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NEWS

U.S. SENATOR FOR KANSAS

FROM:

SENATE MAJORITY LEADER

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LIFT BOSNIA ARMS EMBARGO

CURRENT POLICY A FAILURE; BIPARTISAN DOLE-LIEBERMAN BILL ALLOWS BOSNIA TO DEFEND ITSELF, AFTER U.N. WITHDRAWAL

I am pleased to be joined by the distinguished Senator from Connecticut, Senator Lieberman, and a long list of bipartisan cosponsors as we again try to lift the illegal and unjust arms embargo on Bosnia and Herzegovina. The legislation we are bringing up today is a modified version of the bill we introduced in January, S.21. This bill lifts the U.S. arms embargo after the withdrawal of U.N. troops from Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Debate About American Leadership & NATO Credibility

Before we start to discuss this legislation I want to make clear: this debate is not just about Bosnia. This is not just about a small European country under attack. This debate is about American leadership and American principles. About NATO strength and credibility. About our place in history.

It was just about a year ago that the Senate last voted to lift the arms embargo on Bosnia. That vote was 58-42. However, in conference a compromise was worked out by the distinguished Senator from Georgia, Senator Nunn, and the administration's representative Chuck Redman. It urged the President to introduce a resolution to lift the arms embargo in the U.N. Security Council if the Bosnian Serbs did not sign the July 1994 Contact Group plan by October 15. The compromise language also provided that if the Serbs did not sign the plan by November 15, the United States would cease enforcing the arms embargo. Finally, the compromise urged that in the event of Bosnian Serb attacks on U.N. safe areas, the President introduce and support a resolution in the Security Council to provide the Bosnians with defensive weapons to defend these areas.

A year later we see that the Bosnian Serbs have still not signed the July 1994 Contact Group peace plan; the administration has still not taken up a resolution in the U.N. Security Council to lift the arms embargo; and the Bosnian Serbs are about to run over another U.N. safe haven -- the second in two weeks.

Safe Havens Falling With Embargo on Bosnia

The administration argued last year that lifting the arms embargo would lead to the fall of the three safe havens in the East. The first of these three enclaves has fallen under U.N. watch -- with NATO planes overhead. Today NATO planes are buzzing above Zepa, which is about to fall.

All this has occurred in the absence of lifting of arms embargo. Indeed it has occurred because the arms embargo is preventing the only people willing to fight to defend the Bosnian people from being able to do so. Those people are not the U.N. forces, but the Bosnian government forces -- Muslims, Croats, and Serbs who are willing to die to defend their families, their homes, and their multi-ethnic country.

Last year the administration also made the argument that lifting the arms embargo immediately would endanger allied forces. In this modified Dole-Lieberman legislation we are not lifting the U.S. embargo until after those countries contributing to UNPROFOR who want to leave, have left.

Lifting Embargo will "Bosnianize" War

The administration has also claimed that lifting the embargo would "Americanize" the war. This is the most difficult argument to understand. The Clinton administration has pledged 25,000 American troops for Bosnia if there is peace. The Clinton administration has pledged 25,000 American troops for Bosnia if there is withdrawal. And the Clinton administration is considering escalating the American involvement for transport and close air support of UNPROFOR forces. Let us not forget, an American air force pilot, Scott O'Grady was recently shot down. In light of such commitments, it is hard to take administration

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arguments over "Americanization" seriously. As the Prime Minister of Bosnia said, lifting the arms embargo will not "Americanize" the war, it will "Bosnianize" the war -- by putting the future of Bosnia back in Bosnian hands.

A more recent concern raised by some is that the withdrawal may take more than 12 weeks. In that regard, this legislation includes a renewable presidential waiver providing for an additional 30 days should additional time be necessary for the safety and successful completion of the withdrawal operation.

Let Bosnians Defend Themselves

As I mentioned earlier, each time the Senate has taken up this legislation we have been told by the administration that this is not the right time. We have waited. The Bosnians have waited -- and they have died. The bottom line is that the approach pursued by the Clinton administration -- like that of the Bush administration is a total failure. The question is whether or not we will continue to contribute U.S. dollars, prestige and credibility to this catastrophe or change course.

There are no perfect options. There are no easy answers. We know what has not worked -- relying on the U.N. forces to protect the Bosnians. It seems to me that we owe it to the Bosnians and our own American principles of justice and fairness to let the Bosnians defend themselves. I believe that the American people understand this and will support this.

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* Remarks delivered on Senate floor, approximately 7:15 p.m.