

PREPARED STATEMENT FOR
WALTER B. SLOCOMBE
UNDER SECRETARY OF DEFENSE FOR POLICY
BEFORE THE
SENATE ARMED SERVICES COMMITTEE
HEARING ON
KOSOVO

25 FEBRUARY 1999

Thank you, Mr. Chairman. It is, as always, an honor to represent the Department of Defense before this Committee and to continue our discussion of the challenges we face in the Balkans, and particularly the problem of Kosovo. I welcome the opportunity to address these issues with my colleagues from the Joint Staff and the State Department. I appreciate the need for open public discussion of these important and difficult issues, but I know that the Committee will also recognize that there are significant limits to what can be said on certain aspects of the matter while we are in the midst of complex negotiations and in the process of planning possible military operations.

US Interests: Why Care About What Happens in Kosovo?

America has clear national interests at stake in Kosovo which require that we take the lead in seeking a negotiated solution, and that we stand ready, with our NATO allies, to take military action to back up our diplomacy and to participate in an implementing force if an agreement is reached.

It is appropriate to start with the US interests at stake, because Kosovo is a small province in a remote corner of the Balkans, and so it is natural to ask why the US needs to be concerned about its problems. The answer is that the unresolved crisis in Kosovo threatens the stability of Europe and tests the credibility of NATO as the principal instrument for European security.

The Balkans remains the most volatile region in Europe. Trouble in the Balkans was the immediate cause of the First World War, and a major element in the Second. Stability in Kosovo has long been a US interest. Indeed, in 1992, the

Bush Administration judged it so important as to justify a warning of unilateral US military action, long before we had military forces in Bosnia or Macedonia.

If the problems of Kosovo could be confined to that small province, the situation might be different. But the conflict there has no natural geographic or strategic limit. The danger of the conflict in Kosovo developing into a wider conflict, a conflict that could involve present or future NATO allies, remains real. A renewed large scale conflict in Kosovo would be a humanitarian disaster -- on at least the scale of what was narrowly averted last fall, when tens of thousands faced a winter in the open. NATO's original Activation Orders for air strikes last October were precipitated by our very real fear of a looming humanitarian disaster. That disaster was narrowly averted by the credible threat of NATO air strikes. However, a breakdown of the fragile cease-fire would promptly recreate the humanitarian disaster we forestalled in the fall.

But from the point of view of our national interests the hard fact is that renewed large scale fighting in Kosovo would not be merely a humanitarian tragedy; it would be likely to spread and involve Kosovo's neighbors -- Albania and Macedonia with its large Albanian community, other Balkan nations emerging from conflict, and NATO allies Greece and Turkey. The flood of refugees likely to be set off by a major conflict would affect these countries as well as Italy and other more distant European countries. And such a conflict between Belgrade and the Albanian majority in Kosovo would challenge Bosnia's real, if still incomplete, progress toward peace, for which our soldiers, diplomats and humanitarian and other aid workers have given so much.

To summarize our interests, beyond the obvious imperative to do what we can to avert a terrible humanitarian tragedy,

- Our first interest in Kosovo is to protect regional stability for America has a fundamental interest in peace and stability in Europe generally, and hence in southern Europe.
- Our second interest is to preserve the progress made in Bosnia which would be jeopardized by renewed violence in nearby Kosovo.
- Third, we have an interest in maintaining the capability and credibility of NATO, the institution which is key to keeping the peace across the Euro-Atlantic community. NATO credibility -- now and in the future -- remains on the line. Resolving the crisis in Kosovo is a test of the credibility and capacity of NATO, as well as of the OSCE and the Contact Group.

The State of Play in the Negotiations

As Ambassador Pickering will describe, the US has taken the lead in proposing and seeking a diplomatic solution. In outline, that solution would give Kosovo very broad autonomy, provide for a comprehensive cessation of hostilities, the withdrawal of Belgrade-controlled police and security forces (except for a small border patrol) and the demilitarization of the Kosovar resistance forces, establish a system of democratic local government in Kosovo, and set up a locally based police force to replace the oppressive Belgrade-controlled MUP. It would, however, also maintain Kosovo's status as a part of Yugoslavia and protect the rights of the Serb and other minority groups in the province. As Secretary Albright said yesterday, "The proposed interim agreement is the best deal either side will get and should be agreed to by both."

The Kosovar Albanians have agreed in principle to sign our proposed peace agreement, after two weeks of consultations in Kosovo. Unfortunately, the reluctance of the Kosovar Albanian leadership to accept formally the proposals made by the US and the other Contact Group countries made it impossible to present Belgrade with the choice between a reasonable resolution of the problem that preserves Kosovo as a part of Yugoslavia and the prospect of strong military action by NATO.

We have, however, made significant progress in Rambouillet. We have achieved an agreement in principle on substantial autonomy for Kosovo, including provisions for free and fair elections for democratic institutions, for the governance of Kosovo, for the protection of human rights and the rights of members of national communities, and for the establishment of a fair judicial system. With this political framework now in place, during the next 3 weeks the Serbs must accept that the only way to implement the agreement is by a NATO-led force. Otherwise, the agreement is only another piece of paper.

The Threat of NATO Airstrikes

An important element in securing the ultimate success of the negotiations, and the avoidance of a resumption of full scale fighting thus far has been the credible threat of NATO air strikes. The US and other Allies are carefully watching evidence of a build up of Serb forces in and near Kosovo. If Belgrade

were foolish enough to attack the KLA in some deluded effort to destroy the Kosovar insurgency before an agreement took effect, Belgrade would meet with strong NATO military action. The KLA too must show restraint or risk losing NATO's support.

NATO also remains ready to act if the Milosevic government proves to be the obstacle to an agreement. While the Kosovar side is by no means blameless, the primary obstacle to peace remains the regime in Belgrade, whose brutal campaign of repression gave birth to the KLA as a major factor in Kosovo, and it has been Milosevic's at orders that the worst of the violence and suffering has occurred. The Alliance is therefore united in declaring that it is prepared to use force if Milosevic's actions make it necessary. Foreign Ministers Vedrine and Cook made that clear in their statements on Tuesday, and Secretary General Solana spoke for the whole alliance when he said, "We remain ready to use whatever means are necessary to bring about a peaceful solution to the crisis in Kosovo and to prevent further human suffering. Those who prevent the achievement of an interim agreement, provoke violent incidents or threaten the security of the Kosovo Verification Mission personnel will be held fully responsible for their actions."

Milosevic and his colleagues in Belgrade know that NATO's authority to use force, if necessary, remains in effect. NATO, acting through the North Atlantic Council, that is, the ambassadors representing all the alliance members, has given Secretary General Solana the authority to authorize General Clark, as NATO's Supreme Commander for Europe, to carry out strikes. No further formal NAC action is required for the Secretary General to exercise his authority, but the NAC decision expressly requires that he consult with the allies before acting. Therefore, military action involving US forces could only take place with the express approval of the President of the United States.

Secretary General Solana's authority to authorize airstrikes, and NATO's military readiness to execute them, will be maintained as we prepare for the resumption of formal talks in mid-March. Late last week, Secretary Cohen ordered the deployment of additional key air assets to forward sites in Europe, to join US and European aircraft already standing by in anticipation of NATO air operations in the Balkans should that become necessary. We will be making various adjustments in those deployments, but we, with our allies, will keep fully sufficient assets in place, should they be needed. The military briefing to follow will provide the details.

So far as the Kosovar side is concerned, they too must show restraint. It is in no way in their interest to provide a pretext for Serb brutality, or to confuse the question of responsibility if there is new fighting. If the Kosovars themselves are to blame for new trouble in Kosovo, they would lose NATO's support. We are also prepared, if necessary, to look at other measures, if the Kosovar side is responsible for an outbreak of large-scale fighting.

A NATO-led Implementation Force with US Participation

One of the major issues in the talks has been the requirement that Belgrade agree to the deployment of a NATO-led implementation force in Kosovo to help implement a political settlement. If there is an agreement, a NATO-led multinational force in Kosovo could well be the deciding factor in achieving its implementation. A credible international military presence would assure the Kosovar Albanians that an autonomy agreement would stop Serb repression. The Serbs would be reassured that the rights of the Serb minority in Kosovo would be protected. Based on our experience – including since the October agreements – there is a very high risk that, without an international military presence, a settlement will quickly break down.

There is, to be explicit, no prospect of NATO sending ground forces to impose a settlement nor to send them in before a settlement has been definitively agreed by both sides. We are only talking about the possibility of sending a NATO force if there is an agreement which includes agreement by both sides to accept such a force.

The exact size, composition, and mission of the force are still being determined by NATO military authorities, and are, of course, subject to adjustment as the terms of a possible agreement become definitively determined. However, the mission would include:

- Maintaining a deterrent presence;
- Monitoring and if necessary enforcing restrictions on Serb security forces, including police withdrawals and military reductions;
- Monitoring and if necessary enforcing restrictions on Other Forces, such as the KLA; and

- contributing to the secure environment necessary for the OSCE Kosovo Verification Mission to conduct elections and set up local police.

The US position has been that our European Allies must bear a greater share of the burden in dealing with Kosovo, even compared to the – substantial – share they have carried in Bosnia. They have done just that. Several key Allies have publicly committed the bulk of the ground forces for a NATO force, provided the US also participates with ground troops.

Given the US interests at stake, and the importance of US participation to the Kosovar Albanian agreement, the President has indicated that we are prepared to join such a force, under the right circumstances. As the President said on 19 February: “If there is an effective peace agreement, NATO stands ready to help implement it.”

Indeed, we believe that the proposed balance of effort can serve as a model for future NATO operations -- both the US and Europe participating in a matter furthering common interests, but with the Europeans shouldering a greater share of the burden.

Planning and preparation, both in NATO and by the US military, is proceeding. Our current planning indicates that the US contribution to a NATO implementation force would be just under 4000, out of a total projected NATO force of approximately 28,000. The British and French are now moving substantial additional forces to Macedonia to augment their troops in the "Extraction Force" there now and to be ready to serve, with US Marines, as the initial NATO elements to be deployed if there is an agreement.

In planning a US contribution, we in DOD have been very conscious of the need to limit the level of the US contribution, both to control costs and, more important, to avoid unnecessary strain on a US military force already heavily engaged. But we have also been conscious of the need to insure the capability of the NATO force as a whole and the US contingent in it, both to get the military job done and to do so meeting all applicable force protection concerns. We believe the proposed force meets those conditions.

Let me emphasize: the President will not make a final decision on the commitment of US forces until there is an agreement to implement. But planning and preparation is necessary in order for the President to have the option to decide whether the US would join a NATO force. Indeed, without such detailed planning it is impossible to define such things as force structure,

mission, and cost with sufficient particularity to understand what needs to be decided.

In making the final decision whether to participate in such a force, the Administration continues to insist that a number of baseline requirements be met:

- A sound military plan, including robust Rules of Engagement;
- A clear NATO chain-of-command. There will be no "dual key" with OSCE, the UN or any other institution, and the force will be under the NATO military command, headed by General Clark as SACEUR;
- Full consent and cooperation of the parties to abide by their agreement, manifested in conduct as well as signature, thereby assuring both a permissive security environment for the force and fundamental acceptance by the parties of the terms that are to be completed with the force's help;
- A clearly defined mission, including a clear distinction between the military tasks assigned the NATO force and the civilian responsibilities assigned the OSCE KVM and other non-military institutions;
- A realistic exit strategy, based not on a rigid timetable, but on a reasonable prospect that conditions in Kosovo will be such that, within a reasonable period, neither US nor other NATO military forces will be needed on the ground.

A final decision on US participation in a NATO ground force therefore hinges on these conditions being met and on the willingness of the parties to reach a signed agreement.

During the next three weeks, the responsibility to achieve such an agreement lies squarely with President Milosevic and his government in Belgrade and with the Kosovar Albanians. They have the chance to reach a lasting agreement that will bring an end to the conflict. To achieve this, diplomacy requires the backing of military force, including US willingness to participate in NATO air strikes if that is required and to join in a NATO implementation force if there is a satisfactory agreement. As in many other areas, American leadership is needed to make peace a real possibility and to serve our national interests.