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OPENING REMARKS FOR
MAJOR GENERAL VIRGIL L. PACKETT, II, USA
COMMANDER, STABILISATION FORCE
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, Members of the Committee, thank you for inviting me to participate in this forum to discuss military lessons learned and sustaining democracy in Bosnia.

Nine years ago, Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH) was “mission impossible.” Coming from a civil war that killed thousands and maimed thousands more, few would have thought that a sustained peace was possible. Now, through the combined efforts of the Bosnian authorities, the International Community, The North Atlantic Treaty Organization’s (NATO) Implementation Force (IFOR) and NATO’s Stabilization Force (SFOR), BiH is on the verge of membership in Partnership for Peace and eventual integration into the Euro-Atlantic alliances.

The road to success started with 60,000 troops in 1996. Today, because of the progress made, the coalition that comprises SFOR number 28 nations and 8,000 troops. The coalition includes members that belong to NATO as well as those that do not. These numbers indicate SFOR has been in an almost continual state of restructuring and downsizing.

The success story is not yet complete. Even with the progress made, BiH is not on an irreversible path to a self-sustaining peace. The environment remains fragile with crime and corruption, Persons Indicted for War Crimes – PIFWCs – and terrorism remaining continuing problems.

The presence of the United States military has contributed to meeting the goals of the Dayton Peace Accords to end the tragic conflict and promote an enduring peace. Nine years of peace support operations allow time to make a comparison between the initial assumptions and the reality. The success of this long-lasting peace mission can be attributed to the continuity and clarity of the mission and patience and determination in its execution. An enduring peace requires time and must be nurtured; it takes time for the ultra-nationalistic fervor which fuelled the war to dissipate. It needs goodwill and hard work on all sides. The US military contributed in each of these areas.

While a nine-year peace-support mission makes for a difficult and stress-filled environment, normal, day-to-day activities abound. Sit in the Turkish Market area of Old Town Sarajevo and you will see people bustling about, students preparing for examinations and consumers sitting idly by drinking a cup of coffee. The International Community contributes to the programs and policies but donor fatigue can set in as other problems in other regions demand priority. Both the institutions and the population in general can become dependent upon international, particularly US involvement. Soldiers participate in many of these activities but while NATO and US efforts have spurred peaceful cohabitation, there is not an overt feeling of reconciliation. Latent distrust and even hatred remains but the amount is difficult to quantify. The improving security situation signaled the ability for changes in SFOR strength; however, new methods of maintaining situational awareness become essential. The introduction of Liaison Observation Teams – troops living in houses in the community, eating at the local restaurants, building relationships with the local population - is a shift in the doctrine of

peacekeeping tactics but is one way to maintain that awareness with fewer “boots on the ground.”

Of constant importance is force protection. According to the Mine Information Coordination Cell, Bosnia and Herzegovina is one of the most heavily mined areas in the world. They estimate in excess of 1000 square miles, over five percent of the land mass or half the size of Rhode Island is threatened by mines. Each American service member receives introductory mine and unexploded ordinance awareness training at the point of departure and before being deployed to Bosnia-Herzegovina. Once in theater, each member is receives advanced training, mandatory for all SFOR troops. The training is graphic; it’s not sugarcoated. Pictures show what a mine can do to human flesh. It is the responsibility of the Bosian-Herzegovian government conduct de-mining activities but SFOR has supported those activities. At the current rate of de-mining, about 2.5 square miles per year, it will take 75 years to complete de-mining Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Of prime importance in ensuring an enduring peace is the capture of Persons Indicted for War Crimes – PIFWCs. The North Atlantic Council has set SFOR’s mandate - whenever and wherever SFOR encounters persons indicted for war crimes in the execution of their duties and the situation permits, they will be detained. One hundred and twenty six (126) indictments have been issued and only seventeen (17) key indictees remain to be captured and returned to The Hague to stand trial. Unfortunately, three of those remaining are Radovan Karadzic, Ratko Mladic and Antone Gotovina. PIFWICs remain a significant obstacle to creating the conditions in which the country can develop and prosper. The

local authorities, International Community and SFOR are continually conducting activities to make life more difficult for these people and anyone that may be tempted to help them. They will be caught and brought to justice and Bosnia-Herzegovina will be better for it.

In the nine-years that the United States military has been involved in the peacekeeping activities in the Balkans, much has changed. Nevertheless, in discussions with Bosnians of all ethnic groups, they express a desire for a continuing US presence. They want the US to help them Forge The Future.

Thank you for allowing me to address you today.

I look forward to your questions.