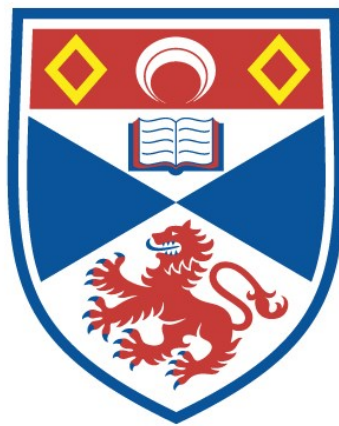


TRACING THE SHIFT : UNDERSTANDING THE
CLINTON ADMINISTRATION'S ABANDONMENT OF
'LIFT AND STRIKE'

Christopher James Constantian

A Thesis Submitted for the Degree of MPhil
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August 26, 2004

Tracing the Shift:
Understanding the Clinton Administration's Abandonment of "Lift and Strike"

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Abstract

This work examines the shift in the Clinton Administration's Balkans policy from the start of the 1992 presidential campaign, when Clinton first articulated an activist policy, to May 1993, when he abandoned that policy in favor of a weaker European-led plan. With many actors resisting an activist policy for the Balkans, the prospect of a failed intervention threatened to derail Clinton's expansive domestic agenda. Having been elected on platform of domestic renewal, Clinton chose the primacy of his domestic agenda over a risky Balkans intervention. Helping to fill a void in existing American Bosnia policy literature, examining why Clinton abandoned his tough campaign strategy allows a better understanding of how the West found itself without an effective policy for ending the Balkan war until the 1995 US-sponsored Dayton Peace Accords.

Using a levels of analysis approach to examine the six actors that most influenced the shift in the administration's policy is instructive. Assessing the combined influence of these actors, Congress, America's allies, the media and American public opinion, Clinton's foreign policy triad, the Pentagon, and the office of the president, helps to unearth why, without widespread support for intervention and with the prospect that a failed policy could derail the administration's domestic agenda, Clinton chose to abandon the activist "Lift and Strike" policy.

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Introduction

This work will contend that a series of factors, most importantly the stances of America's allies and Congress and the power of American public opinion, combined to threaten Bill Clinton's domestic agenda if the administration's "Lift and Strike" strategy for ending the conflict in the Balkans failed. In turn, Clinton, who had been elected on a platform of domestic renewal, prioritized his domestic agenda over Bosnian peace, and withdrew his support for an intervention strategy. This decision represented a distinct shift in Clinton's Bosnia policy, as the activist approach of the 1992 campaign and the "Lift and Strike" strategy were abandoned in favor of the European-led "safe areas" proposal.

Elected on the strength of his domestic policy platform, Clinton entered office having also strongly critiqued President Bush's muted response to the events in Bosnia. A primary plank of Clinton's foreign policy platform promised Americans a more activist policy in Bosnia, but applying such a strategy became extremely complicated once Clinton was in office. Only a few months after his inauguration even the president's close aides would admit the naïveté of his campaign-time plans to rescue the Bosnian Muslims.¹ During the administration's first months in office, Clinton failed to execute his preferred strategy, instead enacting a series of half-measures which were unable to end the war.

Following six months of a muddled American Bosnia policy, Clinton returned to his campaign-time option of "Lift and Strike," the plan to lift the arms embargo against the Bosnian Muslims and use NATO air power to attack the Bosnian Serbs. But when

¹ Thomas L. Friedman, "Clinton and Foreign Issues: Spasms of Attention," The New York Times 22 March 1993: A3.

Secretary of State Warren Christopher failed to gain European support for the strategy, Clinton again abandoned it, all but allowing the Europeans a veto over American policy on the continent only ten months after criticizing Bush's lack of leadership in the region. Clinton settled on the strategy preferred by the Europeans, the May 1993 Joint Action Plan (JAP), even though it was inherently contradictory to the policies his administration had articulated during the preceding months. Though Clinton would later describe this retreat from leadership as the Europeans "reaffirming" their right to direct the international response to the Balkan wars, the shelving of the "Lift and Strike" policy was a stark diplomatic failure, and represented a low point for both his foreign policy and its legacy in Bosnia.² Pundits accused Clinton of being unable to lead, and one veteran diplomat called the inability to bring the Europeans into line "the end of an era" of American leadership in Europe.³

While other works have examined the West's policy under the weak leadership of the European Community (EC), the meandering approach of the Clinton Administration and subsequent failure of American leadership between 1993-1995, or the efforts to break the cycle of Western indifference through the Endgame Strategy and Richard Holbrooke's shuttle diplomacy and Dayton negotiations, these works often begin with the premise that the West was without a strategy for ending the Balkan war until 1995. In contrast, this work focuses on the critical six month period at the start of Clinton's presidency, and shows how and why Clinton abandoned a policy which may have ended the conflict years earlier, could have displayed the sort of decisive leadership that Clinton's foreign policy critics contended was lacking before 1995, and would have

² William Jefferson Clinton, *My Life* (New York: Random House, 2004) 512.

³ For pundits, see Anthony Lewis, "He's Not Harry Truman," *The New York Times* 14 May 1993: A31., for diplomat, see Anthony Lewis, "The End of an Era," *The New York Times* 24 May 1993: A15.

retained America's leadership of post-Cold War Europe. Instead, the decision to abandon "Lift and Strike" may have set in motion the events which lay the foundation for the West's failed legacy in the Balkans.

To allow for this examination, the "shift" in Clinton's Bosnia policy must first be explained. Chapter 1 shows that during the first months of Clinton's presidency American policy moved on a clear trajectory, away from his 1992 campaign promises based on "rolling back" Serbian land gains in Bosnia, and towards the European goal of "containing" the conflict. As well, the administration's rhetorical description of the conflict shifted to match the changes in its policy. Campaign-time and early administration attempts to characterize the conflict as "aggression" or "genocide," conceptions which would have compelled America to intervene in the Balkans, were replaced by suggestions of the uselessness of outside intervention and the hopelessness of Bosnian peace, such as Secretary of State Warren Christopher's portrayal of Bosnia as a "civil war" and "a problem from Hell."⁴

A levels of analysis approach will be used to understand the important actors who influenced the administration's policy, and the circumstances that pressured Clinton away from "Lift and Strike." This examination will focus first on the "systemic" level, assessing the role of America's allies. Next, the "domestic" level will focus on four primary actors: Clinton's foreign policy triad (comprised of the secretaries of state and defense and the national security advisor), the Pentagon, Congress, and the media and American public opinion. Finally, after focusing on the "office of the president," an examination of Clinton's own policy goals will help to reveal fully how the stances of

⁴ Thomas L. Friedman, "Bosnia Reconsidered," The New York Times 8 April 1993: A1.

these actors and the potential for a "Lift and Strike" failure threatened Clinton's domestic agenda, which he valued over an activist Bosnia policy, leading him to abandon intervention. No one actor is responsible for Clinton's decision, and thus, by using such an approach, one is able to understand how many actors combined to influence the administration's policy and allow for the domestic agenda to derail Bosnian intervention.

This approach will be aided by the use of many sources, most importantly *The New York Times*. While a variety of books, journals, newspapers, and periodicals were consulted during the research phase of this project, due to the vast scope of the topic and the variety of newspapers which reported on the conflict, it became necessary to choose one source to both create a chronology of events and trace the shift in the administration's policy. Combining excellent reporting on both the conflict itself and Clinton's policy for the region with a reputation for being America's most superb newspaper of record, *The New York Times* was a logical choice to anchor this research. As a result, citations from *The New York Times* are found throughout this work.

Chapter 2 examines the actors at the domestic level. Yugoslavia was key to the Cold War struggle between the United States and the Soviet Union, but after the fall of the Berlin Wall lost much of its strategic importance. As a result, both the US and its European allies failed to find a national interest in Bosnian intervention. This lack of interest would strengthen European resistance to any American strategy which might escalate the conflict. While the end of the Cold War also refocused European energies on domestic policies, a successfully negotiated peace in Yugoslavia would have allowed the EC an improved image after its failure to create a united front over the 1991 Persian Gulf War. With the prospect of common European foreign policies, came the possibility for

deeper integration. Yet while the EC volunteered to take the early lead in peace negotiations, the European principles soon divided over policy. Once Germany opted to unilaterally recognize two breakaway Yugoslav republics, and in turn Bosnia, the EC, in the interest of maintaining unity, found itself forced to follow suit. But, while support for the republics in their military struggle against the Serbs was strong in Germany, France and Britain failed to see a compelling national interest in supporting any Balkan nation, and preferred instead to find a quick end to the conflict. While Germany remained a strong supporter of the Bosnians, its constitution forbade it to use military force in the Balkans. Thus, with the EC taking the lead in the Balkan peace negotiations, and Germany unable to undertake military action, it fell to Britain and France to send in peacekeepers to protect Bosnia's civilians and the relief effort. As a result, the nation which most broadly supported Bosnia, Germany, did not have any means of saving it from Serbian aggression, while the nations which wished the fighting to end as soon as possible, Britain and France, had thousands of troops on the ground in the form of the United Nations Protection Force (UNPROFOR). The safety of these UNPROFOR troops became the primary stumbling block to the Clinton Administration's "Lift and Strike" proposal. Each suggestion to lift the embargo or bomb the Serbs brought adamant objections from the British and French, who feared Serbian reprisals against their soldiers and opposed any policy which would "level the killing field" and prolong the war.⁵ The price for "Lift and Strike" was clear: immediate evacuation of all UNPROFOR troops, and consequently, America's inheritance of the role as unitary peacekeeper in Bosnia. This "UNPROFOR Dilemma" would create too high a price for intervention, and be

⁵ Brendan Simms, *Unfinest Hour: Britain and the Destruction of Bosnia*, (London: Penguin Books, 2001) 49.

instrumental in shifting the administration's policy.

Chapter 3 focuses on the role of the various domestic actors who influenced the administration's policy. The first section will examine Clinton's foreign policy advisers. As a group, the effectiveness of the foreign policy triad was fatally weakened by the president's inattention to international policy, and as a result the triad failed to convince Clinton of the need to implement an activist policy for Bosnia. His advisers also failed to create strong policy in their individual capacities. Two of the advisers, Secretary of State Warren Christopher and Secretary of Defense Les Aspin, were poor choices for their positions, and the third, National Security Advisor Anthony Lake, lacked the support from Clinton necessary to undertake the sweeping overhaul of American foreign policy required in a post-Cold War world, and thus he was marginalized. The administration lacked a persuasive advocate for "Lift and Strike" during Christopher's disastrous May 1993 negotiations with the Europeans; remained on poor terms with the Pentagon from the earliest moments of Clinton's presidency; and without a post-Cold War foreign policy blueprint, failed to place Bosnian peace in the context of American national interest. Furthermore, Clinton ignored the foreign policy process, and the deteriorating situation in Bosnia, preferring instead to delegate foreign policymaking to his advisers. However, his poorly constituted foreign policy team required the sort of involvement in the policymaking process their president was unwilling to give. Thus, the triad's inappropriate composition, combined with the president's lack of attention to foreign policy, practically paralyzed the triad as an efficient policy making unit.

For both cultural and policy reasons, Clinton's relationship with the Pentagon was strained from his presidency's earliest days, and while it will not be suggested that this

conflict single-handedly derailed the administration's preferred policy, it is possible that such a poor politico-military relationship empowered soldiers already predisposed to resist "Lift and Strike" to remain firm in their opposition while advising the president and Congress. Even while certain soldiers seemed optimistic about the probability for a successful airpower intervention, the majority resistance to "Lift and Strike" made Congressional leaders cautious in their support; the debate over the usefulness of airstrikes tended to follow traditional intra-military rivalries, and most legislators were unwilling to support the policy unless they had overwhelming Pentagon backing. The standard bearer of the "Lift and Strike" resistance was Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Colin Powell, who, though eventually co-opted into approving a watered-down version, injected much doubt into the minds of Congressional leaders, the administration, and the public as to the policy's efficacy. His cautious attitude stemmed from the first of three "Vietnam Syndromes," the "Pentagon Strain," which argued against the use of force without well-defined military and political objectives, a stance articulated in the Powell Doctrine. Beyond Powell's distaste for poorly-defined interventions, his dislike towards Clinton and weak comprehension of the events in Yugoslavia further weakened this advisory relationship.

Strong Pentagon opposition emboldened the many anti-interventionists in Congress, for while much of the Congressional leadership supported or even demanded intervention, the rank-and-file were either cautious about or hostile to engagement. Though presidents traditionally dominate foreign policy formulation, the political climate had Clinton reeling from a series of lost battles on Capitol Hill, and his ability to influence Congress, even in the traditionally executive-dominated foreign policy arena,

seemed minimal. These recent defeats did not bode well for upcoming struggles over the budget, the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), or health care, each of which were important planks of Clinton's domestic platform.⁶ The lack of widespread support suggested that Clinton would have had to spend political capital to gain Congressional approval for an intervention, and that a failed policy would attract retaliation against his domestic agenda. Due to the unique three-way race for the presidency in 1992, Congressional Democrats had not been swept to power on Clinton's coattails, and their lack of indebtedness to him eroded party discipline on Capitol Hill. Thus gaining Congressional support for "Lift and Strike" would have necessitated a great deal of coaxing, even inside his own party, further reducing the reservoir of political capital Clinton needed to implement his domestic policy agenda. When Clinton returned to "Lift and Strike" in May 1993 Congress granted its conditional support, but the message from Congressional leaders was clear, raising even further the stakes for intervention: once engaged, even under the cover of a multinational force, the world's only superpower could not be allowed to fail.⁷ This warning represented the "Congressional Strain" of the "Vietnam Syndrome," and aimed to discourage foreign military action which could damage the international and military credibility of the United States. It raised the stakes for intervention, contributing to Clinton's decision to abandon "Lift and Strike."

The media and American public opinion also influenced Clinton. Media coverage of the Bosnian war played a crucial role in the formulation of the "Lift and Strike" policy. When reporting by Roy Gutman of *Newsday* and the British ITN camera team exposed

⁶ While NAFTA was a foreign economic agreement, as improving the economy was a domestic policy goal, NAFTA can be seen as a domestic policy.

⁷ Elaine Sciolino, "Clinton on Serbs: Pacing Shaky Ground," *The New York Times* 1 May 1993: A6.

the Serbs' detention centers to shocked audiences around the world, the reaction by the Bush Administration was muted.⁸ Locked in a desperate campaign for reelection, and under fierce criticism that he had focused on foreign policy at the expense of domestic policy, Bush could not afford another international engagement. To avoid calls for intervention, the Bush Administration denied first the existence, and later the severity, of the Serb camps. This opened the door for candidate Clinton, who was searching to find a foreign policy issue with which to distinguish himself from Bush, to make the activist promises which would raise expectations across the globe that, if elected, Clinton would take action against the Serbs. The media, much of which was disgusted with Bush's reaction, received Clinton's pronouncements with great fanfare, repeating them often, and setting high expectations for an activist intervention into the Balkans following Clinton's inauguration. It was Clinton's desire to combat Bush through the airwaves which laid the early foundations for the policy crisis in which he found himself by May 1993.

The media also contributed to the formulation of the world's conception of the Bosnia conflict, in turn influencing the aforementioned actors as each formed their own stances on the war and considered what American policy for the region should be. Though often acting with the goal of objectivity in mind, biases among news organizations, the simplification of complicated concepts for easy digestion in a short article or evening news story, reliance on "experts" to explain events, and the granting of an audience to representatives from each ethnic group combined to cloud the

⁸ Ed Vulliamy, *Seasons in Hell: Understanding Bosnia's War* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1994) 118., Warren P. Strobel, *Late Breaking Foreign Policy: The News Media's Influence on Peace Operations* (Washington: United States Institute of Peace Press, 1997) 147.

understanding of the conflict. The media tendency towards oversimplification and “groupthink,” combined with the granting of ample airtime and ink to indicted war criminals such as Radovan Karadzic, muddied the waters, creating doubt for much of the world as to the true nature of the conflict. This directly caused many people to reject intervention on the grounds that the conflict was the result of “ancient hatreds” as opposed to modern Serbian aggression. This could have affected the stance of Congress on intervention, the Pentagon on the intractable nature of the Bosnian “tar baby,” and the public’s resistance towards unilateral action.

While the public tended to support the use of force against the Serbs, it did so only under the banner of multilateralism, in concert with the EC. Once the possibility arose for unilateral American action in the Balkans, public support declined dramatically, all but eliminating the possibility of such action. When the British and French threatened withdrawal of their forces from Bosnia if the US lifted the embargo and attacked the Serbs (in effect bequeathing responsibility for Bosnia to the United States alone) the specter of a public unsupportive of a unilateral intervention made “Lift and Strike” untenable.

Chapter 4 examines the office of the president and shows how the combination of Clinton’s domestic policy goals and the stances of the other actors studied led to the decision to abandon “Lift and Strike.” While a levels of analysis approach often uses the most finitely focused examination, that of the “individual” level, to examine how the personality, psychology, and idiosyncrasies of a particular actor influence policy, this work knowingly follows a different path. While every presidential policy decision is partly influenced by the personality and belief structure of the man occupying the office,

examining those influences would not greatly aid the goal of understanding Clinton's Bosnia policy. The decision to abandon "Lift and Strike" came after weighing the possibility that a failed intervention in the Balkans could derail the domestic policy agenda. Thus, understanding that decision necessitates not an examination of the personality or psychology of Clinton's leadership, but of his domestic policy goals and his initial motivation for taking a strong stance on the Bosnia issue. This chapter takes this approach and ties together the stances of the other actors examined to show how they combined to derail "Lift and Strike."

During this examination of the office of the president, it will be shown that the original formulation of the "Lift and Strike" policy was the result of overheated campaign rhetoric. This reduced Clinton's commitment to intervention once in office, especially after the costs of a failed policy had been made clear. Furthermore, the "Clinton Strain" of the "Vietnam Syndrome" contributed to his decision. For Clinton, Vietnam evoked memories of Lyndon B. Johnson's derailed domestic agenda and tarnished reputation, and the risks for Democratic reformers engaging in expansive foreign engagements. The examination of Clinton's role in derailing the policy shows how the stances of the aforementioned actors combined to convince him that a failed intervention in the Balkans would put his domestic policy in grave danger. Considering the importance of his domestic agenda to his administration's goals and his perceived mandate, he chose to prioritize his domestic policy over a risky Balkans intervention.

As no factor can be given sole responsibility for derailing the "Lift and Strike" policy, this work shows how the combination of several factors worked together to produce this result. The most powerful pressure against intervention came from

Clinton's dedication to his domestic agenda; the other actors only influenced policy in an indirect manner. While the allies, the American public, and Congress would have the greatest indirect impact on halting intervention, these actors did not directly act to restrain Clinton's hand. Instead, their stances made clear that a failure in the Balkans threatened Clinton's domestic agenda. Since the activist Bosnia policy had been formulated to serve the ends of a challenging presidential campaign, Clinton did not prioritize his Balkans stance over his domestic proposals. Wedded to an expansive domestic agenda, Clinton opted not to risk his policy goals in order to execute an intervention in the Balkans that many predicted would fail. He chose instead to shelve the "Lift and Strike" policy, and follow the weak lead of the EC.

Chapter 1: Tracing the Shift

The 1992 Presidential Campaign (October 1991 - January 1993)

Any focus on Clinton's Bosnia policy must begin with the 1992 presidential campaign. Clinton's campaign-time criticism of the Bush Administration's foreign policy record, most specifically its record in the Balkans, set the tone for high expectations of an activist Bosnia policy once Clinton reached office. Clinton was aware that some scoffed at his foreign policy credentials, so to defeat a Republican president with a strong foreign policy record he needed to show his capacity in the international arena, prove that he was not a "dove" unwilling to commit troops to combat, and to reveal weaknesses in Bush's foreign policies, thus undermining his opponent's major area of strength.

This opportunity came in August 1992 following the discovery that the Bosnian Serbs were holding Bosnian Muslim men in detention centers, in situations reminiscent of the Holocaust. When the Bush Administration both denied the existence of the centers and refused to characterize such Serbian activity as "genocidal," an admission which under international treaty would have compelled American intervention, Clinton attacked Bush's Bosnia policy.⁹

"If the horrors of the Holocaust taught us anything, it is the high cost of remaining silent and paralyzed in the face of genocide. We must discover who is responsible for these actions and take steps to bring them to justice for these crimes against humanity,"

⁹ Richard Johnson, "The Pinstripe Approach to Genocide," in Stjepan G. Meštrović (ed.), The Conceit of Innocence: Losing the Conscience of the West in the War against Bosnia, (College Station, TX: Texas A&M University Press, 1997) 65.

suggested Clinton.¹⁰ Clinton claimed that George Bush had failed to show “real leadership” in a region where events had been tantamount to genocide, and that instead of ignoring the fighting in the Balkans, the US should be prepared to take a lead role in bringing peace to the Bosnia.¹¹ Clinton made it clear that if elected, he would be willing to commit forces to a multilateral operation to “shoot its way in” to the Sarajevo airport to ensure the delivery of relief supplies to the beleaguered city, and would later state that he believed the US should use military force to open the Serbian detention camps.¹² In addition, levied onto the entire former Yugoslavia but particularly detrimental to the Bosnian Muslims, should be tightened against the Bosnian Serbs but lifted for the Bosnians.¹³ Clinton also asserted that not only should the Bosnian Muslims be allowed to purchase weapons to defend themselves, allied air power should be used against the Serbs in the interim between the lifting of the embargo and the delivery of arms.¹⁴

Clinton’s rhetoric and proposals marked a radical departure from Bush’s hands-off Balkans approach. However, Clinton would not enact his campaign-time strategies once elected, and at no later time would his proposals for ending the war in the Balkans be as activist and certain as they were during the campaign. During this period Clinton’s conception of the war and America’s strategies for intervening seemed clear: the Serbs were the aggressors, the Bosnians the victims, and the need for American military intervention, at least to assure the safe delivery of aid to the region, was desperate.

¹⁰ Clifford Krauss, “US Backs Away from Charge of Atrocities,” The New York Times 5 August 1992: A12.

¹¹ For Bush critique, see Andrew Rosenthal, “Clinton Attacked on Foreign Policy,” The New York Times 27 July 1992: A1., For “tantamount to genocide” comment, see Krauss, “US Backs Away,” 5 August 1992.

¹² For Sarajevo airport, see R. W. Apple Jr., B. Drummond Ayers Jr., Thomas L. Friedman, Steven Greenhouse, and Gwen Ifill (Interviewers), “Excerpts from Interview with Clinton on Goals for Presidency,” The New York Times 28 June 1992: A17., For detention camps, see Gwen Ifill, “Clinton Takes Aggressive Stance on Role of US in Bosnia Conflict,” The New York Times 10 August 1992: A8.

¹³ Ifill, “Clinton Takes Aggressive Stance,” 10 August 1992.

¹⁴ Ifill, “Clinton Takes Aggressive Stance,” 10 August 1992.

The Administration's Early Days (January 21 - February 9, 1993)

Clinton's difficulty with enacting the policies articulated during the campaign were reflected by his administration's stance on Bosnia once in office. Following his inauguration, the administration seemed to reject its military options after confronting the complexities of the Balkan conflict and the actual prospect of ordering a foreign military intervention with the American public so preoccupied with domestic issues.¹⁵ In the first of several contradictory stances, Clinton attributed the decision not to intervene immediately on the Balkan parties having stepped up peace negotiations in the form of the Vance-Owen Peace Plan (VOPP), but simultaneously declined to grant the plan full American backing or pressure the Muslims to sign it.¹⁶ "Our reluctance on the VOPP... is that the US at the present is reluctant to impose an agreement on the parties to which they do not agree, especially when the Bosnian Muslims might be left at a severe disadvantage if the agreement is not undertaken in good faith by the other parties and cannot be enforced externally."¹⁷ Thus, while the administration declined to intervene militarily in support of the VOPP, it also refused to endorse the plan, fearing it ratified "ethnic cleansing," nor would it pressure the Muslims into accepting the compromise solution put forward by Cyrus Vance and Lord Owen. While there is no evidence of a change in Clinton's conception of the conflict, which saw Serbs as aggressors, Muslims as victims, and the events in Bosnia as tantamount to genocide, his preferred policy had

¹⁵ Thomas L. Friedman, "Clinton Seeking Negotiated Path to Bosnia Pact," The New York Times 5 February 1993: A1.

¹⁶ Friedman, "Clinton Seeking Negotiated Path," 5 February 1993.

¹⁷ Gwen Ifill, "Clinton and Mulrone Fault Balkan Peace Plan," The New York Times 6 February 1993: A3.

already begun to alter.¹⁸ Only weeks into his presidency Clinton had begun a retreat from his interventionist campaign strategy, ostensibly to allow for the success of a plan he did not support. However, perhaps recognizing this, Clinton asked the American public to be patient and wait for his administration to present its own policy, to follow shortly.¹⁹

Clinton's First Bosnia Proposal (February 10 - February 20, 1993)

The administration proposal was revealed at a February 10th press conference featuring Warren Christopher. After only three weeks in office Clinton abandoned both his interventionist campaign rhetoric and early criticisms of the VOPP by presenting a remarkably similar proposal. Unable to create a sufficient alternative to the joint United Nations / European Community plan, Clinton chose instead to throw his weight behind the efforts of Vance and Owen, all but embracing the fundamental tenets of an agreement many in the administration felt rewarded Serbian "ethnic cleansing." As well, to the Europeans' relief, the tough military threats of the 1992 campaign were noticeably absent from Clinton's new plan. With no mention of lifting the arms embargo or using force against the Serbs, it was clear that the administration now favored the diplomatic route and had eschewed its military options. However, Clinton had also signaled a new level of investment in the pursuit of Balkan peace by promising troops to the region following the establishment of a lasting peace agreement, and by dispatching his personal envoy, Reginald Bartholomew, to assist in the talks.

Yet while there was now heightened American involvement in the region,

¹⁸ During a TV question and answer session, Clinton declares that the US must be "much stronger in standing up to aggression," suggesting that his conception of the conflict in Bosnia still portrays the Serbs as attackers and the Muslims as victims. "Excerpts from Clinton's Questions-and-Answer Session on TV," The New York Times 11 February 1993: A26.

¹⁹ Ifill, "Clinton and Mulroney," 6 February 1993.

Clinton's new proposal was also effectively weaker than the VOPP; the agreement the administration had originally claimed not stringent enough. While the VOPP threatened the use of force to push the parties towards peace, the American version refused to support any agreement to which the parties did not freely consent. Thus while this new proposal joined America and Europe as full partners in the push for peace and signaled America's continuing support for the Bosnian cause, it also ostensibly freed America from responsibility for it, as Clinton's version called for the deployment of American troops only for peacekeeping, in the case of a lasting peace. By neglecting to promise the deployment of American forces to separate the warring parties, Clinton had removed the VOPP's strongest "stick." By promising not to support any agreement to which the parties did not freely consent, he also revealed an inherent contradiction in American policy: While the US was now committed to bringing peace in the region, it refused to either threaten the Serbs with force or to pressure the Muslims into signing an agreement which recognized the results of Serbian "ethnic cleansing," one or both of which would be necessary to end the fighting. While the administration's policy had softened, its rhetoric towards the Serbs had not. Though no threats of intervention in Bosnia were made, there was still a noticeable mismatch between Christopher's words and the administration's policy announcement.²⁰

The secretary of state's words were powerful: "Bold tyrants and fearful minorities are watching to see whether 'ethnic cleansing' is a policy the world will tolerate... (Our) answer must be a resounding 'no'."²¹ The administration continued to favor the Muslim

²⁰ Ivo Daalder, Getting to Dayton: The Making of America's Bosnia Policy (Washington: Brookings Institution Press, 2000) 10.

²¹ "Christopher's Remarks on Balkans: 'Crucial Test' - NYT - Excerpts from Warren Christopher's news conference," 11 February 1993: A12.

cause, labeling the Serbs' action as "aggression" and considering the conflict "international" in nature, causing many in Sarajevo to believe that intervention remained just over the horizon.²² However, in the first signs that the campaign-time policy was becoming untenable, the administration's threats would not match the boldness of its words: the only mention of military action emphasized the limits of American activism in the region.

Air Lifts (late February - early March 1993)

The prospects of peace through the VOPP quickly stalled. While greater American pressure on the Muslims or the threat of military action against the Serbs may have forced a breakthrough in the peace process, the administration instead searched for ways to relieve the suffering of Bosnia's civilians and retain international credibility. Facing a cautious Pentagon and a wary public, Clinton continued to avoid military options, opting instead for a series of high-profile airlifts designed to deliver much-needed supplies to beleaguered civilians in various Muslim, Croat, and Serbian enclaves.

Yet while the airlifts were lauded by some as a sign of the administration's continually expanding involvement in the region, American officials privately acknowledged that the new policy was mostly a symbolic gesture.²³ Unwilling to put American pilots in harm's way, Clinton instructed the planes to remain above 10,000 feet, well out of the reach of Serbian anti-aircraft weaponry, but also greatly decreasing the prospect that the aid would reach its intended target. Though the airlifts seemed to alleviate some of the pressure on Clinton to do more for Balkan peace than his

²² "Excerpts from Clinton Question-and-Answer Session on TV," 11 February 1993: A26.

²³ Thomas L. Friedman, "Clinton Announces Airdrops to Bosnia will Begin Shortly," The New York Times 26 February 1993: A1.

predecessor had done, they also revealed how far the administration's policy had already strayed from the tough rhetoric of the 1992 campaign. While only months earlier Clinton had seemed willing to risk American lives to open the airport in Sarajevo, he now seemed cautious in even suggesting that the airlifts would pose any significant danger to the pilots involved. Instead, he stressed that the airlifts would be "quite limited" (in number) and that "the risk (to the pilots would) not be appreciably more than training flights."²⁴ As well, the White House was careful to couch the operation in humanitarian terms, cautioning that the airlifts did not necessarily signal a greater military involvement in Bosnia.²⁵

While the airlifts may have seemed to signify the administration's increasing involvement in the region, the humanitarian focus of the operation was far from the bold promises of military intervention made during the campaign, as were the cautious and limited means in which the administration was willing to deliver to the aid. Instead of signifying increased involvement in Bosnia, this new policy began to reveal the limitations of American policy in the region.²⁶ That the airlifts came partly in response to the stalled VOPP negotiations best represent this: instead of redoubling its efforts for a breakthrough at the negotiating table, the administration did nothing to further the talks, instead engaging in a controversial and largely ineffective relief effort. It had become clear that while the administration wished to be seen as remaining engaged, there were many limits to the effort it would undertake to bring peace to Bosnia.

²⁴ For limiting number of flights, see Friedman, 26 February 1993. For risk to pilots, see Thomas L. Friedman, "Airdrop Proposal Gets Endorsement of the UN Chief," The New York Times 24 February 1993: A1.

²⁵ Michael R. Gordon, "US Avoids Risk; Serbs Raise Ante," The New York Times 4 March 1993: A1.

²⁶ Gordon, "US Avoids Risk," 4 March 1993.

Shifting Back to Tough Talk (early March - Early May)

The contradictions between America's reluctance either to persuade the Bosnians to sign the VOPP or threaten the Bosnian Serbs with military intervention created a policy crossroads in the spring of 1993. When the Bosnian Muslims surprised the world on March 26, 1993 and approved the VO map, making peace seem more possible than ever, Clinton returned to tough rhetoric to compel the Bosnian Serbs to approve the treaty as well. In an interview with CBS television, he indicated that if the Bosnians and Croats signed the peace plan but the Serbs refused, "...we think we're going to have to look at some other actions to try to give the Bosnians the means to at least defend themselves."²⁷ Six days later the Bosnian Serb parliament refused to approve the plan, forcing Clinton to reexamine American policy.

This period of policy formulation, eventually leading the administration to propose "Lift and Strike" to the Europeans, was the most instructive for examining the competing factors in the creation of the administration's Bosnia policy. Clinton found himself torn by the paradox of trying to end the war in Bosnia without rewarding Serbian aggression, and burdened with the task of creating a policy supported by Congress and the public that neither divided the NATO alliance nor destabilized Boris Yeltsin's government.²⁸ With pressure from both domestic and foreign factions to follow various courses, the unsure and oft-changing nature of the president's Bosnia policy had never seemed to uncertain.

Clinton's actions and rhetoric, as well as those of his close advisers, reflected this uncertainty. In the span of a few weeks, not only did the president and his top advisers

²⁷ Steven A. Holmes, "US Presses Serbs by Hinting at End of Arms Embargo on Bosnia," The New York Times 26 March 1993: A13.

²⁸ Paul Lewis, "US Postpones Enforcing Ban on Serb Flights," The New York Times 25 March 1993: A3.

publicly contradict each other as to the military options being considered, but for the first time the administration began to voice varying rhetorical descriptions of the conflict. The president and key officials began describing Bosnia less as a test case for America's role in preserving the post-Cold War order and nurturing democracy and more as an intractable "problem from hell" about which very little could be done.²⁹ Later during this period the president's description of the war swung from attempted genocide to that of an ancient tribal feud, and back to a conception of Bosnia as a "Holocaust to the nth degree."³⁰ A few days earlier he had been quoted as saying, "The US should always take an opportunity to stand up against – at least speak out against – inhumanity."³¹ That single sentence illustrates the two policies between which Clinton could not choose. Even a benign interpretation of the administration's inconsistencies could not obscure this record of indecision.³² Clinton would finally decide to by revive his most controversial policy: lift the arms embargo on the Bosnians and bomb the Serbs until the weapons reached the Bosnian troops. He then dispatched Warren Christopher to several European capitals to gain the Europeans' support for the strategy.

Changing the Europeans: "Lift and Strike" (early May - May 22, 1993)

Christopher's trip to Europe is significant not only because it represents perhaps the biggest diplomatic failure of Clinton's entire presidency, but because it signaled the definitive collapse of the president's hopes to translate his tough campaign rhetoric on

²⁹ Friedman, "Clinton Keeping Foreign Policy," 8 April 1993.

³⁰ For Clinton's conception of the conflict as representing "genocide," see Clifford Krauss, "US Backs Away," 5 August 1992. For tribal feud, see Thomas L. Friedman, "Clinton Keeping Foreign Policy," 8 April 1993. For Holocaust, see William J. Clinton, "Excerpts from Clinton News Conference: 'The US Should Lead on Bosnia,'" *The New York Times* 24 April 1993: A7.

³¹ Elizabeth Drew, *On the Edge: The Clinton Presidency* (New York: Touchstone, 1994) 153.

³² Linda B. Miller, "The Clinton Years: Reinventing Foreign Policy?" *International Affairs* 70.4 (1994): 629.

Bosnia into policy. Not only did the trip spell the death of "Lift and Strike" as a realistic measure for bringing an end to the Bosnian war, but it left America without a strategy capable of achieving its goal of rolling back the Bosnian Serbs' gains of the previous year. With no alternative policy to return land to the Muslims, Clinton altered both his conception of the conflict and subsequent policy goals allow the administration to support the European "safe areas" proposal, a plan he had previously shunned for ratifying Serbian "ethnic cleansing" in Bosnia.

On May 22, 1993, a ceremony took place on the White House lawn which signaled an unceremonious end to the "Lift and Strike." With it, the JAP became the world's best hope at halting Serbian aggression in Bosnia. American policy would no longer seek to create a level playing field between the Muslims and Serbs by arming the Bosnians, nor would it attempt to roll back the Serbs' gains. Instead, containing the conflict had now become Clinton's primary goal.³³ To justify this shift in objectives, the administration also altered its rhetorical description of the war in Bosnia by ceasing to portray the Muslims as victims and the Serbs as aggressors, quite contradictory to any previous administration statement blaming the Serbs for its campaign of "ethnic cleansing."³⁴ Just as Clinton had sharpened his description of the war to score points against Bush during the campaign, the definition of the war would be changed again to make the administration's policy acceptable to the American people.³⁵ While intervention had once been seen as a moral imperative, Bosnia would now be portrayed as an amoral mess.³⁶

³³ Sciolino, "US Goal on Bosnia," 19 May 1993.

³⁴ Sciolino, "US Goal on Bosnia," 19 May 1993.

³⁵ Bert, *Reluctant*, 105.

³⁶ Samantha Power, *A Problem From Hell: America and the Age of Genocide* (New York: HarperCollins

While earlier that month the president had characterized the conflict as “international” in nature, Christopher now suggested to members of the House Foreign Relations Committee that the war was an internal conflict, calling Bosnia a “morass” of deep distrust and ancient hatreds among the Serbs, Croats, and Muslims, and argued that “there are atrocities on all sides.”³⁷ As well, the administration not only stopped comparing events in Bosnia to the Holocaust, it went to great lengths to explain the differences between the two cases. Once, during a heated Congressional hearing, Christopher explained, “It’s somewhat different than the Holocaust. It’s easy to analogize this to the Holocaust, but I never heard of any genocide by the Jews against the German people.”³⁸ In fact, prior to testifying, Christopher had sent urgent requests for State Department experts to provide him with evidence of Muslim atrocities against Serbs.³⁹ This request ignored the fact that while atrocities had been committed on all sides, genocide had not.⁴⁰ Finally, by concluding his testimony with the statement that, “(a)t heart, this is a European problem,” the administration may have been trying to rationalize its decision to neglect America’s traditional role as the primary architect of Europe’s security policy, allowing instead for the Europeans to set the agenda through the “safe areas” proposal.⁴¹ The administration’s conception of the conflict and subsequent policy objectives had altered fundamentally, but were now consistent in its new policy.

Once Clinton announced the death of “Lift and Strike” and endorsed the “safe areas” plan, America’s presumption of post-Cold War leadership in Europe, something

Publishers, 2002) 306.

³⁷ Sciolino, “US Goal on Bosnia,” 19 May 1993.

³⁸ Sciolino, “US Goal on Bosnia,” 19 May 1993.

³⁹ Power, A Problem From Hell, 307.

⁴⁰ Thomas Cushman and Stjepan G. Meštrović, “Introduction,” Thomas Cushman and Stjepan G. Meštrović, (eds.), This Time We Knew: Western Responses to Genocide in Bosnia (New York: New York University Press, 1996) 17-18.

⁴¹ Power, A Problem From Hell, 307.

the important European powers still desired and even required, was greatly eroded. This both stripped the NATO alliance of its traditional leader, reducing the organization's clout in Balkan peacemaking during the subsequent months and years, and revived questions about the administration's ability to conduct a strong foreign policy. In less than six months, Clinton had not only failed to implement his preferred policy to stop the fighting, but he had also completely recreated his conception of the conflict and subsequent policy objectives to fit a policy with which he fundamentally disagreed. Indeed, from the heady days of the 1992 campaign to late May 1993 there had been a truly fundamental shift of Clinton's policy for Bosnia and the conceptions which inspired it. The following sections explain how particular actors contributed to this shift.

Chapter 2 – The Systemic Level

America's Allies and Bosnia: The UNPROFOR Dilemma

This section will explain how the EC's reaction to Yugoslavia's dissolution created a dilemma in which the international community's primary vehicle for maintaining and asserting Balkan peace, UNPROFOR, also became the greatest obstacle to enacting Clinton's "Lift and Strike" policy.⁴² Of the actors who influenced Clinton's decision to abandon the "Lift and Strike" policy in May 1993, none played more of a role than the leading states of the EC, Britain, France, and Germany. Understanding the EC's approach to Bosnian recognition, and in turn the motivation behind the deployment of UNPROFOR, helps explain how America's allies so greatly slowed the Clinton Administration push towards intervention. Without a discernible national interest in forcing a Yugoslav peace, neither the US nor the EC were willing to use force to stop the burgeoning conflict during 1992. However, in order to maintain the appearance of a united European foreign policy, Britain and France supported the German decision to recognize the breakaway republics of Croatia, Slovenia, and Bosnia with the deployment of the UNPROFOR to protect the delivery of relief supplies to the region. In turn, partly due to differing perceptions of the conflict, when the US threatened military action against the Serbs to force the parties to the negotiating table, the safety of the British and French UNPROFOR troops, as well as the non-participation of American ground troops in the relief effort, became the primary European argument against supporting an American use of force. A military intervention would result in the withdrawal of the

⁴² While the EC consisted of twelve members during this period, the term "EC" should be understood to refer to the EC's most indispensable nations on the Bosnia issue: Britain, France, and Germany.

UNPROFOR, leaving the US with sole responsibility for bringing peace to the region. The prospect of such a foreign policy responsibility did not seem in the best interests of either the US or the Clinton Administration, and would play a large role in derailing the push towards intervention. Thus, as the safety of the European UNPROFOR troops was an important blockade to American intervention, examining the EC decision to first recognize and then deploy peacekeeping troops to Bosnia is essential for understanding why it resisted America's efforts to lift the arms embargo and use air power against the Serbs.

Yugoslavia and the National Interest

That's a tragic, tragic situation in Bosnia, make no mistake about that. It's the world's most difficult diplomatic problem I believe. It defies any simple solution. The United States is doing all that it can consistent with our national interest.
- Secretary of State Warren Christopher⁴³

During the Cold War, a civil war in Yugoslavia could have posed a serious threat to international peace and security. Located at both the geographical and ideological fault line between the West and the Soviet bloc, total influence over Yugoslavia long remained an unattainable prize for champions of both democracy and communism. Thus, for decades Soviet and Western leaders would have viewed it in their "vital" national interests to influence the outcome of a Balkan conflict, possibly spending considerable blood and treasure to do so.⁴⁴ However, with the collapse of the Soviet Union, the Cold War's blocs became superfluous, and many previously important alliances lost their purpose, leading to a kind of indifference to many global developments on the part of the

⁴³ July 21, 1993, as quoted in Power, A Problem From Hell, 310.

⁴⁴ Bert, Reluctant, 5.

United States and its allies. Their diminished interest in Yugoslavia fits this pattern well.⁴⁵

When Yugoslavia began sliding into decay in mid-1991, neither the US nor its European allies rushed to intervene militarily to stabilize the region. "We don't have a dog in this fight," Bush Administration Secretary of State James Baker would say of the conflict.⁴⁶ Important leaders on both sides of the Atlantic had come to the consensus during 1991-1992 that the Yugoslav conflict did not impinge on their nations' "vital" security interests, with a Balkan conflict stability no longer representing the threat to European stability it might have during the Cold War. It would no longer be worthy of the expenditure of blood or treasure to force peace onto the region.

However, these leaders failed to see that the conflict in Yugoslavia threatened to disturb the burgeoning norms of the post-Cold War order, and thus represented a "vital" systemic interest for all of the nations involved.⁴⁷ Disintegration and ethnic conflict within an internationally recognized state such as Bosnia challenged various established laws and precedents of international state behavior, threatening to further destabilize several building blocks of an international system already in great flux.⁴⁸ Furthermore, the Bosnian Serb campaign of ethnic cleansing threatened the fledgling international commitment to universal human rights norms. However, Western governments have rarely intervened exclusively in the defense of a humanitarian agenda, although interventions for other purposes have often been decorated with the language of "humanitarianism," such as in the UN's response, designed to protect economic self

⁴⁵ Bert, Reluctant, 4.

⁴⁶ Drew, Edge, 139.

⁴⁷ For more information on these burgeoning norms, see Ian Clark, The Post-Cold War Order: The Spoils of Peace, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001)

⁴⁸ Thomas Halverson, "American Perspectives," Alex Danchev and Thomas Halverson (eds.), International Perspectives on the Yugoslav Conflict, (London: MacMillian Press LTD, 1996) 2.

interest, to the invasion of Kuwait, or the American intervention into Nicaragua in pursuit of Cold War goals. It seemed, however, that an intervention to save thousands of Muslim lives was beyond the scope of a "humanitarian" intervention.⁴⁹

Thus, as the case of Bosnia illustrates, there are few places or ideals that nations deem critical enough to national security to unilaterally defend militarily.⁵⁰ On both sides of the Atlantic, the end of the superpower rivalry ushered in a period of changed priorities, with citizens expecting their leaders to focus their energies on revitalizing sluggish economies and domestic renewal, and leaders welcoming this change to concentrate on domestic policy agendas which paid high dividends from voters. These domestic priorities were simply more important to the individual NATO states than the conflict in the Balkans, and European leaders were saddled with the additional challenge of gaining popular support from a wary public for the movement towards European integration.⁵¹ With leaders unable to make the difficult case that a risky intervention in the Balkans could be tied to a recognizable "national interest," no government rushed to intervene. In turn, while the systemic interests represented in the Balkans were also real, no public would support the unilateral defense of a system from which many benefited. As James Baker would later say in January 1993, "It is unreasonable to expect the US to bear the full burden of intervention when other nations have a stake in the outcome."⁵² As a result, when given the opportunity, the Bush Administration, distracted by fast moving events in the Soviet Union and its own reelection struggles, was happy to allow Europe the lead on the Yugoslav issue. In turn, the Europeans were anxious to show their

⁴⁹ Herbert Hirsch, Anti-Genocide: Building an American Movement to Prevent Genocide (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2002) 79.

⁵⁰ Joyce P. Kaufman, NATO in the Former Yugoslavia: Crisis, Conflict, and the Atlantic Alliance (New York: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers Inc., 2002) 101.

⁵¹ Kaufman, NATO, 29.

⁵² Halverson, "American Perspectives," 13.

abilities on the world stage. "This is the hour of Europe. It is not the hour of the Americans," Luxembourg's Foreign Minister, Jacques Poos, famously commented only days after the EC took the lead in negotiating.⁵³ The legacy of the EC's mediation attempts in the Balkans, first in Slovenia and Croatia and later in Bosnia, created circumstances which would play a powerful role in changing Clinton's policy.

Recognition and Deployment

With the fledgling EC wishing to flex its political and diplomatic muscle, European officials took the lead in Balkan peacemaking in June 1991, following the commencement of fighting in Slovenia. Pacifying the conflict held special significance for proponents of European integration, not only because of the inherent dangers posed by an unstable Balkans, but because officials saw the crisis as a test of its ability to speak with one voice in a fast-changing Europe.⁵⁴ EC officials made little secret of their hope that success in the Balkans would both raise the EC's stature in Washington's eyes and erase the legacy of its muddled response to the Persian Gulf crisis, when the twelve countries could not unite behind a uniform political or military response.⁵⁵ In fact, only days before the fighting in Slovenia began, the EC's legacy of weakness in Iraq had continued to attract criticism, this time from the German daily *Suddeutsche Zeitung*, which claimed the policy had been, "hectic, clueless, muddled and contradictory," and criticized, "that is how the Community stumbled through its first major test since the end

⁵³ Alan Riding, "Europeans Send High Level Team," *The New York Times* 29 June 1991: A4.

⁵⁴ Alan Riding, "A Toothless Europe?," *The New York Times* 4 July 1991: A7.

⁵⁵ Riding, "Toothless Europe?," 4 July 1991. For a comparison of the EC's response to Yugoslavia and the Persian Gulf War, see Trevor Salmon, "Testing Times for European Political Cooperation: The Gulf and Yugoslavia, 1990-1992," *International Affairs* 68.2 (1992): 233-253.

of the Cold War and the rebirth of Europe.”⁵⁶ Bringing peace to the Balkans in only its second post-Cold War test would provide supporters of a politically strong and united Europe with a tremendous boost. However, it became almost as essential for the EC to be united in its response as it did for it to be effective in its mediation. As a result, the German decision to recognize unilaterally the republics of Slovenia and Croatia, and in turn Bosnia, against the wishes of its fellow EC members, hampered the EC’s approach towards peacemaking,

Various factors informed Germany’s decision to unilaterally recognize the breakaway Yugoslav republics. The most oft-repeated and overvalued influences were cultural. While it is true that German familiarity with Slovenian and Croatian guest workers and fondness for Croatia’s Dalmatian Coast, and the bond of shared Catholicism all played a role in German support for the republics, Germany’s recent history probably played the greatest role in swaying public opinion.⁵⁷ Themselves recently reunited after almost fifty years of separation following World War II, Germans viewed the republics’ ambitions of independence through the prism of a pan-European struggle against Communism and Germany’s own reunion after decades of Cold War division. For many Germans, the conflict was simply, “an attack by Serbian Communists on peaceful people whose only crime has been to vote democratically in favor of independence.”⁵⁸ Unlike the Bush Administration, which feared recognition as a dangerous precedent for a dissolving Soviet Union, or France, Britain, and Spain, which worried that the precedent set by recognition could cue demands for greater autonomy or even independence from

⁵⁶ Riding, “Toothless Europe?,” 4 July 1991.

⁵⁷ Accounts of the German fondness and familiarity with Slovenia and Croatia can be found in many sources, including Sabrina P. Ramet and Letty Coffin, “German Foreign Policy Toward the Yugoslav Successor States, 1991-1999,” *Problems of Post-Communism* 48.1 (2001): 50.

⁵⁸ Chuck Sudetic, “Germans Follow Own Line on Yugoslav Republics,” *The New York Times* 8 December 1991: A18.

their own minority groups, Germany, without substantial minorities of its own, showed early support for the independence of the Yugoslav republics.⁵⁹ As a result, quoting its own recent history and the principles of self-determination in the 1975 Helsinki accords on European security, the German government called for the recognition of the republics shortly after the conflict in Slovenia began.⁶⁰

Initially, Germany claimed to support recognition only in concert with its EC allies, but by December 1991 the Kohl government caved to intense domestic support for unilateral recognition after it had become clear that the remainder of the EC would not follow Germany's lead.⁶¹ This decision exposed the Yugoslav policy differences among the EC's leading nations, as well as the organization's inability to close ranks behind a unified position. "We are striving to make our partners understand, starting with Germany, that it would be prejudicial for Europe as a whole. The attitude of unilateral recognition could be damaging for the Community," Foreign Minister Roland Dumas of France would complain without success.⁶² However, when faced with Germany's unilateral recognition of the breakaway republics in December 1991 and the prospect of another embarrassing failure to formulate a unified EC foreign policy stance, the EC followed with recognition of its own, hoping to keep united the public face of the Community. As Hoffman suggests:

The main consideration was not the future of Yugoslavia, or even the effectiveness of the EC in its first major postwar crisis in Europe; it was the preservation of the appearance of unity among the 12 members. A repetition of

⁵⁹ Alan Riding, "Fear of Separatism Pushes Europe to Press Yugoslav Unity," The New York Times 7 July 1991: A1.

⁶⁰ On German sympathies towards self-determination due to their own history see: Alan Riding, "Fear of Separatism," 7 July 1991. On the use of the 1975 Helsinki accords by German leaders sympathetic to the republics see: David Binder, "Some Western Nations Split Off on Yugoslavia," The New York Times 3 July 1991: A6.

⁶¹ Chuck Sudetic, "Germans Follow," 8 December 1991.

⁶² Chuck Sudetic, "Germans Follow," 8 December 1991.

the disarray that had been so conspicuous during the Gulf crisis had to be avoided, and the only way of succeeding, given Germany's strong stand, was an agreement on collective recognition that provided a European costume for a policy made in Bonn.⁶³

Chancellor Kohl had gambled that the recognition of Slovenia and Croatia would signal to the Serbian leadership that Yugoslavia was doomed to break apart, and this would lead to a quick peace settlement.⁶⁴ "Preventative recognition," as the Germans called it, also might shift a conflict which many viewed as a civil war into an unambiguously international conflict, creating a legal basis for outside powers to aid the victims of aggression, and giving Serbia no alternative but to obey the rulings of international authorities or to become an international outlaw.⁶⁵ The gamble failed when recognition led to a declaration of independence by Bosnia, and in turn the Bosnian Serbs, and instead of suing for peace, Serbia initiated war to annex parts of the newly independent state.

However, recognition was not accompanied by a lifting of the arms embargo which UN Secretary General Kofi Annan would later say that this, "left the Serbs in a position of overwhelming military dominance and effectively deprived the Republic of Bosnia of its right under the Charter of the UN to self-defense."⁶⁶ While critics of the embargo often incorrectly claimed that the right for a sovereign government to obtain arms to protect its people was inalienable under Chapter VII of the UN Charter, it is certain that the Western governments, "refused to allow a government they did recognize

⁶³ Stanley Hoffman, "Yugoslavia: Implications for Europe and for European Institutions," Richard H. Ullman (ed.), The World and Yugoslavia's Wars, (New York: Council on Foreign Relations Press, 1996) 111.

⁶⁴ Stephen Kinzer, "Slovenia and Croatia Get Bonn's Nod," The New York Times 24 December 1991: A3.

⁶⁵ Richard H. Ullman, "Introduction: The World and Yugoslavia's Wars," Richard H. Ullman (ed.), The World and Yugoslavia's Wars, (New York: Council on Foreign Relations Press, 1996) 17., Ramet and Coffin, "German Foreign Policy," 49.

⁶⁶ Simms, Unfinest, 74.

(Bosnia) to defend its people against an armed subversion by a government they did not recognize (Republika Srpska).”⁶⁷

While the Bosnians would not be permitted by the international community to receive the arms they needed to defend themselves against attack from within, there was also no government willing to deploy its troops to fight to protect the integrity of the new Bosnian state. The German constitution forbade its military to act unless in defense of German territory or in coordination with allies inside the NATO area, and the conflict in Bosnia met neither condition.⁶⁸ Further, while leaders of the US, France, and Britain were sympathetic to the need to stop the wanton abuse of human rights and pogrom of ethnic cleansing by the Bosnian Serbs, they were unwilling to engage their militaries in what many feared would lead to a Vietnam-style quagmire without a discernible national interest at stake. “Plenty of countries want forceful action, but not so many want to be shot at,” one European diplomat quipped.⁶⁹ Instead, loath to inherit responsibility for the decaying situation in Bosnia and refusing to give it the tools necessary to defend itself, in the interest of unity the EC began a limited engagement into Bosnia, deploying the French- and British-led UNPROFOR to protect the delivery of relief supplies during mid-1992, first to Sarajevo’s airport and the city itself, and later to other areas in the republic. The deployment of these troops created the “UNPROFOR Dilemma,” which would be instrumental in derailing the Clinton Administration’s push towards “Lift and Strike.”⁷⁰

⁶⁷ For UN Charter, see James Gow, Triumph of the Lack of Will: International Diplomacy and the Yugoslav War, (London: Hurst & Company, 1997) 90., for refusal of Western governments to allow Bosnia to defend itself against Republika Srpska, see Simms, Unfinest, 73.

⁶⁸ Marie-Janine Calic, “German Perspectives,” Alex Danchev and Thomas Halverson (eds.), International Perspectives on the Yugoslav Conflict, (London: Macmillan Press LTD, 1996) 62.

⁶⁹ Paul Lewis, “British and French Resists Bush’s Call on Force in Bosnia,” The New York Times 8 August 1992: A4.

⁷⁰ While the deployment of the UNPROFOR into Bosnia was seen by many as a substitute for a stronger response to Serbian aggression, some argue it was intended specifically to fend off US calls for

The "UNPROFOR Dilemma"

Following recognition, though still sympathetic to the newly independent republics in their struggle against the Serbs, Germany would cease to play a major role in the wars of Yugoslav dissolution. Overly sensitive to the legacy of its history, and still trying to find its voice and place in post-Cold War Europe, the Kohl government was aware of the distrust it had attracted from its EC partners over recognition.⁷¹ While the German government continued to campaign behind the scenes for the lifting of the arms embargo, it refused to break away from the European convoy and support a selective lifting.⁷² Suddenly Germany was the country valuing the importance of EC unity over the specifics of the EC's Balkans policy, and having caused massive intra-EC conflict through its decision to recognize the republics, it retreated into the political shadows, hoping that its humbled Balkans approach would mend the damage between it and its EC partners.

This created a strained relationship between the EC, UNPROFOR, and Bosnia. The inherent contradiction in German policy had always been that it lacked the military ability to defend its political goal of supporting the republics in their push for self-determination against the Serbs. While it is unfair to blame the hostilities in Bosnia and the destruction of Yugoslavia on German recognition, as there is little evidence that either the Bosnians or the Serbs could have created conditions in which Bosnia could have survived alone with Serbia and Montenegro in a rump Yugoslavia, it is also important to recognize the German role. The decision to recognize the republics helped to trigger a

intervention, and thus the creation of the "UNPROFOR Dilemma" was in fact intentional. For more information, see Simms, *Unfinest*, 70.

⁷¹ Gow, *Triumph*, 172.

⁷² Calic, "German Perspectives," 71.

conflict which would require outside intervention to control, and Germany, the one nation which supported recognition, was also the one nation which was powerless to use force to stop the fighting.

As a result, France and Britain, to maintain EC unity, inherited an impossible peacekeeping operation which they consistently had attempted to avoid, resulting in this “UNPROFOR Dilemma.” France and Britain had deployed thousands of troops onto the ground in Bosnia as peacekeepers to maintain EC unity and preserve their leading role on the world stage. As medium sized powers with large aspirations, maintaining strong diplomatic clout would necessitate France and Britain taking leading roles in the important international organizations to which they belonged, and peacekeeping in Bosnia was a perfect opportunity to “punch above their weight” in the international arena.⁷³ However, they remained unwilling to risk an escalation of the Bosnian conflict to force a peace. Thus, when the US attempted to initiate military actions to end the conflict in Bosnia, neither France nor Britain was willing to join it.

Trans-Atlantic Perceptions of the Bosnian Conflict and “Lift and Strike”

To understand the effect of the “UNPROFOR Dilemma” on the Clinton Administration’s “Lift and Strike” policy, one must first examine certain important differences in the trans-Atlantic perceptions of the Bosnian conflict. Washington viewed the conflict through a relatively simple lens: the sovereign nation of Bosnia was under attack and deserved protection.⁷⁴ As well, the Bosnian Serbs’ methods of ethnic

⁷³ James Gow, “British Perspectives,” Alex Danchev and Thomas Halverson (eds.), International Perspectives on the Yugoslav Conflict, (London: Macmillan Press LTD, 1996) 90., Gow, Triumph, 159.

⁷⁴ Dana H. Allin, Adelphi Paper no. 347: NATO’s Balkans Interventions (New York: Oxford University Pres, 2002) 20.

cleansing were so repugnant that Clinton steadfastly refused to support any plan which recognized the "ill-gotten Serbian gains that stem from ethnic cleansing."⁷⁵ It was on these grounds that the Clinton Administration did not endorse the VOPP. Without first pushing the Serbs off land captured during the first year of the conflict, thus allowing the Bosnians an equitable share of the former republic, the Americans refused to pressure the Bosnian leadership into suing for peace. The "Lift and Strike" policy would give the Bosnians the chance to recapture what the Americans believed was rightfully theirs, opening the door for what the Clinton Administration deemed a "just" peace.

The European view was far more nuanced. First, the Europeans had a far less "black and white" view of Serbian culpability, and a more "realist" view of the conflict's causes. Although civilians in Bosnia were targeted because of their ethnicity, many Europeans still believed that the conflict represented a "traditional war over territory."⁷⁶ While Europe's leaders were aware of the scope of the crimes perpetrated by the Serbs against the Bosnians, there was also a sense that the Yugoslavs were, "all impossible people... as bad as each other, and there are just more Serbs."⁷⁷ Under the European position lay not an approval of Serbian ethnic cleansing, but a tendency to question the realism of defending a state whose existence was opposed by a majority of its inhabitants.⁷⁸ The Europeans seemed to have a greater sense of urgency to end the conflict immediately, as the conflict threatened to flood the EC with Yugoslav refugees. Lifting the arms embargo removed the Bosnians' incentive to sue for peace, and while this was precisely the objective of the Americans who designed the policy, for European

⁷⁵ Elaine Sciolino, "US Declines to Back Peace Plan as the Balkans Talks Shift to UN," The New York Times 2 February 1993: A9.

⁷⁶ Allin, Adelphi Paper, 20.

⁷⁷ Simms, Unfinest, 17.

⁷⁸ Allin, Adelphi Paper, 20.

leaders, a plan which promised to deepen the conflict, instead of ending it as quickly as possible, had to be resisted at all costs.

Underlying the European distaste for Washington's policy was the American refusal to deploy ground troops alongside its European partners, while simultaneously pushing a policy which many Europeans felt seriously risked the safety of their own peacekeeping soldiers. With troops on the ground who were lightly armed and operating under difficult rules of engagement, the Europeans consistently resisted a policy which could cause a massive backlash against the UNPROFOR, and had only a questionable chance of succeeding. Instead of raising Bosnian expectations that an American ground force would intervene on their behalf, the Europeans felt it a more humane solution to make clear that "they weren't going to get the UN cavalry coming to their rescue."⁷⁹ This major inconsistency, of American insistence to raise the pressure against the Serbs without offering ground troops while simultaneously refusing to pressure the Bosnians into accepting an unjust outcome, remained the primary stumbling block to a trans-Atlantic consensus for its Bosnian policy. In his unwillingness to offer American ground troops to UNPROFOR, President Clinton failed to protect what mediator David Owen would refer to as the "exposed jugular of American policy."⁸⁰

The "UNPROFOR Dilemma" and "Lift and Strike"

As will be unearthed in subsequent sections, understanding the intra-EC politics regarding recognition explains how America's allies played an important role in derailing "Lift and Strike." It is essential to understand why Britain and France accepted the task

⁷⁹ Simms, *Unfinest*, 65.

⁸⁰ Allin, *Adelphi Paper*, 31.

of Balkan peacekeeping but refused to allow the US to engage in Bosnian *peacemaking*. As neither country had a national interest in assuring Bosnian peace, and had deployed their troops primarily in the interest of maintaining EC unity, they refused to allow any policy which risked the conflict's escalation. Each American proposal to lift the embargo and use air strikes was consistently met with European threats to immediately withdraw their troops, bequeathing unilateral responsibility for Bosnian peace to the US military. The power of this European threat to withdraw from the Balkans placing the US in the unenviable task of bringing peace to the region was undeniable, and represented the greatest single stumbling block the execution of "Lift and Strike." With no domestic support for a unilateral Bosnian intervention, and with the Clinton Administration relying on various domestic actors to push through its expansive domestic policy agenda, strong opposition to inheriting a quagmire in the Balkans greatly increased the chance that a failed intervention would derail Clinton's entire domestic policy agenda. Examining the stances of these various domestic actors will show how a "Lift and Strike" failure would have posed such a risk, eventually causing Clinton to halt the march towards intervention.

Chapter 3 – The Domestic Level

Section I: *The Foreign Policy Triad*

This section will assess the role of Clinton's foreign policy triad, Secretary of State Warren Christopher, Secretary of Defense Les Aspin, and National Security Adviser (NSA) Anthony Lake, in pushing the administration's strategy away from the activist "Lift and Strike" policy by May 1993. It shows how the combination of the National Security Council's (NSC) organizational structure, Clinton's failure to devote ample attention to foreign policy formulation, the president's choice of appointments to these key positions, their performance in their roles, and the members' failure to advocate in favor of "Lift and Strike" even at the expense of Clinton's domestic policy goals encouraged the president not to fulfill his campaign promise of Bosnian intervention. While the triad would not contribute to Clinton's decision to abandon "Lift and Strike" in the same way that the other actors would, their role is still instructive. As a unit the triad failed to strengthen Clinton's focus on foreign policy at the expense of domestic policy. In turn, Clinton would prioritize domestic policy over foreign policy in the decision to abandon "Lift and Strike." Further, as individual advisers, the members also failed to strengthen Clinton's policy. Christopher failed to strong diplomatic leadership, Aspin was unable to improve the weak relations between Clinton and the military, and Lake was marginalized during the administration's first months and did not play the important factor an NSA should in the formulation of such a policy.

In turn, the members of Clinton's foreign policy team not only provided the president with a poor Balkans strategy, they failed in their primary assignment: protecting

Clinton's all-important domestic policy agenda from interference by the foreign arena. Understanding these failures makes clearer how other actors were able to gain such influence of the administration's policy. Without clear direction and leadership from his foreign policy triad, Clinton's policy was hijacked by a combination of interests, and would become more beholden to the advancement of Clinton's domestic policy agenda than the execution of a sound American foreign policy.

Three primary factors will explain the policy triad's failure to press Clinton to follow through with the execution of the "Lift and Strike" policy. First, Clinton did not spend ample time or energy on American foreign policy during the presidency's early days. Opting to delegate much of the most important decision making to his foreign policy triad, Clinton hoped his advisers would form a consensus behind well-constructed policy options towards which he would then give his support. However, well formed foreign policies require presidential participation during the formulation stage, and Clinton's lack of participation made arriving at consensus difficult for his foreign policy triad. Without strong consensus for the strategy, Clinton ultimately found it impossible to support "Lift and Strike."

Equally damaging to the formulation of a strong Bosnia policy was the performance Christopher and Aspin. Christopher had a long and distinguished career in government, but may have been best suited for deputy role. As secretary, he was unable to rise to the challenge of guiding American foreign policy following the Cold War without the compass of Containment to determine America's national interest and policy goals. As well, determined to protect Clinton's expansive domestic agenda from interference by events in the foreign arena, Christopher did not press Clinton to ignore

certain domestic goals in order to bring peace to Bosnia. As a result, America's most important foreign policy officer, its secretary of state, failed to advocate for the interests of his realm, and America's Bosnia policy suffered as a result. Christopher's failure would be most strongly felt during his disastrous May 1993 attempt to convince America's allies to support the "Lift and Strike" policy.

Les Aspin was highly intelligent and knowledgeable in defense issues, but his personality and work habits made him a poor choice for the office of secretary of defense. His unsuitability for the office would have itself weakened the administration's politico/military relations. However, considering Clinton's already poor working relationship with the Pentagon, Aspin was not a strong candidate to repair the rift between the executive and the military, let alone help to persuade the military to abandon its instincts, ignore Colin Powell's clear advice, and support a risky intervention in the Balkans.

Finally, while Anthony Lake was a wise choice for the role of NSA, without Clinton's close support and participation, he was unable to quickly find a suitable successor to America's Cold War doctrine of Containment. Though Lake remained a proponent of stronger action in the Balkans throughout the first months of Clinton's presidency, without a new direction for American foreign policy, placing Balkan peace in the context of American national interest became impossible. As a result, though he attempted to strengthen Clinton's hand on the Bosnia issue during the 1992 campaign and during early 1993, Lake was partially marginalized and failed to be influential outside of his role in the foreign policy triad, which itself was marginalized during this period.

By discharging their assignments to protect Clinton's expansive domestic agenda

from interference by the foreign arena, the actions of Clinton's foreign policy triad left America's foreign policy without powerful advocates inside the government. This left an administration already focused on the domestic arena without advocates to balance the administration's policy priorities. The result of this void was an administration that too often ignored the importance of a powerful and cohesive agenda for the international arena. In turn, the execution of an activist Balkan intervention became a casualty to Clinton's domestic policy agenda.

Clinton's foreign policy triad failed him in its Balkans policy guidance. While attempting to protect his domestic policy goals from distraction by the foreign arena, it enabled Clinton to reduce temporarily America's Balkans commitment, but failed in its primary task of protecting the domestic arena from interference. The "Lift and Strike" policy, though unpopular amongst America's European allies, represented the West's strongest response to the Serb's aggression in Bosnia. After shelving it and following the weak European lead, the conflict only expanded. By 1995, Clinton's poor handling of the events in Bosnia had become a liability not only to his foreign policy legacy, but to his reelection chances, and thus, to his entire presidency. Facing attacks from the media, public, Congress, and his political opponents, Clinton would be forced to take an enormous political risk through America's spearheading and hosting of the Dayton Peace Conference. Bringing an end to the conflict in Bosnia would become not only an important foreign policy issue, but an essential ingredient to Clinton's reelection chances. By having taken a weak stance against Balkan aggression during 1993, the situation in Bosnia grew into an acute foreign policy dilemma. Clinton's advisers misinterpreted the conflict in Bosnia as a first term foreign policy issue. In that they failed to understand

that ending the conflict in the Balkans was the administration's essential defense for protecting domestic policy from interference by the foreign arena, Clinton's foreign policy triad failed him in their primary assignment of protecting the domestic arena from interference by foreign policy issues.⁸¹

The creation of American foreign policy requires a delicate balance between many countervailing interests, and, to this end, the foreign policy triad must attempt to advocate for a clear and strong foreign policy, often against the interests of other factions inside government. However, as subsequent sections will show, the failure of the Clinton Administration's triad to fulfill this role allowed a president already predisposed to pushing for a strong domestic policy to ignore important goals of the foreign arena. American policy in Bosnia suffered as a result.

The NSC's Organizational Structure and Clinton's Involvement

Since the beginning of the Cold War, the NSC has acted as the primary advisory body through for a president's foreign policy. By statute, the NSC consists of the heads of the departments of state, defense, intelligence (CIA), the vice-president, and the chairman of the joint chiefs of staff. Tradition has dictated that the assistant to the president for national security affairs (or NSA) also plays a leading role in this advisory body. The NSA, together with the secretaries of state and defense, form the policy triad, the highest level conduit through which the president may execute his foreign policy agenda.

Understanding the organizational structure, membership, and performance of Clinton's NSC and the leadership provided by its foreign policy triad will be essential both for unearthing the administration's failure to implement its "Lift and Strike" policy and in

⁸¹ Drew, Edge, 138.

examining the roles of other actors in altering this policy.

By any account, throughout 1993, Clinton was far more focused on America's domestic rather than its foreign policy. Reports surfaced as early as two weeks into Clinton's presidency that members of the foreign policy team had confided jealousy to their domestic policy counterparts over the time and attention the president was spending on domestic issues such as the budget and health care.⁸²

Thomas Friedman illustrates the extent to which Clinton ignored America's Bosnia policy process with an anecdote:

During a meeting of... economic advisers... Alice Rivlin was describing areas of the country that would be effected by the withdrawal of a Federal Timber subsidy when she found herself being corrected by President Clinton over which trees were found where. A short time later, Clinton's top foreign policy advisers were gathered pouring over a map of Bosnia, ... to establish the Administration's policy for the Balkans, its first major foreign policy initiative. The President did not correct anybody about details on Bosnia. He did not attend.⁸³

Friedman's anecdote is instructive, though not unique. Clinton was not focused on foreign policy during the early days of his presidency. He had been elected on a platform of domestic renewal, and, as reports that during a January 1993 Camp David retreat Clinton listed the goals for the presidency's first one hundred days without mentioning any foreign policy objectives illustrate, domestic policy was the only area gaining Clinton's attention.⁸⁴ Aides argued that the president was not ignoring the foreign policy challenges facing the United States, but instead had "delegated" foreign policy formulation to his key aides in the arena: Christopher, Aspin, Lake and Deputy

⁸² Thomas L. Friedman, "Clinton Keeping Foreign Policy on Back Burner," The New York Times 8 February 1993: A9.

⁸³ Friedman, "Clinton Keeping," 8 February 1993.

⁸⁴ Friedman, "Clinton Keeping," 8 February 1993.

National Security Adviser Sandy Berger.⁸⁵ In reality, Clinton was focused almost exclusively on domestic policy, viewing his responsibility for America's foreign policy as a necessary burden of the office rather than a primary area of interest.⁸⁶ As a result, when pressing domestic issues captured the president's attention, foreign policy was relegated to second status. At one point, CIA Director James Woolsey had so much difficulty making his way onto Clinton's schedule, he enlisted the help of a retired Navy Admiral with White House connections to convince Clinton of the need for daily intelligence briefings.⁸⁷ When Clinton did take an active interest in foreign policy, he did so through the prism of domestic policy, concentrating on such economic agenda items as NAFTA. Yet when it came to foreign policy issues such as Bosnia, rather than personally participate in the policy process, Clinton instructed his foreign policy advisers to present their recommendations for his approval, preferring a strong consensus for the final policy proposal.⁸⁸ As one early report explained, "On domestic policy issues Mr. Clinton is personally absorbed in the give and take. But on foreign policy, he has basically asked these aides to work out solutions and submit them to him to be approved or rejected."⁸⁹

As long as one considers that, "Presidential performance is not bound by a single model... (nor) does the President necessarily engage in a conscious effort to adopt to a particular model and shape his performance accordingly," examining the organization of Clinton's foreign policy triad helps to illuminate some of its poor performance in

⁸⁵ Friedman, "Clinton Keeping," 8 February 1993.

⁸⁶ Alexander George and Juliette L. George, Presidential Personality & Performance, (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1998) 248.

⁸⁷ Drew, Edge, 153.

⁸⁸ Elaine Sciolino, "In Congress, Urgent Calls for Action Against the Serbs," The New York Times 40 April 1993: A9.

⁸⁹ George, Presidential Personality, 244.

advising the president on American policy for Bosnia.⁹⁰ Clinton organized his foreign policy advisory apparatus in a way that seemed an, “uneasy blend of collegiality and formalism explicitly designed...to limit the extent of presidential engagement in foreign policy making – and allow him to focus on his domestic agenda.”⁹¹ This is in sharp contrast to the collegial organizational model as it was originally established by Kennedy, who designed the system in order to be personally involved in the policymaking process. Clinton established the system to allow him a low level of engagement, delegating much of the day-to-day management of foreign policy to his advisers.⁹² Yet as Alexander and Juliette George astutely observe, one must question whether the

collegial foreign policy system can function effectively with a President who wishes to maintain a relatively high degree of detachment from the policy process. Collegial systems generally have been seen as a way of immersing the President in the policymaking process as a means of bringing to bear the collective experience of the advisers on policy issues, rather than compartmentalizing responsibility.⁹³

The decision to delegate this key presidential responsibility to his deputies directly effected America’s Bosnia policy. Without greater amounts of direct presidential participation, Clinton’s policy triad remained unable to create the consensus he desired for determining American policy. Reconciling disagreements amongst his advisers during key stages of the policy process is the responsibility of any president. As a result, “presidential leadership is critical to effective national security policy formulation and execution.”⁹⁴ Yet, with only sporadic presidential involvement in the policy process, the triad-led foreign policy team remained unable to create the consensus Clinton demanded.

⁹⁰ Sam C. Sarkesian, John Allen Williams, and Stephen J. Cimbala U.S. National Security: Policymakers, Processes, and Politics, 3rd ed. (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2002) 300.

⁹¹ George, Presidential Personality, 241.

⁹² George, Presidential Personality, 244.

⁹³ George, Presidential Personality, 251.

⁹⁴ Sarkesian, et. al., U.S. National Security, 121.

Though ostensibly chaired by Lake, without presidential participation, NSC meetings lacked the guidance necessary to produce clear policy. Most of the members had worked closely together for more than a decade, and while that familiarity created the “collegial” atmosphere Clinton hoped for, without either direct presidential involvement or an atmosphere of institutional awe at each other’s positions, the meetings lacked discipline, more closely resembled grad school “bull sessions,” and were characterized by interruptions and lack of focus.⁹⁵ Said one observer, “It wasn’t policymaking. It was group therapy – an existential debate over what is the role of America, etc.”⁹⁶ While it was in Christopher’s nature not to take part in most policy discussions, letting the issues unfold through debate by his colleagues before offering his opinion as to which options were most practical, the debates often produced no quality options, thus all but nullifying Christopher’s role in the discussions.⁹⁷ Aspin was often similarly unhelpful, using the debates to act as an “intellectual gadfly,” expounding at length and with considerable creativity on several sides of an issue, but without taking a clear cut position.⁹⁸

Further, even when he did attend, the meetings resembled the chaos of Clinton’s domestic policy sessions, where the president would be bombarded with conflicting advice, and use his strong command of the policy issues at hand to make decisions. However, without such expertise in the arena of foreign policy, the divisions of Clinton’s top advisors only contributed to the president’s ambivalence.⁹⁹ In the absence of consensus from his advisors, or even a majority support for a single option, Clinton

⁹⁵ Colin L. Powell, with Joseph E. Perisco, *My American Journey* (New York: Random House, 1995) 576., Drew, 145.

⁹⁶ Drew, *Edge*, 150.

⁹⁷ Leslie H. Gelb, “Where’s Bill?,” *The New York Times* 11 March 1993: A23.

⁹⁸ Gelb, “Where’s Bill?,” 11 March 1993.

⁹⁹ Drew, *Edge*, 145.

continually deferred his final decision.¹⁰⁰ As a result, months after Lake had launched a new series of discussions for determining the administration's policy, no decisions had been made.

Clinton had subcontracted America's foreign policy formulation to what he felt was a collection of highly intelligent and competent lieutenants, demonstrating an enormous amount of confidence in their capabilities. This particular organizational structure of the foreign policy apparatus places a great deal of pressure onto the foreign policy triad to lead the NSC and its constituent bodies without direct presidential participation. To the extent that they would fail him in this regard, serious problems are to be expected, and, in this case, divided amongst themselves and faced with the prospect of creating consensus without direct presidential participation, the triad failed to design a successful policy.¹⁰¹ The results of this failure weakened America's Bosnia policy greatly. However, while part of the blame can be placed on Clinton for not directly participating in foreign policy formulation, as the subsequent section will suggest, the poor composition of his foreign policy triad additionally helps to explain how Clinton's advisers provided the president with poor foreign policy guidance.

Secretary of State Warren Christopher

This section examines Warren Christopher's role in designing and executing the Clinton Administration's Bosnia policy during the first months of 1993. Chosen to submerge pressing foreign policy issues in order to allow Clinton to focus on his expansive domestic agenda, under Christopher's guidance the foreign policy triad was

¹⁰⁰ Daalder, Dayton, 13.

¹⁰¹ George, Presidential Personality, 249.

unable to overcome the difficult challenges posed by the war in the Balkans.

Christopher's unsuitability for the role of secretary of state, determination to protect the administration's domestic policy agenda, and subsequent failure to provide the administration with strong foreign policy leadership, damaged the administration's ability to formulate and implement a strong Bosnia policy in two ways. First, although at times supportive of the "Lift and Strike" plan, Christopher also feared that American involvement in Bosnia could derail Clinton's domestic policy goals, often acting to stall policies of intervention. In turn, by glossing over the administration's failure to stop the genocide in Bosnia, and failing to push Clinton to intervene in the Balkans, he failed to protect the administration's foreign policy in favor of its domestic policy, ultimately contributing to conditions in which the administration's Balkans failure would threaten Clinton's entire presidency. Second, when tasked with gaining support for "Lift and Strike" from America's European allies, Christopher, though working under difficult circumstances, did a poor job, resulting in the administration's embarrassing abandonment of the policy.

By the time of Clinton's inauguration, Warren Christopher had assembled as impressive a resume as any public servant of his generation, making him seem well groomed for the job of secretary of state. Further, Christopher's reputation and membership in the Democratic establishment provided Clinton, still not well connected or proven amongst pillars of the national party, with a cabinet member well versed in Washington politics with insider credentials and national credibility that were beyond reproach. But, while Christopher was a highly competent bureaucrat, he lacked the innovation and foreign policy philosophy necessary to lead the State Department at such

a critical moment in history. Though Clinton had been well aware of Christopher's limitations when he appointed him secretary, hoping that Christopher would still prove adept at submerging foreign policy issues while Clinton concentrated on American domestic policy, that decision would prove destructive for America's Bosnia policy.

At the start of his presidency, Clinton hoped to invest energy on foreign policy issues only when crises loomed, relying instead on his ability as a "quick study" to make shrewd and effective political decisions on any subject. Otherwise, he hoped to keep foreign policy minimized, and, if possible, on the back burner.¹⁰² Therefore, Clinton's secretary of state could not be an activist willing to risk the completion of his domestic agenda on new and unpredictable foreign policy initiatives.¹⁰³ Thus, warnings that Christopher lacked the vision to guide the State Department beyond the Cold War, and that he was, "immensely hard working, but not necessarily imaginative... a man to be a functionary rather than a leader," probably helped validate his candidacy for Clinton.¹⁰⁴ Indeed, while many colleagues reported that Christopher was neither a foreign policy innovator nor a visionary, even Christopher admitted that he was not particularly interested in emerging global issues such as the environment or population control.¹⁰⁵ Christopher's primary value to the administration was that he understood his role, as well as the role of foreign policy, in the Clinton White House. According to one administration official, Clinton most liked, "that (Christopher) did not give off any heat."¹⁰⁶ However, while Clinton thought Christopher could be counted on to formulate "safe" policy decisions that fit the goals of his administration, such decisions, "would not

¹⁰² Drew, *Edge*, 138.

¹⁰³ David Halberstam, *War in a Time of Peace: Bush, Clinton, and the Generals* (London: Scribner, 2001) 168.

¹⁰⁴ Halberstam, *War in a Time of Peace*, 174.

¹⁰⁵ Drew, *Edge*, 140.

¹⁰⁶ Halberstam, *War in a Time of Peace*, 174.

end up being safe, because everything (Christopher) did would be premised on conventional choices and this was a world where decisions could no longer be conventional.”¹⁰⁷ As David Halberstam suggests, Clinton, “wanted a status quo national security team in what was most demonstrably no longer a status quo world.”¹⁰⁸

Shutting Down Bosnia in Favor of Domestic Policy

Christopher, without the foreign policy vision necessary to recognize the dangers that submerging foreign policy could pose to the health of Clinton’s entire presidency, acted from the earliest days of the presidency to downgrade the administration’s commitment to Bosnian intervention, eventually working methodically to shut down an activist Bosnia policy, reportedly afraid that an intervention could damage Clinton’s domestic agenda.¹⁰⁹ Examples of Christopher’s attempts to downgrade the administration’s responsibility can be best seen during two key policy crossroads of early 1993, and in refusal to classify the events in Bosnia as a “genocide,” an admission which, under international law, would have compelled an American intervention.

The first example can be seen immediately following the inauguration, when the triad led the Principles Committee (PC) through the first reassessment of American policy towards the region, producing Presidential Review Directive-1 (PRD-1). During the authoring of that document, the administration’s foreign policy Principles, without the direct participation of either Clinton or Vice-President Gore, explored several options. Instead of choosing to implement the campaign-time strategy, after reportedly being swayed by both Christopher and Colin Powell’s disapproval of an activist intervention,

¹⁰⁷ Halberstam, *War in a Time of Peace*, 175.

¹⁰⁸ Halberstam, *War in a Time of Peace*, 168.

¹⁰⁹ Drew, *Edge*, 272., Power, *A Problem From Hell*, XII.

the group concluded the meeting having only examined, “a very wide range of options.”¹¹⁰ To allow Clinton to remain focused on the domestic agenda, Christopher had helped to defer the administration’s first opportunity to initiate the campaign strategy.

A similar failure can be seen through Christopher’s February 10, 1993 press conference, during which the Clinton Administration presented its first Bosnia proposal. While Christopher used strong words to describe the administration’s new policy direction, exclaiming that the US would not tolerate ethnic cleansing, the policy he had helped produce was decidedly weak, emphasizing only the limits the US would go to, to bring peace to the region.¹¹¹ In his memoir, even Christopher admitted that mismatch between his rhetoric and the administration’s commitment to Balkan peace, a phenomenon one aide blamed on “campaign overhang.”¹¹² Only weeks later, on *Meet the Press*, Christopher would be forced to acknowledge the mismatch, as well as Clinton’s retreat from the tough campaign rhetoric, offering only that, “I don’t suppose you’d expect anybody to keep a campaign promise if it was very unsound policy.”¹¹³ In fact, Christopher had remained weary of a strong policy, and had again pushed for a weak administration response during the policy process. Christopher was also the main mouthpiece through which the administration attempted to soften its failure in the Balkans by appealing to context to ease the moral discomfort caused by not acting to save the Bosnians.¹¹⁴ While Christopher’s use of language for this purpose has already been cataloged in Chapter 1, his attempts to stop the administration’s characterization of the

¹¹⁰ Daalder, *Dayton*, 9.

¹¹¹ Daalder, *Dayton*, 10.

¹¹² Warren Christopher, *In the Stream of History: Shaping Foreign Policy for a New Era* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1998) 345., for “campaign overhang,” see Drew, *Edge*, 147.

¹¹³ Drew, *Edge*, 139.

¹¹⁴ Power, *A Problem From Hell*, XII.

conflict as a genocide, and thus remove any legal responsibility for intervention, deserve greater examination.

Following the February 10 press conference, in which Christopher had made clear that crimes were occurring in the Balkans and that the US could not allow them to continue, Christopher made several attempts to quiet claims that the administration was complicit in a genocide. The first of these came during a heated debate during a Congressional hearing between Christopher and Congress' greatest proponent of intervention, Representative Frank McCloskey (D-IN). When faced with direct questioning as to the nature of the killing in Bosnia, Christopher refused to refer to the conflict as a genocide, only promising to conduct research into the issue and return to Congress with an answer.¹¹⁵ It was following this exchange that Christopher ordered officials in the State Department to unearth evidence of crimes by Bosnian Muslims against Serbs.¹¹⁶

However, instead of initiating such a study, Christopher only sought to silence the State Department's Foreign Service Officers (FSOs) working on Balkans policy in Washington whose analysis had classified the conflict as a "genocide." Following instructions by outgoing State Department spokesman Richard Boucher, Marshall Harris, the State Department's Bosnia desk officer, drafted a statement in April stating that, "the United States Government believes that the practice of 'ethnic cleansing' in Bosnia includes actions that meet the international definition of genocide."¹¹⁷ However, afraid of the ramifications such an admission, Christopher "killed" the memo through incoming spokesman, and longtime personal assistant, Tom Donilon. As will be seen again in

¹¹⁵ Power, A Problem From Hell, 300.

¹¹⁶ Power, A Problem From Hell, 308.

¹¹⁷ Power, A Problem From Hell, 300.

Chapter 4, Christopher had mirrored the former Bush Administration's Balkans strategy by focusing not on solving the conflict, but instead on minimizing the political damage done by not confronting Serbian aggression.

In response to having his memo silenced by forces inside the State Department, Harris drafted a letter to Christopher, signed by eleven other leading State Department Balkans experts, which characterized the conflict as a "genocide," castigated Western policy for its failures, and recommended military action against the Serbs.¹¹⁸ Once leaked to the press, this letter exposed to the general public the schism between Christopher and the FSOs involved in the policymaking process.¹¹⁹ While Susan Power credits this rift with pushing Christopher to finally support "Lift and Strike," the administration continued to refuse to characterize the conflict as a "genocide." Following the administration's failure to enact the tough "Lift and Strike" policy, several of the FSOs who signed the letter resigned their posts. Harris would remain a tough critic of Christopher, saying later, "What you hear Secretary Christopher and others saying (that Bosnia does not constitute genocide) is not true. What you see on your television screens is what's happening in Bosnia."¹²⁰

Beyond clouding the events in the Balkans to allow Clinton to continue to press his domestic agenda, by failing to promote a stronger policy in Bosnia, Christopher also failed to promote the interests of foreign policy inside the administration. Such a public expression of displeasure by FSOs against the policies articulated by the Secretary of State is very rare, as are resignations from the Foreign Service based on policy

¹¹⁸ Michael R. Gordon, "12 in State Dept Ask Military Move Against the Serbs," The New York Times 23 April 1993: A1.

¹¹⁹ Gordon, "12 in State Dept," 23 April 1993.

¹²⁰ Brandon Grove, "The Agony of Dissent," Foreign Service Journal 70.11 (1993): 39.

disagreements.¹²¹ With the State Department's entire slate of Balkans experts aligned against the administration's weak policy, one may infer the failure to produce a more robust response to events in the Balkans was based on other political considerations. The formulation of a balanced policy agenda requires that department leaders attempt to promote strong policies for their arenas, allowing the president to determine which competing interests best advance the needs of the administration and the United States. The result of having the nation's top foreign policy officer focused primarily on protecting the domestic policy realm would be weak international policy, and an examination of Christopher's policy legacy and the administration's weak response to events in the Balkans suggests that such a lopsided approach was used in the Clinton Administration. Christopher concentrated more on protecting the administration, and thus the domestic agenda, from the fallout of failed responses to Serbian aggression rather than halting the aggression itself, as a result, the administration lacked an important advocate for "Lift and Strike."

Christopher in Europe

Understanding Christopher's May 1993 trip to visit America's key European allies is essential to any investigation of the Clinton Administration's failed "Lift and Strike" policy.¹²² When Christopher returned after having failed to gain the Europeans' support for Clinton's strategy, the "Lift and Strike" policy was effectively shelved, and the Clinton Administration found itself supporting the Europeans' "safe

¹²¹ Grove, "Agony," 41.

¹²² Christopher traveled to London, Paris, Moscow, Brussels, Bonn, and Rome.

areas" proposal, a plan with which it had publicly criticized only weeks earlier.¹²³

Though his task of gaining European support for "Lift and Strike" was a difficult one, and the context within which he met with Europe's leaders was not auspicious for altering the strong European resistance to the policy, Christopher's performance and approach to the negotiations nonetheless deserve criticism, and are further indicative of his unsuitability for the office of secretary of state.

Three factors further complicated the context in which Christopher attempted the already difficult task of gaining European support for "Lift and Strike." First, many of Europe's leaders seemed predisposed to opposing the policy, a fact the Clinton Administration must have understood before dispatching Christopher. As one British diplomat said later, "We told them that until we were blue in the face. We said we can't do "Lift and Strike," especially "Lift."... There was nothing Christopher could have done to get a different outcome."¹²⁴ Such initial opposition suggests that to have been successful, Christopher would have had to deliver a strong and persuasive presentation.

Second, upon arriving at his first destination, Christopher learned that Radovan Karadzic had signed the latest UN/EC-sponsored VOPP. Instantly, discussions over the Bosnian Serbs' failure to end the conflict in Bosnia had moved from the practical to the theoretical.¹²⁵ As a result, America's European allies were waiting to learn the results of the Bosnian Serb parliament's ratification of that treaty, and were unwilling to agree to military strikes while the possibility for a peaceful resolution still existed. In a deft procedural maneuver, the Bosnian Serb parliament waited for Christopher to finish his

¹²³ Elaine Sciolino, "Uncertainty on Bosnia Complicating US Plans," The New York Times 5 May 1993: A16.

¹²⁴ Drew, Edge, 153.

¹²⁵ R.W. Apple, "Top Bosnian Serb, Facing US Action, Signs a Peace Plan," The New York Times 3 May 1993: A1.

tour across Europe before rejecting the treaty outright. However, this provided the allies with an excuse not to support the proposal, and with the Europeans' answer having been clearly delivered to the Clinton Administration, the Serbs' decision to continue the war did not alter the equation, and "Lift and Strike" remained shelved.¹²⁶

Third, in order to gain the American public's support for "Lift and Strike," it would be necessary to engage in a multilateral, as opposed to a unilateral, action against the Serbs. As a result, Christopher worked into his "Lift and Strike" proposal the unrealistic expectation that both France and Britain supply bombers and pilots to attack the Serbs, further reducing the likelihood of gaining European support.¹²⁷

Thus Christopher traveled to Europe to gather support from America's allies with the high probability that such a trip would fail. While defenders of the secretary's performance claim that "critics who said that Christopher could have been successful if he had been tougher with the Europeans were off base," this position ignores Christopher's poor presentation of the "Lift and Strike" policy to the Europeans. While it is unfair to suggest that Christopher traveled to Europe and made no earnest attempt to gain support for the administration's policy, by failing to assume America's traditional role as the primary architect of European security policy, Christopher's lifeless performance invited the Europeans' dismissive response.

As Christopher recalls, "we decided not to frame the President's plan as a *fait accompli*. My instructions were to take a more conciliatory approach, laying the proposal before our allies, describing it as the only complete option on the table, and asking for

¹²⁶ Daalder, *Dayton*, 15.

¹²⁷ Apple, "Top Bosnian Serb," 3 May 1993.

their support.”¹²⁸ Even before Christopher arrived, European leaders needed only examine the headlines of *The New York Times* to know that the administration would not force their hand on the Bosnia issue, lest it drive them out of the region, and be forced to manage the conflict alone. As a Christopher aide explained before the Secretary arrived, “He is not going with a plan in his pocket. He is going with some ideas and framework for discussion.”¹²⁹ With the allies already predisposed against “Lift and Strike,” the Christopher approach only strengthened their position. As Daalder explains:

Normally these conversations, while couched in the language of consultation, are direct and to the point. ‘American policy is X, and we thank you for your support.’ Christopher’s self-described ‘conciliatory approach’ – consisting of talking points that... started within the phrase, ‘I am here in listening mode’ differed so completely from the prevailing norm that the allies could not believe that the Administration was serious.¹³⁰

Christopher’s comments to the international press also strengthened the allies’ position, as he made clear that the Clinton Administration would not press them into accepting “Lift and Strike.” In Paris, he told reporters, “I’m hearing out (the French leaders’) questions and their concerns which I’ll report back to the President and could involve some adjustments of the various proposals that we have.”¹³¹ As Christopher moved from capital to capital his goals became more modest. Two days later, he would declare that the American “direction” was on the table not only for “discussion” but also for “amendment.”¹³² Contrasted with Lake’s successful presentations to many of the

¹²⁸ Christopher, *In the Stream*, 346.

¹²⁹ Michael R. Gordon, “Clinton Says US Pressure Nudged Serbs Back to Talks,” *The New York Times* 5 May 1993: A6.

¹³⁰ Daalder, *Dayton*, 16

¹³¹ Sciolino, “Uncertainty on Bosnia,” 5 May 1993.

¹³² Elaine Sciolino, “Christopher Fails to Win Consensus,” *The New York Times* 7 May 1993: A12.

same European leaders two years later, in which he noticed that when the United States acted as the "big dog" others followed, Christopher's strategy seems designed to fail. Whereas Lake quietly concluded after each successful meeting that "the big dog had barked," Christopher would downplay his chances of success to the media, publicly lowering his expectations and the chances for success.¹³³

Whereas Christopher's public comments made creating a consensus for "Lift and Strike" seem unlikely, his private performances during the presentations similarly promised little chance of gaining the Europeans' support. His presentation would often begin unconvincingly by noting that while there were no good options for dealing with Bosnia, "Lift and Strike" was the "least worst" among them.¹³⁴ During his talks with the skeptical French, Christopher took the time to point out the limitations of air strikes, predicting that air strikes could lead to open-ended intervention and the Serbs would be strongly tempted to escalate the conflict.¹³⁵ An official present at the meeting between Christopher and NATO Secretary-General Manfred Woerner criticized the secretary of state's poor salesmanship, as Christopher's singular lack of enthusiasm for the policy seemed evident. In fact, while never lifting his nose from his notes, Christopher, "started talking about the proposed US policy... in a way that emphasized the disadvantages rather than the advantages... (Woerner) was being invited to think the policy was a bad idea."¹³⁶

Upon hearing that Christopher had returned to the US describing his failure to gain the Europeans' support as a "healthy exchange of ideas" with his European

¹³³ For Lake's European trip, see Daalder, Dayton, 112-114.

¹³⁴ Daalder, Dayton, 15.

¹³⁵ Sciolino, "Uncertainty on Bosnia," 5 May 1993.

¹³⁶ Power, A Problem From Hell, 302.

counterparts, Richard Pearle, a former Bush Administration defense department official, scoffed that indeed there had been an exchange: "Christopher went over to Europe with an American policy and he came back with a European one."¹³⁷ While it is possible that no diplomat could have gained European support for "Lift and Strike," Christopher's failed performance assured that Clinton's approach would be shelved. No longer was it possible for the Clinton Administration to claim that America's pretense of European leadership remained. Even Christopher was forced to admit when asked whether he had changed his mind about the usefulness of the policy, "No, I haven't changed my views. I just don't know if I've changed anyone else's."¹³⁸ The US had attempted to create a coalition behind "Lift and Strike" and failed. While circumstances had made his a difficult task, Christopher's performance in Europe's capitals did little to improve the Clinton Administration's chances of success.

Though it is possible that Christopher lacked the diplomatic skills to make a persuasive presentation, a fact which would be hard to believe of the man who had negotiated the release of the captured Americans during the Iran hostage crisis, one must also question if the secretary, who had never been a strong advocate of intervention in Bosnia for fear it would derail Clinton's domestic agenda, was actually doing everything in his power to assure that the US did not unilaterally inherit the peacemaking role over Bosnia. Pressing the Europeans to support the "Lift and Strike" policy risked a major confrontation with America's allies which would have made the Clinton Administration solely responsible for bringing peace to Bosnia, and while stopping Serbian aggression had been among Clinton's campaign objectives, it could not detract from his domestic

¹³⁷ Power, A Problem From Hell, 302.

¹³⁸ Elaine Sciolino, "Clinton Delaying Plan to Aid Bosnia," The New York Times 13 May 1993: A9.

agenda.¹³⁹ Christopher had been appointed to “submerge” America’s foreign policy to allow Clinton to focus on domestic policy. By failing to gain European support for a risky foreign initiative, he temporarily did just that.

Christopher and "Lift and Strike"

Christopher’s primary assignment was to submerge foreign policy to allow Clinton to focus on America’s domestic policy, and in that regard, Christopher did not fail the president. However, by not pressing Clinton to take a stronger stance against Serbian aggression, Christopher failed the other component of his assignment: to adequately protect the president’s domestic policy from distraction by the foreign arena. While the Clinton Administration’s decision to withdraw from its tough 1992 campaign rhetoric allowed Clinton to remain focused on his domestic platform, it did so only temporarily. The conflict in Bosnia would continue to spiral out of control, causing great damage to the administration’s foreign policy legacy, and eventually risking Clinton’s 1996 reelection chances. The administration would be forced to take a great political gamble to force peace onto the region, in turn not only threatening its domestic agenda with a “risky foreign policy initiative,” but joining the future of the presidency to the fate of Bosnian peace. Christopher had been chosen precisely because he lacked the vision and initiative which would have forced Clinton to create a robust foreign agenda. In the end, this was a mistake, such vision would have recognized how a failed Bosnia policy threatened the entire presidency.

¹³⁹ Daalder, Dayton, 17.

Secretary of Defense Les Aspin

Although he had been consistently opposed to an activist intervention in the Balkans, of the three members of Clinton's foreign policy triad, Aspin played the most minor role in moving the Clinton Administration away from the "Lift and Strike" policy.¹⁴⁰ While his inability to help his fellow policy advisers create the clear consensus the president wanted before acting has already been noted, it was in his relations with his military counterparts in the Pentagon where Aspin most damaged the administration's drive towards intervention. Though well versed in defense issues, Les Aspin was a poor fit for his role as secretary of defense. His unsuitability for the job left Clinton without an intermediary able to bridge the deep cultural and policy gaps between himself and the Pentagon, a fact further compounded by Colin Powell's strong professional distaste for Aspin. As a result, the Clinton Administration found its leverage over the Pentagon further reduced, increasing the difficulty of gaining the military's support for "Lift and Strike."

In his memoir, Colin Powell accepted that Aspin possessed a brilliant mind and had a strong command of defense issues, but criticized his organizational skills, inarticulate nature, and sloppy appearance, concluding that he had been miscast as secretary of defense.¹⁴¹ When asked his opinion about Aspin's candidacy for secretary prior to his appointment, Powell warned Clinton that, "smart's not everything in running the Pentagon... Les might not bring quite the management style you're looking for."¹⁴² However, Clinton ignored the General, placing a man whom Powell had described as a

¹⁴⁰ Daalder, Dayton, 15.

¹⁴¹ Powell, My American Journey, 563, 566, 578.

¹⁴² Powell, My American Journey, 563.

“former adversary” into the top civilian role at the Pentagon.¹⁴³

As a result, the Clinton Administration’s politico/military relations started poorly and Aspin never gained the respect of the nation’s top generals. This problem was compounded by both Aspin’s attempts to reorganize and cut the military’s budget through his highly unpopular Bottom Up Review (BUR), as well as by the administration’s highly misguided decision to make integrating homosexuals into the military its first policy proposal. In turn, the joint chiefs of staff began its relationship with Aspin in an adversarial role from which it would not recover.

Thus, the administration lacked an honest broker to maintain good working relations with the military. Had Clinton appointed a secretary with a stronger reputation within the halls of the Pentagon, finding a military solution that was supported both by the Pentagon and the administration may have been possible. However, much like with Christopher, Aspin was appointed primarily because he had been extremely helpful during the campaign, and also because he championed a reorganization of the military which would cut its budget, in turn creating resources to be used to help the domestic economy.¹⁴⁴ This would damage the administration’s hopes of gaining popular support for “Lift and Strike.” As will be shown in subsequent sections on the role of the Pentagon, the military’s opposition was influential in Congress which in turn was highly influential to administration policy. Had Les Aspin been a better fit for his role as secretary, it is possible the Clinton Administration would have had greater influence over the Pentagon’s strong opposition.

¹⁴³ Powell, *My American Journey*, 563.

¹⁴⁴ Michael R. Gordon, “Report by Powell Challenges Calls to Revise Military,” *The New York Times* 31 December 1992: A1.

National Security Adviser Anthony Lake

Unlike Aspin and Christopher, NSA Anthony Lake was not a poor choice for his position. A leading expert in the field of international relations possessing strong academic credentials and extensive bureaucratic experience, Lake was capable of redesigning American foreign policy following the Cold War. However, even though the US lacked a successor to its guiding policy of Containment, Lake was not afforded the presidential attention or mandate to undertake a reconstruction of American foreign policy during this period. In fact, it would not be until months after the administration's failure to gain support for "Lift and Strike" that Clinton would give Lake's nascent policy successor, "Enlargement," its necessary presidential attention. As a result, without well defined goals for American foreign policy, it became difficult to place Bosnian intervention into a context of American national interest. Without such a declaration, it became increasingly difficult to convince various domestic actors to support the Balkans intervention. Though Lake felt Bosnia was an important issue in which the US should engage itself, he worried about an expansive Bosnia policy distracting from what he perceived were the major items of the post-Cold War foreign policy agenda: Russia and Japan. Thus, Lake deserves credit for strengthening Clinton's hand on Bosnia during the campaign, and helping to press him to attempt to gain European support for the policy in May 1993. But, as a result of Clinton not giving foreign policy the necessary attention it deserved, outside of his role as a member of the foreign policy triad, Lake failed to strongly influence the president's Bosnia policy.

According to Sarkesian, "To develop coherent policy and relevant strategy requires articulation of what the US stands for and a national will and political resolve to

use the instruments necessary to achieve national security goals.”¹⁴⁵ Although Clinton assumed the presidency at an uncertain time of foreign policy flux, he did not make creating a successor to Containment an important aspect of his agenda. In one example of his failure to give sufficient attention to reforming America’s foreign policy goals, his inauguration speech included a mere 141 words on the topic of America’s international policy, and lacked any articulation of the new direction for American policy.¹⁴⁶ While Lake scrambled behind the scenes to create a new direction for policy, he was hampered by the president’s public focus on domestic affairs, and Warren Christopher’s failure to advocate for a strong foreign policy at the expense of the administration’s domestic goals. Assigned to “submerge” American foreign policy at a time when it required the greatest presidential focus in fifty years, foreign policy was not given the sort of presidential attention which characterized Truman’s approach to the international arena following World War II. As a result, while the administration would set its policy goals on course by late 1993, through May 1993 there had been no distinct presidential articulation of the new direction of American policy. Without this articulation, it became impossible to fit a risky Balkans intervention into the context of national interest that democracies tend to require before intervening in foreign conflicts.

Even without such a public presidential pronouncement, Lake had distinct goals for the new direction of American foreign policy, and understood how a Balkans intervention could be a means to those ends. He had felt that the US had a responsibility to protect human rights norms in the Balkans from the time of the 1992 campaign when

¹⁴⁵ Sarkesian, et al., U.S. National Security, 102.

¹⁴⁶ Hames, “Searching for the New World Order,” 120.

he had helped to strengthen Governor Clinton's stance on the conflict.¹⁴⁷ Lake both believed that America had security interests in Bosnia, and was also deeply affected by the Serbian atrocities there, and fought for a stronger policy from the early days of the administration.¹⁴⁸ While he also believed that the US should not force a Bosnian peace at the expense of its other essential foreign policy goals, namely strengthening Russian democracy and recapturing a competitive trade balance with Japan, Lake remained a consistent advocate of the "Lift and Strike" policy during the meetings of the foreign policy triad.¹⁴⁹ However, part of a foreign policy team which had been relegated to second status by Clinton's domestic policy goals, and having shunned the spotlight in deference to Christopher, who he felt should be the chief mouthpiece of American foreign policy, Lake failed to make a strong impact outside of the intra-administration policy formulation process. While Lake advocated for a stronger policy when given the opportunity during meetings of the policy triad, he was not proactive in seeking to strengthen Clinton's policy at the expense of America's other goals, and in that the foreign policy triad failed as a unit to capture a great deal of presidential attention, he was marginalized as an important force in the "Lift and Strike" debate.

The Triad and "Lift and Strike"

In their own capacities as advisors, and as a policy triad unit, Clinton's key foreign policy advisers' failure to execute their intended policy roles played a strong role in pushing Clinton away from the "Lift and Strike" policy. As a unit the triad failed to give the president the sort of consensus he required to make a decision, though much of

¹⁴⁷ Anthony Lake, 6 Nightmares (Boston: Little, Brown and Co., 2000) 141.

¹⁴⁸ Bert, Reluctant, 197.

¹⁴⁹ Daalder, Dayton, 21

this blame could also be levied against Clinton for not taking a more active role in the policy process. Individually, each of the members failed in some way to push the president towards supporting the activist policies he had articulated during the campaign, though this failure as well owes much to Clinton's expectations for their roles as secretary, and, in Lake's case, Clinton's failure to support the necessary redesign of American foreign policy.

In that both Lake and Christopher were charged with protecting the president from involvement in the foreign arena, their successes also pushed Clinton away from "Lift and Strike," and hurt the formulation of sound foreign policy. With both Lake and Christopher focused on the needs of Clinton's domestic agenda, American foreign policy was without sufficient advocates in the administration. A president is best served when his advisors each fight for the promotion of their individual policy spheres. In the case of Clinton's early foreign policy triad, by assigning them to protect American domestic policy, the importance of a robust foreign agenda was overlooked, derailing the administration's activist Bosnia policy in the process.

Further, this success did not prove lasting. By protecting Clinton from distractions by the foreign arena, the triad, but especially Christopher, would place the administration in the difficult position it would find itself by August 1995, when it became necessary to embark on Richard Holbrooke's daring diplomatic assault on the Balkan leaders, culminating in the Dayton Accords. While the administration's negotiated peace became the foreign policy highlight of its first term, a failure in Dayton could have badly damaged Clinton's chances for reelection. The results of protecting the domestic arena from interference by the foreign arena were only temporary, it was almost

that same foreign arena which not only derailed Clinton's domestic agenda, but his hopes for reelection in 1996.

Section II: *The Pentagon*

The Pentagon's resistance to Clinton's "Lift and Strike" policy played an important role in shifting the administration's attempts away from its preferred strategy by May 1993. While it will not be suggested that the White House's poor working relationship with its military advisers was the primary cause for the Pentagon's distaste for Balkan intervention, the impact of the mutual mistrust between these two actors cannot be overlooked. Already reeling from a series of policy disagreements and the Pentagon's subsequent suspicion of its commander-in-chief, Clinton could not afford to spend valuable political capital needed for his domestic agenda on gaining the military's support for a risky Balkans intervention, nor, especially considering his lack of credibility in military issues, could he afford another public disagreement with America's generals. Likewise, cautious of the various Clinton plans which Pentagon leaders felt threatened military preparedness and effectiveness, and buoyed by a series of small victories over the administration's attempts to implement these measures, the Pentagon was predisposed to resist an intervention it felt unwise. Led in its attempts to keep Americans out of the fighting in Bosnia by General Colin Powell, who was widely hailed as a hero by Americans both in and outside of the military, the Pentagon proved a formidable adversary when the administration sought to gain its support for "Lift and Strike." Further, while some prominent military advisers showed optimism during Congressional testimony that "Lift and Strike" would halt the fighting in Bosnia, this point of view was marginalized as it tended to represent traditional intra-military branch rivalries.

This section seeks to show how the Pentagon contributed to the administration's

policy shift by May 1993. It begins by outlining the various areas which led to the politico-military tensions complicating the execution of the strategy. Next, the important role of Colin Powell will be discussed by examining his perception of both the administration and the Yugoslav conflict. In turn, the influence of the Powell Doctrine and the legacy of Vietnam on American Bosnia policy will be shown. Once these areas are understood, it will be possible to show the ways the Pentagon's resistance of the administration's policy contributed to its derailment.

Military Policy Conflicts

While Clinton's ideas for reorganizing, streamlining, and reorienting the focus of America's military dovetailed nicely with his primary domestic policy goal of improving America's struggling economy, they also directly threatened the Pentagon's resources and traditions. Attempts to cut the military's budget in real terms, Secretary of Defense Les Aspin's plans to reorganize an institution traditionally resistant to change through his BUR, and the new foreign policy team's widespread commitment to increasing American involvement in multilateral peacekeeping missions each were met with skepticism and criticism from the Pentagon's top leaders. The primary policy drafts outlining these changes, the BUR and Presidential Review Directive 13 (PDR-13), which examined the American role in multilateral peacekeeping operations, created conflict between Clinton and the Pentagon even before his inauguration in January 1993.

The BUR, which aimed to eliminate duplication by realigning the roles and missions of the separate services, called for cuts in the number of army divisions, aircraft

carriers, fighter wings, Marines, and nuclear forces.¹⁵⁰ This plan attracted quick criticism from military leaders who accused it of being driven by budget considerations while ignoring military strategy. Then Chief Of Staff Army General Gordon Sullivan and Lieutenant Colonel James Dubik argued:

American political leaders expect the military to *contract* in both size and budget, *contribute* to domestic recovery, *participate* in global stability operations, and *retain* its capability to produce decisive victory in whatever circumstances they are employed – all at the same time... International and domestic realities have resulted in the paradox of declining military resources and increasing military missions, a paradox stressing our armed forces. The stress is significant.¹⁵¹

Totally focused on the need to both balance the government's fiscal budget and revive America's economy, Clinton suggested not only realigning the roles and missions of the separate services, but spoke of the need to cut the military budget in real terms as well.¹⁵² Even as Clinton was suggesting a \$10 billion reduction in Pentagon spending, he sought to maintain the ability to intervene around the world, as suggested by PDR-13.

PRD-13 responded to Clinton's goal of husbanding the nation's resources for use in the domestic arena, and responded to his commitment to support and strengthen the UN as a means of maintaining order in the post-Cold War world.¹⁵³ Similar to his campaign time proposals for creating an international Rapid Reaction Force (RRF), both

¹⁵⁰ For goals of the BUR, see Michael R. Gordon, "Report by Powell Challenges Calls to Revise Military," The New York Times 31 December 1992: A1., For list of suggested force reductions, see Sarkesian, et. al., U.S. National Security, 133.

¹⁵¹ General Gordon R. Sullivan and Lieutenant Colonel James M. Dubik, Land Warfare in the 21st Century (Carlisle Barracks, PA: Strategic Studies Institute, 1993), as cited in Sarkesian, et. al., U.S. National Security, 134.

¹⁵² Gordon, "Report by Powell," 31 December 1992.

¹⁵³ Ivo Daalder, Pew Case Studies: The Clinton Administration and Multilateral Peace Operations (Washington: Institute for the Study of Foreign Policy, 1995) 1.

PRD-13 and the BUR suggested that an increased American role in peacekeeping, when appropriate, would be beneficial to America's post-Cold War foreign policy. The Senate confirmation hearings of both Warren Christopher, but especially UN Ambassador Madeline Albright, show that there was widespread adherence to this view among Clinton's foreign policy team.¹⁵⁴

Following the publication of the BUR, Colin Powell published his own report, in many ways a response to the incoming administration's nascent plans for military reorganization, which rebuffed the consolidation of roles and missions of the separate services, and served as a warning to the administration that its plans for reorganization and cost cutting would likely produce a contentious battle with the Pentagon.¹⁵⁵ Powell represented the view of many top military leaders when he argued that attempts to use America's military for peacekeeping operations could draw it into another Vietnam-style quagmire and undermine its readiness for "real" combat operations.¹⁵⁶ In Powell's view, the military had but one purpose, "to fight and win America's wars."¹⁵⁷ Thus, as Clinton entered office, it is not surprising that the military prepared to resist his plans to reorganize it, cut its budget, and deploy it on missions that it deemed inappropriate; national security bureaucracies often tend to resist any change that threaten their budget or authority as, at times, bureaucratic loyalty can overshadow policy priorities.¹⁵⁸ This conflict would be greatly exacerbated by Clinton's decision to attempt a social reshuffling of the military, with the result that military leaders felt their new "draft-dodging foreign policy naïf" commander-in-chief did not understand or respect their

¹⁵⁴ Daalder, Pew, 3.

¹⁵⁵ Michael R. Gordon, "Report by Powell," 31 December 1992.

¹⁵⁶ Lawrence J. Korb, "The Use of Force," The Brookings Review 11.2 (1993): 24.

¹⁵⁷ Drew, Edge, 140.

¹⁵⁸ Sarkesian, et. al., U.S. National Security, 97.

cherished institution.¹⁵⁹

Social Policy and Character Conflicts

Considering that overturning the age-old ban on homosexuals openly serving in the military was not only one of the lower priorities of the Clinton Administration but even for gay-rights activists, the decision to make it the first policy proposal of the new administration seemed an odd one.¹⁶⁰ The proposal not only faced an uphill struggle to alter the culture of an institution traditionally resistant to change, but also sent a stark message to the military that Clinton failed to understand their institution, and instantly created an adversarial relationship with the Pentagon's top soldiers. The joint chiefs of staff, many of whom were furious that they learned of Clinton's proposal not from the president himself but from a news article on the issue, opposed the new policy vigorously.¹⁶¹ In fact, during Defense Secretary Les Aspin's first two meetings with the Chiefs, the issue so dominated the agenda that the emotional discussions left only a few moments to discuss international crises in Bosnia, Somalia, and Iraq, causing some Pentagon aides to suggest that the joint chief's uncharacteristically aggressive campaign to change the mind of the president bordered on insubordination.¹⁶² Though a compromise would be reached several weeks later, Clinton had laid the ground work for future conflict with the Pentagon. Many senior officers, including Powell, saw a proposal

¹⁵⁹ Halberstam, War in a Time of Peace, 204.

¹⁶⁰ Joe Klein, The Natural: The Misunderstood Presidency of Bill Clinton (London: Random House, 2002) 45.

¹⁶¹ Eric Schmitt, "Joint Chiefs Fighting Clinton Plan to Allow Homosexuals in Military," The New York Times 23 January 1993: A1.

¹⁶² For domination of gay issue in meetings, see Eric Schmitt, "Joint Chiefs Hear Clinton Again Vow to Ease Gay Policy," The New York Times 27 January 1993: A1., For insubordination comment, see Eric Schmitt, "Military Cites Wide Range of Reasons for Its Gay Ban," The New York Times 27 January 1993: A1.

to impose such radical social change on the military as further evidence that Clinton, a president with no military background, did not understand the armed forces.¹⁶³

This perception was strengthened by accusations, which had followed Clinton since the early days of the 1992 campaign, that the military's new commander-in-chief had dodged the Vietnam draft.¹⁶⁴ As Sarkesian explains:

Clinton's avoidance of service in Vietnam was lightning-rod issue inside the US military, but it goes far beyond that, (as many professional government workers have not served in the military)... Such personal disassociation from the military weakened the ability... to make informed judgments about military issues, let alone influence military decision-making.¹⁶⁵

Even attempts by military leaders to pretend that such accusations did not alter their opinion of Clinton seemed faint-hearted. Colin Powell claimed in an underhanded comment that such criticisms, "did not bother me. By will of the American people, he was our commander-in-chief." However, in the same paragraph, he juxtaposed their experiences in the 1960s by describing himself as a, "two tour veteran who had lost buddies in Vietnam, while Clinton was reading books at Oxford."¹⁶⁶ These claims did bother military leaders though; Clinton's anti-Vietnam activities at Oxford University as well as the perception that he had dodged the Vietnam draft lay at the root of the difficult relationship between the commander-in-chief and his generals.¹⁶⁷

¹⁶³ Eric Schmitt, "The Top Soldier is Torn Between 2 Loyalties," The New York Times 6 February 1993: A1.

¹⁶⁴ Thomas L. Friedman, "US Will Not Push Muslims to Accept Bosnia Peace Plan," The New York Times 4 February 1993: A11.

¹⁶⁵ Sarkesian, et. al., U.S. National Security, 149.

¹⁶⁶ Powell, My American Journey, 581.

¹⁶⁷ Richard A. Melanson, American Foreign Policy Since the Vietnam War: The Search for Consensus from Nixon to Clinton 2nd ed. (London: M.E. Sharpe, 1996) 275.

Further contributing to the military's distaste for Clinton was the wide circulation of rumors around Washington that neither Clinton nor his administration cared for the military. In one oft-repeated anecdote, Powell's assistant, the highly decorated soldier and future Clinton drug-czar Lieutenant General Barry McCaffrey, was told by a young White House staffer while walking through the through the West Wing that, "We don't talk to soldiers around here."¹⁶⁸ While one must treat with great skepticism Powell's wording of the story, which begins with McCaffrey approaching the women using the overly friendly greeting of "Hello, there" and continues with the women replying with "an upturned nose," there is little doubt to the veracity of his description that the, "young woman's comment rocketed back to the Pentagon and whipped through the place like a free electron."¹⁶⁹ The effect of this story, as well as that of the military's other criticisms of Clinton, could be seen even at the lowest levels of the services. In one example, Clinton was treated with great disrespect by crew members when he visited an aircraft carrier during the early months of his presidency.¹⁷⁰

There is little doubt that Clinton's avoidance of military service, anti-Vietnam War activities, and policy to lift the ban on homosexuals openly serving in the military each complicated his working relationship with the Pentagon. Sarkesian argues that, "This resulted in a gap that many within the military believed had serious consequence for civil-military relations... For some, the military had become more of a social institution than a fighting institution."¹⁷¹ The traits of Clinton's personal history, combined with his military organizational and social policy plans, created skepticism as

¹⁶⁸ Powell, My American Journey, 581.

¹⁶⁹ Powell, My American Journey, 581.

¹⁷⁰ Sarkesian, et. al., U.S. National Security, 148.

¹⁷¹ Sarkesian, et. al., U.S. National Security, 134.

to whether Clinton was fit to act as commander-in-chief and invited conflict with the military's leaders from the first days of his presidency. These judgments about Clinton's character and understanding of military issues would incite the leaders of America's armed forces to resist his efforts at organizational and social restructuring, and carry over into the Pentagon's evaluation of his activist Bosnia policy.

As one editorial in American Forces Journal International criticized:

Although the majority of the American public had only recently come to realize that their president plays loose with the truth and has a proclivity for inducing others to follow his lead with hair-splitting semantical obfuscation, America's military forces have long seen evidence of those traits in their Commander in Chief. The US military involvement in Bosnia provides abundant illustration of both points.¹⁷²

The Power of Powell

Colin Powell, not only in his capacity as chairman of the joint chiefs of staff at the start of the Clinton Administration, but also in regards to his high stature as the most famous and nationally respected American soldier since Dwight Eisenhower, commanded almost universal respect in the arena of American national security policy. Had Powell been a passionate supporter of Clinton's "Lift and Strike" policy, it is possible that an aggressive campaign to push for this intervention would have found sufficient support to enable its execution. Instead, Powell was both contemptuous of the new administration and a strong opponent of Bosnian intervention. Powell led the Pentagon's resistance to "Lift and Strike," ultimately contributing to the policy's demise. Three important factors combined to predispose Powell to resist "Lift and Strike": his lack of respect for, and in

¹⁷² John G. Roos, "Commander-in-Chief Clinton: The Military Had Already Been Marched Down the Moniker Road," Armed Forces Journal International 17.11 (1998) 4.

some cases dislike of, Clinton, his key advisers, and their policy goals, his poor understanding of the events occurring in Bosnia, and his well developed ideas about the limits of American military intervention, known as the Powell Doctrine.

Powell and the New Administration

Although I was a member of the team, I still felt a little like a skunk at the picnic. I had been up to my eyeballs in Reagan and Bush national security policies that were held in some disrepute by my new bosses... Lake... sat in the chairman's seat, but did not drive the meeting... Christopher, lawyerlike, simply waited for his client group to decide what position he was to defend. Aspin... did not try to lead either, and when Aspin did speak, he usually took the discussion onto tangents to skirt the immediate issue... I had managed to adjust to the looser Bush-era approach, and I would somehow adapt to the Clinton style. But it was not going to be easy.¹⁷³

Colin Powell not only rejected many of the new Clinton Administration's policy goals, he was critical of many of his new colleagues, and like many in the military, had strong reservations about his new commander-in-chief. Never quite fitting into the new foreign policy team, and anxiously awaiting his retirement, Powell did not experience the sort of collegiality with the Clinton Administration officials that he did with his former colleagues in the Bush Administration.

Powell's cautious skepticism towards Clinton at the start of his presidency were due to the personal history and policy goals which made Clinton unpopular with many members of the military. However, for Powell, especially in his capacity with the former administration, this matter seemed more personal. As chairman of the joint chiefs for George H. W. Bush, Powell had grown quite fond of the departing president, saying a few years later that George and Barbara Bush were, "exceptional people who will be

¹⁷³ Powell, *My American Journey*, 575.

(my) close friends for life... (George Bush) had shown me kindness, loyalty, and friendship. I thought the world of him and always will.”¹⁷⁴ Powell even used space in his autobiography to blame the lackluster performance of Bush’s presidential campaign partly on a thyroid medicine which caused a “slowing of the mental process,” affecting Bush’s verbal reasoning on the campaign trail.¹⁷⁵ The imbalance of respect by Powell from one president to the next is encapsulated in this quote, describing the final day of the Bush presidency, Powell said, “The next day a young President, shaped by the sixties, took the torch from a man who had been the Navy’s youngest fighter pilot in the war years of the forties. I felt like a bridge spanning the Administrations and generations.”¹⁷⁶ While it is not certain whether Powell harbored personal animosity towards Clinton for unseating a president whom Powell personally and professionally respected so greatly, it can be inferred that Powell was far less comfortable with his new commander-in-chief than his previous one.

Powell’s discomfort was exacerbated by Clinton’s push to integrate homosexuals into the armed forces. Powell had warned that instituting the policy so early in his presidency could damage Clinton’s credibility with the armed forces, and was disappointed when Clinton ignored him. His feelings about the new president, as well as a subtle comment on the quality of his character, can be inferred from this comment: “I felt increasingly disappointed that this issue [gays in the military] had been allowed to become to new administration’s first priority. I also thought I understood why. Bill Clinton had already backed off other campaign stands...”¹⁷⁷

¹⁷⁴ Powell, *My American Journey*, 560.

¹⁷⁵ Powell, *My American Journey*, 560.

¹⁷⁶ Powell, *My American Journey*, 569.

¹⁷⁷ Powell, *My American Journey*, 572.

As the quote at the beginning of this section suggests, Powell did not respect the abilities of his new foreign policy colleagues. Never overly impressed with any of his fellow principles, Powell reportedly once made a comment during an early meeting which offended Madeline Albright so deeply, he later made her a written apology.¹⁷⁸ However, Powell had the greatest difficulty working with Les Aspin, his new civilian chief at the Pentagon.

Though he claimed to “like Aspin personally,” he was critical of skills as an administrator, again referring to the superior composition and functioning of the Bush Administration’s cabinet: “(Aspin) was immune to efficient organization, counting on his congressional staff to keep him from hurtling off the rails... (He) was as disjointed as Cheney was well organized...”¹⁷⁹ In fact, Aspin’s poor organizational skills were widely criticized, and Powell did suggest to Clinton prior to his appointment that Aspin was not an ideal candidate for the position. That Powell refers to Aspin as a former “adversary” in his autobiography helps explain that it was more than organizational skills that accounted for the a poor working relationship between the chairman of the joint chiefs and the secretary of defense.¹⁸⁰ Powell entered his final months as chairman mistrusting Clinton, lacking respect for the new foreign policy team in general, and believing so strongly that the new secretary of defense was miscast that he made early attempts to derail his appointment. Powell was so uneasy about his new working conditions that he made two separate attempts to retire early, both of which Clinton

¹⁷⁸ Thomas W. Lippman, Madeline Albright and the New American Diplomacy (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 2000) 97-98.

¹⁷⁹ For inefficient organization, see Powell, My American Journey, 566. For comparison to Cheney, see Powell, My American Journey, 578.

¹⁸⁰ Powell, My American Journey, 563.

politely rejected.¹⁸¹ There is little evidence that Powell respected either Clinton or any of his new colleagues enough to defer to them on their Bosnia policy of choice. However, lack of collegiality was not the only reason Powell would resist the direction of the Clinton Administration's activist policy.

Powell's Understanding of Bosnia

While its effect cannot be overestimated, Powell's poor conception of the conflict in Bosnia also may have influenced his resistance to an activist policy there. At the start of the administration much of the foreign policy team shared Clinton's conception of the Balkan conflict. This point of view saw the Bosnian Serbs, supported by Milosevic's Serbs of the rump Yugoslavia, attempting to carve up Bosnia in the interest of creating a "Greater Serbia." While ethnic animosities did inflame the situation in Bosnia, the root of the conflict was political, and was driven primarily by Milosevic and Tudjman as they attempted to enlarge their republics at the expense of their neighbors. However, writing in 1995, Powell describes the conflict in a much different way. "Serbs living in Bosnia, backed by an newly independent Serbia, started fighting to foreclose a Muslim-dominated state... In Bosnia, we were dealing with an ethnic tangle with roots reaching back a thousand years."¹⁸²

This lack of understanding, considering Powell's access to information as chairman of the joint chiefs and the benefit of hindsight, is alarming if one assumes that Powell was not in fact trying simplify the description of the conflict for his readers. First, Serbia was not "newly independent," and it would not become so for several years after

¹⁸¹ Powell, *My American Journey*, 563, 566.

¹⁸² Powell, *My American Journey*, 558.

1995. Second, by “Serbia” Powell must have been referring to “Yugoslavia.” But, Yugoslavia was not “independent” of anything, and in fact was the state fighting to keep the Serb-dominated union intact. While Bosnia did have a majority of Muslims, it was never “dominated” by them. Its government had a long tradition of representation by all Yugoslav ethnic groups. The tragedy of Bosnia lies in that its tradition of unity and inter-racial acceptance was shattered by the destructive pogrom of Milosevic and the Bosnian Serbs. Finally, while ethnic animosities always have roots which stretch backwards in time for centuries, and the Balkan brand of hatred was particularly known for its focus on events as far back as the Crusades, the “ethnic tangle” was *not* the root of this conflict. While it was not necessary for Powell to understand the roots or complexities of the Balkan conflict to give competent military counsel to a president, that such an inaccurate and jumbled one-paragraph description of the Bosnian conflict came from the member of Clinton’s foreign policy team most opposed to American intervention in the Balkans is unsettling. Thus, one must question the sources which informed Powell’s resistance to an activist policy.

The Powell Doctrine and the Vietnam Syndrome

Powell’s well defined views on the use of military force to back political goals were the primary stumbling block to gaining the chairman’s support for “Lift and Strike.” The Powell Doctrine, as it is often called, is primarily a corollary to the Weinberger Doctrine, which stresses the importance of committing US forces only when a vital national interest is at stake, using military power in the interest of clearly defined political and military objectives, and deploying American troops only when there is sustained

support from America's elected representatives and its public.¹⁸³ Like Weinberger, Powell's ideas developed in response to America's military and political mistakes during the Vietnam War. Powell expanded the Weinberger Doctrine by arguing that military action should have decisive results, and therefore should require the deployment of decisive force.¹⁸⁴ For Powell, no intervention should be "limited," for such a lack of commitment invites a lack of results.

In examinations of American military interventions over the previous thirty years, authors often refer to the "Vietnam Syndrome," suggesting that the lessons of Vietnam are instrumental, sometimes overly so, in determining America's subsequent policy decisions. While lessons from Vietnam did play an important role in influencing the decisions of actors as they determined their stances on "Lift and Strike," one cannot simply point to the "Vietnam Syndrome" and automatically understand how the legacy of Vietnam is still viable today. While assessing the impact of Vietnam, one must also determine for which concept "Vietnam" is a shorthand abbreviation. In fact, it will be argued through the course of this work that at least three strains of the Vietnam Syndrome influenced Clinton's Bosnia policy. The first, the Pentagon strain, argued against intervention without clear political and military objectives, and warned against the "limited" use of power to achieve results.

Powell's view towards a Bosnian intervention stemmed from his doctrine for the use of American military force and the lessons of Vietnam. While "Lift and Strike" may have seemed an "activist" American policy for Bosnia in comparison to the Bush Administration's policy, it hardly assured an end to the fighting in Bosnia. In fact, "Lift

¹⁸³ Sarkesian, et. al., U.S. National Security, 138.

¹⁸⁴ Sarkesian, et. al., U.S. National Security, 138.

and Strike" was little more than the best option available to a foreign policy team which could not engage in a full scale war in the Balkans, but still needed to "do something" to try and stop the killing. While Powell empathized with their desire to stop the slaughter, he also thought that ending the war in Bosnia could require a great deal of military force, and was not worth a high cost in American lives.¹⁸⁵ As well, "Lift and Strike" would engage the American military in an intervention without a clear or obtainable political or military objective, risking the same sort of unintended escalation that had characterized the American presence in Vietnam.

"So you bet I get nervous when so-called experts suggest that all we need is a little surgical bombing or a limited attack," Powell wrote in a *New York Times* editorial. "When the desired result isn't obtained, a new set of experts then comes forward with talk of a little escalation. [History] has not been kind of this approach... [The military has] learned the lessons of history, even if [those calling for intervention] have not."¹⁸⁶

For Powell, the conflict in the Balkans seemed too intractable for limited bombing attacks to have a high probability of success, and from his formative experience in Vietnam, he represented the view of many military officials who were only prepared to support missions which promised to achieve their objectives. His philosophy on intervention called for an initial induction of overwhelming force, but also required the sort of expansive engagement that Clinton would never have been willing to order. Without such deployment, Powell feared an unintended escalation of American involvement in the conflict. During early cabinet meetings in which his colleagues pushed for "Lift and Strike," Powell would question, "What is the end point?... If we

¹⁸⁵ Powell, *My American Journey*, 558.

¹⁸⁶ Powell, *My American Journey*, 559.

bomb Serb military targets in Bosnia and that doesn't bring them to the conference table, then what?"¹⁸⁷ When Aspin once responded, "Then we'll try something else," Powell retorted by paraphrasing a remark made by General George Patton Jr. explaining, "When you put your hand to the thing, make sure that thing works."¹⁸⁸

While he would have never supported an intervention that risked an unintended slide into a war resembling Vietnam, Powell's lack of confidence in his colleagues and/or Clinton only exacerbated this fear. Powell's short tenure as chairman under Clinton had been marred by the president's poor control of the policy agenda, tendency to ignore the advice of his military advisers, appointment of unsuitable members of the foreign policy team, and tendency not to follow on through on policy proposals when faced with resistance. Remembering the last great military intervention by a liberal Democrat, certain that Clinton knew little of either war or military affairs, concerned that "Lift and Strike" could suck policymakers into a Balkan quagmire, and believing that neither Clinton nor his cabinet understood the risks inherent in such an intervention, Powell resisted Clinton's Balkans policy.

Clinton's Pentagon Conflicts, Powell, and Bosnia

The Pentagon played two important roles in influencing Clinton to abandon "Lift and Strike." First, during the administration's early days, Powell stalled the initial push towards intervention. Second, when "Lift and Strike" was revisited in May 1993, high-ranking Pentagon officials testified to Congress on the poor likelihood for a successful intervention in the Balkans. While there were some disagreements, these tended to

¹⁸⁷ Drew, Edge, 149.

¹⁸⁸ Halberstam, War in a Time of Peace, 247.

respect traditional intra-military rivalries, and the dissent in support of intervention was mostly discounted by members of Congress. The Pentagon's largely pessimistic prospects for the success of "Lift and Strike" may have created doubt in the minds of many actors whose support of "Lift and Strike" would be essential for its implementation, including the American public, Congress, and even Clinton himself.

Stemming the Early Intervention Push

The joint chiefs of staff, led by Powell, had been opposed to military engagement in the Balkans even during the Bush Administration. Questioning the potential success of State Department proposals to use limited force against the Serbs or police the no-fly zone from Serbian aircraft, Powell stated unambiguous opposition to Bosnian intervention even before the 1992 election, and suggested that the civilians calling for force were, "the same folks who have stuck us into problems before that we have lived to regret."¹⁸⁹ Taken in consideration with Powell's lack of collegiality and respect for the new administration, it is little wonder that he opposed "Lift and Strike" from the earliest days of Clinton's presidency.

Powell's objection to "Lift and Strike" was clear: unless Clinton and his advisers could identify the political and military objectives on an intervention, Powell would oppose one. Thus, he opposed not only "Lift and Strike", but any suggestion that resembled a new push to use the military for limited objectives.

"The debate exploded at one session when Madeline Albright... asked me in frustration, 'What's the point in having this superb military that you're always talking

¹⁸⁹ Michael R. Gordon, "Powell Delivers a Resounding No on Use of Force in Bosnia," The New York Times 28 September 1992: A1.

about if we can't use it?' I thought I would have an aneurysm. American GI's were not toy soldiers to be moved around some sort of global board."¹⁹⁰ Powell doubted that an intervention would succeed, feared it could bog down American fighting forces, and worried about the Clinton foreign policy team's desire to expand the use of American military forces for frequent peacekeeping operations. As Clinton's foreign policy triad failed to outline the political and military objectives a secure Bosnia achieved for American foreign policy, and in turn Clinton failed to articulate those objectives to both Powell and the American people, Powell opposed any intervention in Bosnia during the first months of 1993. Unwilling to create another public conflict with the military, uncertain of his own military and security policy credentials, uninterested in making the primary focus of his early administration a foreign intervention, and similarly concerned about allowing an American intervention force to become bogged down in a Balkan quagmire, Clinton allowed Powell to contribute to his decision to abandon his early plans for a Balkan intervention.

Doubts from Congressional Testimony

When the Clinton Administration reconsidered the "Lift and Strike" policy in early May 1993, top generals engaged in an unusually public debate before Congress over its probability for success. In turn, many of these generals' pessimistic predictions raised doubts in the minds of Congress, Clinton, and the American public that such an intervention could succeed. Lieut. Gen. Barry McCaffrey argued that using air strikes to stop the Serbs would "be quite a severe challenge for the use of air power," and Admiral David Jeremiah argued that the attacks would lead to both allied losses and civilian

¹⁹⁰ Powell, *My American Journey*, 576.

damage.¹⁹¹ Further, these commanders all but negated the optimistic testimony of Air Force Chief of Staff Gen. Merrill A. McPeak, who, touting the new capabilities of precision guided weapons, testified that bombing the Bosnian Serb gun positions posed “virtually no risk” to American pilots.¹⁹² Citing their experience in the Vietnam war, ground and naval commanders argued that such claims were exaggerated.¹⁹³ Even more deflating for proponents of air strikes may have been the testimonies of Maj. Gen. Michael Ryan of the Air Force and Maj. Gen. John Sheehan of the Marines, who argued that while strikes could initially damage the Serbian war machine, the Serbs would quickly camouflage their artillery, and only the induction of follow-up ground forces could assure success.¹⁹⁴ Though the divisions between proponents and opponents of air strikes against the Serbs mirrored traditional institutional divisions in the armed services, the strong skepticism towards the plan by many military advisers must have alarmed the administration’s more careful policy makers.

In fact, some argue that the military used those hearings to assure that sufficient doubt existed over the probability of “Lift and Strike” that lawmakers would eventually opt not to attempt the policy. Former Yugoslavian Ambassador Zimmermann argued, “The Pentagon’s tactic was never to say no, simply to raise the objections which made the proposal seem unworkable.”¹⁹⁵ The stance of many military leaders was clear in a confidential high-level Pentagon cable to the British Ministry of Defense during this period which simply pleaded, “Save us from ourselves.”¹⁹⁶

¹⁹¹ Elaine Sciolino, “US Military Split on Using Air Power Against the Serbs,” The New York Times 29 April 1993: A1.

¹⁹² Elaine Sciolino, “US Military Split,” 29 April 1993.

¹⁹³ Elaine Sciolino, “US Military Split,” 29 April 1993.

¹⁹⁴ Elaine Sciolino, “US Military Split,” 29 April 1993.

¹⁹⁵ Melanson, American Foreign Policy, 83.

¹⁹⁶ Simms, Unfinest, 88.

The Role of the Pentagon

The Pentagon's role in pushing the Clinton Administration away from "Lift and Strike" during this period is important, though complementary. While Powell and the Pentagon's top generals may have been predisposed to resist the policy, both in their professional capacity as soldiers and in the bureaucratic defense of their institutional interests, their impressions of Clinton and disdain of his early Pentagon policies must have also raised their doubts as to his suitability to be commander-in-chief, further strengthening their opposition to "Lift and Strike." While the Pentagon did not stonewall Clinton as the European allies did, nor did it fail him as his foreign policy triad had, the military was nonetheless an important voice during the intervention debate. That voice was clear in its apprehension over using the military for missions other than war and pessimistic in its assessment that "Lift and Strike" would achieve its objective, suggesting instead that American soldiers would be trapped in a Balkan quagmire. In turn, these opinions influenced Congress, the American public, and Clinton, each of whom played important roles in sidelining "Lift and Strike".

Section III: *Congress*

Two types of Congressional influence on the Clinton Administration's Bosnia policy can be identified during this period. First, the combination of Congressional opposition to intervention, US presidents' decreasing control of foreign policy making, Clinton's weak influence over Capitol Hill during the early days of his presidency, and several looming domestic policy struggles with Congress made gaining Congressional support for "Lift and Strike" too politically costly, and perhaps, ultimately unsuccessful. As a result, the administration made no serious attempt to gain the legislature's support for intervention during the first months of 1993. Second, when the administration revisited intervention in May 1993, Congressional leaders, responding to Pentagon divisions over the possible success of "Lift and Strike" and influenced by the Congressional strain of the "Vietnam Syndrome," made clear the high risks a military failure in Bosnia would pose to Clinton's presidency. The high risk of intervention to Clinton's domestic agenda directly contribute to the decision to abandon the policy.

The Decision not to Lobby Congress

The Clinton Administration was restrained from lobbying Congress to back the "Lift and Strike" policy during the early weeks of the presidency. As a result, without widespread support for unilateral intervention from either the Pentagon or the American public, the administration's failure to gain a Congressional endorsement of "Lift and Strike" further weakened Clinton's mandate to engage in an activist intervention in the Balkans. Several factors limited the administration's ability to rally Congressional

support for its campaign-time strategy.

Congressional influence in the formulation of foreign policy had been growing steadily since Vietnam, and, with the end of the Cold War, had increased sufficiently to pose a serious threat to any Clinton plan to pressure Congress to support "Lift and Strike" against its wishes. A trend had existed for many years in which the president, who often preferred the formulation of foreign policy over that of domestic policy, almost always found Congressional support for his foreign policy agenda. This pattern, best known in its articulation as Aaron Wildavsky's "Two Presidencies Thesis," suggested that, due to the need to protect America during the Cold War, "since World War II presidents have had greater success in controlling the nation's defense and foreign policy than in dominating its domestic policies."¹⁹⁷ However, by Clinton's inauguration, the trend had been slowing for some thirty years, and even while the executive branch had often prevailed, Nixon, Carter, Reagan, and Bush had all experienced difficulty in gaining Congressional support for unpopular foreign policies. In fact, by the end of the Cold War, Wildavsky and Duane Oldfield had published a formal obituary for the "Two Presidencies Thesis," preferring to credit an epiphenomenon of Cold War bipartisan consensus in foreign policy over presidential power as the reason for Congressional acquiescence.¹⁹⁸ In fact, the new security environment which formed following the end of the Soviet threat restricted presidential latitude for creating foreign policy, instead reducing it to better resemble presidential influence over domestic policy. As Feaver explained:

¹⁹⁷ Aaron Wildavsky, "The Two Presidencies," Transaction 4 (December 1966) 8., as cited in Steven A. Shull The Two Presidencies: A Quarter Century Assessment (Chicago: Nelson Hall, 1991) 11-25.

¹⁹⁸ Peter Feaver, "The Domestication of Foreign policy," American Foreign Policy Interests 20.1 (1998) 2.

In the past secondary issues were linked to the primary issues, the Soviet threat, and this gave the President leeway to formulate policy. Now secondary issues look like secondary issues, the President's freedom of action is circumscribed accordingly. Other policymakers are more willing to challenge the President because they can afford to do so. Since the unifying glue of a dramatic threat to national security... has lost its adhesive quality, foreign policymaking resembles the pulling and hauling of special interests, the balancing of secondary tradeoffs, and the cutting of deals – in short, domestic policy.¹⁹⁹

Therefore, as Congress had reasserted influence over the formulation of US foreign policy, Clinton would have to gain Congressional support for "Lift and Strike" before engaging in the Balkans. Any attempt not to do so would have invited the same sort of stern Congressional lectures on its Constitutional power to declare war that George H.W. Bush wisely avoided by bringing the decision to engage in the first Persian Gulf War to a vote on Capitol Hill. While Bush had sold his Gulf War strategy to Congress, and had used the UN to bring international pressure onto individual members, Clinton lacked a strong sense of his "Lift and Strike" policy, which the UN actually opposed.²⁰⁰ Thus, for Clinton to gain Congressional support, an intense lobbying of Congress would have been necessary. Three important factors convinced the administration not to engage in such an effort.

Strong Congressional Aversion

If lobbying Congress for support for foreign intervention had become more difficult for presidents under most circumstances, gaining Congressional support for such an unpopular Bosnian intervention in 1993 seemed highly unlikely. Though much of the Congressional leadership supported an activist intervention, and while bipartisan

¹⁹⁹ Feaver, "Domestication," 4.

²⁰⁰ Lance T. LeLoup and Steven A. Shull, The President and Congress: Collaboration and Combat in National Policymaking (New York: Longman, 2003) 115.

consensus at the highest levels is often sufficient to attract the support of rank-and-file legislators, so large were the numbers who opposed intervention, and so passionate their opposition, not even the cooperation of the Congressional leadership could assure Clinton's success. For even while foreign policy luminaries such as Senators Bob Dole (R-KS), Joe Biden (D-DE), and George Mitchell (D-ME) supported "Lift and Strike", the policy's Congressional detractors were too many. Emboldened by Pentagon skepticism over a successful intervention, Vietnam veteran John McCain (R-AZ), House Foreign Relations Committee chairman Lee Hamilton (D-IN), the normally hawkish Newt Gingrich (R-GA), and majorities of both houses vocally opposed "Lift and Strike" during the first months of 1993. While some critics made stark comparisons of Bosnia to America's experience in Vietnam, others demanded that the new "peace dividend" be used on domestic policy reform. Thus, as the fading of the "Two Presidencies Thesis" suggested that Clinton would have to lobby members of Congress directly to gain support for "Lift and Strike," Congress's strong aversion to the idea of a Balkan intervention raised the costs of its support; a substantial majority of Congress would have to be lobbied.

Clinton's Weak Influence

This strong Congressional distaste for "Lift and Strike" was not helped by Clinton's lack of influence on Capitol Hill. While not every president is as masterful at manipulating Congress as was Lyndon B. Johnson or Harry Truman, Clinton's power to persuade Capitol Hill in early 1993 may have been the weakest of any president's in modern history. Not only did Clinton find himself without many of the inherent

advantages enjoyed by his predecessors while negotiating with Congress, but he squandered much of what political power remained through poor relations with members and misguided and mistimed policy attempts.

First, Clinton faced the complicated gap between expectations and reality. While expectations ran high for a Democrat entering office while his party controlled both houses of Congress, hope for sweeping domestic legislative change was unfounded. The Democratic majority produced by the 1992 election was neither large nor cooperative, and while Bush had risked little by ignoring a hostile Democratically controlled Congress, Clinton would be expected to produce legislative results with his party in control of both the executive and legislature.²⁰¹ However, Clinton found his Democratic majority, long acting as the opposition party and thus more skilled in obstructionism than in legislation, unwieldy.²⁰² Despite clear majorities in both houses, Clinton had no natural coalition for his domestic agenda.²⁰³ Instead, for each issue Clinton had to cobble together a series of ad hoc groups to advance his policy goals. Further, while Clinton did receive support from many Democrats on important policy proposals, too many defectors either abandoned Clinton on important issues or extracted large concessions for their support.²⁰⁴ In the most egregious example, much of the Democratic Congressional leadership led the fight against the passage of NAFTA in September 1993, and Clinton found himself personally lobbying more than a third of Congress by phone in the hours

²⁰¹ Kenneth E. Collier, Between the Branches: The White House Office of Legislative Affairs (Pittsburgh, PA: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1997) 260., Feaver, "Domestication," 6.

²⁰² Collier, Between the Branches, 260.

²⁰³ James P. Pfiffner, "President Clinton and the 103rd Congress: Winning Battles and Losing Wars," James A. Thurber (ed.), Rivals for Power: Presidential-Congressional Relations (Washington: Congressional Quarterly, 1996) 171.

²⁰⁴ Pfiffner, "President Clinton," 185.

leading to the vote.²⁰⁵ Specific policy proposals were not the only source of poor Democratic party discipline.

Not only did Clinton's policy agenda lack a clear mandate from voters in the 1992 election, but so did Clinton, a point driven home by Bob Dole when he appeared on television only hours after the election to point out that a majority of voters had chosen either Bush or Perot.²⁰⁶ That the Democrats lost a modest number of seats in both houses further highlighted the flimsy Democratic mandate to govern, and suggested that the completion of Clinton's domestic agenda would have little impact on the reelection of individual members, be they Democrat or Republican.²⁰⁷ Furthermore, because of Perot's third party candidacy, Clinton was actually outpolled in Congressional districts by all but five incoming members of Congress, suggesting that Clinton's coattails had helped elect no Democrat, thus further reducing members' loyalty to him and his policy agenda.²⁰⁸

Theorists examining the relationship between the president and Congress have often suggested that presidential popularity as political capital undergirds Congressional support. A popular president is more likely to gain support for specific policies than an unpopular one.²⁰⁹ Clinton was not a popular president. Entering office with an approval rating which would stay near or below 50% for much of his first months in office, Clinton was unable to use his standing in the polls to push legislation through

²⁰⁵ Pfiffner, "President Clinton," 184.

²⁰⁶ Collier, Between the Branches, 260. Texas billionaire Ross Perot captured 19% of the popular vote, giving Clinton a majority of the Presidential College vote, but not of the popular voter.

²⁰⁷ Collier, Between the Branches, 260.

²⁰⁸ Pfiffner, "President Clinton," 187.

²⁰⁹ Richard Sobel, The Impact of Public Opinion on U.S. Foreign Policy Since Vietnam (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001) 15.

Congress.²¹⁰ Further, America's opinion of Clinton seemed to fluctuate constantly, and if confronted by a popular Clinton, lawmakers merely had to wait for his next downturn in the polls to slow his legislative agenda.²¹¹ Combined with a poorly constituted Congressional Liaison Office, which Clinton used as a device to bring diversity to the White House staff and reward campaign workers, the White House lacked both the national popularity and the day-to-day interaction with Congress that allows presidents to create an effective strategy for achieving legislative results. Presidents may overcome some of these inherent disadvantages by aggressively pushing legislation through Congress during the initial honeymoon, but Clinton's mistakes during that period further weakened his influence on Capitol Hill.

The Honeymoon

The notion of a presidential honeymoon is that there is a small window of time following the inauguration during which presidents have the highest chance of convincing Congress to adopt their policy goals. James Pfiffner has written of the need for presidents to "hit the ground running," and Paul Light argues that presidents must "move it or lose it" to push the legislative agenda with Congress quickly before their influence is reduced.²¹² Had Clinton used the honeymoon to push for Congressional support of "Lift and Strike," he may have been successful, but poorly timed legislative attempts and embarrassments over cabinet appointments squandered this period, further weakening Clinton's influence on Capitol Hill.

²¹⁰ Pfiffner, "President Clinton," 187.

²¹¹ Collier, *Between the Branches*, 266.

²¹² James Pfiffner, *The Strategic Presidency: Hitting the Ground Running* (Chicago: Dorsey, 1988), Paul C. Light, *The President's Agenda: Domestic Policy Choice from Kennedy to Carter* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1982), as cited in LeLoup and Shull, *The President and Congress*, 23.

While Clinton's economic plan was the highlight of his campaign-time agenda, and would have been a wise proposal to push through Congress during his honeymoon, disagreements between Clinton and his economic team delayed the presentation of a cohesive economic plan until late February. Instead, the first days of the 103rd Congress were dominated by Clinton's mistimed proposal to integrate homosexuals into the armed services, and a series of attorney-general nominations who embarrassed the White House with their record of hiring illegal immigrant nannies. While rows over Clinton's first two choices for attorney-general distracted Clinton from engaging in substantive policy debates with Congress and the nation, the White House's failure to sufficiently vet prospective members of the cabinet was, in the end, nothing more than an embarrassment. The issue of gays in the military was much more damaging, and all but ended Clinton's presidential honeymoon.

Not only did Clinton's decision to press the gays issue play into the stereotype that he was a national security naïf, but it put the nascent administration in the position of advancing a tremendously unpopular proposal without sufficient Congressional support, and over the objections of Colin Powell, one of the most popular Americans in modern times.²¹³ This risk backfired, and the failure to achieve a legislative victory on the issue greatly damaged Clinton's clout on Capitol Hill. Not only had Congress been shown that it could force an embarrassing presidential retreat, even on a national security issue, but that Sam Nunn (D-GA) led the vocal opposition showed that Clinton not only lacked the normal institutional leverages for the formulation of foreign policy, but that he could not control members of his own party.²¹⁴ These impressions were only strengthened a few

²¹³ Feaver, "Domestication," 6.

²¹⁴ Pfiffner, "President Clinton," 173., Feaver, "Domestication," 6.

weeks later when Clinton was reduced to calling newly elected junior committee members to lobby for particular amendments to bills relating to the stimulus package and budget.²¹⁵ To some, that Clinton was already using his presidential coin during the honeymoon period, and in the most trivial of circumstances, was a sign that he lacked any real clout on Capitol Hill. “Whoever heard of a president calling junior members of a committee on an amendment?” complained one staffer.²¹⁶

Abandoning "Lift and Strike"

Congress's adamant opposition to a Balkan intervention, Clinton's lack of influence on Capitol Hill, and his futile squandering of his honeymoon period combined to make Congressional cooperation almost impossible, and thus contributed to Clinton's early decision to abandon the prospect of a military intervention. However, understanding that Clinton faced a decidedly uphill battle in gaining Congressional support for "Lift and Strike," does not fully reveal why Clinton did not press Capitol Hill for intervention. Like many decisions Clinton made concerning Bosnia, domestic policy considerations played a crucial role in the abandonment of "Lift and Strike."

All of Clinton's inherent weaknesses in working with Capitol Hill would have most likely combined to create a Congressional halt to intervention. Even if Clinton had been successful in lobbying Congress for its support, the act of doing so surely would have weakened his presidential coin, and greatly damaged his ability to implement the domestic policy proposals that lay at the heart of his agenda and razor thin mandate. During the most crucial moments of Bosnia decision making, the specter of domestic

²¹⁵ Collier, "Domestication," 265.

²¹⁶ Collier, "Domestication," 265.

policy always hung overhead. The battle over the stimulus package occurred just as Clinton opted to quite his talk of intervention in favor of the European-led VOPP. The battle over the budget loomed as he abandoned "Lift and Strike" all together. Getting NAFTA passed a few months later would require massive amounts of Clinton's direct participation, in order to overcome the anti-NAFTA opposition led by leaders from inside his party.

Though America had entered a post-Cold War era in which Congress was deeply involved in foreign policy formulation, and presidential participation in the lobbying effort had become essential for major proposals, Clinton was unwilling to use his limited influence in Congress to gain support for "Lift and Strike." Many factors limited the power of that influence, and mistakes made during the honeymoon both contributed to those limits, and squandered an opportunity to gain quick support for key aspects of his domestic policy platform, perhaps opening the door for Clinton to lobby for Bosnia intervention. The large majority of his campaign promises had been made on issues in the domestic sphere, and with much of the Congress opposed to his domestic agenda, and without sufficient influence on Capitol Hill to assure its successful implementation, Clinton could not also lobby Congress to support a risky intervention in the Balkans.

Congress Raises the Risks: The Vietnam Syndrome's Congressional Strain

As the killing in Bosnia continued through the spring of 1993, the administration began to revisit the "Lift and Strike" option. As well, the members of Congress who had always supported intervention became louder in their criticism of Clinton, keeping the issue alive in the political arena. Denouncing Clinton's tacit support of the VOPP, Rep.

Frank McCloskey (D - IN) declared as early as February, "More diplomacy is not going to stop genocidal aggression. It's going to take military force."²¹⁷ McCloskey would be joined shortly by the highly influential Joe Biden who, after an independent fact finding mission to the region, presented the White House with a strongly worded letter castigating the administration for its "confusion and inertia" in responding to Serbian aggression.²¹⁸ On the other side of the aisle Dole similarly authored a letter to the president warning that, "nothing short of the credible threat of military action will be sufficient to stop the Belgrade war machine."²¹⁹ Pressure from these members, combined with behind-the-scenes maneuvering on the part of the Democratic Congressional leadership, formed a coalition willing to support a limited intervention in Bosnia by May 1993.

These leaders reported to Clinton in early May that they could deliver bipartisan support for using military force in the Balkans, provided he explained the stakes to the American people, and as long as he understood that such support came with a caveat: once engaged, even under the cover of a multinational force, the world's only superpower could not fail.²²⁰ Unlike the "old college try" approach supported by Secretary of Defense Les Aspin, Congressional leaders warned that Clinton could not set the goal of saving the Muslims and then withdraw if the costs of intervention became too great.²²¹ "Several of us said the republic will survive, but the presidency will be badly damaged,

²¹⁷ Elaine Sciolino, "US Backs Bosnian Peace Plan, Dropping Threats to Use Force" The New York Times 11 February 1993: A1.

²¹⁸ Elaine Sciolino, "In Congress, Urgent Calls for Action Against Serbs," The New York Times 20 April 1993: A9.

²¹⁹ Michael R. Gordon, "US Says Belgrade Joined in Attacks," The New York Times 18 April 1993: A17.

²²⁰ Congressional leaders, see Thomas L. Friedman, "US Officials Hold Back on Reaction to Serbian Vote," The New York Times 6 May 1993: A16., US cannot fail, see Elaine Sciolino, "Clinton on Serbs: Pacing Shaky Ground," The New York Times 1 May 1993: A6.

²²¹ Sciolino, "Clinton on Serbs," 1 May 1993.

and the standing and credibility of the US in the world will be damaged,” reported Hamilton.²²² Senator Richard Lugar (R-IN) was more blunt, “...our advice was that the president was going to suffer substantially if in fact this doesn’t work out well, that people will not be generous and he ought to anticipate that.”²²³

Congress had made clear the price of a Balkans intervention. Were "Lift and Strike" to fail, Clinton would face strong consequences both in Congress and with the American people, complicating his domestic agenda and all but assuring that he would lose controversial upcoming legislative battles such as the fight over NAFTA. While "Lift and Strike" promised to cause UNPROFOR’s exodus, making any American intervention a unilateral one with scant public support, Congress now discarded Clinton’s one safety net which protected America from a quagmire: withdrawal. Again, in relation to the Vietnam Syndrome, this Congressional strain obsessed about the loss of America’s international prestige and the high costs of an American failure. Congressional leaders seemed determined not to let Clinton ruin America’s clout on the international stage.

Congress and "Lift and Strike"

Since Congressional support was not the only hurdle to an intervention in Bosnia, though it is important to understand why Clinton chose not to lobby for "Lift and Strike" early in his presidency, doing so does not paint a complete picture of Clinton’s decision to abandon the policy. Of greater impact was the message Congressional leaders sent in the days leading up to Clinton’s final decision to abandon intervention. These leaders understood that while presidents often receive credit in the court of public opinion for

²²² Sciolino, "Clinton on Serbs," 1 May 1993.

²²³ Sciolino, "Clinton on Serbs," 1 May 1993.

trying but failing to push controversial domestic legislation through the legislature, such an approach with foreign policy was promiscuous engagement. As Feaver explains:

In domestic policy, the President gets political credit for engaging issues even when he knows he cannot resolve them and cannot commit the resources needed to address them seriously. In foreign policy, engaging and failing is worse than not engaging at all... and can be politically lethal. The principle currency in foreign policy is... credibility ... An ineffective crime bill is harmless because criminals do not decide to commit crimes based on the credibility of the politicians who voted for the bill.²²⁴

This message was essential, because it exposed the essential weakness of Clinton's dedication to an intervention: saving the Bosnians was not a high policy priority. Further, a failed intervention put at risk the implementation of Clinton's domestic policy platform. Thus, while it is important to note that Congressional leaders raised the risks a failed intervention posed to Clinton's presidency, one must also consider that they gave "Lift and Strike" their support. Such considerations help to make clear the power of Clinton's domestic agenda in derailing a possible intervention.

²²⁴ Feaver, "Domestication," 6.

Section IV:
The Media and American Public Opinion

The news media and American public opinion also played important roles in Clinton's decision on his policy. First, the news media indirectly guided Clinton towards adopting the "Lift and Strike" policy during the 1992 campaign. In August 1992 journalists brought the existence of Serbian death camps to the attention of a stunned world, and in turn became highly critical of President Bush's muted policy towards the Serbs. This reporting, and the subsequent criticism of the Bush Administration's response to the destruction of Bosnia, opened the door for candidate Clinton's attack on Bush's Balkans policy. The final evolution of this campaign-time critique would formulate the framework of the "Lift and Strike" policy. Thus, the news media created the conditions in which Clinton chose to exploit a rare weakness in Bush's foreign policy record. As a result, one can find a direct link between the shocking exposure of the camps, the subsequently poor Bush Administration reaction, and the formulation of Clinton's over-expansive policy for the Balkans which, once in office and confronted with the realities of intervention, he would be forced to abandon. Second, many in the media failed to adequately understand the events in Bosnia, and overcompensated in their attempts to paint an impartial picture of the Balkan war. In turn, many issues which should have seemed more clear to actors influencing the Clinton Administration's Balkans policy became muddled. This failure to better educate the public may have both pushed public opinion away from intervention and allowed the Clinton Administration to recast its rhetorical description of the conflict by late spring 1993 to better match its reduced commitment to saving the Bosnians. Third, though public opinion tends to

restrict policy instead of determine it, analysis will suggest that by supporting multilateral intervention but strongly opposing unilateral intervention the American public played an important role in pushing the Clinton Administration away from "Lift and Strike."

Pushing Clinton Towards "Lift and Strike"

When Roy Gutman first reported on the "systematic slaughter" of Muslims and Croats by the Bosnian Serbs in his *Newsday* article "Death Camps," the response of the international community was that of shock and disbelief.²²⁵ Four days later, Britain's ITN negotiated access to the Serbian camps of Omarska and Trnopolje and captured video images of emaciated men caught behind barbed wire fences, evoking memories of cruelty not seen in Europe since the time of the Nazis. Both officials and journalists agreed that the images in the ITN video gave the story a power that it would have otherwise lacked, and the resulting reaction from other members of the media was intense.²²⁶

Faced with a barrage of questions as to what American policy would be in the face of the wanton abuse of human rights, the Bush Administration made the critical error of devoting energy not towards addressing the human rights abuses themselves but towards the political problems created by the ITN images and the Gutman story.²²⁷ Similar to the Clinton Administration's strategy months later, the Bush Administration initially acknowledged the camps, but officials carefully avoided casting the events in Bosnia as a genocide, an admission which, under international law, would have obliged

²²⁵ Vulliamy, *Seasons in Hell*, 118.

²²⁶ Strobel, *Late Breaking Foreign Policy*, 147.

²²⁷ Strobel, *Late Breaking Foreign Policy*, 147.

America to take action.²²⁸ “We do know from our reports of information similar to the press reports that the Serb forces are maintaining what they call detention centers... and we do have our own reports ... that there have been abuses and torture and killings taking place in those areas,” admitted State Department spokesman Richard Boucher in a press conference immediately after the publication of the Omarska and Trnopolje accounts.²²⁹ However, the Bush Administration, struggling to regain its falling popularity before the 1992 election, could afford no foreign intervention with Americans so deeply concerned about domestic issues, and thus Boucher’s admission was not followed by the announcement of a policy change. This quiet acquiescence to events in Bosnia enraged the journalists in attendance, some of whom filed fierce stories criticizing the Bush response. “I had rarely seen the State Department press corps – or what was left of it in August – so agitated,” said one observer.²³⁰

The Bush Administration’s response was attacked during Assistant Secretary of State for European and Canadian Affairs Thomas Niles’s Capitol Hill testimony the following day. Niles, reeling from calls for the Bush Administration to undertake substantive action against the Serbs, backed away from Boucher’s statement. According to Niles, the existence of the camps had not actually been confirmed, and there was little the US could immediately do to investigate the atrocities.²³¹ “We know there are camps and conditions at them are poor,” said one official familiar with the issue, “but we can’t substantiate systemic killings and won’t be able to anytime soon.”²³² This denial of the existence of camps already shown on televisions across the world greatly weakened the

²²⁸ Strobel, *Late Breaking Foreign Policy*, 150.

²²⁹ Don Oberdorfer, “State Department Backtracks on Atrocity Reports: Calls for Action on Serb Camps Rise,” *Washington Post* 5 August 1992: A1.

²³⁰ Strobel, *Late Breaking Foreign Policy*, 150.

²³¹ Krauss, “US Backs Away,” 5 August 1992.

²³² Krauss, “US Backs Away,” 5 August 1992.

aura of invincibility surrounding the Bush Administration's foreign policy prowess. Quickly sensing that in Bosnia Bush faced a crisis for which he had no solution, and thus had finally become vulnerable to foreign policy criticisms during an election year, Democrats attacked the administration's inconsistencies, and Niles's poor performance was replayed on every major news channel that evening. "Either Mr. Boucher is lying or you are lying, but you are both working for Jim Baker," Niles was told as he concluded his Congressional testimony.²³³

Clinton also recognized the opportunity Bush's weak response provided and quickly joined the attack, finally allowing the governor to score rare foreign policy points at the height of the 1992 campaign. These criticisms were designed to bolster Clinton's presidential campaign, and the result was the articulation of a strategy not easily compatible with the most important goals of his administration. Though the early framework for "Lift and Strike" succeeded in highlighting the timidity of the Bush Administration, it also created a level of expectation for action that Clinton would be unable to meet once in office.

To underscore the failure of the callous Bush strategy, Clinton compared the events in Bosnia to the Holocaust, and declared that those responsible must be punished.²³⁴ Such rhetoric was supported by policy proposals which marked a radical departure from Bush's hands-off Balkans approach. Clinton prodded Bush to show "real leadership" in the Balkans, and made clear that the US should use force to open the Serb camps and consider lifting the arms embargo on the former republics of Bosnia and

²³³ Krauss, "US Backs Away," 5 August 1992.

²³⁴ Krauss, "US Backs Away," 5 August 1992.

Croatia.²³⁵ Though Clinton had finally distanced himself from Bush on a key foreign policy issue which remained at the forefront of public debate, this decision came at a heavy cost: not only had Clinton made several policy promises which would engage the US in the conflict in the Balkans, he had made clear that he perceived the Serb action as “genocide,” which brought moral and legal obligations for the US to intervene.

The impact of the *Newsday* article and ITN’s reporting cannot be ignored. First, they revealed the reality of Bosnia’s horror to a stunned world, changing completely outsiders’ conception of the conflict. Even more importantly for this research, these reports shifted the debate over American policy for the region, and, subsequently, the landscape of the 1992 campaign. For the Bush Administration, the reports made its policy of nonintervention untenable.²³⁶ Further, Bush’s response to these reports and the subsequently poor media reaction to the attempted denial of the camps by Thomas Niles left Bush vulnerable to intense criticism from all corners, especially from Clinton. Indirectly, the media had allowed the Democrats to attack Bush’s greatest strength: his foreign policy record.

By maximizing that opportunity to its fullest, Clinton also found himself deeply influenced by these media reports. Driven by media images from Bosnia and focused on winning the 1992 campaign, Clinton used the opportunity the media afforded him by publishing the reports and subsequently attacking Bush’s response. Clinton had been searching for a way to showcase his skills in the foreign policy arena while simultaneously weakening Bush’s record. The media allowed him that chance, and in

²³⁵ For Sarajevo airport, see R.W. Apple Jr., B. Drummond Ayers Jr., Thomas L. Friedman, Steven Greenhouse, and Gwen Ifill, 28 June 1992. For detention camps and arms embargo, see Gwen Ifill, “Clinton Takes Aggressive Stance on Role of US in Bosnia Conflict,” *The New York Times* 10 August 1992: A8.

²³⁶ Power, *A Problem From Hell*, 268.

doing so Clinton backed many of the policy suggestions offered by the press, a strategy which dovetailed nicely with his hope to harm Bush as much as help his own campaign. However, by designing his approach for maximum value on the campaign trail, Clinton articulated a strategy which, though successful in highlighting the weakness of the Bush Administration's Balkans policy, created expectations for Balkan activism which Clinton would spend the next years attempting to dampen. Thus, one may suggest that by placing President Bush in a vulnerable position, and affording Clinton a rare opportunity to criticize the strong foreign policy record of his opponent, the media images ignited the original spark which pushed Clinton towards articulating "Lift and Strike." This strategy would be extremely successful in the campaign, but conversely so once Clinton entered office. Clinton had responded to media outcry by championing an activist policy. As Strobe suggests, it truly was a media induced policy change.²³⁷

The Media Muddies the Waters

Though the media may have ignited Clinton's support of "Lift and Strike," it simultaneously also influenced actors, primarily the American public, to slow the administration's drive towards Balkan intervention. Difficulties in critically interpreting the importance of Balkan history, an over-reliance on partisan sources, the need to place the complicated events in Bosnia into a framework which could be easily understood by the general public, and a determination to provide "balanced" reporting affected the way in which the media portrayed the war in Bosnia. Instead of allowing general public to reach its own conclusions about the events in Bosnia, the media portrayed many concepts with questionable accuracy, reinforcing Balkan stereotypes, and clouded rather than

²³⁷ Strobe, Late Breaking Foreign Policy, 218.

informed the public's critical understanding of the war. The media's failure is important: its portrayal of events in Bosnia could have contributed to the American public's perception that an intervention in Bosnia would become a quagmire, and that each of the region's ethnic groups were equally to blame for Yugoslavia's dissolution. As a result, the American public had a strong aversion to unilateral intervention, a key factor in Clinton's failure to implement "Lift and Strike."

In his work The U.S. Media and Yugoslavia, 1991-1995, James J. Sadkovich undertook a comprehensive examination of the media's role in the Yugoslav wars and suggested that, though it did become more sympathetic to the Bosnian position as the war dragged on, during this period the media often failed to understand and report the conflict's most important nuances, ultimately making its portrayal of the fighting inaccurate. Many factors, including the need for journalists unfamiliar with recent Balkan history to meet competitive deadlines, and the dearth of unbiased sources, caused much of the reporting on Bosnia to be done without the sorts of stringent checks journalists typically use to validate the accuracy of their reporting. As Sadkovich suggests:

[The media] regularly reported information without checking it... repeated partisan accounts, and then ignored other explanations. Because most sources were Serbian politicians and military leaders or Western officials and officers, reporting tended to be biased. Efforts at historical explanation only made things worse, because most reporters lacked the time and knowledge to construct nonpartisan historical accounts. Instead they relied on a few works in English, notably those by West, Djilas, Glenny, and Kaplan – all biased towards Serbs or against Muslims and Croats.... Reporters uncritically repeated claims that the US had no vital interest in the Balkans, that there was no reasonable chance of success should outside military forces be sent to Bosnia.²³⁸

²³⁸ James J. Sadkovich, The U.S. Media and Yugoslavia, 1991-1995 (London: Praeger: 1998) 39.

Early conclusions formed from these sources created the foundation for many incorrect assumptions recycled by commentators and news anchors over the next several years. These included oft-repeated notions that the peoples of Yugoslavia were nothing more than “atavistic tribes,” that Serb atrocities could be justified as preventative retaliation for past and possible future Muslim and Croat aggression, that the conflict constituted a “civil war,” that the fact that Serb guerrilla fighters had successfully withstood attacks from Hitler’s fiercest fighters during World War II signaled that modern militaries would meet the same fate, and that America had no national interest in finding a solution to the fighting.

Further media failures resulted from attempts to compensate for ignorance by remaining even-handed while portraying the various factions fighting in the Balkans.²³⁹ However, as Sadkovich and others have suggested, “to not take sides was to eschew accuracy.”²⁴⁰ In that the media and Western intellectuals refused to take more overt efforts to assign blame for the destruction of Bosnia, they confused victim and aggressor, thus allowing proponents of neo-isolationism to argue that there had been guilt on all sides without differentiating war crimes from genocide, or weighing the degree of guilt of the various crimes.²⁴¹ Further, the media weighed historical events too heavily when explaining the roots of the contemporary conflict. For example, daily accounts of Serbian atrocities in *The New York Times* were often accompanied by short recaps of Croatia’s World War II crimes against the Serbs. These sort of rationalizations employed the same intergenerational guilt that the Serbs used in their propaganda, and only strengthened the American public’s conception that the Balkans were a “morass of

²³⁹ Power, *A Problem From Hell*, 268.

²⁴⁰ Sadkovich, *The U.S. Media*, 126.

²⁴¹ Meštrović and Cushman, “Introduction,” 23.

ancient hatreds” where no solution could be found to stop the fighting.²⁴² Treating accused Serbian war criminals with sympathy and deference while allowing them a forum to make their arguments directly to the American people during television interviews only reinforced the notion that the culpability for destroying Bosnia was spread evenly among the ethnic groups.²⁴³ Even David Binder, who filed many important stories on the Bosnia conflict for *The New York Times*, refused to criticize indicted war criminal Ratko Mladic before there was greater proof of his guilt, calling him “professional.”²⁴⁴ As a result, with few journalists willing or able to assign guilt to any of the Balkan parties, much of the American public felt a partisan intervention was inappropriate and thus assumed that a negotiated settlement between the parties was the only path to peace in the region.²⁴⁵

While the effect of this inaccuracy was to obscure the public’s perception of the Balkan conflict, this was certainly not the intention of many of the journalists reporting in Bosnia. The inaccuracy resulted as much from the Bosnians’ failure to report their version of events quickly as it did from the fact that the Serbs, inasmuch as they controlled most of Bosnia and all of the rump Yugoslavia, had the quickest and most direct access to news outlets. Thus, it was often the Serbian version of events which first found its way into the public domain through spokesmen like Karadzic and Mladic.²⁴⁶ Also, as most journalists were heavily restricted to Sarajevo, they tended to have greater access to information on events in the besieged city than on the fighting in the

²⁴² Meštrović and Cushman, “Introduction,” 25.

²⁴³ Meštrović and Cushman, “Introduction,” 24-5.

²⁴⁴ David Binder, *New York Review of Books*, 21 December 1995: 85.

²⁴⁵ Meštrović and Cushman, “Introduction,” 24-5.

²⁴⁶ Sadkovich, *The U.S. Media*, 81.

countryside.²⁴⁷ As a result, journalists often reported with sympathy and greater accuracy towards the Bosnian position when covering events in Sarajevo, only to repeat Serb reports of Muslim atrocities when describing events in the countryside secondhand, further contributing to the American public's perception that culpability for the destruction of Bosnia was spread evenly among the parties. Unable to independently confirm accounts of atrocities by both sides, many journalists resorted to disseminating information almost strictly through the passive voice, or repeating reports that the obvious slaughter of Muslims by Serbs may have actually been the work of Muslims – an oft-repeated theory periodically reinforced by UN officials wishing to deflect blame for having not intervened during a genocide.²⁴⁸

As a result of these patterns of reporting, much of the American public remained confused and ambivalent about the fighting in the Balkans more than a year after the conflict began.²⁴⁹ In turn, this confusion and ambivalence had the important effect of reducing popular support for a unilateral intervention in Bosnia. The failure to gain public support for such an intervention is essential to understanding the Clinton Administration's decision to abandon the "Lift and Strike" policy by May 1993.

American Public Opinion, the Media, and Unilateral Intervention

V. O. Key, a political theorist who considered the impact of American public opinion on foreign policy more than forty years ago, likened the views of the public to a "system of dykes" and suggested that although these attitudes did not themselves set

²⁴⁷ Strobel, *Late Breaking Foreign Policy*, 212.

²⁴⁸ Sadkovich, *The U.S. Media*, 85.

²⁴⁹ Richard Sobel, "Trends: United States Intervention in Bosnia," *Public Opinion Quarterly* 62.2 (1998) 250

policy, public opinion did tend to guide and constrain the policymaking process.²⁵⁰ Other scholars reached a similar conclusion when they suggested that while mass opinion may not cause policymakers to choose a specific policy, it does set the parameters of acceptable alternatives by "ruling out" one or more policies.²⁵¹ In terms of America's Bosnia policy, other scholars were more specific, arguing that the American public constrained, but did not set, America's intervention policy.²⁵²

The work of these theorists is instructive when considering the impact of American public opinion on the Clinton Administration's "Lift and Strike" policy. While American public opinion was never the primary determinant in setting the administration's policy, it constrained the parameters under which the US could have intervened in the Balkans, in that while many Americans supported a multilateral intervention in Bosnia, there was never strong support for unilateral American action in the Balkans. This prevailing reluctance for unilateral intervention, partly the product of the media's portrayal of the Balkan conflict, was powerful deterrent against intervention.

Richard Sobel analyzed various public opinion polls, conducted throughout the war in Bosnia, of Americans' attitudes toward a possible intervention in the Balkans, and revealed several telling statistics. At no time in 1993 was there a majority support for unilateral intervention, with no more than 27% of those surveyed supporting such action at any one time, and with the average percentage far closer to 12-15%.²⁵³ However, when suggestions of multilateral intervention were made, support climbed to over 60% in

²⁵⁰ V. O. Key, Jr. *Public Opinion and American Democracy*. (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1961), as cited in Sobel, *Impact*, 1.

²⁵¹ Douglas C. Foyle, *Counting the Public In: Presidents, Public Opinion, and Foreign Policy*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999) 7.

²⁵² Sobel, *Impact*, 5.

²⁵³ Sobel, "Trends," 264.

most polls.²⁵⁴ This probably has much to do with the fact that more than 80% of Americans surveyed felt that primary responsibility for stopping the conflict lay with the Europeans and the UN, and that if the Europeans refused to participate in an intervention, the US should not take unilateral military action to stop the fighting.²⁵⁵ In other words, Americans tended to be supportive of intervention in conjunction with the European allies or the NATO alliance, but ambivalent towards unilateral action.

If one searches deeper into the surveys of American opinion, statistics suggest a relationship between the failure of the American media to paint a complete and consistently accurate picture of the events in the Balkans, and the American public's resistance to unilateral intervention. First, when questioned whether the US should intervene to stop the "civil war" as opposed to the "fighting" in the Balkans, a greater than 20% margin opposed intervention in a "civil war."²⁵⁶ The media often incorrectly referred to the conflict in the Balkans as a "civil war," and as these surveys showed that a large number of respondents supported an intervention to stop "fighting" but rejected the notion of intervening in a "civil war," it seems that many Americans may have been swayed away from intervention by the media's portrayal of the conflict as a "civil war." The media's consistent portrayal of the Serbs as "invincible guerrilla fighters" also may have had a strong effect on many Americans opinions of an intervention. While a majority of respondents supported the use of American troops for use in a multilateral force designed to protect the delivery of food and humanitarian supplies to besieged towns, that number fell more than 20% when the wording was changed to using the

²⁵⁴ Sobel, "Trends," 267.

²⁵⁵ Sobel, "Trends," 264.

²⁵⁶ These two surveys were conducted within one week of each other in April 1993. Sobel, "Trends" 268-270.

military to “stop the Serbs” from blocking the delivery of those supplies.²⁵⁷ In another examination, more than 60% of Americans surveyed believed that the roots of the conflict in Bosnia stretched “hundreds of years” into the past.²⁵⁸ Even more troubling for proponents of a unilateral intervention against the Serbs, 45% believed that no one ethnic group could be directly blamed for the destruction of Bosnia, though more than 40% also held the Serbs responsible.²⁵⁹

These findings suggest that had the conflict seemed less intractable, had the Serbs seemed less militarily invincible, and had more Americans held the Serbs directly responsible for the carnage in the Balkans, there may have been greater support for unilateral intervention on the side of the Bosnians. With Americans being consistently told that the roots of the conflict stretched far into the past, without a consensus of opinion that the Serbs were culpable, with the notion of the Serbs fighter as being “invincible” oft-repeated by pundits and commentators, the waters were sufficiently muddied to slow a consensus of public opinion towards unilateral intervention. The media’s portrayal of the conflict showed the Balkans as a region in where war, hatred, and atrocity were pandemic, and no outside party could assume to bring peace. And even though Americans consistently supported a multilateral intervention in the Balkans, America’s European allies would never support such action; thus without overwhelming support for a unilateral American intervention, Clinton found himself restricted by public opinion in the very way V.O. Key had suggested almost thirty years earlier.

²⁵⁷ Sobel, “Trends” 264, 267.

²⁵⁸ Steven Kull and Clay Ramsey, “US Public Attitudes on US Involvement in Bosnia,” Paper presented at Program on International Policy Attitudes, University of Maryland, May 4, 1994. www.pipa.org.

²⁵⁹ Kull and Ramsey, “US Public Attitudes,” www.pipa.org.

Clinton and the Power of Public Opinion

A direct link can be found between the American public's strong distaste for a unilateral Balkan intervention and the Clinton Administration's eventual decision to abandon the "Lift and Strike" policy. As was explained in Chapter 3, the stance of America's allies with troops in UNPROFOR was clear: any move by the US to lift the arms embargo against the Bosnians followed by air strikes against the Serbs would result in the withdrawal of the European troops stationed in Bosnia. This action would, in effect, put the US in the position of embarking on a unilateral intervention; a policy for which the American people had clearly had no stomach. Further, as was explained in Chapter 4, the stance of Congressional leaders was that any American intervention would have to be successful and that failed foreign adventurism would not smooth the passage of Clinton's expansive domestic policy agenda. With the combination of these factors, American public opinion became a key component of the Clinton Administration's decision to abandon "Lift and Strike." If Europe withdrew following the commencement of "Lift and Strike," America would be embarking on the exact sort of unilateral intervention which its people did not support. While Clinton pollster Stan Greenberg felt that Americans would initially rally around the president's decision, even in the case of a unilateral intervention, a failure to end the conflict quickly could be disastrous to Clinton's standing.²⁶⁰ Dovetailed with the Congressional stance that any intervention must be successful, and that Clinton could not retreat following a failure to calm the conflict, it was quite possible that Clinton's decision to embark on the "Lift and Strike" policy could engage the US in a war from which it would be difficult to withdraw; the very sort of quagmire that skeptics of a Balkan intervention feared. A decision that so

²⁶⁰ Melanson, American Foreign Policy, 258.

greatly risked launching the US into a complicated foreign war from which it could not easily escape seemed politically foolish, especially while most American's seemed to approve of Clinton's handling of America's Balkans policy during the first months of his presidency.²⁶¹ American public opinion had acted as a "series of dykes," limiting the options available to America's policy makers. However, nothing would limit America's intervention in the Balkans more than Clinton's determination to initiate the most expansive domestic agenda since the New Deal.

²⁶¹ Sobel, "Trends," 263.

Chapter 4 – The Office of the President

Bosnia and the Risk to Clinton's Policy Goals

This chapter examines how the prioritization of Clinton's domestic policy goals contributed to the decision to abandon "Lift and Strike." While a levels of analysis approach often uses its most focused examination to explore how an individual's psychology, personality, and belief structures influence a decision, this work uses this chapter to understand how Clinton's domestic policy goals and the genesis of his Bosnia stance led to the abandonment of intervention. Though psychology and belief structures in some manner inform every decision a leader makes, at its core the abandonment of "Lift and Strike" was influenced most not by personality, but after a consideration of policy. Thus, to complete this understanding, this work uses this chapter in an untraditional manner to focus on how Clinton's policy goals and the stances of the other actors examined influenced the administration's decision.

It shows how Clinton's campaign strategy and domestic policy priorities influenced the formulation of both his Bosnia policy and his decision to abandon "Lift and Strike." Each of these factors would play a major role in determining how his administration would approach the conflict in the Balkans, but in the end it would be the prioritization of domestic primacy which would do the most to derail the policy. In order to prove his ability in the foreign policy arena, Clinton articulated a more activist Bosnia policy than President Bush during the 1992 campaign, but was not prepared to execute the strategy when the true costs of intervention were revealed. The upcoming Congressional struggles over Clinton's ambitious domestic policy agenda required the

entirety of his presidential political capital, and thus he could not use his influence to gain the public's support for a risky multilateral Balkans intervention. The cost of the "Lift and Strike" policy only increased when the UNPROFOR threatened to abandon Bosnia if the US lifted the arms embargo and bombed the Serbs, as America would be left with unilateral responsibility for calming the Balkan conflict. This outcome would have put Clinton at odds with both the US Congress and the public, neither of which supported a unilateral intervention into Bosnia. Such conflict would have sunk Clinton's domestic agenda, and possibly his presidency, as support from these two groups was absolutely vital for Clinton to achieve his domestic policy goals.

Clinton, Bosnia, and the 1992 Campaign

Clinton's criticism of the Bush Administration's Balkans policy during the 1992 presidential campaign was instrumental in formulating his administration's initial stance on American policy for Bosnia. Under attack from Bush Administration officials who claimed that Clinton lacked the vision and experience to lead American policy in the foreign arena, Clinton used Bush's weak response to the reports of Serbian ethnic cleansing in August 1992 as an opportunity to articulate a stronger Balkans policy. However, created during the heat of a presidential campaign, the precursor to the "Lift and Strike" policy was the result of overheated campaign rhetoric, and created unrealistic expectations for an activist policy. In articulating his activist policy for the Balkans, Clinton would break two of his predecessor's most important guiding principles: do not make the US responsible for a problem it cannot solve and make no threat that the US

cannot execute.²⁶²

The Bush Administration attempted to raise doubts about Clinton's ability to manage America's foreign policy throughout much of the 1992 campaign, adopting a similar tactic to the one used against Michael Dukakis in 1988, though the pace of these criticisms quickened once Ross Perot withdrew from the race.²⁶³ Early criticisms of Clinton's statements on Bosnia claimed he was "a closet dove masquerading as a hawk, and that his experience in world affairs is limited to breakfast at the International House of Pancakes."²⁶⁴ Prominent Republican strategist Eddie Mahe would mock that Clinton has "zero, and I underscore zero" background in foreign policy.²⁶⁵ His detractors scoffed at his credentials for formulating a post-Cold War foreign policy, and criticized his viewpoint's broad combination of oft-competing ideologies, from idealism to pragmatism, from internationalism to protectionism, claiming the governor's foreign policy was a combination of these differing ideas "because he wanted to be all things to all men and had not really made up his mind."²⁶⁶ Every Democratic presidential candidate in Clinton's adult life, save Jimmy Carter, had been defeated in large part because they "were perceived to be unwilling to use force to confront the Soviets in various regions around the globe and because they were too willing to cut the military budget."²⁶⁷ Thus, in order to defeat a Republican president with a strong foreign policy record, it was necessary for Clinton to show his capacity in the foreign arena, prove that

262 David C. Gompert, "The United States and Yugoslavia's Wars," Richard H. Ullman (ed.), The World and Yugoslavia's Wars, (New York: Council on Foreign Relations Press, 1996) 138.

263 Rosenthal, "Clinton Attacked," 27 July 1992.

264 Thomas L. Friedman, "Clinton's Foreign Policy Agenda Reaches Across Broad Spectrum," The New York Times 4 October 1992: A1.

265 Robin Tower, "Arkansas Chief Seeks to Lead Democrats to Middle Ground," The New York Times 14 August 1991: A14.

266 Friedman, "Clinton's Foreign Policy Agenda," 4 October 1992.

267 Friedman, "Clinton's Foreign Policy Agenda," 4 October 1992.

he was not a dove unwilling to commit troops to combat, and reveal unnoticed weaknesses in Bush's foreign policies, hopefully undermining his opponent's major area of strength. In August 1992, following the international outcry resulting from the Bush Administration's muted response to media reports of Nazi-style camps in Bosnia, Clinton took aim at Bush's policy for the Balkans, articulated a notably tougher American approach to the Balkans.

"If the horrors of the Holocaust taught us anything, it is the high cost of remaining silent and paralyzed in the face of genocide. We must discover who is responsible for these actions and take steps to bring them to justice for these crimes against humanity," Clinton would announce.²⁶⁸ Such rhetoric was supported by policy proposals which marked a radical departure from Bush's hands-off Balkans approach. Clinton prodded Bush to show "real leadership" in the Balkans, and called for American and European navy ships stationed in the Adriatic to search vessels headed for Serbia which might be carrying contraband.²⁶⁹ As well, straying far from the Bush Administration's policy, Clinton suggested the use of military might, including American air power, against the Serbs. "The US should take the lead in seeking UN Security Council authorization for air strikes against those who are attacking the relief effort. The US should be prepared to lend appropriate military support to that operation. Air and naval forces adequate to carry out these operations should be visibly in position."²⁷⁰ Clinton, who had already made clear that if elected he would be willing to commit forces to a multilateral operation to "shoot its way in" to the Sarajevo airport to ensure the delivery of relief supplies to the beleaguered city, would later make clear that he believed the US should use military

268 Krauss, "US Backs Away," 5 August 1992.

269 Rosenthal, "Clinton Attacked," 27 July 1992.

270 Rosenthal, "Clinton Attacked," 27 July 1992.

force to open the Serbian detention camps and consider lifting the arms embargo on the former republics of Bosnia and Croatia.²⁷¹ The Bush Administration attempted to handle these attacks by painting Clinton as a foreign policy neophyte unfit to manage the complex issues of the international arena. "It sounds like the kind of reckless approach that indicates he better do some more homework on foreign policy. It's clear he's unaware of the political complications in Yugoslavia," White House spokesman Marlin Fitzwater would say.²⁷²

In the short term space of the 1992 political campaign, Clinton's attacks were successful, as he convinced many voters to be what the Republicans had long maintained he was not: presidential in both the domestic and foreign arenas. Nevertheless, over the longer term, Clinton's attacks on Bush's record would set dangerous expectations of quick and decisive action in the Balkans he would be unable to meet. Even the Clinton Administration's first pronouncements on American policy for the Balkans made clear that no calculation of the costs of intervention had been made. When asked to explain the specific steps the administration would take to create a Balkans policy which reflected Clinton's tough campaign rhetoric, Warren Christopher could say only that in Bosnia he had inherited "one of the most difficult foreign policy problems that can be imagined," and that he was still "gathering data." One commentator scoffed that it was as if Churchill had entered office in 1940 announcing that the German problem was more complex than had been anticipated.²⁷³ In fact, as complicated as the Balkans question was, the greatest challenge Christopher faced was rectifying the gap between the policies

271 For Sarajevo airport, see Apple et al., "Excerpts from Interview with Clinton," 28 June 1992. For detention camps and arms embargo, see Ifill, "Clinton Takes Aggressive Stance," 10 August 1992.

272 Rosenthal, "Clinton Attacked," 27 July 1992.

273 Jonathan Clarke, "Rhetoric Before Reality," *Foreign Affairs* 74.5 (1995) 6.

articulated by the candidate on the campaign trail and the policies enacted by the president in office. In the case of America's Bosnia policy, the gap was large, and affected the administration's willingness to intervene in the Balkans through the first months of 1993.

Derailing "Lift and Strike"

To analyze the role that Clinton played in the derailment of the "Lift and Strike" policy as the final arbitrator of any American foreign policy, one must understand how he viewed both his mandate and the risk that a failed Bosnia policy could pose to his domestic policy agenda. In turn, one may examine how the promise by America's allies to withdraw their UNPROFOR troops and the low Congressional and public support for a unilateral intervention combined to threaten that domestic agenda. This allows a complete understanding on Clinton's decision to abandon the policy.

Alleging early during the 1992 campaign that, "We have a president who last month met with the leaders of 21 nations, including Micronesia and Liechtenstein, and wouldn't even meet with Republicans to discuss the economy," Clinton made clear which issue he thought would resonate with voters most strongly.²⁷⁴ Thus, Clinton took his election as a mandate to devote most of his energy to domestic needs, which he saw as the greatest threat to America's security.²⁷⁵

Victory in the 1992 election also reaffirmed Clinton's inclination that presidents rarely benefited from even the most splendid foreign policy victories, as Bush's approval

²⁷⁴ Robin Toner, "5 Democratic Hopefuls Mount Attack on Bush" The New York Times 3 November 1991: A32.

²⁷⁵ Seyom Brown, The Faces of Power: Constancy and Change in United States Foreign Policy from Truman to Clinton 2nd ed. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994) 581.

ratings fell throughout his long string of foreign policy successes.²⁷⁶ Clinton was of the opinion that no matter how much attention a president gave to foreign policy, failure in the domestic arena would spell political doom.²⁷⁷ More importantly, he also believed that he had learned from Lyndon Johnson's experience with Vietnam and Jimmy Carter's with Iran that no matter how successful one's domestic policy, foreign disasters would seal a president's fate.²⁷⁸ His advisers and fellow Democrats shared his view. Clinton's renowned political adviser Dick Morris warned him of embarking on a risky Bosnia policy: "You don't want to be LBJ and risk domestic policy for foreign policy."²⁷⁹ Senator Tim Wirth (D-CO) cautioned that, "the best liberal hope in a generation," could be dragged down by a failed intervention in the Balkans.²⁸⁰ Even Arthur Schlesinger had counseled Clinton in the op-ed pages of *The Wall Street Journal* that failure in Bosnia could pose grave dangers to his domestic agenda.²⁸¹ Such cautionary messages only reinforced Clinton's natural inclination to preserve his political capital for his domestic policy, as voters rarely reward foreign policy successes.²⁸² Such fears that a failed foreign policy initiative could derail an expansive domestic agenda represent the Clinton strand of the Vietnam Syndrome, and owe much to the legacy of Lyndon Johnson's Vietnam induced downfall.

Thus when one considers the low electoral mandate which resulted from the three way 1992 election results, Clinton's expansive domestic agenda, his perception of the risk-reward ratio with which voters rewarded successful foreign policy ventures, and the

²⁷⁶ Tim Hames, "Searching for the New World Order: The Clinton Administration and Foreign Policy in 1993," *International Relations* 12.1 (1994) 112.

²⁷⁷ Hames, "Searching," 112.

²⁷⁸ Hames, "Searching," 112.

²⁷⁹ Power, *A Problem From Hell*, 306.

²⁸⁰ Allin, *Adelphi Paper*, 17.

²⁸¹ Drew, *Edge*, 158.

²⁸² Feaver, "Domestication," 4.

legacy of Vietnam in Democratic policy circles, prioritizing Bosnia over the planks of his domestic policy platform seemed a poor policy choice. This accounts for why Clinton did not tackle the Bosnia issue during the first days of his presidency.²⁸³ While his stance on the importance of foreign policy contributed to the abandonment of the "Lift and Strike" policy, to understand the decision completely, one must focus closely at the nexus between the Bosnia policy stances of America's allies, Congress, and American public opinion.

The importance of Clinton's domestic policy agenda has already been reviewed, as has the tenuous position in which he found himself in his dealings with Congress, whose support for his domestic agenda was critical. Further, it has also been shown that the American public, while sympathetic to the Bosnian cause, was unwilling to countenance a unilateral Balkans intervention. The allies had made clear their position, both before and after Christopher's failed trip to Europe's capitals, that any decision to unilaterally lift the arms embargo and use air power against the Serbs would result in the immediate withdrawal of their peacekeeping troops, leaving the US with sole responsibility for calming a conflict many military planners predicted could mire the American military in a Vietnam-styled military quagmire. Finally, while Congressional leaders would eventually give their guarded support for the "Lift and Strike" policy, they had also made clear that once engaged, the US military could neither fail nor withdraw.

In the nexus between these factors, one finds a clear understanding of why the Clinton Administration abandoned its proposal to arm the Bosnians and use air power

²⁸³ While he did assign his foreign policy triad with the task of performing a full-scale review of America's Balkans policy upon entering office, he did not take part in this review, nor did he spur on his advisers when no new direction could be charted. It would be more than two months before Clinton made any substantive policy pronouncement for the Balkans, and not until late May before he would attempt to redirect Western policy with the failed attempt to gain allied support for "Lift and Strike."

against the Serbs. The stances of the allies, Congress, and the public, combined with the primacy of Clinton's domestic policy, are the most essential factors in understanding the abandonment of the policy. Had the Clinton Administration initiated its "Lift and Strike" policy, there is little doubt that France and Britain would have withdrawn their own troops, as neither of country had a vested national interest in assuring Bosnian peace, and had deployed their troops in order to maintain the face of a united EC foreign policy. The US would then be given sole responsibility for calming a conflict using a strategy which most Pentagon planners had predicted would fail, in a region which threatened to entangle the US military in a quagmire. Further, the US would have embarked on a unilateral intervention against the wishes of American public opinion, whose support Clinton, who lacked an electoral mandate, desperately needed to buttress his attempts to press his domestic policy through Congress. Congress, whose support for Clinton's domestic reforms was even more essential, had already made clear that it would not allow America's credibility to be tarnished by a withdrawal from Bosnia without victory, even if this position granted America unilateral responsibility for bringing peace to the Balkans. Further, if the US was either forced to withdraw prematurely or was mired in a military quagmire, Clinton's political credibility and standing in Congress, both of which would be essential for pushing his domestic agenda through the legislative body, would be negated.

Clinton would then have ignored the lessons of the previous two Democratic administrations, both of which saw their domestic policy agendas derailed by a foreign policy failure. He would have inherited responsibility for a conflict in the Balkans, against an enemy whose fanaticism and fighting skill would later be discredited, but who

at that moment enjoyed an almost mythical portrayal in the Western media as an invincible fighting force. The deployment would not have enjoyed support of a military which was already distrustful and contemptuous of Clinton, and with whom a positive working relationship would be almost impossible with the poor appointment of Aspin to the office of secretary. Such a deployment would have also been an expensive luxury that a president, whose entire campaign had centered around economic renewal, could not afford.

Thus, taken together, these factors suggested that a failed intervention put Clinton's domestic agenda at grave risk. Already defeated by Congress over a policy proposal, gays in the military, which was relatively unimportant to the administration's broader goals, Clinton had also seen his attempts at passing his stimulus package through Congress thwarted. On the horizon for a president whose entire campaign and expertise centered around domestic goals were the three greatest, and perhaps most controversial, aspects of his policy agenda: the budget package, NAFTA, and health care. His standing in Congress was weak upon his inauguration, and the failures over gays in the military and the stimulus package, combined with the successive embarrassments over his illegal-nanny-hiring attorney general appointees, only further eroded his standing with the body. A unilateral failure in the Balkans would have so eroded Clinton's popularity with the public, in essence disconnecting the "transmission belt" between a president's popularity and his legislative clout in Congress, that his expansive domestic agenda would have been grounded before he had made any substantive attempts to push it through the legislature. Even without an unpopular Balkans intervention, Clinton failed to pass his health care proposal, and while he succeeded in pushing both NAFTA and the budget

package through Congress, he did so only by a razor sharp margin and after an intensive lobbying effort, the granting of political favors, and, in the case of NAFTA, over a large uprising from within his own party. In essence, if Clinton had initiated the "Lift and Strike" policy, unless there had been a quick Serb capitulation (which, ironically, considering the dramatic events of the summer of 1995, actually seems to have been a distinct possibility) a failure in the Balkans really would have derailed Clinton's domestic agenda. In fact, after comparing the support both Carter and Johnson enjoyed in Congress and the popularity of their respective domestic agendas with their Democratic bases to Clinton's deficiencies in these areas, one may conclude that a foreign policy crisis could have made Clinton's fall even more meteoric than his predecessors'. Considering the damage that a foreign policy had on their agendas, one can only imagine the effect of a disastrous Bosnia policy on Clinton's agenda.

Thus Clinton's domestic agenda was the greatest impediment to plans to intervene in the Balkans. While Congress, the Pentagon, the allies, and public opinion contributed to the final decision to abandon "Lift and Strike," none actually acted directly to discourage the administration's policy. Instead, they increased the risk a failed Bosnia policy could pose to the domestic agenda, and it is only because of the primacy of Clinton's domestic platform that this risk in turn stalled plans for intervention. For example, the allies did not threaten to defend the Serbs militarily, they merely threatened to withdraw their troops if intervention occurred. It was the cost of an unpopular unilateral intervention which gave the allied policy such weight in Clinton's decision-making calculus. As well, the administration was not limited by the bipartisan group of Congressional leaders who gave their tentative support to "Lift and Strike" in May 1993.

Instead, the administration limited itself when Congress made the costs of a failed intervention clear, prioritizing fulfillment of its domestic agenda over Balkan intervention. While each of these actors had a strong effect on the administration's eventual decision, that effect was predicated on the prioritization of the domestic agenda. One can only imagine that had had a similar threat been made over NAFTA, Clinton would have accepted the risk in light of the administration's priorities.

Finally, for all of the damage America's failures in the Balkans would cause to its standing during the first years of Clinton's presidency, and for all of the risk the failure to quell the fighting in the Balkans would eventually pose to Clinton's foreign policy legacy, and, indeed, to his Presidency, when one considers the genesis of Clinton's tough rhetoric on Bosnia in terms of his domestic policy agenda, the reasoning for the decision to abandon "Lift and Strike" is even more clear. Made in the heat of the 1992 presidential campaign, the motivation for Clinton's tough Balkans policy was first and foremost to act as a foil for Bush's strong foreign policy legacy. The purpose of that foil was to strengthen Clinton's standing so that he could strengthen his candidacy, become elected, and proceed to work on America's domestic policy. Thus, much like the European decision to deploy its UNPROFOR troops in defense of European unity, the genesis of Clinton's activist Bosnia policy owed more to domestic and electoral considerations than the formulation of a sound foreign policy. It is unsurprising that with the first signs of danger, the Europeans threatened to withdraw UNPROFOR, and in the earliest sign that "Lift and Strike" risked the domestic agenda, Clinton abandoned the effort to push it forward. Clinton had run for president on a platform of domestic renewal, risking that agenda to press a risky foreign policy initiative which had been

originally designed to bolster his candidacy so that he may one day attempt to initiate that domestic agenda would have lacked all logic. As a result, the "Lift and Strike" was abandoned for more than two years, until NATO revived aspects of it, with great success one might add, two years later.

Conclusion

Employing a levels of analysis approach allows a unique, and arguably more complete, view of the administration's policy shift. While Clinton's domestic policy primacy was the most important influence on his plans to intervene in Bosnia, through their various connections to the administration's domestic agenda and America's foreign policy apparatus each of the other actors studied played a part in pushing the administration away from "Lift and Strike." As a result, without examining the various other actors which influenced the president, it would have been impossible to understand how Clinton's domestic agenda played such a large role in determining his foreign policy. An uneasy cohabitation of a strong domestic agenda and an Balkans intervention is not automatic. It is through the levels of analysis approach that the connections between the risk Bosnia posed to Clinton's domestic goals and an intervention in the Balkans is made clear.

Clinton had run on a platform promising to focus on American domestic policy, but had also made clear his plans to intervene in the Balkans. Had he entered office announcing his determination to proceed in both directions, there is little reason to believe that this decision would have surprised the American public. Both policies would have been consistent with his intentions articulated during the campaign. However, Clinton's presidency began with misstep after misstep, empowering critics in both the Congress and Pentagon to resist various aspects of his agenda. It became clear that passing that domestic platform would require a great deal of direct presidential attention. This fact alone would make a difficult Balkans intervention less desirable, but it was only after the true costs, and risks, of intervention became clear that saving the Bosnians was

no longer an important priority.

While it was Clinton and his dedication to the domestic agenda which would act as the final factor derailing "Lift and Strike," it is important to understand that a Balkans intervention did not threaten the agenda *per se*. The other actors studied in this work threatened the domestic agenda in that their various stances on intervention, combined with the inherent risks in any military operation, promised to make conditions difficult for the passage of the domestic agenda if intervention went failed. Considering the extreme skepticism of the Pentagon experts who testified in Congress about the probability that "Lift and Strike" would succeed, it is clear why the administration felt intervention to be such a risk.

Each of these actors increased the risk a failed intervention could pose to the domestic agenda. Congress was already a difficult partner for Clinton. He had no natural policy coalition on Capitol Hill, and no member of Congress felt they owed him his or her position in government. The bungled honeymoon period had already shown legislators the ease of resisting the Clinton agenda. When Congressional leaders later gave their guarded blessing to "Lift and Strike," they also made the costs to the president's stature clear were an intervention to fail. It would be hard to imagine Clinton would have remained an effective policy entrepreneur had his stature with the Congress decreased following a Balkan failure, and administration officials must have understood this point. Congress had made clear that an intervention could not fail, while the allies had made clear that any intervention would give the US sole responsibility for solving the Balkan conflict. Combined with the public antipathy towards a unilateral intervention, Clinton's difficult decision becomes easier to understand.

If the US intervened in Bosnia, and the Pentagon, which had several reasons to resist the new president, was correct in their estimates of the high risk to American troops, Clinton could have found America at war less than 150 days into his presidency. Following the allied withdrawal, the US would have lone responsibility for calming this conflict, a fact which would have drained a great deal of Clinton's public support, especially amongst those who voted for him with the understanding that he would focus on the domestic agenda more than his predecessor had. With Congress view towards intervention, a failed intervention would have damned the presidency.

Clinton would have locked himself into an intervention from which he could not escape, for which there was no public support, without allied help, and which failed to represent an identifiable threat to America's national interest. The public support he required to buttress his agenda goals in an already hostile Congress would have eroded. It is possible that he would have failed to achieve every major goal of his presidency were an intervention in Bosnia to have turned sour. It is with this view towards his policy goals that Clinton opted to abandon the "Lift and Strike" policy.

This decision by Clinton invites several observations. While politically understandable at the time, the decision to reject intervention would have lasting effects. First, Clinton's ability to lead on the world stage would be questioned until the victory of Balkan peace three years later in Dayton, especially after the debacles in Haiti and Somalia. In fact, one can argue that while these still would have been very serious events indeed, had Clinton already ordered a successful military intervention in the Balkans, the failures may not have given Clinton the reputation as a weak custodian of US power.

Second, by 1995, his foreign policy record had become such a target for his

political enemies that a failure in Dayton could have been fatal to Clinton's 1996 reelection bid. The policy triad which had attempted to protect Clinton's domestic agenda by steering him away from an activist foreign policy did not protect the agenda forever. Instead, they deferred the risk until the Bosnia issue had grown so acute that it threatened to swallow his entire presidency. In that they failed to realize that the essential protection of Clinton's expansive domestic agenda could only be achieved by attacking the Bosnia cancer as early as possible, before it spread, they failed him in their advisory role.

Third, when intervention finally did come in 1995, it was swift and easy. There is little reason to believe that the Bosnian Serbs were even a fraction of the military machine many had predicted them to be. While the Pentagon's leaders were reacting to poor political decisions made a generation earlier, during the last great American intervention in Vietnam, it is impossible to ignore how incorrect their predictions were in this instance. Had they been more accurate, or not guilty of inflating the risks posed by intervention as many suspected, intervention would have seemed a clear choice. Had resistance to American forces melted during the first days of US air strikes, and had the Bosnians been able to quickly regain their military losses, public resistance to the unilateral nature of intervention would have been fleeting, and Clinton could have gained support for the intervention once the ease of the mission became clear. While he might not have gained political capital from the policy, he might have been able to continue his push for the domestic agenda with little interruption.

Each of these actors helped to create the conditions in which a failed "Lift and Strike" policy threatened the domestic agenda. Like any president, Clinton was forced to

examine the competing interests which governed every decision his administration made. In doing so, Clinton had to weigh the consequences of failed Balkans policy against the ramifications of a failed domestic agenda. Clinton was elected on a domestic policy platform, and the risks in Bosnia seemed high. Considering the stances of many actors on whom he relied to achieve that domestic agenda, Clinton's decision to abandon the "Lift and Strike" policy was an unfortunate one, but was a function of the policy position in which he found himself by May 1993.

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germane to this research from the period between February 1991, prior to the outbreak of hostilities in Slovenia, to June 1993, after the Clinton administration had abandoned "Lift and Strike," was examined. These articles gave insight on areas such as the Balkan conflict, international reaction to the hostilities, the 1992 campaign, the Bush administration approach to Bosnia and its foreign policy, and Clinton's approach to these issues before and after the election. It also allowed for a consistent and fluid factual account of events during this period.