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Volume 18, Number 1, Spring 1998

URI: [https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/jcs18\\_01art01](https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/jcs18_01art01)

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**Publisher(s)**

The University of New Brunswick

**ISSN**

1198-8614 (print)

1715-5673 (digital)

[Explore this journal](#)

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**Cite this article**

Peceny, M. & Sanchez-Terry, S. (1998). Liberal Interventionism in Bosnia.  
*Journal of Conflict Studies*, 18(1), 5–26.

# Liberal Interventionism in Bosnia

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## INTRODUCTION

The Clinton administration proclaimed on many occasions that it would bomb the Bosnian Serbs in support of the beleaguered Bosnian government, only to back off despite the Serbs' failure to comply fully with US demands. Only in 1995 did Clinton authorize significant air strikes. Substantial numbers of US troops arrived in Bosnia only after the negotiation of the Dayton Peace Accords. Throughout 1996, when 20,000 US troops were stationed in Bosnia, NATO did not attempt to apprehend war criminals or assist displaced refugees in returning to their homes. A smaller NATO force took limited measures to accomplish these goals in 1997, but failed to follow through on these initiatives. As the NATO presence diminishes further in 1998, it is even less likely that the US will take the action necessary to construct a unified, democratic Bosnia.

Many analysts point to the Bosnian case as the most prominent example of a broader set of problems with the Clinton administration's military interventions abroad. On the one hand, many argue that the Clinton administration has used force mostly to achieve ideological, humanitarian and domestic political goals rather than traditionally conceived national interests. Some have emphasized that US efforts have been targeted toward "guaranteeing democracy" abroad.<sup>1</sup> Others have focused on US interventions designed to do "social work" or achieve humanitarian goals.<sup>2</sup> While some applaud these efforts, others are appalled that the US would depart so frequently from national security considerations in deciding when and where to intervene. The Bosnian intervention possesses elements of each of these motivations.

On the other hand, many analysts have argued that the Clinton administration has generally been vacillating, ineffective and indecisive in its use of force abroad. Those who support intervention on behalf of ideological or humanitarian causes wish that Clinton had done more to achieve these goals.<sup>3</sup> Those more reluctant to support these interventions have criticized Clinton for violating General Colin Powell's doctrine of the use of overwhelming and decisive force.<sup>4</sup> Instead, they argue, Clinton interventions have been limited affairs involving incremental escalation. Finally, according to these critics, American forces have fallen prey to the delusion of "impartial intervention" in conflicts where the appropriate strategy would be either to choose a primary ally and assist it in achieving military victory or to support a strict partition of the country in question.<sup>5</sup>

These problems have been more evident in the Bosnian case than in any other contemporary US military intervention.

Why has the Clinton administration committed to using American military might to resolve a variety of crises, as with the constant threats to launch air strikes against the Bosnian Serbs from 1993 to mid-1995, only to back off at the last minute, damaging US prestige and the credibility of American commitments? Why does it send troops only when it is relatively certain those troops will not face combat, as was true in the NATO deployment after the Dayton Peace Accords? Why has the Clinton administration consistently done less than the minimum necessary to achieve its goals in these conflicts, as may be the case with the removal of most US troops from Bosnia before a full implementation of the provisions of the Dayton Accords?

It is tempting to ascribe these anomalies to the personality of the president, the bureaucratic politics within his administration, or to a uniquely American pattern of military intervention. Building on the literature on Kantian liberalism and the democratic peace, we develop a different line of analysis and argue that the puzzling pattern of contemporary US military interventions is precisely what one should expect of a liberal state. Cultural values cause liberal states such as the US to intervene in response to humanitarian crises, human rights violations and political tyranny in states where they lack more concrete national interests. At the same time, however, the political constraints imposed by liberal institutions of governance make these states reluctant to use force or to pay high costs to achieve liberal goals. Thus, liberal values and liberal political institutions have somewhat contradictory impacts on military intervention. This problem is compounded by the strong alliances liberal states form among themselves. A collection of liberal states acting in concert reinforces the contradictory political impulses within each liberal state. This article uses the Clinton administration's policy toward Bosnia to demonstrate the utility of this argument for explaining US intervention in the contemporary era.

## **THE DEMOCRATIC PEACE AND US MILITARY INTERVENTION**

Analysts from the liberal perspective have focused most of their attention on answering the question of why democracies don't fight one another. One group of democratic peace scholars argues that the institutional constraints imposed by republican government limit the ability of liberal states to go to war.<sup>6</sup> Others believe that liberal cultural norms of tolerance for self-determination and support for non-violent conflict resolution bind liberal states together in the "pacific union."<sup>7</sup> Yet another group has focused on the enhanced influence that international regimes and alliances have on the liberal states that participate in them.<sup>8</sup>

While liberal democracies have almost never gone to war with one another, democracies fight nearly as often as illiberal states. This part of the puzzle of the democratic peace has received less attention than has the absence of war between democracies. This article seeks to expand our understanding of the conflict behavior of liberal states to determine whether these states exhibit distinctive patterns in their military interventions abroad. We

apply each of the broad arguments noted above to account for the pattern of contemporary US interventions. While advocates of the liberal approach believe these factors to be mutually reinforcing in forging the democratic peace, we argue that the practice of liberal interventionism manifests a basic tension between the policy logic of liberal values and liberal institutions, which is exacerbated by the alliances between liberal states.

Most analysts of the democratic peace emphasize that shared liberal values lead to mutual respect and cooperation among liberal states. What has been lost from Michael Doyle's path-breaking contribution to this literature, however, is that these liberal values can legitimate moral crusades by liberal states to spread their values, at times through the use of force.<sup>9</sup> Thus, liberal states intervene as often as other types of states, yet rarely against other liberal states.<sup>10</sup> Opposing illiberal states, promoting democracy, intervening to stop abuses of human rights and to protect large numbers of individuals from humanitarian catastrophes all spring from the same liberal philosophy that breeds peace among liberal states. Liberal values can, therefore, spur states to intervene abroad, even in the absence of concrete national interests. Institutional constraints, however, make these states cautious about paying the costs of war in lives and treasure.

We argue that these conflicting political dynamics lead to a distinctive pattern of military intervention, which manifests itself in a particular way in the US polity because of the separation of powers between the president and Congress. On the one hand, presidents need to respond in a manner consistent with American liberal values to the political and humanitarian crises that reach the consciousness of the American people. Failure to do so could open them up to congressional charges of violating liberal values either by callously disregarding a human tragedy or by failing to fight for liberal democracy. The fact that such attacks came from both "liberal" Democrats and "conservative" Republicans in the Bosnian case suggests that liberal culture broadly conceived, rather than the unique domestic political ideologies of actors in the US, explains the puzzling patterns of contemporary US military interventions. On the other hand, any presidents who send troops into combat make themselves vulnerable to political charges that they have needlessly sacrificed the lives of US soldiers.

Because these types of political attacks are likely to resonate within a liberal public, politicians may use them to achieve objectives unrelated to the promotion of liberal ideals or the protection of soldiers' lives. Indeed, it would be surprising if all the members of Congress who attacked presidential policy were motivated purely by liberal ideals. Regardless of whether the motivations of advocates of intervention or withdrawal matches their rhetoric, presidents must respond to such attacks.

The logical response of presidents placed in this domestic political bind is to do whatever they can short of war to demonstrate that they are responding to the crisis in the country in question.<sup>11</sup> Presidents do this even if they believe that their limited actions are unlikely to resolve the crisis. If they are fortunate, diplomacy, economic sanctions and the threat of force might achieve limited progress or preserve a stalemate, even if failing to generate a definitive solution. Having staked US resources and prestige on achieving solutions,

however, it becomes more difficult and costly to disengage from the situation when it appears that a substantial commitment of US military power may be necessary to resolve the crisis.

When the political costs of suffering casualties in war are greater than the cost of violating American principles, as they often are in these cases, presidents are likely to withdraw from the intervention. Knowing that this would be the likely outcome, the wisest choice might be to decide early on not to commit US resources and prestige to a losing battle one is unprepared to fight. However, when the initial choice is to do nothing or to demonstrate commitment to the cause by using diplomacy or sanctions that have a limited chance of success, the politically safest course at that time is to take limited action. Thus, short-term political calculations encourage presidents gradually to escalate US involvement in these crises and then step away from the brink when it appears that military force might be necessary to achieve a solution. When military force is used in support of liberal values, it will often be used in a limited, vacillating and ineffectual manner.

This problem is compounded by the strong alliances liberal states form among themselves in their Kantian "pacific union." A collection of liberal states acting in concert can only reinforce these contradictory political impulses within each other. On the one hand, states making principled commitments to solve humanitarian crises in other countries can drag their allies into a cooperative effort to address the problem. On the other hand, these states, each facing domestic constraints against suffering casualties, can convince their liberal friends to exercise caution and thus reinforce the restraining dynamics of liberal institutions.

We recognize that not all cases of "liberal interventionism" will adhere precisely to this pattern of behavior. Furthermore, we acknowledge that an examination of a single case cannot provide definitive evidence that the political dynamics laid out above will be present in all cases of US military intervention. An examination of the Bosnian case, however, provides a useful plausibility probe to determine whether a process-tracing of the decision-making in this instance illuminates the type of political processes and decisions we expect to see in the interventionist behavior of liberal states.<sup>12</sup>

## **CLINTON'S INTERVENTION IN BOSNIA**

The pattern of US involvement in Bosnia clearly illustrates how American liberalism has both compelled Clinton to act, yet constrained him from taking decisive action. Clinton has been pressured by domestic groups both to do something to stop the humanitarian crisis in Bosnia and to avoid sending US troops into combat. America's liberal partners in the international system have also played a crucial role, mostly by constraining Clinton's ability to pursue the strategies that best served his domestic interests.

The utility of the liberal argument for explaining Clinton's policy toward Bosnia will be illustrated through an examination of four crucial decision points from 1993 through 1997. The first section examines Clinton's early 1993 decision to promote a lifting of the

UN arms embargo against the Bosnian government and the launching of air strikes against the Bosnian Serbs. The second section centers on Clinton's decision to take some steps toward lifting the arms embargo in the summer and fall of 1994. The third section analyzes Clinton's mid-1995 decisions to launch significant air strikes against Bosnian Serb targets and to play the central role in brokering the Dayton Peace Accords. The fourth section briefly examines the implementation of the provisions of the Dayton Accords.

## **Lift and Strike**

In May 1993, the Clinton administration settled on two major policy initiatives in its first major foray into the Bosnian crisis. First, it would push to lift the arms embargo that had been imposed on Bosnia by the UN. Second, it would punish the Bosnian Serbs by launching air strikes against Serb targets. Within two weeks of the announcement of the US intention to begin bombing Serb targets, however, the Clinton administration backed away from its threat and instead endorsed European plans that fell well short of America's liberal goals in Bosnia. Despite Clinton's strong rhetoric, he backed down from taking decisive action. In this section, we argue that domestic political pressure encouraged the Clinton administration to embrace the "lift and strike" plan, while opposition from America's liberal allies in Europe caused Clinton to shelve this initiative.

Bill Clinton faced two sets of contradictory domestic pressures on the Bosnian crisis when he entered office. On the one hand, he was confronted by constant television images detailing the shelling of Sarajevo and the flight of the victims of Serb ethnic cleansing. Hundreds of thousands of Bosnians, most of them Muslims, had been driven from their homes by paramilitary gangs during 1992 and tens of thousands had been killed.<sup>13</sup> Clinton had used these very images during the 1992 presidential campaign to attack George Bush's inaction in the face of genocide and to charge him with violating American liberal values in his foreign policy.

In an October 1992 campaign speech, Clinton suggested that the Bush administration "coddled dictators" and "seems too often to prefer a foreign policy that embraces stability at the expense of freedom." Clinton implied that Bush was at least partly responsible for the genocidal policies of ethnic cleansing in the former Yugoslavia:

Mr. Bush sent his Secretary of State to Belgrade, where in the name of stability, he urged the members of the dying Yugoslav Federation to resist dissolution. This would have required the peoples of Bosnia, Croatia and Slovenia to knuckle under to Europe's last Communist strongman. When instead these new republics asserted their independence, the emboldened Milosevic regime launched the bloodiest war in Europe in over 40 years.<sup>14</sup>

Clinton also attacked the Bush administration for backing a plan for a negotiated settlement of the conflict offered by European Union representative David Owen and UN representative Cyrus Vance. The Vance-Owen Plan, which called for a constitutional agreement and a political map of the republic that would break the country into ten relatively ethnically homogenous autonomous provinces under a weak central

government, was denounced because it "ratified the atrocities of ethnic cleansing."<sup>15</sup> In his first days in office, Secretary of State Warren Christopher expressed the reasons why many Americans wanted the US to play an active role in resolving the Bosnian crisis: We cannot ignore the human toll. Serbian ethnic cleansing has been pursued through mass murders, systematic beatings, and . . . rapes . . . , prolonged shelling of innocents in Sarajevo and elsewhere, forced displacement of entire villages, inhumane treatment of prisoners in detention camps, the blockading of relief to sick and starving citizens . . . Our conscience revolts at the idea of accepting such brutality.<sup>16</sup> Clinton was on the verge of being trapped by his own liberal rhetoric when in his first Bosnian initiative, he gave a lukewarm endorsement of the Vance-Owen Plan that he had attacked during the campaign. In light of this endorsement, Clinton needed to find some way of demonstrating that he was indeed vigorously pursuing liberal goals in Bosnia.

On the other hand, Clinton also faced institutional constraints from both the American public and Congress that made the large-scale involvement of American troops unacceptable. Many members of Congress feared that Bosnia could easily become a Vietnam-style quagmire if US troops intervened.<sup>17</sup> Sen. Harry Reid (D-Nev.) expressed the fears of many when he stated that, "the Balkans are the fountainhead of guerrilla war . . . The conflict in Bosnia . . . is a civil war. As we know from our own domestic wars, they can be brutal and unforgiving. The last thing that the United States needs at this time in its history, or ever again, is another Vietnam, and that is exactly what this would be."<sup>18</sup> Therefore, while Clinton needed to respond to the crisis in Bosnia, he could not take the kind of military action that might have been necessary to resolve the crisis at that time.

The combination of "lift and strike" proved effective for meeting Clinton's domestic dilemma of doing something highly visible in support of the Bosnian cause with little risk of US casualties. Calling for a lift to the embargo allowed Clinton to argue "that justice has been served," according to Sen. Richard Lugar (R-Ind.).<sup>19</sup> If the US would not fight for the Bosnians, the least it could do would be to allow the Bosnians to procure the weapons they needed to protect themselves. Sen. Joseph Biden (D-Del.), Chair of the Foreign Relations Subcommittee on European Affairs, argued that the US should do even more to support the Bosnian cause:

Even before the lifting of the embargo, the U.S. should support the Bosnian government with all possible supplies and military intelligence relevant to the defense of the republic . . . The international community can no longer hide behind the excuse that this is a Balkan civil war . . . . The U.S. must lead the west in a decisive response to Serbian aggression . . . with air attacks on Serbian artillery everywhere in Bosnia.<sup>20</sup> Thus, launching air strikes against Serb targets provided an excellent symbol of America's commitment to oppose illiberal "Serbian aggression."

Providing military aid to Bosnian forces would keep US troops off of the front lines in the Bosnian war. In addition, the president and the Congress were assured by Air Force General Merrill McPeak that the unsophisticated air defenses of the Serb forces posed "virtually no risk" to American warplanes.<sup>21</sup> Thus, air strikes were a domestically



effective way to respond to Serb aggression. The strikes served as a highly visible demonstration of US action, with only minimal risk of politically damaging American casualties. At the same time the US was contemplating military action from the air, Warren Christopher laid out four strict tests for the use of American ground troops: 1) the goal had to be clearly stated to the American people; 2) there had to be a strong likelihood of success; 3) there must be an exit strategy; and 4) the action had to win public support.<sup>22</sup> These tests were not remotely close to being met in Bosnia in 1993.

The justified skepticism with which Clinton's military advisors viewed these initiatives provides additional evidence for the domestic political roots of this decision. Military advisors warned that lifting the embargo would take months to give the Bosnians a significant advantage in the fighting. In the short term, it would provide the Serbs with a powerful incentive to attempt to wipe out the Bosnian government before the weapons arrived.<sup>23</sup> On the issue of air strikes, Air Force General Michael Ryan testified to Congress that, "if you can find the artillery pieces and get the pilots' eyeballs on them, you can probably take them out. But after the first time, they'll go into hiding, camouflage them or move them around. It's really a tough issue . . . Without the threat of follow-up ground forces, they'll just ride out a bombing strike."<sup>24</sup> These sentiments were expressed more strongly by spokesmen from the other branches of the armed forces. Strikes limited to attacking artillery pieces near Sarajevo would be especially ineffectual. The US armed forces' concerns with the effectiveness of "lift and strike" played only a limited role, however, in Clinton's abrupt decision to set aside his first major initiative on Bosnia.

International protests forced Clinton to shelve his plans. When Secretary Christopher traveled to Europe to "consult" with America's allies, the French and British rejected the lift and strike plan because, while it may have solved Clinton's own domestic problems, it would have created domestic problems for the two European powers.<sup>25</sup> Both countries had substantial contingents of peacekeeping troops deployed in Bosnia, which had been sent there to serve as non-partisan protectors of aid convoys. Removing the arms embargo and launching air strikes against Serbs would place the international community on the side of the Bosnian government and render the vulnerable peacekeeping troops subject to reprisals by Serb forces.<sup>26</sup> Clinton backed down from the policy of lift and strike because he did not wish to alienate America's liberal allies in Europe. Protecting the trans-Atlantic ties to its liberal NATO allies was more important to the US than the outcome of the Bosnian crisis.

During the next year, therefore, the US set aside its plan to lift the arms embargo. Instead, it endorsed a European plan to establish "safe havens," in the Bosnian towns of Gorazde, Zepa, Srebrenica, Tuzla, Sarajevo and Bihac, where UN forces promised to protect Muslim civilians from Serb attacks. Later, it supported European-backed plans for negotiated settlements of the conflict that would have gone further in "compell[ing] the Bosnian government to accept Serb ethnic cleansing" than the Vance-Owen Plan of 1993.<sup>27</sup> The plans offered by the "Contact Group," comprised of the US, the United Kingdom, Russia, Germany and France, would have created a hard partition of Bosnia, with 51 percent of Bosnian territory controlled by a Muslim-Croat Federation and 49



percent controlled by the Bosnian Serbs. Punitive action would be taken if either side refused to accept the plan. According to one UN official, "if the Muslims agree to the settlement and the Serbs don't, then the arms embargo on Bosnia could be lifted . . . . If the Serbs agree and the Muslims don't, the idea is that trade sanctions on Serbia could be progressively lifted."<sup>28</sup>

Clinton did periodically call for air strikes between mid-1993 and mid-1994, usually in response to visible, televised attacks on Bosnian civilians which generated outrage in the US.<sup>29</sup> Each time Clinton pushed for air strikes, however, America's liberal allies demurred and worked out diplomatic solutions with Bosnian Serb forces. In August 1993, when Bosnian Serb forces captured the strategically crucial Mt. Igman protecting the Bosnian capital, Clinton called for air strikes. Before the threat was carried out, the Bosnian Serbs agreed to a partial withdrawal and a replacement of Bosnian government troops on the mountain with French peacekeepers. In February 1994, when a Serb mortar attack killed 61 at Sarajevo's central market, Clinton called again for air strikes. Before the strikes could commence, the Bosnian Serbs agreed to withdraw their heavy artillery from a 20 kilometer radius surrounding Sarajevo. Only in April 1994, when the Bosnian Serbs had launched an offensive against the safe haven of Gorazde, did NATO warplanes launch an air strike, but then only against a few tanks and artillery pieces. Serb forces accepted a 20 kilometer heavy weapons exclusion zone around Gorazde, but only after they had defeated the local Bosnian government forces.

During each stage of the crisis, Clinton initially proposed forceful actions only to back down at the last minute. When air strikes were launched, they were so limited they made Clinton look weak both to domestic critics and the Serbs. These seemingly anomalous responses largely reflected America's consideration for its liberal allies in Europe. Indeed, because the US acted in concert with its allies through the NATO command, this "consideration" was translated into a very specific institutional constraint within that transnational military organization of liberal states. The US could not bomb the Serbs from NATO airfields without the express consent of its NATO allies. Thus, in the year after the lift and strike option was initially proposed, Clinton's preferred policy led only to a handful of pinprick air strikes. The United States would not pursue a more aggressive policy in Bosnia until the summer and fall of 1994.

### **Clinton Undermines the UN Arms Embargo**

In the summer of 1994, the Clinton administration decided to circumvent covertly the European opposition to a lifting of the arms embargo by tacitly supporting Iranian efforts to smuggle weapons to Bosnia. In November 1994, Clinton ordered US naval vessels to stop participating in the enforcement of the embargo. While the naval initiative was primarily of symbolic importance, the decision to undermine the UN arms embargo by giving a green light to the smuggling of Iranian weapons to Sarajevo directly violated the wishes of America's liberal European allies. This initiative also had a significant impact on the conflict. As US Ambassador to Croatia, Peter Galbraith, argues: "The president's decision not to object to the flow of weapons . . . allowed the original victims of the aggression to, in a very short time, reverse the military situation on the ground."<sup>30</sup> This

shift in policy was fundamentally tied to the increasing importance of domestic considerations for the Clinton administration as the mid-term congressional elections approached in November 1994.<sup>31</sup> By mid-1994, Clinton's policy in Bosnia was being driven to a substantial degree by manifest public pressure, as Congress became the principal advocate of a unilateral lifting of the arms embargo.

Members of Congress supported an end to the arms embargo for the same reason that Clinton initially gave it his support. This policy allowed them to take a principled liberal stand that would impose very limited costs on their constituents. Sen. Joseph Lieberman (D-Conn.) illustrated this political logic in a June 1994 speech:

[We] feel that the United States has an interest in this conflict: first, in standing up against aggression by one nation against another; second, in not standing idly by while genocidal acts occur; and third, in acknowledging that what happens in Europe has twice drawn us into world wars in this century and we have a strategic interest in preserving order there . . . . We also feel that while we have an interest in the Balkans, it is not sufficient to justify sending American soldiers there.<sup>32</sup>

Thus, the day after Clinton announced his support for a revised version of the Contact Group's peace plan, the House passed a measure by a vote of 244-178 that would unilaterally lift the embargo.<sup>33</sup> House Majority Whip, David Bonior (D-Mich.), who co-sponsored the amendment, convincingly summed up the sentiment on the floor: "Unless we act right now to lift the arms embargo and to use the full force of the United States and NATO to increase air strikes, then the blood of Bosnia is not just on the hands of the Serbs, it is on the hands of all of us."<sup>34</sup> On the other side of the aisle, Rep. Henry Hyde (R-Ill.) argued that, "[w]e see unspeakable inhumanity, and we're reduced to shrugging our shoulders, frowning our brows and folding our arms . . . . We can't let timid and paralyzed nations and self-important U.N. bureaucrats prevent us from doing what is right and in our own self-interest."<sup>35</sup>

The Senate passed two resolutions in August 1994 calling for a lifting of the arms embargo in November 1994. As Sen. Bob Dole (R-Kan.), co-sponsor of a strong Senate resolution demanding unilateral action, proclaimed: "What if another 100,000 Bosnians are slaughtered while we talk about this and think about it, when all they want us to do is lift the embargo - no American troops, no air strikes - nothing, nothing nothing but lifting the embargo."<sup>36</sup> Dole's advocacy of the Bosnian cause represents an excellent example of the political dynamics of liberal interventionism. On the one hand, Dole genuinely supported the Bosnian cause and embraced the anti-embargo position because it would involve "no American troops." On the other hand, Dole also clearly used liberal arguments for partisan and personal advantage. As Senate Minority Leader, Dole wanted to use liberal attacks against the Clinton administration in order to help Republicans recapture the Senate in the 1994 congressional elections. Dole also wanted to discredit the president in order to enhance his own candidacy for the presidency in 1996. Whether Dole's attacks emanated from a genuine commitment to liberal ideals, partisan politics, or some combination of the two, Clinton still had to respond to these criticisms in a liberal fashion.

So did Clinton's Democratic supporters in Congress. They, therefore, coalesced around an alternative resolution sponsored by Sen. Sam Nunn (D-Ga.) which called on Clinton to urge the UN to lift the arms embargo if the Serbs did not agree to the peace plan by the end of October 1994.<sup>37</sup> This watered-down resolution, which did not demand that the US unilaterally defy the UN arms embargo if Clinton failed to convince the UN to change its stance, also received a majority vote in the Senate. The conflicting resolutions allowed Clinton to seize upon the one sponsored by Nunn, which gave him the most flexibility. Nevertheless, Clinton was compelled to adopt a stronger policy against the arms embargo because of this increased congressional pressure.

At the same time, pressure from America's liberal allies, and those like Russia which the US hoped would become liberal allies, pushed the Clinton administration not only to drop its public insistence on an end to the arms embargo, but also to lobby vigorously against this measure in Congress. In testimony to the Senate Armed Services Committee, Deputy Secretary of State Strobe Talbott reinforced the administration's stand: "There is all the difference in the world between taking the step unilaterally at this time and holding open the possibility for the future of a multilateral lifting of the arms embargo. A unilateral lift would damage our relations with Russia, and would lead to the general collapse of U.N. sanctions as an effective instrument in international affairs."<sup>38</sup>

Torn by these conflicting domestic and international pressures, Clinton hoped to appease his international allies by publicly rejecting a unilateral lifting of the arms embargo. He hoped to appease his domestic critics with the symbolic step of ending US participation in the enforcement of the embargo. The congressional pressure symbolized by the 1994 votes on lifting the arms embargo foreshadowed the more damaging political consequences of a collapse of the Bosnian government prior to the November 1994 US elections. Without substantial military assistance, the Bosnian government was vulnerable to a complete defeat at the hands of the Bosnian Serbs. The Clinton administration secretly supported the Iranian efforts to violate the arms embargo in order to prevent a Serb victory in 1994. It hoped to keep this decision secret in order to avoid alienating America's allies and congressional Republicans who would have preferred a direct US role in arming the Bosnians. The Iranian arms did help the Bosnian government hold back the Bosnian Serbs during the remainder of 1994. A Christmas truce negotiated by former US President Jimmy Carter postponed further fighting until the spring of 1995.

### **Significant Air Strikes and the Dayton Peace Accords**

The Bosnian Serbs launched a major military offensive in the spring of 1995. When a Serb artillery attack killed dozens of civilians in a Tuzla cafe, the US pushed again for air strikes. The Bosnian Serbs responded by taking more than 350 UN peacekeepers hostage, which led to a quick suspension of the strikes. In July 1995, Bosnian Serb forces overran the UN safe havens of Srebrenica and Zepa. The lightly-armed Dutch troops in Srebrenica failed to stop the massacre of thousands of Bosnian Muslim men who had taken refuge in the "safe haven." Clinton called once again for air strikes. This time, the Contact Group agreed to the use of substantial air power to rescue the safe

haven of Gorazde. In August and September, NATO launched large-scale air attacks against Serb forces surrounding Gorazde and Sarajevo and destroyed important military assets in other parts of Bosnia. Bosnian and Croatian forces took advantage of these strikes by launching an offensive against the Serbs, "liberating" 770 square miles of western Bosnia by mid-September.

In October, the Clinton administration brokered a cease-fire in Bosnia and invited the combatants to engage in peace negotiations in Dayton, Ohio. After nearly a month of cloistered talks moderated by Assistant Secretary of State Richard Holbrooke, the participants signed the Dayton Peace Accords on 21 November 1995. Bosnia maintains its existing borders under the agreement, but is equally divided between a Bosnian-Croat federation and a Serb republic. Sarajevo remains unified as part of the Bosnian-Croat federation and as capital of a weak central government. As a crucial part of this settlement, the Clinton administration finally agreed to send US ground troops to Bosnia. Twenty-thousand US troops led a sixty-thousand strong NATO peacekeeping force.

What explains this decisive and resolute policy after three years of indecision? In part, the intensification of the humanitarian crisis in Bosnia, represented by the atrocities committed at Srebrenica, helped break the deadlock in the international response to the Bosnian crisis. Ironically, American fears of suffering significant casualties in a military intervention in Bosnia played an even greater role in bringing about decisive US action. The Clinton administration had been steadfast in its refusal to include US troops in the ongoing UN military intervention in Bosnia. When the French called for the direct participation of American aircraft, ground crews and troops in a more vigorous and active defense of safe havens in the summer of 1995, this posed a risk that, according to a senior Defense Department official, the "U.S. will not take."<sup>39</sup>

A more likely scenario for the involvement of US troops revolved around the withdrawal of UN troops from Bosnia. Clinton had been acutely aware of America's commitment to its NATO allies and had promised to send American soldiers to participate in the withdrawal of their troops from Bosnia should that become necessary. Clinton backed off from his insistence on lifting the arms embargo in part because the British and French had made it clear that they would ask the US to evacuate their troops from Bosnia in the event that the US armed the Bosnian government. When he had vetoed a congressional bill to lift the embargo Clinton declared:

If the United States unilaterally lifts the arms embargo the United States, as the leader of the NATO alliance, would be obliged to send thousands of American troops to assist in that difficult operation. Second, unilaterally lifting the embargo could cause the fighting in Bosnia to escalate . . . Third, unilaterally lifting the embargo will lead to unilateral American responsibility. If the Bosnian government suffered reverses on the battlefield, we and not the Europeans would be expected to fill the void with military and humanitarian aid.<sup>40</sup>

By mid-1995, 162 UN soldiers had been killed and 1,420 injured. Participants in the UN operation in Bosnia were "thinking very seriously that [the UN] should pull its troops out

of the former Yugoslavia," even without a US decision to violate the arms embargo.<sup>41</sup> The Bosnian Serb capture of hundreds of UN hostages in mid-1995 provided a stark illustration of the reasonableness of European concerns about the negative consequences for their troops on the ground of a more vigorous military policy. Clinton felt bound to follow through on his commitment to extract the troops of his liberal allies from Bosnia. As he stated in June 1995:

I determined that the role of the United States should be to vigorously support the diplomatic search for peace, and that our vital interests were clear in limiting the spread of the conflict. Furthermore, our interests were in doing what we could short of putting in ground forces to help prevent the multiethnic Bosnian state from being destroyed, and to minimize the loss of life and the ethnic cleansing . . . . If our allies decide to stay, we want to support them, but within the very careful limits I have outlined. I want to make it clear again what I have said about the use of our ground forces. We will use them only, first, if there is a genuine peace with no shooting and no fighting, and the United States is part of that peace . . . . Second if our allies decide they can no longer continue the U.N. mission and decide to withdraw, but they cannot withdraw in safety, we should help them with our unique capabilities.<sup>42</sup>

The Clinton administration was faced with the possible choice of abandoning its liberal allies in Bosnia or sending US troops to remove thousands of dispersed UN troops from a conflict zone, risking domestically damaging casualties in the process.

Clinton once again called for air strikes as a way to avoid adopting more painful courses of action. This time Clinton garnered allied support because the atrocities committed at Srebrenica had been too profound and humiliating for the Europeans to continue with the status quo. More importantly, the risks associated with air strikes began to look less severe in comparison to the risks involved in a withdrawal from Bosnia. The removal of peacekeepers from the areas where they had been held hostage earlier in 1995 and the expulsion of others from areas acquired by the Serbs in the summer of 1995 rendered them less vulnerable to Serb reprisals. Finally, in an initiative pushed by France, participants in the UN operation created a 12,000 member Rapid Reaction Force in July 1995 to protect the lives of UN peacekeepers. As a result of this deployment, Europeans were more confident that the lives of peacekeepers would be better protected than in the past.

Thus, changes in Europe were crucial in bringing about the significant shift in US policy in the summer of 1995. Substantially increased domestic pressures reinforced this political dynamic as Clinton tried to resolve the Bosnia issue before he began his own campaign for re-election in 1996. Congressional resolutions to lift the arms embargo on the Bosnian government became the principal forum for congressional attacks by the new Republican majority against the morality of Clinton's Balkan policy. On 8 June 1995, the House voted 318-99 in favor of a resolution that would unilaterally lift the arms embargo upon the request of the Bosnian government, or if the UN withdrew its forces. When the Senate passed this resolution 69-29 on 26 July, Senate Majority Leader Dole denounced Clinton's inaction: "It is high time the Clinton administration abandon its flimsy excuses for the United Nations' pitiful performance, shed the false mantle of humanitarianism,

and face the reality of the U.N. failure in Bosnia . . . We have an obligation to the Bosnian people and to our principles, to allow a U.N. member state, the victim of aggression, to defend itself."<sup>43</sup> This bill was passed with majorities that could have overridden the president's veto had he not taken the dramatic action of the August air strikes to demonstrate his resolve. The fact that "conservative" Republicans launched this "liberal" attack against Clinton's Bosnia policies suggests strongly that a broader liberal perspective rather than a focus on the unique domestic political dynamics and culture of the US is needed to explain this phenomenon. It also suggests that liberal attacks can be used to partisan advantage.

Clinton used the air strikes not to defeat the Bosnian Serbs, but to pressure them to negotiate a peace settlement. Clinton decided that the risks posed to US troops as part of a peacekeeping force would be less than the risks posed by a difficult mission of extraction. Furthermore, a peace settlement held out the possibility of reaching some resolution to the humanitarian crisis that had compelled the US to act in the first place. Despite the reduced risks associated with a true peacekeeping mission, the same members of Congress who had pressed Clinton to take decisive action in Bosnia, also argued against the deployment of 20,000 troops called for by the Dayton Accords. According to Sen. Fred Thompson (R-Tenn.):

All of us are for peace in Bosnia and for an end to the slaughter . . . Any time there is a moral imperative to stop slaughter, to stop genocide, I think one could say that there is a national interest in seeing that this is stopped. That does not mean in every case that the United States should send ground troops or we would have ground troops in possibly 20 or 30 or 40 places on the globe today . . . So the mere fact that there is a moral imperative in some sense to stop the slaughter, to stop the genocide in different parts of the world, does not automatically mean the U.S. should send ground troops.<sup>44</sup>

Just before the Dayton Accords were signed, the House voted to bar any money for the peacekeepers in Bosnia. It then narrowly turned back an amendment that would have halted funds for American peacekeepers, 210-218, in a 13 December 1995 vote.<sup>45</sup> In nearly derailing the deployment of US troops essential for the successful implementation of the peace accords, the House followed public opinion. Polls indicated that only 36 percent of Americans thought the deployment was the "right thing to do" while 58 percent said that the troops should be kept home.<sup>46</sup>

Clinton gained Congress' reluctant approval by assuring the leadership in a November letter that the size of the NATO-led force, the high quality of American and NATO troops and equipment, and the rules of engagement adopted for the mission would create conditions offering the minimum possible risks to American soldiers.<sup>47</sup> The Senate voted down the amendment which would have cut funds for the peacekeepers by a larger margin than the House after Clinton promised Dole that the US would arm and train the Bosnians before it would withdraw its forces.<sup>48</sup>

Clinton declared that while the US should not serve as the world's policeman,



we must do what we can do. There are times and places where our leadership can mean the difference between peace and war . . . . In Bosnia this terrible war has challenged our interests and troubled our souls. Thankfully, we can do something about it . . . . The people of Bosnia, our NATO allies and people all around the world are now looking to America for our leadership. That is our responsibility as Americans. Thus, Clinton sent troops to Bosnia to achieve liberal goals. Nevertheless, he also promised "that our mission will be clear, limited, and achievable" and that US troops would leave Bosnia in a year's time.<sup>49</sup>

### **Implementation of the Dayton Accords**

President Clinton visited Sarajevo during the 1997 Christmas season, a little over two years after the signing of the Dayton Peace Accords. During that visit, he presented Sarajevo residents with the following assessment of the challenges facing Bosnians:

You have accomplished much, but there is much more to do. You have established the joint institutions of democracy. Now you must work within them, sharing power as you share responsibility. You have vowed to welcome back those displaced from their homes by war. Now you must vote for the return program so that they actually can come back with stronger protections for minorities . . . . You have begun to turn the media from an instrument of hate into a force of tolerance and understanding. Now you must raise it to international standards of objectivity and access and allow an independent press the freedom to thrive. You are taking the police out of the hands of warlords. Now you must help to reform, retrain and re-equip a democratic force that fosters security, not fear. You have pledged to isolate and arrest indicted war criminals. Now you must follow through on that commitment, both for the sake of justice and in the serving of lasting peace.<sup>50</sup> This quote also provides an elegant summary of the character of his administration's military intervention in Bosnia. The implementation of the Dayton Accords clearly demonstrates that the Clinton administration never resolved the contradictory impulses of liberal interventionism in Bosnia.

On the one hand, the United States has pursued an ambitious political strategy to resolve the Bosnian Civil War by installing a full-fledged liberal democratic regime in Bosnia. As Secretary of State Warren Christopher stated at the signing ceremony for the Dayton Accords: "The agreement is a victory for all of those who believe in a multiethnic democracy in Bosnia-Herzegovina."<sup>51</sup> Maintenance of the territorial and political integrity of Bosnia would deny victory to the practitioners of ethnic cleansing while autonomy for the ethnic enclaves would safeguard each community from domination by the others. In hopes that liberalism would prevail, the Clinton administration has consistently argued for repatriation of refugees, the elimination of hyper-nationalist propaganda, the creation of a non-partisan professionalized police force and the arrest of suspected war criminals.

Most importantly, the United States has argued that international sponsorship of "free, fair, and democratic elections" were crucial for "lay[ing] the foundation for representative government and ensur[ing] the progressive achievement of democratic goals throughout

Bosnia and Herzegovina," according to the elections annex of the Dayton Accords.<sup>52</sup> The general elections scheduled for 14 September 1996 were the linchpin of the entire political project. As the State Department's William Montgomery noted, "there is no regular Parliament or assembly of all the Bosnians. There is no joint Presidency. None of the organizations that were specified by Dayton now exist. They will be created by the elections. Until those elections are held, it is favoring the separatists because there is a growing division between these two entities that only establishing these overreaching government entities will help start to overcome."<sup>53</sup>

On the other hand, the pursuit of these liberal goals in Bosnia has been tempered by an extreme reluctance to take significant risks to accomplish these goals. This contradiction was built into the Dayton Accords. In what Assistant Secretary Holbrooke later described as the "biggest contradiction within the agreements," 'national' defense was entrusted to the Muslim-Croat federation and the Bosnian Serb Republic rather than the federal government.<sup>54</sup> The NATO occupation force has limited its mission to monitoring a ceasefire between the combatants and patrolling the boundaries between the entities. International forces have done little to apprehend people indicted by the UN War Crimes Tribunal or to help refugees return to their homes. When ethnic extremist parties manipulated the internationally sponsored elections of September 1996, the US and the international community accepted the results.

Thus, while Clinton's political strategy has called for the creation of liberal democracy in a unified Bosnia, his military strategy has helped solidify a de facto partition of the country. Some analysts see this as an explicit strategy to use liberal rhetoric as a cover for partitioning Bosnia. In contrast, we see both the commitment to liberal democracy in Bosnia and the extreme reluctance to use the force necessary to realize this dream as genuine initiatives that flow from the contradictory character of American liberalism.

Congress remained a principal source of each of these contradictory impulses. Congressional hearings focused overwhelmingly on the question of when US troops would leave Bosnia so that they could be out of harms way. Throughout 1996, there was rampant skepticism in Congress about the administration's professed commitment to bring US troops home by December 1996. Republican members of Congress spent an entire year of hearings trying to goad administration representatives into admitting that substantial numbers of American troops would stay in Bosnia beyond December 1996. Congress greeted Clinton's second deadline for withdrawal in mid-1998 with equal skepticism.

At the same time, congressional Republicans challenged the administration on whether it was sufficiently committed to the pursuit of liberal democracy in Bosnia. The House International Relations Committee held a set of hearings on the September 1996 elections in Bosnia, at which committee chair Benjamin Gilman (R-NY) claimed that, "these elections have given a mantle of legitimacy to individuals who have no interest in seeing Bosnia reconciled and reintegrated. Moreover, that mantle of legitimacy was conferred by a process where the hard-liners have an insurmountable advantage in terms of the

control of media and local police and other institutions of authority which made the elections in many places unfair."<sup>55</sup>

As the mid-1998 deadline for the withdrawal of US troops from Bosnia approached, the Clinton administration faced a difficult dilemma. If US troops were to leave, Bosnia could erupt in civil war again, negating the benefits that have resulted from the NATO occupation. Domestic critics would hold Clinton responsible for any violations of human rights that might ensue. In anticipation of this problem, US and NATO forces gingerly began to expand the mission of the occupation forces in mid-1997. British troops apprehended one suspected war criminal and killed another. US troops accompanied and protected small groups of refugees returning to their homes. NATO forces have taken advantage of a rift in the leadership of the Bosnian Serb Republic by backing the president of that Republic, Biljana Plavsic, in her power struggle against Radovan Karadzic, who leads the most powerful and intransigent faction in the region.

NATO has thus far resisted the temptation to attack Karadzic directly, however, because such an action might lead to significant casualties. As Karadzic forces increased their opposition to these new NATO initiatives and won more seats than Plavsic's supporters in the December 1997 elections in the Bosnian Serb Republic, the US and NATO reverted to the more cautious posture that has characterized the NATO occupation thus far. NATO targeted Bosnian Croat suspected war criminals for their December commando raid rather than Bosnian Serbs. The Clinton administration has announced that US troops will remain in Bosnia past the summer 1998 deadline, but it is unclear whether the smaller force which will replace the troops now in Bosnia will be any more likely to take aggressive steps to achieve Clinton's ambitious political goals for that country. It is for precisely this reason that Clinton has been reduced to exhorting Bosnian leaders who have systematically undermined the liberal spirit of the Dayton Accords to take the actions necessary to turn Bosnia into a multiethnic liberal democracy.

## **AMERICAN POWER AND LIBERAL INTERVENTIONISM**

The Clinton administration's response to the Bosnian crisis strongly reflects the political dynamics expected by the liberal argument. Simultaneous domestic pressures to do something about the humanitarian crisis in Bosnia, yet not to risk the lives of US soldiers led the administration to call for air strikes as its strategy for addressing the Bosnian crisis. Calling for a lifting of the arms embargo against the Bosnian government also remained a persuasive strategy for doing something consistent with American liberal ideals for Bosnia while putting US troops at limited risk. Clinton was stopped from implementing this strategy of lift and strike only by America's liberal allies whose peacekeeping troops would have been placed at risk by this strategy. Clinton risked alienating those allies in 1994 by undermining the arms embargo because of the upcoming congressional elections in the United States. The stalemate was not fully broken until 1995 when America's liberal allies decided that the dangers associated with air strikes were less than those associated with a continuation of the status quo and when the Clinton administration decided that the risks to US troops associated with a real peacekeeping mission in Bosnia would be less than those associated with a mission to

extract their allies' forces from the region. Furthermore, a peacekeeping mission held out the possibility of achieving at least some of America's liberal humanitarian goals, while an extraction mission would have illuminated the humiliating failure of the US to address the humanitarian crisis in Bosnia. The contradictory pressures imposed by American liberalism remained after the initial decision to intervene, as Clinton has consistently pursued an ambitious liberal agenda in Bosnia, yet has proven extremely reluctant to use the force necessary to achieve his goals.

The question remains, however, as to whether the Bosnian case reflects a systematic pattern of decision-making that is common to all liberal states, or a unique case. While we believe that the Bosnian case does indeed reflect a systematic trend in US military interventionism in the post-Cold War era, we also believe that the generalizability of this argument is limited by a consideration of America's unique position in the global balance of power. While liberalism did shape US military interventionism during the height of the Cold War, America's bi-polar competition with the Soviet Union helped generate interventions in places like Korea and Vietnam which would be hard to imagine in the contemporary era. Therefore, our version of the liberal argument does not explain fully the pattern of US intervention across different eras.

Today, America's overwhelming power in the international system gives its pattern of military interventionism characteristics that are unlikely to be replicated by weaker liberal states. First, while all liberal states might want to fight for liberal causes abroad, a hegemon like the United States possesses a much greater capability to act on those impulses than do less powerful liberal states.<sup>56</sup> In addition, American presidents have attempted to reconcile the potential contradictions involved in being a liberal hegemon by forging a unique identity for the US as the "leader of the free world." Because the United States relies on alliances among liberal states as a central means through which it exercises its global leadership, it may be especially reluctant to ignore the concerns of its liberal allies in institutions like NATO. Finally, America's overwhelming power also provides it with the ability to make numerous mistakes and look foolish from time to time without presenting a significant threat to its pre-eminent position in the international system.

America's unique position in the global balance of power may influence how liberalism shapes its military interventionism abroad. Nevertheless, an application of the liberal argument to explain the pattern of US military interventions highlights an interesting paradox for the forging of the liberal pacific union. The Clinton administration has placed the "enlargement of the world's community of market democracies" at the core of its foreign policy because it views a world filled with liberal democracies as one in which the US will become more prosperous and secure.<sup>57</sup> As the Bosnian case demonstrates, however, America's own liberalism can make it difficult for the US to be an effective champion for the promotion of democracy and human rights abroad.

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## Endnotes

We thank the Research Opportunity Program and the Eugene Gallegos Regents Lectureship of the University of New Mexico for research support and Ken Roberts, Bill Stanley, David Charters and two anonymous reviewers for the *Journal of Conflict Studies* for their comments on earlier drafts of this article.

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