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Joel Glassman, Director

The Limits of U.S. Intervention  
in Global Conflicts

Senator John Ashcroft

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## THE LIMITS OF U.S. INTERVENTION IN GLOBAL CONFLICTS

### SENATOR JOHN ASHCROFT

Senator John Ashcroft was sworn in as U.S. Senator for Missouri on January 4, 1995. His committee assignments include: Foreign Relations; Commerce, Science and Transportation; and Labor and Human Resources.

Senator Ashcroft has served the State of Missouri since 1973, most recently as Governor. Previously, he served as Auditor, Assistant Attorney General, and Attorney General.

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## THE LIMITS OF U.S. INTERVENTION IN GLOBAL CONFLICTS

Next month, Russians from St. Petersburg to Vladivostok will go to the voting booth in the first presidential election there since the break-up of the Soviet Union. Of course, as much of the world worries about the election's outcome, we must remember that a scant ten years ago, none of us would have imagined that the results of a democratic election would be our greatest concern about Russia.

There is no better metaphor for the dramatic changes in the world over the past decade than these historic elections. The Berlin Wall has fallen. Democracies have begun to blossom around the globe in previously infertile ground.

Yet, with all the promise and potential blessings of this new era, old and new forms of instability are loose in the world. Ethnic tensions, once repressed by the strategic challenges of the Cold War, have been unleashed with a fury. Most of the violent tragedies of the post-Cold War era have resulted from civil strife, not from aggression between nation-states.

This transformation requires the United States to retool our foreign policy efforts. Our interest in a stable and productive community of nations remains substantial, as America's integration with the rest of the world is at an all-time high. We are the world's lone military superpower. Nonetheless, we do not face a challenge of the magnitude of the Cold War.

During the Cold War, our basic security and way of life were at stake. Hence, President Kennedy could say in his inaugural address that "we shall pay any price, bear any burden, meet any hardship, support any friend, oppose any foe, to assure the survival and success of liberty." In 1961 the stakes were that high. Fortunately, that is no longer true. We must remain heavily engaged in the world, but the challenges of the post-Soviet world no longer require us to 'pay any price' or 'bear any burden'.

We must seek a new balance of objectives in foreign affairs that reflects common sense. Finding this new balance is of particular importance in deciding when to send our fighting men and women into harm's way. After the tragic Lebanon debacle of 1983, Secretary of Defense Caspar Weinberger, laid out a set of guidelines to govern U.S. military intervention abroad. The "Weinberger Principles" demonstrate the importance of setting clear and thoughtful guidelines to govern the overseas deployment of American troops. While Secretary Weinberger's guidelines may no longer fully apply in the context of the ethnic conflicts plaguing the world today, it was in the spirit of those principles that I set out my own test for U.S. military deployments.

My test has 5 parts:

First - Is there a vital U.S. national interest at stake?

Second - Will our troops be pursuing clear U.S. military and policy objectives?

Third - Is there a timetable and strategy for achieving those objectives?

Fourth - Is there an appropriate exit strategy?

and Finally - Will the American public support our policy initiatives?

I originally laid out this five-point test last June, when the Senate Foreign Relations committee held its first hearings about a potential Bosnia deployment. The repeated inability of the administration to even begin to satisfy this test for over six months compelled my vote against sending America's military men and women to Bosnia last December.

There are probably as many definitions of "vital national interest" in this room as there are people. Broadly defined, however, vital national interests are those that have a direct political or economic effect on the nation. For instance, threats to American strategic assets--oil, shipping lanes, strategic allies--represent a "clear and present danger" to the United States. Likewise, hostile encroachment into a region of traditional American influence would be a matter of "vital national interest".

The administration's justification for its Bosnia deployment rested on two supposed U.S. interests: preventing the conflict from spreading and maintaining the credibility of NATO. Regarding the possible expansion of hostilities, the administration gave conflicting statements. Various officials claimed that a full-scale Balkan War was a "likelihood", a "strong possibility" and a "real danger". At the same time, however, Secretary of State Christopher stated that all parties were suffering from "battle fatigue". Administration officials admonished those who opposed its policy to learn the lessons of 1914. Yet, no serious student of World War I would accept such an analogy.

As for maintaining the credibility of NATO, well, the credibility of NATO was not at stake until the President declared it to be so. That is no way to make foreign policy. More importantly, the credibility of NATO, while important, is not an inherent vital interest of the United States. NATO is a means. NATO is not an end in itself.

The second test for U.S. deployment is that our troops must have clearly defined military and policy objectives. Five months into the Bosnia deployment such objectives are difficult to find. Our troops are essentially in Bosnia to stand between the two sides. That is not a military mission and it may be a fool's mission. On the political side it is an open question about whether we are fully neutral or supporting the Muslim government.

Our troops are supposedly neutral peace-keepers, yet we bombed Serb positions to bring about a peace. We have pledged to help arm the Muslim government during the so-called peace process. And now we, and the Serbs, have learned, while our troops are on the ground, that the administration secretly approved Iranian arms shipments to Bosnia during an international arms embargo. Under these circumstance, would the Serbs be unreasonable in questioning our neutrality? Let us remember that the operations in Lebanon and Somalia turned sour precisely because one side perceived that the United States had ceased being a neutral broker.

Third, we must have a strategy and a general timetable for achieving our objectives. These two must complement each other, with the strategy determining the timetable. Unfortunately, the administration has a timetable, without a strategy. By setting an arbitrary one-year timetable, the administration allowed the calendar to drive policy, not vice-versa as it should be.

This problem also relates to the fourth part of the test: developing an appropriate exit strategy. We want to ensure that an operation is not open-ended; that our troops will go, do their job and come home. I would challenge anyone in the administration to answer this question about the Bosnia operation: How will we know when the work of our troops is done?

Finally, there is the question of whether the American people support a deployment. Of course, I don't mean that a President's foreign policy should be driven solely by public opinion. Presidents often must demonstrate leadership and lead public opinion. But a President must be able to make a compelling case to the American people as to why he wants to send their sons and daughters into harm's way. Not only was President Clinton unable to do this, but he started trying too late. Only after he had committed troops did he make a public appeal. This process should have started months earlier.

So my test is fairly straight-forward. It is only a framework, not a perfect equation. But it does provide a general set of guidelines for decision-making. That allows for clear thinking about how to adapt to the contingencies of a specific situation.

Let me address a few other points that have been raised by proponents of the Bosnia deployment. They argue, that as the world's lone remaining superpower, the United States has a duty to give our fair share to these operations. Yet, ask the almost 90,000 U.S. troops in the Pacific rim if we give our share. Ask the more than 128,000 U.S. troops in the European theater if we are doing our part for world security. The United States sacrificed in unprecedented ways during the Cold War by providing

security for the free world in the global struggle against Communism. Since the Cold War ended, we have continued to make a disproportionate effort to guarantee the stability of the international community.

So we have not shirked our responsibilities to the world. Rather we have consistently filled the world's greatest responsibility. And when we expend our scarce military resources on peripheral interests we limit our ability to affect the fundamental issues of security and prosperity around the globe.

We need to avoid ill-defined missions that do not serve a clear national interest specifically to avoid an isolationist turn in this country. If American troops begin losing their lives during an operation that we cannot explain clearly on the grounds of national interest, it will become increasingly difficult to rally public support for future operations. Even ones that are essential to America's national security. In years past we called this the "Vietnam Syndrome", which paralyzed our foreign involvement for almost two decades. It would be tragic if, in the years to come, we are paralyzed by a "Bosnia Syndrome."

I mentioned earlier the upcoming historic election in Russia, and there is a valuable lesson to be learned from how the Russians reached this stage. Russia is a nascent democracy because we won the Cold War. But we did not win the Cold War with our military might. Rather it was our ideas that prevailed. That is a point we need to keep in mind when thinking about the future of the Balkans. Far too often, when we use our military abroad, the contribution we can make to a country with our political, cultural and even religious heritage gets pushed aside. Our greatest export is not our military might. Our greatest exports are our ideas. The rapid technological advances of the communications age make this a particularly ripe time to send our ideas abroad. We know that underground videotapes helped to spread the ideals of Western democracy among the citizens of Eastern Europe in the 1980s, and the market for these ideas continues to explode. We must make sure that our preoccupation with our

military deployment in Bosnia does not cause us to overlook the more valuable contributions we can make.

Beyond our political and cultural institutions, our unsurpassed know-how and experience in the economic realm can also serve the people of Bosnia. Regardless of what we give in foreign assistance or in commitments of troops, in the long run economic trade holds the real key to rebuilding the Balkans and mending other areas of global conflict. I truly commend the efforts of the late Commerce Secretary Ron Brown, who tragically lost his life trying to foster American investment in this worn-torn region.

For years, we in the West have been guided by the hope and the belief that in the main economically prosperous people--or nations--do not generally engage in self-defeating aggression or wars. Acting on such beliefs we have poured billions of dollars into international aid programs and foreign assistance. For instance, in an effort to build peace, the President has pledged \$200 million in construction assistance to Bosnia together with millions of dollars in similar help from other nations. Bosnia's hoped for peace is also supported by our millions of dollars in contributions to various international agencies including the United Nations, the International Monetary Fund, the World Bank and others.

However, as much as many people believe in foreign assistance, I harken back to Ronald Reagan's adage about domestic policy to the effect that 'the best welfare program in the world is a job.' Carrying that philosophy over into the international arena, trade--not aid--is the best tool for bringing about global stability and security. Unfortunately, the federal government has made it extremely difficult--not to mention inefficient--for American companies to trade overseas.

The government's international trade assistance efforts for American companies are spread among 14 different departments and agencies. For a Missouri business seeking overseas opportunities, such unwieldy and duplicative bureaucracy forms an

almost indecipherable maze. I have been working on a proposal to consolidate our efforts in this area. By doing so we can ensure a more coordinated approach, that will better serve American business, as well as doing more to help areas such as Bosnia that so desperately need investment.

But even those who believe that foreign assistance--not trade--is the key to global stability, should agree that such aid should be distributed efficiently and in a manner which supports our diplomatic objectives. In an effort to do this, I supported proposals this past year to reorganize our foreign policy agencies, including folding the functions of the Agency for International Development into the State Department. This plan would not only increase efficiency and reduce overhead, but also end the separation between foreign aid and U.S. diplomacy. For that reason five former Secretaries of State supported the reorganization plan, but President Clinton nevertheless vetoed it.

Finally, I think we have a right to demand greater efficiency and accountability from those international organizations that are supported by contributions from taxpayers in the United States. Most notable among these is the United Nations. The U.N. has an important role to play in the world, but there is broad consensus that wasteful spending, inflated salaries and benefits, and incoherent management practices have severely limited its effectiveness. If the U.N. is going to be an effective tool for peace-keeping and reconstruction in the world, including Bosnia, it must be reformed. I support an approach that would withhold portions of the U.S. contribution until reforms have been made in the U.N.'s budgeting, management, and personnel practices. Such efforts are needed not to destroy the U.N., but rather to save it.

Through reformed and effective institutions, and increased trade, we can help Bosnia and other areas of the world focus on a hopeful future, rather than a dismal past. But 20,000 American troops do not need to be on the ground in Bosnia for us to do that. When we call on our soldiers to risk their lives, it must only be in the service

of vital U.S. interests and their task must be well-defined. We must do so based on a thoughtful set of principles. Without such principles, we not only unnecessarily threaten the lives of our troops, but threaten the nation's security in days yet to come.