
AMERICAN DOMESTIC POLICY AND BOSNIA: FOREIGN POLICY CONSTRAINTS AND THE CLINTON ADMINISTRATION

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This paper demonstrates the foreign policy constraints imposed on US President Bill Clinton in his policy deliberations regarding the early years of the ethnic conflict in Bosnia from 1993 to 1995. Clinton was limited by the unwillingness of the American public to endorse strong action in the country in response to increasing casualties and destabilizing fighting among Bosnian Serbs and Bosnian Muslims. The paper seeks to identify the root causes of those limitations, showing how the conduct of US foreign policy is affected by many political forces, most of which originate from domestic actors.

Introduction

President Bill Clinton faced a number of domestic political obstacles that restricted the direction of his administration's Bosnia policy during the course of his first term in office. The decisions made from 1993 to 1995 regarding the ethnic conflict in Bosnia and Herzegovina (hereafter Bosnia) were shaped largely by the president's ability, or lack thereof, to maneuver politically at home. The most conspicuous domestic constraints involved: (i) the apprehension of the American public toward sending US armed forces to Bosnia; (ii) the tension between the president and Congress over the authorization of force escalation; (iii) the impending presidential election of 1996; and (iv) the nature of the internal processes of decision-making and the structure of Clinton's foreign policy apparatus. Understanding the impact of these constraints on the policy outcomes of the Clinton administration is instructive as foreign policy is affected by a myriad of sources of influence; identifying these in the context of Bosnia will help future decision-makers to acknowledge these domestic political forces that impact foreign policy choices.

The ethnic cleansing of Bosnian Muslims in Bosnia by Serbian-backed forces was reaching devastating proportions by 1993 and only showed signs of worsening. The US, at what could arguably be the height of its military strength in the mid-1990s, sought to impress its soft and hard power on the Balkan region to resolve the catastrophic situation that threatened to destabilize Central Europe and creep into the Western European space controlled by major American allies, some of whom shared military responsibility for the region as members of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO).

Since the middle of the 20th century and throughout the Bosnian conflict,

the US had been the foundation for advancing humanitarian military decisions on behalf of the Western community. Countries such as France and Britain had been reluctant to forcefully intervene in conflicts out of a fear of casualties and the real possibility of force. As such, the US, in its then-unchallenged role as global military leader, found it in its interest to lead the push for taking forceful action in response to the deliberate and selective killing of Bosnian Muslims in Bosnia. With its European allies unable to use force to stop the rise of violence in their periphery due to strong political opposition from their own domestic constituencies, the US, from a political standpoint, cautiously sought to take gradually escalating measures to prevent the atrocities in Bosnia from continuing.

However, despite American leaders' determination, domestic politics played a conspicuous role in restraining the decisions made by the US. The country could not simply send combat troops to Bosnia to wipe out Serbian installations; the average American saw no real benefit from putting US soldiers in harm's way for the sake of a small group of people in an unknown European country. This fact was a major reason that such incremental action was taken by the US in Bosnia. While morally just, according to American leaders, pursuing an end to the Bosnia conflict with the use of force was predicated on assuaging the concerns of a wary domestic political base. Leaders' accountability to the American public had a direct effect on the course taken to resolve the fighting in Bosnia, which will be demonstrated throughout the course of this paper.

Public Opinion and Policy Decisions

One of the most significant domestic influences on Bosnia policy during Clinton's first term was public opinion. That this conflict was framed by Clinton's predecessor, President George H.W. Bush, as one in which the US did not "have a dog in that fight,"¹ reflected the way the public perceived events in Bosnia; it was referred to consistently as a European conflict. But Clinton, while campaigning in 1992, pledged his support for the Bosnian cause, counter to the position taken by Bush. However, upon election Clinton came to appreciate the complexity of the Bosnian conflict. He and his advisers began to view the problem differently, less as a moral tragedy that would have rendered American inaction immoral and more as a factional conflict about which little could be done.² This, coupled with the relative indifference of the public, rendered any strong-handed policy moot.

Clinton administration pollster Stan Greenberg reported to the president in the spring of 1993 that the American public was generally not supportive of US action in Bosnia, and that any action taken had to be multilateral.³ The American

1 Peter Maass, "It's Risky to Talk Tough on Kosovo," *The New York Times*, March 10, 1998.

2 Elaine Sciolino, "Clinton's Bosnia Stand: Political Risks Remain," *The New York Times*, November 29, 1995.

3 David Mitchell, *Making Foreign Policy: Presidential Management of the Decision-Making Process*

public was not keen on sending troops to stem the violence in ethnically war-torn Bosnia. Polls in 1994 reported that a majority was opposed to sending troops to maintain peace, even though a peace-keeping task is usually better accepted by the public than a peace-making mission.⁴ The number of Americans who followed news coverage of the Bosnian conflict exceeded twenty percent only once, in May 1993 when military action seemed likely, and hovered just over ten percent for the rest of 1993 and all of 1994.⁵ Henry Hyde (R-IL) while on recess from Congress in his district said that he was hearing “from people about tax policy and pesticides and affirmative action, not Bosnia.”⁶

General perceptions of the use of force in Bosnia were negative. In 141 national polls over the ten years from 1992 to 2002 regarding public opinion of US action in Bosnia, the percentage of respondents favoring the use of force when the question mentioned no multilateral participation in a US mission was 42 percent. The result jumped to 49 percent when any multilateral participation was added to the question, still short of majority public support.⁷ In mid-December 1995, after Clinton authorized the deployment of troops as part of a NATO peacekeeping mission in Bosnia, a Gallup poll reported 56 percent of respondents disapproving to the presence of US troops in Bosnia, either strongly (44 percent) or disapproving somewhat (12 percent).⁸ Additionally, the average percentage of respondents who agreed that the United States had vital interests in Bosnia from June 1994 to December 1995 was 37 percent.⁹ In all, only roughly three in ten respondents indicated that they felt the US had a responsibility to do something about the fighting in Bosnia or that the US should do more to stop the war in Bosnia.¹⁰ Any difficulties experienced by the military would not have been met well by the public given low levels of interest in the conflict.¹¹

Polls show that most Americans were not willing to risk casualties to solve the conflict in Bosnia. From those 141 polls taken from 1992 to 2002, any mention of casualties in the question had a profound effect on the percentage of respondents in favor of the use of military force in Bosnia. When casualties were excluded, 46 percent of respondents were in favor of using force compared with

(Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2005), 149.

4 Wayne Bert, *The Reluctant Superpower: United States' Policy in Bosnia, 1991-1995* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1997), 90.

5 Ibid., 90.

6 Katharine Q. Seelye, “Many in Congress Reluctant To Widen U.S. Role in Bosnia,” *The New York Times*, June 2, 1995.

7 Richard C. Eichenberg, “Victory Has Many Friends: The American Public and the Use of Military Force, 1981-2005,” *International Security* 30 (2005): 140-177.

8 Eric V. Larson and Bogdan Savych, *American Public Support for U.S. Military Operations from Mogadishu to Baghdad* (Santa Monica: RAND Corporation, 2005), 64.

9 Ibid.

10 Ibid., 65.

11 Ibid., 89.



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only 37 percent in favor when casualties were mentioned in the question.¹² In an October 1995 poll asking respondents about their willingness to support the use of US troops in an operation given different casualty levels, two out of three said they would be willing to support the operation if there were no casualties, but support fell by more than half (to 31 percent) given a situation involving 25 hypothetical deaths.

Apprehension to risking American lives in a conflict that was perceived to be of dubious national security concern combined with low levels of interest in the conflict, as reported by polling data, significantly limited the ability of the Clinton administration to conduct foreign policy toward Bosnia. Any significant action would bear high political costs, and, especially in the early stages of his presidency, Clinton understood this risk.

What the public would support, however, was the use of air power to help ameliorate the situation in Bosnia. Intervention using air power was seen as a modest investment that posed little risk to American forces and was readily retractable; that is, the United States could withdraw quickly if the situation worsened, whereas the introduction of ground troops to the country could quickly result in a stickier commitment. There was also the fear that initial military action would lead to irreversible escalation, resulting in a Vietnam-like intractable military engagement.¹³ Given the tragic result of the intervention in Somalia in October 1993,

¹² Eichenberg, "Victory Has Many Friends"

¹³ Bert, *The Reluctant Superpower*, 121.

the public was highly sensitive to any new deployment in an obscure region of the world that posed little risk to US national security. As dictated by public opinion, the human toll was also unjustifiable as a basis for American involvement. Humanitarian claims, as stated by Clinton's National Security Adviser Anthony Lake, are "an insufficient basis for intervention."¹⁴

That the conflict was framed as one of European concern, that it was viewed as a humanitarian issue, that Bosnia was seen as a far-away, obscure country posing little relevance to US national security, that Somalia took place early in Clinton's presidency, that the introduction of troops on the ground was rebuffed and that Americans paid little attention to the conflict all contributed to the constraints public opinion placed on foreign policy. With these as contending national sentiments, Clinton was restricted in his options to provide American political and military assistance to the situation.

Legislative-Executive Relations and Foreign Policy

The actions and atmosphere in Congress also played a prominent role in setting the boundaries of Clinton's Bosnia policy. Congress, like the public, was reluctant to involve the United States in any significant way in Bosnia. One option advocated was to lift an arms embargo that had been initially implemented to cease the flow of weapons into Bosnia. The intent of the proposed lift was to rearm the Bosnian Croats and Muslims in an effort to strengthen their forces to fight against the Serbian-backed Bosnian Serbs, thereby reducing the need for military support. Congress saw this policy as a means to show that the US was taking action toward resolving the conflict without having to resort to the introduction of force in the country. Clinton ultimately demurred, after first supporting the lift, because of the potential risks it posed to the troops of European allies on the ground in Bosnia. Each European country with forces on the ground was highly wary of any proposed solution to the conflict that could result in troop casualties, as none had strong support at home for forceful policies.¹⁵ Despite Clinton's objections, Congress eventually passed a veto-proof resolution in the summer of 1995 authorizing a lift of the arms embargo. Clinton, at a risk to his political legitimacy at home, vetoed the bill which subsequently was not overridden.

Well before the embargo bill was passed and vetoed, Congress and Clinton were at odds regarding the power of the president to take action in Bosnia. Congress considered various restrictions on executive military initiatives, including one amendment that was not enacted which sought to prevent, without Congressional approval, the deployment of US forces in Bosnia in excess of the already-

14 Anthony Lake, "Between War and Peace," *Harvard International Review* 25, no. 4 (2004): 68-71.

15 Paul A. Papayoanou, "Intra-Alliance Bargaining and U.S. Bosnia Policy," *The Journal of Conflict Resolution* 41, no. 1 (1997): 104.

deployed 13 F-15 and 12 F/A-18 fighter aircraft.¹⁶ Clinton saw these amendments as encroachments on his ability to effectively carry out his role as commander in chief and adamantly opposed them. Under Article 1, Section 8 of the United States Constitution, Congress can refuse or cease to fund any prolonged deployment of American troops, and the War Powers Resolution of 1973 reaffirms this as law. Whether declared or undeclared, the decision to initiate war is left up to Congress, however adamantly the executive branch claims that authority. The president, though, is commander in chief, and any attempts by Congress that appear to encroach on that executive role can be politically damaging.

With the sort of situation that Bosnia presented, where a distant and seemingly inconsequential international conflict confronted a president dedicated to intervening in it, a political dance of sorts begins between the executive and legislative branches. To appease home constituencies that were resolutely opposed to sending troops and leery of any sort of American involvement, Congress sought to drum up enough negative publicity to preclude the president's commitment of forces to Bosnia. After debate on various amendments, Congress and the president in 1994 compromised on nonbinding "sense-of-Congress" observations about the placement of US troops under foreign commanders and the conditions for such engagements.¹⁷ Congress was intent on standing up to the president in the media, trying to avoid being perceived as deferential to a president who was conducting an unnecessarily risky foreign policy in a region of the world seen as inconsequential to US interests. Clinton brushed these observations aside.

Reinforcing the ambivalence of Congress, House Speaker Newt Gingrich in June 1995 told the media that it was unlikely that "we would say to our allies of a half-century the US won't do anything, but at the same time, we don't want to go and get involved." He added, "It's important for us to be very cautious."¹⁸ Before Clinton decided to take military action in the form of air strikes in Bosnia, Congress was vociferous in its appeals to the president to change the direction of Bosnia policy. On June 9, Senator John Kerry (D-MA) made known his desire for a more contiguous policy, stating: "I believe that we have to be clearer about exactly what lines we're willing to draw, precisely what distance we're willing to go to achieve them and then stick by it—not be moving back and forth."¹⁹ Less than one week prior to Kerry's comments, President Clinton sharply scaled back his definition of the circumstances under which ground troops could be used to aid UN peacekeepers in Bosnia. Instead of the initial "reconfiguring and strengthening" outlined days before, in his weekly radio address Clinton redefined the role that the US would play in Bosnia. In this, he highlighted the use of American

16 Louis Fisher, *Presidential War Power* (Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 2004), 183.

17 *Ibid.*, 184.

18 Seelye, "Many in Congress Reluctant To Widen U.S. Role in Bosnia"

19 J. Jennings Moss, "House Votes Lift Bosnia Arms Embargo; Senate Raps Clinton's 'Chaotic' Policy," *The Washington Times*, June 9, 1995.

forces for help with “an emergency extraction” of NATO forces, indicating that the likelihood of such a necessity was “remote, indeed highly unlikely.”²⁰ Senator John Ashcroft (R-MO) echoed Kerry’s sentiment: “Instead of articulating a clear policy on Bosnia which pursues these principles, we have a chaotic, constantly changing approach that bounces from pillar to post with each new event.”²¹

In late August 1995, Clinton made the decision to initiate heavy bombing raids on Serbian positions in Bosnia. Clinton did not state that prior authorization from Congress would be required before ordering the strikes.²² Congress, while willing to reprimand the president when he was not taking action, declined to endorse the bombings, waiting instead to see what outcome would result so that they could better position themselves politically if the policy was ineffective or resulted in American deaths.²³ The success of that strategy would go a long way toward determining whether Congress became a partner in Clinton’s Bosnia policy.²⁴ Politically, the president was solely responsible for his policy choice, which meant that he alone would enjoy any success or suffer any failure. Congress, on the other hand, was risk-averse, eliminating any downside risk of endorsing a failed policy while preserving the ability to criticize the president should his decision turn out poorly. Their tone had shifted from vociferously supporting lifting the arms embargo, which if effective would have given them the political credit for effecting a positive outcome in the region while simultaneously undercutting the president, to a watchful, quiescent position that placed the onus on Clinton should things fall apart.

Members of Congress were reluctant to challenge Clinton’s decision to use airstrikes in Bosnia for two reasons. The first is the status of the president as commander in chief. It is politically risky for Congress to question a president’s decision to use force when deemed necessary, especially when the likelihood of success is high. The second is that the decision did not involve risking American lives, which was of greatest concern to members of Congress. This decision put very few American lives in danger, making it less of a political issue. Senate Majority Leader Robert Dole (R-KS) said that he was “willing to consider postponing Senate action [overriding Clinton’s veto, thereby lifting the arms embargo] if the recent Western attacks prove to be part of a new and effective policy which leads to a just and lasting peace settlement.”²⁵ The timing of the bombing decision gave Clinton political cover, forcing Congress to take a wait-and-see approach to assess the effectiveness of the new policy before turning against the president and over-

20 Todd Purdum, “Sets Strict Limits,” *The New York Times*, June 4, 1995.

21 Moss, “House Votes...”

22 Fisher, *Presidential War Power*, 183.

23 Ryan G. Hendrickson, *Clinton Wars: The Constitution, Congress, and War Powers* (Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press, 2002), 85.

24 Carroll J. Doherty, “Hill Warily Awaits Outcome of NATO Strikes on Serbs,” *Defense & Foreign Policy*, September 2, 1995.

25 Doherty, “Hill Warily Awaits Outcome of NATO Strikes on Serbs.”

riding his veto. Clinton maintained a tepid and sometimes adversarial relationship with Congress regarding the Bosnian conflict. The president favored a stronger US presence to help with the resolution of the conflict while Congress was highly wary of risking American lives and resources, favoring instead policies that Congress believed would allow the Bosnians to end the fighting themselves.

In September 1995, after the decision was made by the Clinton administration to authorize heavy air strikes on Serbian positions, Clinton sought to deploy 25,000 troops to Bosnia to ensure that peace was maintained. Congress again tried to intervene, and again drafted a nonbinding resolution. This time the Senate also stated that no funds should be used to deploy combat-equipped US forces for any ground operations in Bosnia unless “Congress in advance approves of such forces.”²⁶ Many senators approved of the legislation because it lacked legal effect. Hindering the powers of the president to conduct foreign policy and command the armed forces was not a politically tenable situation for members of Congress. Republican Senator Judd Gregg who wrote the amendment felt strongly that “prior to the president taking [the action of deploying troops], he should come to Congress and ask for our approval.”²⁷ A number of senators, including then-Senate Majority Leader Robert Dole, came forward with statements reaffirming the constitutional authority of the president to command the armed forces of the United States. Given the political back-and-forth in Congress, it was clear that it was not the role of the president as commander in chief that was in question; rather, his policies and their political ramifications for Congressional constituencies were being questioned. After many votes and rejected amendments Congress finally passed a bill providing support for American troops, but expressing reservations about sending them to Bosnia.²⁸

Three days before the signing of the Dayton Peace Accords, on November 18, the House voted 243-171, largely along party lines, to deny funds for a Bosnian peacekeeping mission that did not obtain prior Congressional approval.²⁹ Congress reasserted its concern about a prolonged mission in which American troops could be ordered to shift roles if conditions on the ground deteriorated; despite their ostensible peacekeeper status they could still be put in harm’s way. They understood the political challenges that would emerge should they defy the commander in chief and demand the return of American troops once they had been sent to Bosnia.

Under Section 1542 of Title 50 of US Code, Chapter 33 (otherwise known as the War Powers Resolution) there is a clause requiring that “The President in every possible instance shall consult with Congress before introducing United States

26 Fisher, *Presidential War Power*, 186.

27 Ibid.

28 Ibid.

29 John Aloysius Farrell, “Clinton Turns to Task of Getting OK on US Troops,” *The Boston Globe*, November 22, 1995.

Armed Forces into hostilities or into situations where imminent involvement in hostilities is clearly indicated by the circumstances.”³⁰ The Congressional vote on November 18 reflected concerns in a forceful, public way that the troops would indeed be subject to hostilities and may be required to take on a more active role once they had been deployed in Bosnia. This vote reinforced Congress’s demand that it be satisfactorily consulted prior to the Bosnia mission, despite its purported peacekeeping objective, as it would be much easier for the president to shift the objectives of the mission once the troops were already in the country. Given his unpopular political position on Bosnia, Clinton would be at a political advantage if he had vocal support in Congress on the issue. He would also avoid potential legal problems should he break with the text of the War Powers Resolution. According to Section 2(c) of the War Powers Resolution, the president may introduce combat troops only pursuant to 1) a declaration of war, 2) specific statutory authorization or 3) “a national emergency created by an attack upon the United States, its territories, or its armed forces.”³¹

If the president did not follow this law’s stipulations he could be challenged in court. Any legal challenge to the president would have serious political implications for the remainder of his term, and it is for this reason that he must be cognizant of the limitations imposed on him under the Resolution. Congress has full constitutional authority to place limits on the deployment of soldiers, even when such restrictions affect the “command and control” of the president.³² In the case of Bosnia, however, the president deployed troops as peacekeepers, not as combat forces, which does not fall under the same rubric. If the mission would have resulted in hostilities toward US troops, then the Resolution would require Congressional approval for their continued deployment within 60 days of the start of hostilities.

Congress demanded more information about funding a mission to Bosnia before it would consider backing the president. Congress sought to press Clinton on whether the applicable yardstick for success—and thus the precondition for withdrawing troops—would be the successful conclusion of general Bosnian elections, the rearming of Bosnia or the mere preservation of peace for some minimum period of time.³³ Despite their exhortations for consultation and a further definition of the troops’ mission, Clinton ordered the deployment to Bosnia to begin in early December 1995.

After the first troops were deployed during the first week of December, talk of the mission in Congress ceased almost immediately. All of the political

30 War Powers Resolution, *U.S. Code*, title 50, chapter 33, section 1542 (Legal Information Institute, Cornell Law School).

31 Fisher, *Presidential War Power*, 149

32 *Ibid.*, 184.

33 George Moffett, “Skeptical Congress Means Hard Sell on Bosnia Troops,” *Christian Science Monitor*, November 27, 1995.

wrangling until that point had been intended to reinforce the public's apprehension to the administration's Bosnia policy and to dissuade Clinton from sending troops to the country. There was nothing to gain from challenging a president on a decision that had yet to produce any political outcomes; something first had to go wrong. One anonymous Republican strategist said, "If this policy turns sour and we lose lives, we're going to go after him on it."³⁴ Democratic pollster and informal White House adviser Mark Mellman called Bosnia a "ticking time bomb at the heart of the White House" stating that "any day, something awful could happen that could have very significant political ramifications" for the president.³⁵ During the early months of 1996 the media and Congress were focused on discussions of the state of the union in 1996, the Republican presidential primary, US-France relations and a visit by President Jacques Chirac and a budget war with Congress that shut down the federal government; the ephemeral tranquility in Bosnia remained a non-issue.

The indifference among the American public toward Bosnia and their opposition to intervening in that country drove Congress to devise ways to distance itself from the president: on one hand Congress rebuked Clinton's policies, while at the same time allowing him to conduct them despite their displeasure. Congressional politicking is conspicuous when the commander in chief is intent on pursuing a policy which is unpopular with the general public but for which Congress passes a nonbinding resolution of admonishment. Congress made strong efforts to walk the fine line between supporting the military without committing to the president's policy of engagement with the Bosnians in order to assuage both their constituencies and the president. The result was a flurry of nonbinding, declaratory statements that had little substantive value but which conveyed Congress's apprehension toward the mission in Bosnia.

Effects of the 1996 Presidential Election on Bosnia Policy

The presidential election of 1996 was a decisive factor in the Clinton administration's policymaking process toward Bosnia. Though the president had been crafting Bosnia policy in fits and starts over the previous three years, it was advised that decisive action was required to avoid the appearance of conducting incompetent foreign policy.³⁶ In the summer of 1995, events on the ground in Bosnia took a marked turn for the worse with international media coverage showing scenes of destruction and devastation from the Bosnian towns of Srebrenica and Zepa after

34 Donald Lambro, "Republicans Ready to Attack Clinton; GOP Plans to Hit President on Economy, Taxes and Troops in Bosnia," *The Washington Times*, January 3, 1996.

35 Richard Berke, "Long, Costly Prelude Does Little to Alter Plot of Presidential Race," *The New York Times*, January 3, 1996.

36 Henry F. Carey, "U.S. Domestic Politics and the Emerging Humanitarian Policy: Haiti, Bosnia and Kosovo," *World Affairs* 164, no. 2 (2001): 72-82.

Serbian forces overran them. The president was not keen on having Bosnia become a focal point of the campaign. Clinton, despite concerns among Europeans about the potential for an increase in violence on the ground if NATO took aggressive action, initiated a campaign of heavy bombing raids on Serbian positions throughout Bosnia. The president pointed out that any successes that US policies enjoyed were achieved only when NATO was used as a real threat against the Serbs. Clinton did not like the current state of American policy because it harmed the overall reputation of the United States. Instead, Clinton argued that a more forceful policy was necessary.³⁷ A display of strong force was chosen to kick-start a process aimed at putting an end to the conflict.

The sustained NATO bombing campaign played a significant role in transforming the strategic landscape in Bosnia. The Serbs suffered substantial military and territorial losses, including nearly twenty percent of the Bosnian territory they had held since the summer of 1992. Fearing the loss of even more land, the Bosnian Serb leadership sought a settlement and concluded the Dayton Accords on November 21, 1995.³⁸ In addition to ending the war, the goal of the talks was to build a viable, lasting peace in a united Bosnia.³⁹ The timing of Dayton could not have been better from the domestic American political perspective. Its success not only removed a potential point of attack for the Republicans in the 1996 elections, but it also gave Clinton something to flaunt as proof of his ability to conduct foreign policy. Bosnia was certainly a risk for the president; if American blood was shed he stood to lose many votes, but a successful mission would bolster his military credentials and boost his chances of winning a second term.⁴⁰

The accords were accompanied by a troop deployment of 20,000 servicemen and women as the Christmas season approached. Clinton intended to spend the holiday in Bosnia with the troops but military commanders advised him against it, stating that his presence could impede the planned deployment.⁴¹ Even declaring his intent to spend Christmas with the troops in Bosnia was a politically favorable move, especially heading into an election year. It demonstrated his ability to command the armed forces and his commitment to the troops and his own policy. Clinton also pointed out the success of NATO in working to accomplish a military goal, implicitly highlighting the effectiveness of American, and specifically his own, leadership. In a statement alongside French President Jacques Chirac he said, "In Bosnia, all of us can see NATO's critical role in ending a terrible war and

37 David Mitchell, *Making Foreign Policy: Presidential Management of the Decision-Making Process* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2005), 162.

38 Ivo Daalder, *Getting to Dayton: The Making of America's Bosnia Policy* (Washington: Brookings Institution Press, 2000), 135.

39 *Ibid.*, 160.

40 Tod Olson and Karen N. Peart, "The Issues," *Scholastic Update* 128, no. 9 (1996): 11-13.

41 *The Seattle Times*, "'Very Bad Idea' For Clinton Trip to Bosnia: Dole Wants To Go," December 21, 1995.

helping peace to take hold and restoring stability to the heart of Europe.”⁴² Clinton went on to note that “[t]he Bosnia operation also demonstrates how well NATO can work with Europe’s new democracies. Countries that were our Warsaw Pact adversaries less than a decade ago now are serving side by side with our troops for peace.”⁴³ This was a significant boost to his foreign policy credentials, a policy area in which Clinton was previously seen as lacking strong ability.

The combination of air strikes, the Dayton Accords, and the deployment of US forces to Bosnia all asserted the power of the president to conduct foreign policy. The timing of the resolution of the conflict was notably auspicious. Given the high stakes of the election campaign, Clinton’s political fortunes could not be held hostage to events in the Balkans.⁴⁴ Clinton took a significant risk in attempting to fix Bosnia as there was no guarantee of success. But given the potential damage it could cause him in the general election in 1996, the prospect of loss was worth the risk in order to prove his competence.

Internal Processes and Clinton’s Foreign Policy Apparatus

The structure of President Clinton’s foreign policy decision-making team also had a significant impact on the policy outcomes pertaining to Bosnia. It is evident that Clinton had a collegial advisory structure, preferring a more informal setting when shaping policy. Clinton was known for taking a broad approach to management while paying “spasmodic” attention to foreign policy, as opposed to domestic policy where he had a much greater interest and depth of knowledge.⁴⁵ With a freer reign, Clinton’s team could be more deliberative and loose in their meetings, and more influential; Clinton’s preference for domestic issues was itself an implicit signal of the level of influence his advisers would have. Clinton did not, though, always sit idly by as his advisers argued different policy positions. Instead, he was occasionally an active participant in the formulation and deliberation of policy.⁴⁶

The Clinton foreign policy apparatus during the Bosnia conflict consisted of two committees: the Principals Committee and the Deputies Committee, the former chaired by National Security Adviser Anthony Lake and the latter by Deputy National Security Adviser Samuel Berger. Bosnia policy was discussed primarily within the Principals Committee, which consisted of the National Security Adviser, Secretary of State, Secretary of Defense, National Security Adviser for the Vice President, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Director of the Central Intelligence Agency, US Representative to the UN and the Deputy National Secu-

42 William J. Clinton, *Weekly Compilation of Presidential Documents* 32, no. 5 (1996).

43 Ibid.

44 Daalder, *Getting to Dayton: The Making of America’s Bosnia Policy*, 166.

45 Mitchell, *Making Foreign Policy: Presidential Management of the Decision-Making Process*, 141.

46 Ibid.

rity Adviser.⁴⁷ Given the almost casual nature of Clinton's foreign policy-making structure, and the fact that all members of the Principals Committee had previously served together in one capacity or another, a highly fluid decision-making process developed that lent itself to sound discussion at the expense of formality, something which in other circles is seen as a necessity to arrive efficiently at a policy decision. One member of the Clinton team was noted as saying that the structure of the team made "it all very pleasant, but people interrupt each other and there [was] not enough discipline. We [were] there not as people brought together as representatives of institutions, but as people who've been around tables with each other for a long time."⁴⁸

A prime example of the outcomes generated by this structure can be seen in the development of both a long-term plan by Lake, designed to drastically shift policy toward Bosnia beginning in June 1995, and a short-term plan devised by Joint Chiefs of Staff Chairman John Shalikashvili which aimed to quickly curtail the violence in the country. It is unclear whether Clinton was aware of what Lake was trying to do, but Lake was set on formulating a new direction for Bosnia policy.⁴⁹ The purpose of his plan was to devise alternatives to keeping UN Protection Force (UNPROFOR) troops in Bosnia until such a time that the Serbs and the Bosnians reached a settlement. Working with US Representative to the UN Madeleine Albright, Lake developed an "endgame strategy" that included a variety of military and diplomatic options, namely using force to relieve Sarajevo, encouraging third party arms shipments to Bosnia, unilateral lifting of the arms embargo, redeployment of UNPROFOR, air strikes against Serbia, the exchange of territory and limited autonomy for Bosnian Serbs in a new Bosnian state.⁵⁰ Lake set up a meeting with Secretary of Defense Perry, Secretary of State Christopher, Representative to the UN Albright and Joint Chiefs Chairman Shalikashvili, and had arranged for Clinton to stop by to reinforce the necessity of coming up with a long-term plan as opposed to the finger-in-the-dyke approach the team had been taking up to that point. Before the meeting, Lake got support from Clinton for the main points of his endgame strategy. No other official had known of the plan before Lake had secured presidential support. He was able to redirect policy largely because of the hands-off, delegation-focused nature of Clinton's approach to foreign policy that allowed him to take control.⁵¹

Despite the support of the president, the plan was opposed by Shalikashvili, Christopher and Perry, who thought that unrestricted air strikes should take precedence given the Serbian attacks on Srebrenica in July 1995. They believed that a more assertive, short-term approach would check the destruction caused

47 Ibid., 142.

48 Ibid.

49 Ibid., 161.

50 Ibid., 162.

51 Ibid., 163.

by the Serbs. After the attacks on Srebrenica, Clinton designated Shalikashvili to design a response. In contrast to the plan laid out by Lake, this policy was meant to deal with the immediate situation on the ground in Bosnia. The president agreed that bombing would convince the Serbs that their aggression would not go unrequited. Clinton sent Secretaries Christopher and Perry to Europe along with General Shalikashvili to convince the Europeans, who were apprehensive about any force escalation, to assent to the US position.⁵²

Clinton chose both policy options, short and long-term. With Shalikashvili's bombing policy, as was the case with Lake's endgame strategy, delegation followed by deliberation was the approach favored by Clinton. He sought a number of recommendations and made his decision based on the information provided by his advisers, but he was also actively engaged in discussions. This gave his advisers an immense amount of influence over policy decisions. Combined with Clinton's lack of interest in foreign policy, the confidence he had in his staff to devise a workable policy resulted in a decision-making structure where Clinton set the broad agenda and his advisers developed frameworks that fit within his broader vision. This structure largely contributed to the outcomes in Bosnia during Clinton's first term.

Ethnic Conflict in Bosnia: An Isolated Case?

Bosnia, in an international context, represents more than the experience of one minority group facing a grave threat to its existence. Responding to that crisis demonstrated to the world that morality and justice in foreign policy is at times as important as a real need to advance the raw interests of a nation. The United States proved its commitment to upholding justice internationally, and through its response to the violence in Bosnia made clear that it would not sit idly by as a people was systematically exterminated. This lesson served as an example to the international community: the US would not turn the other cheek to atrocities committed by any group, and innocent people would be supported in deed as well as in word. The United States undoubtedly sought to ensure that Bosnia would serve as an example to any country that may attempt such abhorrent acts in the future. It would be instructive for future researchers to investigate whether the policies enacted by the United States in Bosnia served to change the aggressive behavior of any international actor or, as would be optimal, to preclude any aggressive behavior from taking place. Did force escalation in a tough domestic political environment enable peace in just this one instance, or did it lead to a more secure international environment for an extended period of time?

It is clear that the four major domestic political constraints—the American public, Congress, the presidential election of 1996 and Clinton's foreign policy

52 Ibid., 164.

structure – all contributed to the policy decisions of the Clinton administration as they pertained to Bosnia throughout the course of the president’s first term. One thing that these four influences have in common is their tendency to revert to the public for policy direction. Each, in some way, takes into consideration the sentiment among voters for guidance and limitations. In a Jeffersonian democracy the voters have the final say, given their ability to seat and unseat decision makers. Both Congress and the president are ultimately responsible for the action or inaction taken by the federal government and their efficacy is judged by the people based on their decisions. Regarding Bosnia, the structure of Clinton’s foreign policy apparatus was an extension of his presidency. His re-election campaign was predicated on the opinions of Americans, which was impacted by the outcome of policy choices toward Bosnia. Congress sought to placate voters by limiting US involvement in that country and by satisfying the president by taking unobtrusive action. It is the electoral system under which these governmental actors operate that dictates their political compensation, and that system is influenced by voters, who, through domestic politics, largely impact the shape of American foreign policy.

PEAR