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NEWS

U.S. SENATOR FOR KANSAS

FROM:

SENATE MAJORITY LEADER

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BOSNIA UPDATE

ADMINISTRATION ARGUMENTS AGAINST UNPROFOR WITHDRAWAL & LIFTING ARMS EMBARGO UNFOUNDED; TIME FOR AMERICA TO EXERCISE LEADERSHIP & END FAILED POLICY

It is indeed ironic that the Clinton administration -- whose policy on Bosnia needs to be checked hourly -- is on the attack against those in Congress like myself who have consistently argued for a policy that candidate Clinton advocated. Maybe administration officials are tired of attacking each other in the press and have decided to take their frustration out on the Congress.

The administration's arguments against withdrawing the U.N. Protection Forces and lifting the arms embargo are neither based in fact nor on American experience.

Failed U.N. Mission

First, we have the statement from the Secretary of Defense today that withdrawing U.N. forces would lead to a humanitarian disaster. I don't know if the Pentagon has been keeping up with the news over the last few months but the situation in Bosnia is and has been a humanitarian disaster -- despite the presence of 22,000 U.N. troops. The U.N. mission in Bosnia has failed and bandages like the quick reaction force won't change that fact.

Secretary Perry also told the Armed Services Committee today that the casualty rate in Bosnia had dramatically dropped -- which he attributed to the presence of U.N. forces. As the recent hostage taking has painfully demonstrated, the U.N. forces can't even protect themselves, let alone the Bosnians. Furthermore, the heaviest Bosnian casualties were in areas where U.N. forces were either not deployed or were deployed too late -- in northern and eastern Bosnia. So, it seems to me that the real reason casualties have dropped is because the Bosnians over time have acquired more weapons and have been able to better defend themselves.

U.S. Ground Forces Only for UNPROFOR Withdrawal

The second argument made by the administration is that lifting the arms embargo would "Americanize" the war and make the United States responsible for events in Bosnia. Let's not fool ourselves -- America is responsible now. America is responsible because it has not been a leader, rather it has meekly followed the Europeans' failed approach.

As for the accusation that lifting the arms embargo would "Americanize" the conflict, it seems to me that the United States has plenty of experience from Central America to Afghanistan in providing military assistance without being drawn into a quagmire with American troops on the ground. The real recipe for getting bogged down is to send U.S. ground troops into Bosnia without a mission which is why the resolution I intend to introduce will authorize, with strict conditions, the use of U.S. ground forces for the clearly stated purpose of withdrawing U.N. forces from Bosnia -- not for peacekeeping, not for reconfiguring, not for strengthening or any other of the proposed deployments supported by the Clinton administration.

Lift Arms Embargo on Bosnia

Furthermore, Bosnian officials have repeated time and time again that they do not want U.S. ground troops. Just a couple of days ago in response to the news that a European quick reaction force would be created, Bosnian Prime Minister Haris Silajdzic said, and I quote, "Please untie our hands, arm the Bosnians. We do not want your boys to die for us". British boys, French boys, or American boys.

Finally, when those of us who advocate lifting the arms embargo point out that other countries would also participate in
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arming the Bosnians, we are told that this would allow Iran to arm the Bosnians. Well, the fact is that the arms embargo has guaranteed that Iran is a key supplier of arms to Bosnia and administration officials have actually used that fact to argue that there is no need to lift the arms embargo. From statements made by State Department officials to the press, one gets the impression that Iran is the Clinton administration's preferred provider of weapons to the Bosnians. If the administration has a problem with Iran arming Bosnia, it should be prepared to do something about it.

If the arms embargo is lifted, America would not be the only country to provide assistance. Countries like Turkey, Malaysia, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, and Pakistan would offer financial and military assistance. In addition, former Warsaw Pact countries would be free to sell their vast arsenal of Soviet-style weapons that have been designated for export pursuant to the Conventional Forces in Europe (CFE) treaty. Since the Bosnians presently use Soviet-style equipment, acquiring former Soviet bloc equipment would minimize the amount of training they would require. Furthermore, any training whether by U.S. military advisers or other country military advisers could be conducted outside of Bosnia -- in Croatia or Slovenia, for example.

Begin Real Consultations With Congress

Administration officials should quit fighting amongst themselves and begin real consultations with the Congress -- consultations based on the facts and not on wild accusations or unrealistic scenarios. It is time to take sides -- with the victims of this aggression. It is also high time for America to exercise leadership and end its participation in this international failure.

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* Remarks delivered on Senate floor, approximately 3:25 p.m.