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OPENING REMARKS FOR
MAJOR GENERAL JAMES W. DARDEN, USAR
DEPUTY DIRECTOR FOR PLANS & POLICY,
UNITED STATES EUROPEAN COMMAND
TO THE HOUSE ARMED SERVICES COMMITTEE ISSUE FORUM

*“Winning the Peace Under the Dayton Peace Accords:
Military Lessons Learned & Sustaining Democracy in Bosnia”*

ON

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Mr. Chairman and members of the committee, I would like to thank you for inviting me to this member forum and for the chance to speak to you about the US commitment to the NATO Stabilization Forces (SFOR) mission in Bosnia and Herzegovina. It is important that the US continues its engagement with Bosnia, even after the successful NATO mission is complete in December 2004. The US involvement over the last nine years and post-SFOR has and will add to the success of the country and the region as a whole. To highlight this, I would like to talk about three subject areas.

Future of Eagle Base

After the much anticipated results of the NATO Istanbul Summit were announced and as we continue planning for the reduction of our troop presence in Bosnia, we have debated extensively on the best course of action for the future of Eagle Base in Tuzla. When US forces first crossed the Sava River in 1996 with a force of 20,000 personnel, little infrastructure remained in the war-torn region. Tent camps were quickly set up with the basic goal of simply getting our troops out of the mud. Eagle Base, a former Yugoslavian Air Base, was chosen as the headquarters of the 1st Armored Division Task Force. Over the next eight years of IFOR and SFOR peacekeeping, the mission in Bosnia matured, and our facilities and capabilities at Eagle Base were significantly upgraded.

Now we find ourselves planning for the successful completion of the SFOR mission, and the follow-on missions that will remain in Bosnia. Our strategy presently calls for a contingent of US military personnel to help man the future NATO Headquarters at Camp Butmir in Sarajevo. And although a final decision has not been made, we are also investigating the usefulness of maintaining a small US presence at

Eagle Base. Eagle could be used as a staging area to conduct Multi- or Bi-lateral exercises with Bosnia and other nations. This is part of the Headquarters, US European Command's (USEUCOM) strategy for continued theater security cooperation activities in the region. Additionally, if necessary, a surge force of one battalion could easily be brought into Eagle Base for any future contingency, and finally, keeping a presence there demonstrates a strong and lasting US commitment to the future success of Bosnia.

Moreover, with the end of SFOR and the majority of US troops departing, we know we have excess capacity and unused infrastructure at Eagle Base. If we decide to keep a US presence there, one option we are exploring is sharing any unused portions of Eagle with the EU follow on force. This would reduce our part of the operating costs, and help our EU allies to succeed in their mission. Details of these arrangements have not yet been finalized, and as I have said, even the final decisions on the exact size, make-up, and location of any US forces in Bosnia have not been decided.

Terrorist Threats

In general, the threat of terrorist influence in Bosnia is low as the operations of SFOR and International Community continue to suppress extremist enclaves and terrorist support activities. However, Bosnia still lingers as a potential safe haven for transit, training, arms sales and financial support of terrorist activities due to porous borders, lax immigration control and underdeveloped governmental and civil police and security organizations.

Where present, terrorist influences in Bosnia exist primarily in Muslim extremist strongholds where anti-western resentments have been sharpened by sympathetic reactions to the current “Global War on Terrorism”, and by the introduction of more radical Muslim beliefs under the cover of foreign aid. This current threat consists mostly of indoctrination, training, and recruitment of young fighters for other places in the world where Muslims are fighting. There are, however, several recent indications that foreign sponsors have been frustrated in their attempts to recruit enough fighters from Bosnia to make it worth the risk.

Most reporting of “terrorist” training today is more related to a continued perception that war can breakout at any time, especially as the International Community reduces its physical footprint in the country, and that the population must be ready to defend itself along ethnic lines. While the entity military structures have been dissolved or integrated, the perceived need for entity self-defense persists. These extremist and terrorist support activities are often assisted by outside sources sponsored with ethnic and religious separatist interests.

It should be noted that SFOR leads operations in Bosnia to provide for a safe and secure environment to include counter terrorism actions. The US approach is to work with international organizations to deny terrorists safe havens in Bosnia and cut off their support networks through the integration of US policy, intelligence, and law enforcement efforts.

USEUCOM's Joint Interagency Coordination Group (JIACG), the US Embassy in Sarajevo, the US Joint Interagency Task Force (Bosnia), and SFOR all work successfully with the Bosnia Federation Financial Police and the Federal Intelligence and Security Service to identify Non-Governmental Organizations (NGO) with direct terrorist links. Information collected and collated by local counterparts and US intelligence activities in Bosnia are key to these efforts. To date, eight Islamic NGOs operating in Bosnia have been positively linked to al-Qaida. Bosnian Federation officials, in coordination with the State Department and United Nations, have closed the offices and frozen all financial assets of these NGOs. We must maintain continued vigilance and conduct specific actions to disrupt the external support that foments extremist and terrorist behavior. We can do this by retaining robust US intelligence capabilities in the area and by actively supporting future NATO Headquarters in Sarajevo. We must also continue to work closely with other organizations that deal with counter-terrorism, crime and corruption.

Lessons Learned Applicable to Afghanistan and Iraq

As stated before, the communiqué from the Istanbul Summit announced the NATO SFOR mission in Bosnia will successfully end after nine years of peacekeeping. The fact that this mission has lasted longer than imagined allows the US to garner military lessons learned for current and possible future operations. While the situation in Bosnia is different than Afghanistan and Iraq, there are some common threads running through each of these which are applicable, most notably in a post-conflict environment. Key points include the primacy of establishing physical security and controlling loose weapons; the need for a comprehensive approach to establishing the rule of law;

avoidance of parallel ethnic institutions; the need for strong executive powers; avoidance on the reliance of international aid and multiple international institutions; and continuity by utilizing professionals such as bankers, prosecutors and military experts on long-term contract. It is this last point I would like to underscore where the US has had the most influence in Bosnia and could have the same influence in Iraq and Afghanistan.

It is important now for post-SFOR Bosnia, as it will be for Iraq in the future, to maintain continuity in the people who are involved in developing institutions and capabilities. SFOR soldiers have rotated every six to twelve months for the past nine years and this has added to the difficulty of the mission as there is a lack of continuity. Bankers, prosecutors, military professionals, etc. who are continuously engaged with the Bosnians will be the key now. This is where the US has and will provide the greatest benefit. Specifically in defense reform, military contractors working directly with the minister of defense and his staff can provide the long term continuity needed. Additionally, the State Partnership Program (SPP) with the State of Maryland as the partner will soon start to conduct civilian-to-civilian engagement bringing in economists, doctors, educators and other professionals. This is a long-term program where relationships will be built between Maryland and Bosnia.

Conclusion

Looking back to the fundamental political basis of the NATO deployment to Bosnia, lessons of SFOR's success could likely be transferred to other similar situations. Where general political agreement is lacking and combat operations are still in progress, however, the SFOR model would not be fully applicable. The success of the long-term Bosnia peacekeeping mission is believed to be a result of consistency of purpose and clarity of mission, national support, and the ability to transition through the pre-established peacekeeping charter phases. The peacekeeping phases were clearly defined allowing leaders to periodically reevaluate the mission and adjust as the environment allowed. Peacekeepers can now withdraw as the International Community expands its focus on economic and quality of life programs to further contribute to long-term stability, not only for Bosnia, but for the region as a whole.

Again, thank you Mr. Chairman and committee members for the opportunity to address this forum and I welcome any questions you might have.