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## **THE ROLE OF THE UNITED STATES ARMED FORCES IN THE BALKANS**

### **INTRODUCTION**

Kosovo's eruption of ethnic and religious violence in March 2004 is a very real wake-up call to those who prematurely called NATO's mission in Kosovo and the Balkans a success. Five years after the end of the war, NATO is "increasingly finding itself in the crossfire of ethnic hostility as restless Albanians clamour for independence and the besieged Serbs demand NATO protect them from their persecutors. Acts of terrorism have been stepped up against both the Kosovo Force (KFOR) military peace keepers and United Nations M in Kosovo (UNMIK) colonial administrators."<sup>394</sup> While in the Balkans, a relative peace prevails, yet recent elections indicate a conservative leaning of the population along ethnic divisions.

While NATO and the Multinational Forces can claim many successes for both the Implementation Force/Stability Force (IFOR/SFOR) in Bosnia and KFOR, the job is far from over. This paper will give a brief background of the U.S. armed forces involvement in the Balkans and discuss the current draw down of forces. It will examine reasons why the U.S. should remain engaged in South Eastern Europe until the eventual hand-over to the European Union's control.

### **ENGAGEMENT IN THE BALKANS: THE NEED TO CONTINUE**

The Balkans remain a volatile mix of ethnic tension, a home to a large active criminal element, a potential harbour for drug trafficking and a terrorist

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<sup>394</sup> <http://www.balkansanalysis.com/modules/php?name=news&file=article&sid=314>

safe haven. In a report by the Council on Foreign Relations in 2002, it was correctly predicted that “high unemployment, criminal syndicates, government corruption and continued ethnic and religious tension could make Bosnia, Serbia including its Kosovo Province and Macedonia a destructive and destabilizing force for all of Southern Eastern Europe.”<sup>395</sup> The violent events in Kosovo in March of 2004 confirm this unpleasant prediction.

Any more renewal in conflict could be a devastating blow to the region and beyond. It would greatly impact Europe with a flow of refugees, unstable economy and the prospect of violent spill over into neighbouring nations. For America, it would signal a policy failure and at a time when the U.S. is forging new grounds in the international Muslim community.

The United States military has had a continuous presence in the Balkans since 1992. Whether as peacekeepers in Bosnia following the Dayton Peace Accords, or more recently as peacemakers and enforcers in Kosovo, American Soldiers have played a vital role in the stability and security of South Eastern Europe. When interviewed, Bosnians and Kosovars, as well as US military personnel who are entrusted with their protection, claim that “continued troop engagement is needed to build on the successes achieved to date.”<sup>396</sup> The U.S. remains dedicated to keeping the region of South Eastern Europe stable and secure.

“From the outset of the conflict in the former Yugoslavia, the U.S. tried to get Europe to assume and to retain primary responsibility for dealing with the looming conflict on its doorstep, but tried to do so without permanently endangering the US position of leadership within NATO. The EU took up the gauntlet as it should handle the crisis.”<sup>397</sup>

As the EU and the U.S. are planning to reconfigure and rebalance their engagement in the Balkans, it is in both entities interests to continue to provide

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<sup>395</sup> <http://www.balkanpeace.org/hed/archive/dec02/hed5360.shtml>

<sup>396</sup> <http://www.refugeesinternational.org/cgi-bin/ri/bulletin?bc=0045>

<sup>397</sup> Roy Gutman, *A Witness to Genocide*. New York: MacMillan Pub Co. 1993, p. xxv

incentives and enforcement measures that will keep the Balkan governments on the path of progress and reform. To be most effective the U.S. and the EU must act in harmony. Failure to do so “could result in a costlier and more dangerous intervention down the line and act as an unnecessary irritant in EU-U.S. relations.”<sup>398</sup>

## **BOSNIA**

In December of 1995, the presidents of Bosnia, Croatia and Serbia signed a peace settlement in negotiated in Dayton Ohio. “The agreement preserved the sovereignty of Bosnia by formerly recognizing two distinct entities within its borders: the Bosnia Croats Federation and the Bosnian Serb Republic...and thus established a de Facto NATO protectorate.”<sup>399</sup> In 1993, the Clinton Administration promised to provide US troops to oversee the implementation of an over all peace settlement (when and if one was to be reached). During the peace negotiations at Wright Patterson Air force Base in Dayton Ohio, U.S .officials laid out their plan for the NATO led peace Implementation Forces (IFOR) for Bosnia. “Administration officials argued that US participation with ground forces was necessary for two main reasons: 1) the Bosnian, Croatian and Serb Negotiators all made US ground forces participation a condition of their accepting a peace any peace settlements and 2) US participation was necessary for the US to maintain a leadership position in NATO”<sup>400</sup>

To enforce the military provisions of the Dayton agreement, NATO sent the IFOR, which compromised approximately 54,000 troops in Bosnia. That force designation lasted until December 20, 1996. It was then evident the a longer term force was needed and thus the SFOR was the new designation. “This reflected the decision by NATO’s members that the Bosnian deploy-

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<sup>398</sup> “Balkans 2010” *Report of an Independent Task Force Sponsored by the Council on Foreign Relations Center for Preventative Actions.*

<sup>399</sup> William R. Keylor. *The Twentieth-Century: An International History, 4<sup>th</sup> Edition.* NY, Oxford University Press, 2001. 481.

<sup>400</sup> CRS IB93056 “Bosnia: US Military Operations”, July 8, 2003

ment should not have a specified end-date, but rather that its duration would be tied to the successful accomplishment of the Dayton Peace Accords provisions.”<sup>401</sup>

By the end of 1997, Bosnia was still in a state of political and economic disarray. The U.S. Government Accounting Office (GAO) reported that the “transition to a unified democratic government that respects the rule of law has not occurred. . . political leaders from all sides had blocked efforts to link ethnic groups economically or politically.”<sup>402</sup> Due to the general consensus, that an international military presence would be necessary to maintain order and stability in Bosnia, the NATO foreign ministers re-authorized SFOR in March of 1998, without establishing a hard dead-line for withdrawal.

## US/IFOR CONTRIBUTIONS

U.S. military operations in Bosnia have undergone an evolution over the last nine years beginning with Operation Joint Endeavour, evolving to Joint Guard, and currently it is Joint Forge. Originally, the U.S /IFOR contingent was about 13,000 personnel from the 1<sup>st</sup> Armoured Division from Germany. On Nov 10, 1996, the 1<sup>st</sup> Armoured division transferred authority for command and control of the Multinational Division (North) to the 1<sup>st</sup> Infantry Division. By December 1996, the Implementation Force mission came to a successful conclusion and the 1<sup>st</sup> Infantry Division continued on as part of SFOR. In June, SFOR was scaled back and transitioned to a smaller follow on force led by the 1st Cavalry Division from Fort Hood Texas.<sup>403</sup> Presently it is the Army National Guard and Reserves who are responsible for operations in theatre. Most recently, the U.S. contingent for SFOR is as follows: April 2003 October 2003 35<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division (ARNG), September 2003 March 2004, 34<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division (ARNG) , March 2004 September 2004 38<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division (ARNG), and 16 September 2004 March 2005,42

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<sup>401</sup> Ibid.

<sup>402</sup> “Bosnia Peace Operations: Progress Toward Achieving the Dayton Goals, an Update” GAO/T-NSIAD-97-216.

<sup>403</sup> [http://www.tfeagle.army.mil/TFE/SFOR\\_History.htm](http://www.tfeagle.army.mil/TFE/SFOR_History.htm)

Infantry Division (ARNG).<sup>404</sup> The National Guard is particularly well suited for peacekeeping missions such as this. The Citizen Soldier can bring expertise and experience beyond his military job to those with whom he is working. Sharing experiences as a teacher, businessman, or civilian policeman can transcend ethnic and national barriers and provide an added element to a society that is trying to rebuild. Often the rotation into the Balkans is an annual event over a several months and the Guardsmen can build trusting relationships with the locals.

Currently, the U.S. and SFOR's primary focus is that of a support role. It provides support to the High Commissioner, monitors elections, supports the return of displaced persons and assists the International Criminal Tribunal, the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe and the International Police Task Force.

## **KOSOVO**

In 1998 and 1999 the U.S. and its NATO allies attempted to put an end to the escalating violence between ethnic Albanians guerrillas and Yugoslav/Serb forces in the Kosovo region. The efforts culminated when, on 23 March 1999, due to the non-compliance by President Milosevic to withdraw his forces, the order was given to commence Operation Allied Force. Operation Allied Force was a NATO contingency response aiming at ensuring full compliance with UN Security Council Resolution 1199 (Sept. 23rd 1998). Operation Noble Anvil was the American component of this NATO action to promote regional stability, cooperation and security, in support of the international community. On 24 March 1999, NATO forces began air operations over the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia. These air strikes against Serbian military targets in the Former Yugoslavia sought to:

1. Ensure a verifiable stop to all military action and the immediate ending of violence and repression in Kosovo;

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<sup>404</sup> <http://globalsecurity.org/mil/ops/sfor.htm>

2. Withdrawal from Kosovo of Serbian military, police and paramilitary forces;
3. Agreement to the stationing in Kosovo of an international military presence;
4. Agreement to the unconditional and safe return of all refugees and displaced persons, and unhindered access to them by humanitarian aid organizations; and Provide credible assurance of Serbian willingness to work on the basis of the Rambouillet Accords in the establishment of a political framework agreement for Kosovo in conformity with international law and the Charter of the United Nations.<sup>405</sup>

On June 10, 1999 the seventy-eight day air campaign was suspended after General Wesley Clark, Supreme Allied Commander Europe, confirmed the full withdrawal of Yugoslav forces from the Kosovo had begun.<sup>406</sup> The withdrawal was in accordance with the Military and Technical Agreement between NATO and the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia on the evening of 9 June. The agreement was signed by Lt. General Sir Michael Jackson, on behalf of NATO, and by Colonel General Svetozar Marjanovic of the Yugoslav Army and Lieutenant General Obrad Stevanovic of the Ministry of Internal Affairs, on behalf of the Governments of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia and Republic of Serbia. The withdrawal was also consistent with the agreement between the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia and the European Union and Russian special envoys, President Ahtisaari of Finland and Mr. Victor Chernomyrdin, former Prime Minister of Russia, reached on 3 June.<sup>407</sup>

The United Nations Security Council passed UNSCR 1244,<sup>408</sup> which paved the way for a political solution by the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia to the Kosovo Crisis. The Resolution gave the United Nations a mandate to deploy

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<sup>405</sup> [http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/ops/allied\\_force.htm](http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/ops/allied_force.htm)

<sup>406</sup> <http://www.nato.int/kfor/kfor/intro.html>

<sup>407</sup> <http://www.nato.int/kfor/kfor/nations/usa.htm>

<sup>408</sup> For details of UNSC Resolution 1244 see: <http://www.nato.int/kosovo/docu/u990610a.htm>

international policing forces in Kosovo. It was upon this authority that Operation Joint Guardian commenced.

The U.S. armed forces and KFOR have been at the forefront of not only security concerns, but at humanitarian efforts as well. The U.S. Contingent, Task Force Falcon is Head Quartered at Camp Bondsteel in Multinational Brigade East and its tasks are as follows:

- 1) Monitor, verify and enforce as necessary the provisions of the Military Technical Agreement in order to secure a safe and secure environment.
- 2) Provide Humanitarian assistance in support of UNHCR efforts
- 3) Initially enforce basic law and order, transitioning this function to the designated civilian agency as soon as possible
- 4) Establish and support the resumption of core civil functions<sup>409</sup>

Task Force Falcon is composed of the 1<sup>st</sup> Infantry Division with various supporting Battalions, to include Artillery, Infantry, Armour, Aviation and Logistics. It has been in theatre since June 2002.

## **CONTINUED US MILITARY OPERATIONS IN THE BALKANS**

Though the EU is poised to take over the Bosnian peacekeeping mission from NATO in late 2004, there is home hesitation. As recent as June 2003, U.S. officials and NATO HQ stated it was “premature to consider this option, effectively postponing this option for the foreseeable future”<sup>410</sup> While the U.S has reduced its numbers in the Balkans, ( 2,000 participants in NATO’s stabilization force-SFOR, and 2,500 participating in Kosovo Force-KFOR)<sup>411</sup>, it remains committed to staying the course to provide a secure environment for the implementation of UNSC Resolution 1244. During a visit to troops in Kosovo President Bush stated

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<sup>409</sup> Ibid

<sup>410</sup> CRS IB93056 “Bosnia: US Military Operations”, July 8, 2003

<sup>411</sup> <http://web1.whs.osd.mil/mmid/M05/hst0309.pdf>

We will not draw down our forces in Bosnia or Kosovo precipitously or unilaterally. We came in together, and we will go out together. But our goal is to hasten the day when peace is self-sustaining, when local, democratically elected authorities can assume full responsibility, and when NATO's force can go home. This means that we must reorganize and re-energize our efforts to rebuild civil institutions and promote rule of law.<sup>412</sup>

In a letter dated January 22, 2004, President Bush reported to Congress that the U.S. force contribution to SFOR is approximately 1,800 personnel or about 15% of the total SFOR contingent. He restates his commitment for the US forces to continue "to support SFOR efforts to apprehend persons indicted of war crimes and to conduct counter-terrorism operations."<sup>413</sup>

The Bush administration opposes an immediate decision on Kosovo's status, including independence for Kosovo or any effort to partition the province into Serbian and ethnic Albanian regions. "It has supported the 'standards before status' policy favoured by UNMIK and the EU."<sup>414</sup> It believes that the various benchmarks must be met before the question of status can reach the table. "The administration believes that an early decision on the status question could destabilize Kosovo and the region, perhaps leading to renewed fighting in Kosovo, southern Serbia and Macedonia."<sup>415</sup>

Where SFOR is concerned, those who believe that "a return to ethnic warfare in Bosnia holds greater dangers for U.S. security interests than the prospect of continued U.S. deployments in the region."<sup>416</sup> Soldiers in theatre

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<sup>412</sup> Steven J Woehrel, CRS Report for Congress, "Kosovo and US Policy", July 18 2003.

<sup>413</sup> [http://www.usembassy.it/file2004\\_01/alia/a4012202.htm](http://www.usembassy.it/file2004_01/alia/a4012202.htm)

<sup>414</sup> "Kosovo and US Policy", CRS RL31053, July 18, 2003.

<sup>415</sup> Testimony of Deputy Assistant Secretary of State Janet Bogue to the House International Relations Committee, May 21, 2003, [www.usinfo.state.gov/topical/pol/usandun/03052105.htm](http://www.usinfo.state.gov/topical/pol/usandun/03052105.htm)

<sup>416</sup> CRS IB93056

report that “maintaining a presence through mobile patrols on a round-the-clock basis has instilled unit cohesion and discipline through on-the-ground training that would not have been acquired if the soldiers were on routine exercises.”<sup>417</sup>

The US has slowly and methodically reduced its force structure and corresponding budget in Kosovo. Since 1999, U.S. aid has shifted away from humanitarian and reconstruction aid toward assistance aimed at democratization, the rule of law and establishing a free market economy. “The 107<sup>th</sup> Congress focused on limiting the cost of continuing U.S. engagement in Kosovo. The FY2003 foreign aid appropriations law provides \$525 million in aid for central and Eastern Europe under the Support for East European Democracy (SEED) program. The bill said that aid for Kosovo should not exceed 15% of total resources pledged...”<sup>418</sup> Based on current spending patterns, it is estimated that the U.S. will spend \$8 billion to \$12 billion on military operations and \$2 billion to \$3.5 billion on assistance to the Balkan region between now and 2010.<sup>419</sup>

Deputy Secretary of Defense, Paul Wolfowitz said, during a visit to the Balkans troops in May 2003, “peacekeeping in the Balkans continues to be a very important mission to the US and NATO...the last thing anyone wants to see in the light of September 11 is to have a failed state here in the heart of Europe.”<sup>420</sup> He then continued this idea in a press conference on that same trip saying:

We’ve been successful, I think, in steadily reducing SFOR’s presence in Bosnia and the U.S. presence in Bosnia. We’re at a point now where, at least for the time being, we’re going to see how the present deployment works and see whether there are oppor-

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<sup>417</sup> <http://www.refugeesinternational.org/cgi-bin/ri/bulletin?bc=00445>

<sup>418</sup> CRS RL1053

<sup>419</sup> Meyer, p.6.

<sup>420</sup> DPA wire service dispatch, May 17, 2003.

tunities to reduce further. But as I [said] in answer to some of the troops' questions, the mission here remains important and essential. If we can accomplish the same mission with a smaller force we're always trying to do that. But we're not in any way going to leave conditions where this place goes back to the kind of tragedy we've seen in the past. I think the key to success is going to be more and more to get the people of Bosnia and Herzegovina themselves to step up to the task of responsibility for their own affairs. And I think that is the key, making it possible for us to manage that same mission with less.<sup>421</sup>

There is a strong case for continued American Engagement. It is based partly on the U.S. interest in the supporting emerging democracies and securing a stable Europe and partly on the need for U.S. power to confront the security threats posed by having a power vacuum in the regions that may be filled by future despots or terrorist sympathizers. Thus, Wolfowitz expressed that the "United States and its allies would, as in the past, look for opportunities to reduce the size of SFOR and KFOR, as well as the US troop presence in the region, as long as such reductions do not compromise the mission."<sup>422</sup>

As the U.S. continues to operations in Iraq and conducts the Global War on Terror it is essential that it maintains its link to the Bosniac Muslims and is on record as being a friend and protector of oppressed Muslims. To totally withdraw from the region, as the EU takes over, might send a signal of abandonment to the Muslim community and further erode American soft power among Muslims.

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<sup>421</sup> <http://www.defenselink.mil/transcripts/2003/tr20030516-depsecdef0209.html>

<sup>422</sup> Transcripts of media availability with Deputy Secretary of Defense Paul Wolfowitz in Tuzla, Bosnia, May 16, 2003.

Finally, as the U.S. is looking to reduce its force structure and large strategic “Cold War” bases in Western Europe, it can look to the “New Europe” and the nations of South East Europe to base its smaller, more rapidly deployable forces around the world. There would be a boost to the nascent democracies’ economies of South Eastern Europe and the U.S. could keep a military presence in Europe that is closer to the Middle East and Central Asia from where the new threats to international security are emerging.

Due to the success in achieving a reasonably safe and secure environment and the possibility of ethnic violence is assessed at low in Bosnia, SFOR will restructure its forces to “7000 soldiers but still maintain a significant Over the Horizon Force capability that can be rapidly deployed into the country at a time of crisis.”<sup>423</sup> It will bring an end to the Multinational Brigade Concept and will introduce the Multinational Task Force. (MNTF). The MNTF will have two main tasks. The first is to achieve and maintain situational awareness and the second is to conduct focused operations. To achieve this awareness the MNTF will use the Liaison Observation Team (LOT), which is a small group of soldiers living in normal houses in the local communities. They will collect and disseminate information throughout the community by building natural relationships and having close contact with the local population.

The MNTF(NW) will remain in Banja Luka and will incorporate the LOT HQ and also the Multinational Battle Group comprised of 2 British Companies, a Dutch combat team and a Canadian Reconnaissance Squadron to conduct focused operations and respond to emergency situations in theatre.<sup>424</sup>

If the EU will continue this new and innovative MNTF and LOT program is unclear. As it is just in its nascent stage, its concept is logical as reduction in force size and expenditure is the next step toward an independent, and self-sustaining Bosnia.

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<sup>423</sup> <http://www.nato.int/sfor/indexinf/170/pl13a/t02p13a.htm>

<sup>424</sup> Ibid.

The National Guard State Partnership Program will also be a vehicle for a sustained American military presence in Bosnia. “On 24 January 2003, General James Jones, Commander of US European Command, officially recognized the State Partnership Program (SPP) between Maryland and Bosnia-Herzegovina (BiH). Unlike the Stabilization Force, the State Partnership Program is bilateral (strictly between the United States and BiH with no involvement from third countries, NATO, or the United Nations). SPP is an essential tool of the European Command Security Cooperation Plan. Its purpose is to increase understanding and interoperability between the United States military and the armed forces of BiH. SPP also aids in supporting the democratic institutions and state-level civil government in BiH.”<sup>425</sup>

In 2003, the emphasis of the State Partnership has been to assist with reform of the armed forces in Bosnia and Herzegovina. The General Framework Agreement for Peace authorizes certain manning levels for both the Federation and the Serb Republic armed forces. The armed forces in BiH are too large, and it is imperative that they be downsized to reduce the burden of the military on the Bosnian economy.

One option for reducing the size of the active force is to create a reserve component. BiH has active duty forces and an individual ready reserve system, but no organization analogous to the US National Guard. In 2003, groups of Maryland National Guard soldiers travelled to Sarajevo to present detailed seminars on the workings of the reserve components, and how they relate to the total force. A Maryland National Guard Judge Advocate General officer participated in a seminar in Sarajevo designed to assess the constitutionality of proposed Defense reforms. In June 2003, a group of Bosnian officers from both entities will visit MDARNG units at annual training in the United States. Disaster Relief will be another reform to be addressed.

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<sup>425</sup> <http://www.ngb-ia.org/public/spd.cfm/spi/library>

According to the National Guard Bureau's International Affairs Office, in 2003, all Bosnia SPP events were military to military in nature. One of the strengths of SPP is that the National Guard brings access to a state's civilian resources and expertise as well. Therefore, proposed initiatives fall into the category of military-to-military contact, military to civilian contact, and civilian-to-civilian contact.

The State Partnership Program between BiH and Maryland is in its initial stages. The program is a security cooperation tool for the Commander of US European Command, and is independent of NATO or the Stabilization Force. Events thus far have focused on Defense reform. As the program matures, it will move into civil-military partnerships.<sup>426</sup>

## **EUROPEAN LEADERSHIP IN THE BALKANS**

As the U.S. is engaged in Iraq and the Global War on Terror, the burden of the Balkans will continue to shift to the responsibility of the European Union. "Much has changed since the early 1990's when Europe failed in its efforts to respond to the unfolding Balkans tragedy."<sup>427</sup> NATO's military commitment in the Balkans includes the SFOR, KFOR, Operation and Amber Fox in Macedonia. "It is important to recognize that approximately 85% of the forces in these operations are non-U.S. forces...as befits its primary role in the development of the region, the European Union has the most to offer."<sup>428</sup>

The Balkans remain a primary security interest for Europe. The growth of the European Union has equipped it to deal with the economic problems of the region and it should commit its funding as it does to EU aspirants. But due to cuts in European Defense budgets its lacks essential lift, intelligence and communication capability needed to continue a stabilization force in the

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<sup>426</sup> ibid.

<sup>427</sup> <http://www.usip.org/newsmedia/releases/2002/nb20020227.html>

<sup>428</sup> "Balkans 2010" *Report of an Independent Task Force Sponsored by the Council on Foreign Relations Center for Preventative Actions.*

Balkans. Europe will need to expand its military capabilities to fully take responsibility for peacekeeping in the region.

As the baton passes to Europe, a “key challenge will be ensuring that U.S. interests in the region are not sacrificed and that the U.S. can follow where the EU leads. The U.S. and the EU need to make it clear that their visions are convergent: the Balkans states belong in Europe ...and status issues should be resolved peacefully.”<sup>429</sup>

The U.S. will be particularly concerned with the following issues:

- 1) To maintain credibility as an honest broker with the Bosnian and Albanians
- 2) Meeting any major terrorist risks
- 3) Establishing a rule of law and ensuring terrorists do not find refuge in the Balkans
- 4) Pressing Balkan state to cooperate with War Crimes Tribunal in the Hague.

The U.S. interest is to support the Balkan’s states reforms—in particular using its influence in NATO, to ensure security, stability and to guide military and civil reform. It recognizes and supports the EU’s lead role in providing political, economic and technical assistance. In the end, as the EU takes over, the US influence will diminish, but at this point a unilateral withdrawal is not in the near future. A policy dialogue needs to continue between the transatlantic relation concerning the Balkans, a dialogue that prevents discord and the indecision of the early 1990’s.

The future of the Balkans must remain an international priority for the coming decade. Keeping a robust international presence led by the European Union which includes and American presence is crucial to the stability of the region. The Balkan issue will be a type of test case for the EU military

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<sup>429</sup> Ibid.

capability and it is here that lessons learned can be applied and shortfalls addressed. The EU and NATO must remain the primary agents of international influence. But the ultimate goal, to turn over responsibility to the leadership of the region and wean them from dependency of outside aide, must always be kept in sight.

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