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Folder Title:
Bosnia - Talking Points

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• Unilateral lift of the arms embargo will require the United States to send ground troops to Bosnia. The inevitable casualties -- and the debate over responsibility -- will tear our nation apart.
• It will severely undermine NATO and lead to American responsibility for the outcome of the war in Bosnia.
• Unilateral lift will help the Bosnian Serbs in their fight, and increase the risk of a wider war.
• Supporting a strengthened United Nations Mission is our best course to a negotiated peace.

Current situation in Bosnia unacceptable

Three alternatives:
1. Massive NATO commitment, including U.S. ground forces.
2. Unilateral lift of arms embargo.

Alternative 1: Massive NATO commitment, including U.S. ground forces.
• No justification
• No public support

Alternative 2: Unilateral lift of arms embargo.
• Leads to introduction of U.S. ground forces as United Nations mission withdraws.
  We must meet our commitment to our NATO allies.
• Means unilateral responsibility because the U.S. will bear the burden after Allied troops withdraw.
• Increases chances for wider Balkan conflict, affecting heart of Europe and beyond.
• Increases chances of Serb victory. They will not rest as Moslems rearm.
• Sets back chances for a negotiated peace.
• Gives other nations excuse to ignore U.N. arms embargos/resolutions they don't like.

Alternative 3: Strengthen United Nations mission, with serious commitment to NATO power.
• Has produced results, as peace in much of central Bosnia shows.
• Allows stronger UN mission to protect safe area.
  • Rapid Reaction Force deployed.
  • Allies agreed to use NATO air power if Serbs attack Gorazde.
  • Allies can expand this formula to other safe areas.
  • “Dual key” system streamlined, in military hands.
• Keeps humanitarian aid flowing.
• Best creates conditions for limited war and negotiated peace.
THE WHITE HOUSE

Office of the Press Secretary

For Immediate Release August 1, 1995

STATEMENT BY THE PRESS SECRETARY

The President is disappointed with today’s vote in the House to unilaterally lift the arms embargo against Bosnia and Herzegovina. He repeats his pledge to veto the bill and is confident that his veto will be upheld in Congress. The President noted that the strength of the unilateral lift vote, although still substantial, diminished from the earlier June vote.

Unilateral lift of the arms embargo will drive the UN force out of Bosnia and oblige the U.S. to send in ground forces, as part of NATO, to assist in that withdrawal. It will divide NATO and increase American responsibility for the outcome of the war in Bosnia.

Now is not the time to Americanize the conflict. Supporting a strengthened United Nations mission is our best course to a negotiated peace. We should test this course of action.

Today, the NATO Alliance took another important decision to strengthen the UN mission and halt Bosnian Serb aggression by extending the threat of decisive NATO air strikes, previously extended to Gorazde, to the other safe areas of Sarajevo, Bihac and Tuzla.

At a time when the international community is showing new resolve to stabilize the situation in Bosnia and get negotiations back on track, it doesn’t make sense to take action that could undermine these efforts and encourage the UN mission to withdraw.

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Statement by the Press Secretary

The President is deeply concerned by today’s vote in the House on legislation that would provide for the unilateral lifting of the arms embargo against Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Unilateral lifting of the arms embargo would trigger the collapse of the UN mission and require the United States to send ground troops to Bosnia. As our Allies withdrew their troops, we would keep our pledge to help them. There would inevitably be American casualties, and the debate over responsibility would divide our people and the NATO Alliance.

Unilateral lift would lead to an escalation of the violence and new attacks on Sarajevo, Gorazde and other Bosnian safe areas. Having triggered this escalation, the United States would be drawn further into the war and be held responsible for the fate of Bosnia.

Unilateral lift would also force the United States to violate a binding UN Security Council resolution, undermining other UN sanctions regimes, such as that on Iraq, that serve vital American interests.

Today, the NATO Alliance took another important decision to strengthen the UN mission and halt Bosnian Serb aggression by extending the threat of decisive NATO air strikes, previously extended to Gorazde, to the other safe areas of Sarajevo, Bihac and Tuzla.

At a time when the international community is showing new resolve to stabilize the situation in Bosnia and get negotiations back on track, it doesn’t make sense to take action that could undermine these efforts and encourage the UN mission to withdraw.

The President has repeated his pledge to veto this bill and is confident that his veto will be upheld.
Statement by the Press Secretary

The President is deeply concerned by today's vote in the House which would unilaterally lift the arms embargo against Bosnia and Herzegovina. He repeated his pledge to veto this bill and is confident that his veto will be upheld in Congress.

Unilateral lift of the arms embargo would require the United States to send ground troops to Bosnia. As our Allies withdraw their troops, we will keep our pledge to help them. There would inevitably be American casualties, and the debate over responsibility would divide our people. The United States would also be drawn further into the war and be held responsible for the fate of Bosnia.

Unilateral lift would also help the Bosnian Serbs in their fight, and increase the risks of a wider war. At a time when the situation in the safe areas in eastern Bosnia and Croatia is growing bloodier, we must support the strengthened United Nations mission. The President believes that is our best course to a negotiated peace.
Statement by the Press Secretary

The President is dismayed by today's vote in the House which would unilaterally lift the arms embargo against Bosnia and Herzegovina. He repeated his pledge to veto this bill and is confident that his veto will be upheld in Congress.

Unilateral lift of the arms embargo will require the United States to send ground troops to Bosnia. As our allies withdraw their troops, we will keep our pledge to help them. There will inevitably be American casualties, and the debate over responsibility will divide our people. The United States will also be drawn further into the war and be held responsible for the fate of Bosnia.

Unilateral lift will also help the Bosnian Serbs in their fight, and increase the risks of a wider war. At a time when the situation in the safe areas in eastern Bosnia and Croatia is growing bloodier, we must support the strengthened United Nations mission. The President believes that is our best course to a negotiated peace.
REACTION BY THE PRESS SECRETARY TO THE PASSAGE OF THE DOLE RESOLUTION ON BOSNIA (S. 21)

-- The President is very disappointed by the Senate's vote to pass S.21, which would provide for the unilateral lifting of the arms embargo against Bosnia and Herzegovina.

-- The President will continue to make his opposition clear to Congress, and he is prepared to veto any legislation requiring unilateral lift that reaches his desk.

-- Our Allies in UNPROFOR has said that a unilateral U.S. action to lift the arms embargo will result in their withdrawal from UNPROFOR, leading to its collapse. In that case the U.S., as the leader of NATO, would have an obligation to assist in that withdrawal, involving thousands of U.S. ground troops in Bosnia for an exceedingly difficult mission.

-- Moreover, requiring the U.S. to unilaterally violate a binding UN Security Council resolution would undermine other UN sanctions regimes, such Iraq, that serve vital U.S. interests.
Unilaterally lifting the arms embargo on Bosnia is the wrong step at the wrong time. Let me explain why I believe so strongly this is the case.

Without question, the current situation in Bosnia is unacceptable. The recent assault by Bosnian Serbs on the Muslim enclaves in Srebrenica and Zepa, and the brutality and atrocities that have accompanied it, are intolerable. The inability of the United Nations mission in Bosnia (UNPROFOR) to protect centers it has declared as “safe areas” undermines the UN, NATO and Western values in general. UNPROFOR in its current posture clearly has reached a crossroads. The issue is not whether to act, but how.

There are three basic alternatives. One is to undertake a massive commitment by NATO, including U.S. ground forces, for the purpose of decisively affecting the outcome of the war. From the beginning of my Presidency, I have refused to cross that line, and I will continue to do so. I cannot justify committing American ground troops to Bosnia except for the limited purpose of acting within NATO to protect our allies if they withdraw or to help enforce a genuine peace agreement if one is reached.

The second alternative, borne of intense frustration with the current situation and embraced by many in the Congress, is for the United States, by itself, to violate the international arms embargo in order to better enable the Bosnians to fight for themselves. It is powerfully appealing, but it is not that simple. It has real and serious consequences for the United States.

First, our allies have made clear that unilateral U.S. action to lift the arms embargo, which would place their troops in greater danger, will result in their immediate withdrawal from Bosnia. As the leader of NATO, the U.S. would have an obligation under those circumstances to assist in that withdrawal, involving thousands of U.S. troops in a difficult mission. Consequently, at the least, unilateral lift by the United States immediately drives our European allies out of Bosnia and pulls the U.S. in, even if for a temporary and defined mission.

Second, after that operation is completed, there will be an intensification of the fighting. It is unlikely that the Bosnian Serbs would stand idly by waiting for the Bosnian government to be armed by others. The U.S., having broken with our NATO allies as a result of unilateral lift, will be expected to fill the void -- in military support and in response to humanitarian crises. If lifting the embargo leads to more Serbian military gains, would we watch Sarajevo fall, or would we be compelled to act -- this time by ourselves?

Third, intensified fighting risks a wider conflict in the Balkans, with far reaching implications for Europe and the world. We have worked hard at containing the conflict in Bosnia to Bosnia -- so far successfully. If the fighting spreads, the fact that we had triggered the escalation by our unilateral action would compel us to deal with the consequences.
Finally, the UN’s withdrawal will set back prospects for a negotiated peace for the foreseeable future -- the only hope for a genuine end to the conflict.

In short, unilateral lift means unilateral American responsibility.

We must recognize that there is no risk-free option on Bosnia. But I believe the wiser course -- the path I have been pursuing intensively with our allies over these past days -- is to strengthen the ability and willingness of the UN forces to protect Bosnian safe areas against Serb aggression: to give UNPROFOR the means to make a real difference in Bosnia as it has, for all its deficiencies, over the past three years. Let us not forget that UNPROFOR has carried out an unprecedented humanitarian operation that feeds and helps keep alive over two million people in Bosnia; that, until recently, the number of civilian casualties has been a fraction of what they were before the UN arrived; that much of central Bosnia is at peace; and that where UNPROFOR has agreed with our strategy to make a serious commitment to use NATO power, as it did to stop the brutal Serb shelling of Sarajevo in February 1994, it has worked dramatically as long as that threat remained credible.

For UNPROFOR to play this role now, it must become a genuine force for peace in Bosnia once again. Serious steps have been taken over the past several days. The British and French, with our support, are deploying a Reaction Force to open land routes to Sarajevo and strengthen UNPROFOR’s capability to carry out its mission. Meeting in London in recent days, our allies, mindful of the risks, agreed that they will respond to an attack on the remaining eastern enclave of Gorazde with substantial and decisive air power. We are working to extend that commitment to the other safe areas.

To make good that agreement, NATO has fundamentally altered the way in which such air strikes will be conducted if necessary, empowering military commanders to respond to a broad range of targets rather than the "pinprick" responses of the past. And UN Secretary General Boutros-Ghali last week delegated the authority for the use of air strikes to the military commanders in the field, where it belongs.

NATO air power will not end the fighting in Bosnia, but, at best, it can deter aggression; at least, it will increase its price; and in the process, it will enhance the chances of a diplomatic settlement.

We must make this final effort to strengthen UNPROFOR's ability to save lives in Bosnia and create the conditions for a negotiated peace. Congressional passage of unilateral lift legislation at this decisive moment will undermine that effort. It will provide our allies with the rationale for absolving themselves of responsibility in Bosnia. Ultimately, it will Americanize the conflict.