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U.S. SENATOR FOR KANSAS



NEWS

FROM:

SENATE MAJORITY LEADER

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BOSNIA UPDATE

DOLE REQUESTS HEARINGS ON CLINTON PLAN FOR U.S. TROOPS IN BOSNIA; GOP LEADER SETS RECORD STRAIGHT ON CONSULTATION WITH CONGRESS

Yesterday, together with some of my colleagues, I sent a letter to President Clinton urging him to consult with the Congress on the nature of the commitments his administration has made to our NATO allies and the Bosnians with respect to U.S. involvement in a potential peace enforcement operation in Bosnia. The letter included a number of specific questions about such an operation and the wisdom of the administration's present approach.

No Consultation on U.S. Ground Forces Since 1993

Much to my surprise, administration spokesmen protested this letter claiming that there have been numerous consultations on this matter.

Despite White House claims, the fact is that the Clinton administration has not consulted the Congress on sending U.S. ground forces to Bosnia since 1993 -- when consultations were held on possible enforcement of the Vance/Owen plan.

What was Congress' reaction then? As part of the FY 1994 Defense Appropriations bill we passed an amendment, 99-1 -- the Mitchell/Dole amendment -- which reads as follows, and I quote,

"It is the sense of the Congress that none of the funds appropriated or otherwise made available by this Act should be available for the purposes of deploying United States armed forces to participate in the implementation of a peace settlement in Bosnia-Herzegovina, unless previously authorized by the Congress."

A subsequent provision addressed consultation on U.S. participation in any peacekeeping or peace-enforcement operations and opposed it unless, and I quote, "The President initiates consultations with the bipartisan leadership of Congress..." This was followed by directions for such consultation -- including discussion of the goals of the operation, U.S. interests, the costs, funding strategy, extent of U.S. involvement, and the expected duration and scope of the operation.

Well, it's more than two years later -- and a great deal has changed. The situation on the ground is not what it was and the peace settlement being negotiated is also not what it was. While we are aware that the administration continues to repeat its commitment to send U.S. troops to participate in a settlement force, we in the Congress do not know what that means in concrete terms.

About two and a half weeks ago, the administration sent a high level team, led by Deputy Secretary of Defense White, to brief senators on the NATO air campaign. At that time, questions were raised about administration plans to participate in a peace enforcement operation. Unfortunately, these officials did not answer any of these questions, claiming that the planning process was not finished.

The point of consultations is to have input before there is a finished plan -- before the Congress is handed a fait accompli. We do not want to be told after the fact -- that is a briefing, not a consultation. Lists of administration briefings and returned phone calls don't add up to consultation.

Congress Must Know What Administration Says About U.S. Troops

Today administration officials and members of the Contact Group concluded a second round of negotiations with the Bosnian, Croatian, and Serbian foreign ministers on principles for a peace settlement. There is little doubt in my mind that whether the Bosnian government continues participating in these talks and

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finally agrees to sign a settlement will depend significantly on whether or not the United States sends troops to enforce it.

Let's face it, the so-called "agreed principles" are vague - - except in that they partition Bosnia into two entities. As such, the Bosnians are bound to rely on U.S. guarantees where there are differences with the Serbs -- which are inevitable on matters of Bosnia's sovereignty and territorial integrity. And, because the administration and allied approach has left the Bosnians without the means to secure their own peace, they will depend on those troops sent to enforce a settlement to defend their sovereignty.

We are still waiting to hear the administration's plan on lifting the arms embargo on Bosnia -- a question that remains relevant now, as well as central to any exit strategy for American forces. I cannot conceive of supporting a plan that sends U.S. troops into Bosnia, while leaving the Bosnians unable to defend themselves against future aggression.

We must know what the administration is telling the Bosnians, the Serbs, and our NATO allies -- what promises and what threats, are being made. We also need to know what commitments are being made to the Russians with respect to their participation. In particular what is the administration response to Russian demands to share command with NATO in an enforcement operation? Will U.S. forces be under unified NATO command at all times?

Bottom Line: Don't Make Promises U.S. Can't Keep

The bottom line is that U.S. credibility depends on the U.S. keeping its word -- meaning what it says. NATO credibility is also on the line. Why has there been no response to Bosnian Serb violations of the NATO no-fly zone reported today and last week?

No doubt about it, there is a lot at stake here -- U.S. and NATO credibility, as well as the future of Bosnia.

It cannot escape the administration that the Congress has repudiated its approach towards Bosnia for the past two years. An overwhelming bipartisan majority has opposed the arms embargo, and Congress has voiced concerns with respect to peace plans that would destroy the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Bosnia and Herzegovina. So, to operate under the assumption that Congress will approve administration plans to send thousands of Americans in harm's way to enforce a settlement is a major error. The fact is that the Clinton administration may be making promises it cannot or should not keep.

Therefore, I am writing today to the Chairmen of the Appropriations, Armed Services and Foreign Relations Committees to request that they hold extensive hearings on this critical issue. I will request that the questions asked in the letter to President Clinton form the basis of their examination of this matter.

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* Remarks delivered on Senate floor, approximately 5:15 p.m.