reproduced in NATO Review 41, no. 3 (June 1993): 21.

21. Some 624 flights were recorded as violations from November 1992 to June 1993 and the total had risen to over 1600 by February of 1994. See SIPRI Yearbook 1994, p. 77.


25. SIPRI Yearbook 1994, p. 79.


41. Referenda, held in all the breakaway republics in 1991 and 1992, indicated substantial support for separation, but these were generally boycotted by Serbs who feared the consequences of minority status.


47. For example, in July 1992, General Lewis MacKenzie asserted that all sides were breaking "the international rules of war." Keesings 38/7-8 (July-August 1992): 39012.


49. Ibid.
50. The Financial Times, 24 November, 1994, p. 2. If Milosevic was telling the truth, his inability to control other Serb factions does raise questions about the Anglo-French diplomatic strategy.


52. The Financial Times, 6 December, 1994, p. 3.


63. William Drozdiak, “The Bosnian Nail in NATO’s Coffin,” Washington Post National Weekly Edition, 5-11 December, 1994. Morillon is on record as saying that America’s “future military engagements will be weighed against those remarkably few losses suffered against Iraq, in a way that could prove to be a burden you never expected.”


71. Keesings 38, no. 6 (June 1992): 38970.
