



# PRESS RELEASE

**House National Security Committee  
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**STATEMENT BY FLOYD SPENCE  
CHAIRMAN, HOUSE NATIONAL SECURITY COMMITTEE**

**Hearing on Future of U.S. Policy in Bosnia**

September 25, 1996

This morning the committee continues its examination of U.S. policy in Bosnia and, in particular, on the increasing likelihood that the Administration will commit U.S. troops to Bosnia past this December's withdrawal deadline.

To address these issues, we have with us today The Honorable John White, Deputy Secretary of Defense, and General Joe Ralston, Vice-Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. Gentlemen, I welcome you both back to the committee and look forward to your testimony.

As you know, the committee originally requested this hearing in June. Although I am pleased to see our witnesses here today, I must state a degree of frustration that it has taken this long for the Department to accommodate our hearing request. The week before adjournment is not the most optimal time to discuss and try to understand the many policy issues associated with what is currently the largest on-going American military operation.

Just over one week ago, the people of Bosnia voted in their first presidential and parliamentary elections since 1990. Some have asserted that this election was a milestone in the transition of a war-torn country from a deeply divided battlefield back to a multi-ethnic and unitary state.

Now that the outcome of the election is clearer, it also is apparent that the healing process has a long way to go. The three elected officials who will share power in Bosnia's rotating presidency are all strong nationalists who were each elected with the support of an overwhelming majority of their respective ethnic communities. Some observers see this as a sign that Bosnia will remain hopelessly divided and politically unstable for years to come.

The potential for increased instability in Bosnia leads to a more immediate concern for Americans — a concern that is a focus of today's hearing — namely, what is the long-term U.S. military commitment in Bosnia and when can we expect American troops to come home?

Lately, Secretary of State Christopher and other senior Administration officials have reiterated President Clinton's earlier assurances to the Congress that IFOR's mission will terminate this December, and that American troops currently participating in Operation Joint Endeavor will be withdrawn. I assume that all Americans can accept these assurances at face value.

However, the issue today is not whether IFOR's mission will end as planned in December, but what will happen next? Will the end of IFOR mean the end of U.S. troops in Bosnia? Or will it simply mean the beginning of a new phase of American military involvement and the continued deployment of significant combat forces as part of a restructured multinational peacekeeping force under a revised mandate?

Already we have learned that an additional 5,000 U.S. troops will be sent to Bosnia starting next month as part of a so-called "covering force" to provide a degree of protection for the initial troop withdrawals which are scheduled to commence in December. It has been reported that a follow-on peacekeeping force may include up to 15,000 U.S. troops and may last for a period of up to 2 years. In addition, the costs to the American taxpayer of the Bosnia operation have already nearly doubled to \$2.8 billion from the estimate provided by the Administration to this committee late last year. A continued U.S. military presence on the ground in Bosnia will inevitably further escalate these costs.

These developments suggest that the Administration is quietly preparing for the commitment of U.S. troops on the ground in Bosnia well beyond this December's deadline — but does not want to admit such a fundamental change in plans prior to the November election. I find these developments highly disturbing, especially in light of the fact that neither Congress nor the American people have ever been given a clear explanation of the Administration's exit strategy in Bosnia, if in fact one exists. Such a major shift in policy deserves Congressional review and debate — both of which would be denied by the Administration's unwillingness to make its intentions clear prior to the pending Congressional adjournment.

However, the bottom line remains that the Administration owes the American people candid answers on questions concerning what U.S. participation will be in Bosnia past December. I have asked today's witnesses to appear before us to give us unambiguous answers to these unambiguous questions.

I want to once again welcome Secretary White and General Ralston and thank both of you for appearing before us here today.