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Peace stabilization and Nation Building: lessons learned in Bosnia and Herzegovina

Written statement at the Forum on Bosnia and Herzegovina “Winning the Peace Under Dayton Peace Accords: Military Lessons Learned and Sustaining Democracy in Bosnia”
In House Armed Service Committee

I Introduction

It is a great honor for me to have been invited by Michael R. Turner, Member of Congress to participate at the Forum “Winning the Peace Under Dayton Peace Accords: Military Lessons Learned and Sustaining Democracy in Bosnia” in House Armed Service Committee. In this written statement I have summarized lessons learned in Bosnia and Herzegovina, which I assume might be relevant for the ongoing peace stabilization operations worldwide, especially for the reconstruction efforts in Iraq.

Let me underline why lessons learned in Bosnia and Herzegovina are relevant for the other peace operations in the world and to the policy maker in the US. First, DPA implementation process has been one of the biggest international peace stabilization and nation building activity in recent UN history. Second, the US has been the major international actor in DPA implementation process, with more than 20.000 soldiers at the begging of the military operation in 1996. Third, compared by the other UN peace building operations the operation in Bosnia and Herzegovina, though far from being perfect, is being considered to be successful one. Therefore, it could be used as a model for the ongoing post conflict stabilization and peace building operations in Kosovo, Afghanistan and especially in Iraq. Even though Bosnia and Herzegovina and Iraq differ in size, natural resources end geo-political importance the conflicts and post- conflict reconstructions in these countries have certain resemblance.

II Characteristics of conflict in Bosnia and Herzegovina

Socialist Republic of Bosnia and Herzegovina was one of the six republics of former Yugoslav federation (SFRY). Its distinctive central geographic position and multi-ethnic and multi-confessional character made it especially important for the Federation. In 1991 census the structure of population in Bosnia and Herzegovina was: 42% Bosniacs (Bosnia Muslims), 31% Serbs (Bosnia Orthodox Christians), 17% Croats (Bosnia Catholics) and 10% others.

In 1991, as consequence of major post-cold war changes, a process of devolution of Yugoslav Federation began. The war in Bosnia and Herzegovina was the third and most

destructive stage of Yugoslav federal state's disintegration. Therefore, the conflict in Bosnia was interdependent with political processes in the region, which escalated in full-scale war in Bosnia and Herzegovina in the spring of 1992.

When on 22 May 1992 B&H became the member of the OUN it had been expected that the international Community (IC), represented in the UN Security Council, would have reacted decisively and quickly to stop further suffering of civilian population, since by that time it was clear that the civilian population was going to be the main target of the war. Instead of a resolute action to stop the war the IC decided to "intervene" with UN peacekeeping forces (UNPROFOR) and establishing Tribunal for the war crimes (ICTY). The price paid by population in Bosnia and Herzegovina for overdue intervention of the IC to stop the war is well known: more than 6% of its population was killed or is missing, more than half was displaced, country's physical infrastructure and economy was destroyed, the worst war crimes in Europe since the end of WWII were committed. Dark symbols of suffering of the civilian population are: ethnic cleansing, besieged cities, detention camps, systematic rape, mass murder, planned torture and "the darkest pages of the UN history", the genocide in the UN "safe area" Srebrenica or the massacre of more than 7000 Bosniac men and boys. Srebrenica genocide is a paradigm of suffering of Bosnia civilians and a symbol of failure of the IC.

The armed conflict finally ended because of intensive pressure from interested governments, especially from the US. On 14 Dec 1995, Dayton Peace Accords (DPA), negotiated and agreed in Dayton, Ohio, was signed in Paris. DPA main objective was to stop the fighting. It was based on a compromise, which was imposed upon "the parties in the conflict". It was obvious that majority of the parties were far from committed to the arrangements they signed. The central implication of this fact for peace process was clear: any chance for success would heavily depend on international third parties and there was likely to be heavy continuing negotiation, even enforcement, needed to ensure that signing parties stick to the terms of the accords.

III Current status of DPA implementation process

The involvement of the IC in reconstruction of physical infrastructure, peace stabilization, refugees' return and establishing of state institutions has brought a number of successes. Slowly but surely Bosnia and Herzegovina is becoming a "normal" country in transition and the challenges it is facing are "normal" challenges that new democracies of Eastern Europe have already dealt with. The country increasingly moves from issues of physical security and reconstruction to those of economic reforms and structural changes. It is now tackling the big, structural reforms that all transition countries have had to tackle. We are strongly committed to Euro and NATO integration. At the summit in Istanbul NATO announced the successful termination of its SFOR mission in Bosnia and Herzegovina and its replacement with EUFOR mission. All necessary reforms in defense sector were implemented but due to the lack of the cooperation with the ICTY, Bosnia and Herzegovina was not invited to join Partnership for Peace (PfP) program. We expect that EU will soon open negotiations for Stabilization and Association Agreement.

In short, current situation in the country is characterized by a complicated and sensitive process of state building made up of four major transitions:

- Consolidation of peace
- Development of sustainable state structure
- Economic and social transition
- Reforms necessary for integrations into NATO and EU.

IV Lessons learned

The following lessons for the area of peace stabilization might be drawn on the basis of the experience to date in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Lesson first: Intervention/assistance of the IC has to be coherent, well planned and coordinated with the local stakeholders.

The IC intervention/assistance has to be well planned, with clear objectives and milestones, with clear division of responsibilities amongst the international actors involved. It is also important to have local authorities and stakeholders involved ASAP.

The divided and bureaucratic command and control arrangements for UN military action (UNPROFOR) during the war in Bosnia and Herzegovina were a disaster. Overlapping agendas of the international actors participating in DPA implementation presented real impediment in the first five years of the process. Poor coordination amongst key international peace implementing agencies: WB, UN, EU, OSCE and OHR caused tensions and lowered effectiveness of assistance programs in that period. Poor participation, especially in decision-making process, of local authorities created “dependency syndrome”.

Lessons for Iraq operation: Early involvement of local authorities with clear division of responsibilities and coordination lines with the international actors is highly recommended.

Lesson second: Widely accepted vision of the country is very important.

The importance of vision-destination as a goal than can motivate the people of war-torn countries to make sacrifices necessary to transform their societies should be emphasized. Bosnia and Herzegovina and the region of South East Europe (SEE) today have a clear destination. It is called Europe. The hope of getting into NATO and the EU has now become the main driving force of reform in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Lessons for Iraq: Structures like NATO, EU, OSCE, CoE do not exist in the Middle East. Therefore importance of widely accepted vision of the country is even bigger. Whether Iraqis will find the vision of creating democratic, secular, modern Iraq sufficiently motivating, still has to be seen.

Lesson third: Post-conflict constitutional arrangement is of the utmost importance.

DPA, negotiated under the strong pressure from the IC, was a result of compromise. Many consider that Dayton constitution (Annex IV of DPA) represent the major impediment to efficient system of governance. Recently the High Representative Lord Paddy Ashdown stated that an evolution process of constitution of Bosnia and Herzegovina is necessary if Bosnia and Herzegovina wants to be integrated into Europe. Current state structure, which resulted in a government organization with 760 legislators, 180 ministers, four separate levels of administration, in the long term is not sustainable. It is clear that if this evolution process is successful one day in the future, people of Bosnia and Herzegovina will have to consider adapting Dayton-based constitution according to the European Human Rights norms.

Lessons for Iraq: New constitutional arrangement should be acceptable to all ethnic/confessional groups. However, necessary compromise should not present impediment to efficient system of governance.

Lesson fourth: Regional context significantly influences post conflict reconstruction.

As it has already been mentioned the conflict in Bosnia and Herzegovina was interdependent with political problems in the SEE region. Reconstruction of the country is also interdependent with security, political and economic processes in the region. Therefore, regional context has been very important in the post-conflict reconstruction of Bosnia.

Lessons for Iraq: The future of Iraq is of special importance, due to security, political and economic interests, for the countries in the region, especially for its neighbors.

Lesson fifth: Intervention steps have to be prioritized.

Prioritizing intervention steps in security area, political, economic and social aspects of the reconstruction are of the utmost importance. Without a functioning judiciary and police, democracy and economic recovery will not take root. It took six years in Bosnia and Herzegovina to understand that the rule of law should have been the first thing. If the rule of law is not established very swiftly it does not take long before criminality infects every corner of the society, obstructing the process of stabilization and corrupting every attempt to create decent government and a healthy society.

It is also vital to start ASAP on major structural reforms: from reforming law enforcement agencies to transforming the armed forces, from reforming civil service to structural reforms that will restart the economy. Without a functioning economy, social unrest is likely to grow into chaos.

Lesson sixth: Time and determination.

Winning the peace following a military intervention is measured in decades. It cannot be done – as it was initially claimed Bosnia and Herzegovina - in a year or two. Setting deadlines should be avoided and the IC should be prepared for the long presence.

Building the hardware of the state, its institutions, can be done relatively quickly. But changing the software, the minds of its citizens, takes a very long time. It can take even longer to develop, because these things cannot be imposed from above.

Lesson seventh: Reconstruction of war-torn countries is expensive.

Reconstruction of nations shattered by war or decades of misrule is expensive even if they have oil).

Lessons for Iraq: Rebuilding of Iraq will not take only time but will require substantial financial resources. Financial burden of the post-war reconstruction of Iraq should be evenly distributed amongst the developed nations and its rich neighbors.

Lesson eight: War criminals must be prosecuted in a due judicial process and adequately punished.

The war crime committed in Bosnia and Herzegovina by the war criminals should never be forgotten. There will be no sustainable peace in Bosnia and Herzegovina unless truth about committed war crimes is established and justice for the victims is served. For the victims of war crimes and their families the ICTY work is only hope that justice will be administered.

The main task of the ICTY is to prosecute the individuals responsible for war crimes, thus individualizing the responsibility and absolving the nations of a possible collective guilt. Its second main task is to establish the facts and set record straight, bequeathing the truth to the history.

Lesson ninth: Reconciliation process is basis for long term stability.

The story of the ICTY is not only the story of indictments and arrests, sentences and appeals, plea bargains and admissions of guilt, however significant and important those are in setting the record straight. Until ordinary people realize that the war criminals are no heroes, but the worst kind of criminals who dishonor their own people, all efforts for the arrest of indicted war criminals will be a futile attempt of cauterization of the wound that has to heal from within, since they will not contribute to the reconciliation process.

Reconciliation is fragile, long lasting and cumbersome process. Countless examples from recorded history, including the one of Bosnia and Herzegovina, teach us a single valuable lesson: national reconciliation is not possible without the national catharsis. Catharsis can only be reached by self-examination of objective and unquestionable facts, providing all

other conditions exist: the environment without fear, xenophobia or collective guilt, the atmosphere of dialogue and understanding, and forgiveness as the most noble of all human virtues. The recent report of the Special Commission of the Government of Republic Srpska on the events in and around Srebrenica between 10-19 July 1992 as well as the statements of the highest officials and the reaction of the general public indicate that a possible turnaround is beginning to happen in the collective conscience of the peoples of Bosnia and Herzegovina: from denial to acceptance of responsibility, from a-priory blaming “the others” to admitting one’s own blame, from general and impersonal remorse to redemption, and eventually all the way to catharsis. That is why the work of the ICTY is substantial for future of peace process and for long term sustainability of Bosnia and Herzegovina.