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Protecting civilians or preserving NATO? Alliance entanglement and the Bosnian safe areas

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ABSTRACT

The Bosnian 'safe areas' established in the 1990s failed abysmally at civilian protection; indeed, by generating moral hazard, they may have worsened the humanitarian situation. Drawing on declassified documents as well as other primary sources, this article makes the case that US, British, and French support for the safe areas can be understood as an instance of mutual alliance entanglement. The United States and its principal European allies had serious doubts that the safe areas could effectively protect civilians. Nevertheless, the Western powers agreed to support the safe areas diplomatically and by means of a limited NATO airpower commitment. The expectation was that this would allow them to signal alliance unity after a period of transatlantic discord and showcase their ability for joint action. The article sheds new light on the origins of the Bosnian safe areas and illuminates how alliance pressures might pull NATO members toward ill-conceived military interventions.

KEYWORDS Alliance politics; alliance value; entrapment; safe zones; humanitarian intervention

The Bosnian experience in the 1990s gave safe areas for civilian protection a bad name. Several studies have highlighted that from 1993 to 1995, the Bosnian safe areas not only failed to adequately protect civilian populations because of weak enforcement, they also fuelled the ethnic conflict, becoming staging grounds for high-risk military offensives by the supposedly protected party.[1] Strikingly, as I show in this article, this potential moral hazard and related challenges were anticipated by United Nations (UN) officials as well as in Western capitals. Nevertheless, in the spring of 1993, the United States,

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[1]Steven Burg and Paul Shoup, *The War in Bosnia-Herzegovina: Ethnic Conflict and International Intervention* (Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe 2000), 146–47; Carol McQueen, *Humanitarian Intervention and Safety Zones: Iraq, Bosnia and Rwanda* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan 2005), 77–79; Stefano Recchia, 'The Paradox of Safe Areas in Ethnic Civil Wars', *Global Responsibility to Protect* 10/3 (2018), 362–86. On international intervention and moral hazard in Bosnia more generally, see Alan J. Kuperman, 'The Moral Hazard of Humanitarian Intervention: Lessons from the Balkans', *International Studies Quarterly*, 52/1 (2008), 49–80.

Great Britain, and France backed the safe areas policy at the UN Security Council (UNSC) and issued a much-publicised NATO airpower commitment to 'deter' attacks against the areas. They did so notwithstanding the lack of a coherent strategy to protect threatened civilians – let alone end the war. Given the Western powers' avowed humanitarian instincts, this policy choice not only was reckless but also constitutes an analytical puzzle.

I argue that the Western powers' decision to support safe areas in Bosnia and commit military resources to this ill-fated intervention policy constitutes a case of mutual alliance entanglement. Alliance entanglement occurs when a state's decision to intervene militarily abroad is determined or significantly influenced by its membership in an alliance. That is, absent the alliance, either the state would prefer not to become involved militarily at all, or it would choose a substantially different intervention policy.[2]

To date, alliance entanglement has been theorised as a one-way phenomenon. The idea is that one or several allies are involved in a military conflict and pull other allies into that same conflict. According to the classic argument, a state may end up drawn into military conflicts involving its allies, to establish or maintain its reputation as a credible security guarantor.[3] More generally, a state may allow itself to be pulled into military conflicts by its allies because of 'the anticipation of future benefit from the alliance' – whether in the form of military security, burden sharing, or enhanced diplomatic leverage in other contingencies.[4]

The possibility that the United States and some of its main allies might *pull each other* into conflicts besetting non-members, because of alliance pressures, has not been explicitly examined. My argument is that when alliance members at first disagree openly about how to proceed in the face of a security crisis in their neighbourhood, after a period of deadlock, concerns about the alliance's perceived relevance and effectiveness may push the allies to coalesce around an intervention policy that none of them previously favoured. In such cases, it is appropriate to speak of mutual entanglement, given that the allies pull each other into the resulting military operation. Mutual entanglement, I argue, is especially likely for members of

[2]Sometimes this phenomenon is identified as 'entrapment'. See esp. Glenn Snyder, 'The Security Dilemma in Alliance Politics', *World Politics* 36/4 (1984), 467. However, the term 'entrapment' is best reserved for instances when a state acts opportunistically and deliberately adopts a risky or offensive policy that drags its allies into a military conflict. See Tongfi Kim, 'Why Alliances Entangle but Seldom Entrap States', *Security Studies* 20/3 (2011), 355–56; also Michael Beckley, 'The Myth of Entangling Alliances: Reassessing the Security Risks of US Defense Pacts', *International Security* 39/4 (2015), 12–13.

[3]James D. Morrow, 'Alliances: Why Write Them Down?' *Annual Review of Political Science* 3/1 (2000), 71. Retrenchment advocates argue that to avert entanglement, the United States should revisit its alliance commitments and adopt a more 'restrained' foreign policy. See, e.g., Barry R. Posen, 'Pull Back: The Case for a Less Activist Foreign Policy', *Foreign Affairs* 92/1 (2013), 116–28; also Emma M. Ashford, 'Hegemonic Blackmail: Entrapment in Civil War Intervention', *Canadian Foreign Policy Journal* 23/3 (2017), 218–31.

[4]Jason Davidson, *America's Allies and War: Kosovo, Afghanistan, and Iraq* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan 2011), 15.

institutionalised alliances, such as NATO, that combine elements of both a traditional defensive alliance and a collective security organisation. Members may value the alliance not just for its mutual security guarantee, but as a symbol of their collective identity, which can be expected to generate strong incentives for consensual problem-solving.[5]

Imagine a situation in which core NATO members, notwithstanding pressures to tackle a security crisis in their neighbourhood, fail for a considerable time to agree on a common policy; indeed, they are at odds to such an extent that they partly undermine each other. This results in significant alliance discord and public recriminations. Eventually, pro-alliance leaders on different sides of the intra-NATO dispute, worried about the alliance's health, start pushing for a joint military response – motivated to a significant degree by a desire to reinvigorate the alliance and signal unity of purpose both domestically and internationally. After some pulling and hauling, the main alliance members converge around a particular military intervention policy. The alliance – specifically, the value that member states attach to the alliance relationship – will have pulled members toward the intervention. This is not a case of one side in an alliance dragging other members into a military conflict. Instead, the allies have pulled each other toward intervention in a non-member state; they have mutually entangled each other.

Using causal process tracing and drawing on declassified US and UK documents, original interviews with senior policymakers, and oral histories, I show that mutual entanglement is precisely what brought about the Western allies' military commitment to the Bosnian safe areas.[6]

The principal European powers, on one side, and the United States, on the other, entered 1993 with fundamentally different policy preferences about Bosnia. The Europeans favoured impartial peacekeeping and supported a pragmatic settlement among Bosnia's main ethnic groups (Bosnian Muslims, Croats, and Serbs). By contrast, US president William J. Clinton came to office in early 1993 clearly identifying the Bosnian Serbs as the aggressor and calling for aerial bombing of Serb targets. This resulted in near deadlock among the allies and growing intra-alliance discord that spilled over into public view. The safe areas policy was cobbled together later that year, notwithstanding grave concerns about its effectiveness as a tool for civilian protection, in an effort to patch things up among the allies and demonstrate to the world their unity of purpose. The United States shelved its plans for broader airstrikes and military assistance to the Bosnian Muslims; instead, the allies agreed to support UN-proclaimed safe areas and issued a

[5]See, e.g., Thomas Risse-Kappen, *Cooperation among Democracies: The European Influence on US Foreign Policy* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP 1995).

[6]Unless noted otherwise, all US documents cited in this article are available on the William J. Clinton Presidential Library website, at https://clinton.presidentiallibraries.us/items. UK documents cited in the article have likewise been digitised and can be requested at http://discovery.nationalarchives.gov.uk/.

limited airpower commitment to deter attacks on these areas. I argue that without pressures related to the NATO alliance, the United States and Great Britain, in particular, would have been unlikely to support the safe areas politically and militarily.

Some scholars claim that entanglement occurs only if military intervention would not have happened altogether, absent the alliance.[7] However, following David Edelstein and Joshua Shifrinson, I argue that entanglement can also 'shape the nature of state participation in conflicts'; specifically, it can determine what goals states decide to pursue and what means they devote to a military intervention.[8] In other words, alliance members may favour some form of military assistance or intervention (e.g., impartial peacekeeping or security force training) for reasons unrelated to the alliance itself; but alliance pressures may lead them to commit more resources or different types of resources, and embrace different intervention strategies than they otherwise desire.[9] The term 'entanglement' appears especially apt when states are drawn into unprofitable endeavours they would most likely have shunned in the absence of alliance pressures.

The rest of the article is structured as follows: The first part describes the NATO allies' deeply divergent preferences in the face of the political and humanitarian crisis in Bosnia. The second part documents how these divergences and the resulting policy deadlock resulted in growing intra-alliance discord over the spring of 1993, which eventually gave rise to concerns about permanent damage to the alliance. The third part zeroes in on how the allies became entangled in the safe areas policy: I show that the United States, Great Britain, and France persuaded each other to support the safe areas diplomatically and by means of a joint airpower commitment, because they concluded that this would allow them to showcase a newfound sense of unity and signal that NATO still had a valuable purpose in the post–Cold War period. The conclusion reflects on what the Bosnia experience can tell us about the likelihood of NATO entanglement in non-member state conflicts today.

A security crisis in NATO's neighbourhood

Bosnia-Herzegovina (henceforth: Bosnia) declared its independence from Yugoslavia in the spring of 1992. Bosnian Serbs, who made up about one-third of Bosnia's total population, opposed this. Soon thereafter, Bosnia became the

[7]E.g., Beckley, 'The Myth of Entangling Alliances'; also Alexander Lanoszka, 'Tangled Up in Rose? Theories of Alliance Entrapment and the 2008 Russo-Georgian War', *Contemporary Security Policy* 39/2 (2018), 234–57.

[8]David M. Edelstein and Joshua R. Itzkowitz Shifrinson, 'It's a Trap! Security Commitments and the Risks of Entrapment', in A. Trevor Thrall and Benjamin H. Friedman, eds., *US Grand Strategy in the 21st Century* (New York: Routledge 2018), 24–28, at 25.

[9]Edelstein and Shifrinson, 'It's a Trap!', 26–28.

scene of a bloody ethnic war. Fighting escalated rapidly between Bosnian Serb military units, supported by elements of the Serb-dominated Yugoslav National Army, and Bosnian Muslim and Bosnian Croat militias. By the end of the summer, the Bosnian Serbs had gained control of about 70% of Bosnian territory. The large-scale civilian suffering, broadcast live by television networks across the globe, built up pressure on the Western powers to do something about it.[10]

European preferences: Peacekeeping and pragmatic accommodation

Europe's main military powers, France and Great Britain, spearheaded initial diplomatic efforts to contain the Bosnian crisis and mitigate its humanitarian impact. They helped deploy, and played a central role in, the United Nations Protection Force (UNPROFOR) – a 'peacekeeping' mission that helped escort humanitarian aid convoys. By the end of 1992, Paris and London had each sent about 2,000 troops to Bosnia.[11] France's president, François Mitterrand, viewed his country's leadership in Balkans peacekeeping as a way of reaffirming its major-power status, and Britain joined the effort partly because Prime Minister John Major did not want to let France assume the mantle of Europe's preeminent security actor.[12] Both leaders were also under domestic pressure to help relieve the suffering, and they reckoned that a low-risk humanitarian deployment could ward off demands for more robust intervention.[13]

The French and British governments saw their mission in Bosnia as supporting the UN's impartial aid efforts. They were reluctant to single out the Serbs as the aggressors and contemplate coercive action against them. This reluctance was partly due to the fact that Paris and London had thousands of lightly armed troops deployed in UNPROFOR, which they feared were vulnerable to Serb retaliation. In addition, President Mitterrand and Prime Minister Major had little sympathy for the Muslim-dominated Bosnian state, and they considered Serb hegemony over the Balkans to be the key to the region's stability. The only way of keeping Bosnia together, they believed, was to facilitate a pragmatic settlement among the country's three principal ethnic groups, taking the distribution of power among them into account.[14]

[10]Burg and Shoup, *The War in Bosnia-Herzegovina*, 128–80.

[11]Brian Rathbun, *Partisan Interventions: European Party Politics and Peace Enforcement in the Balkans* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell UP 2004), 58–59; Thierry Tardy, *La France et la gestion des conflits yougoslaves, 1991–1995* (Brussels: Bruylant 1999), 172–74; James Gow, *Triumph of the Lack of Will: International Diplomacy and the Yugoslav War* (New York: Columbia UP 1997), 160–65.

[12]Gow, *Triumph of the Lack of Will*, 164–65, 176–77; Rathbun, *Partisan Interventions*, 129–30; Beatrice Canivez, 'François Mitterrand et la guerre en ex-Yougoslavie', in Samy Cohen, ed., *Mitterrand et la sortie de la guerre froide* (Paris: PUF 1998), 76.

[13]Britain's foreign secretary, Douglas Hurd, privately observed that contributing to UNPROFOR was a way of 'preventing the indefinite deterioration of the situation in Bosnia to the point where pressure for the use of British . . . troops in a ground combat role might become irresistible'. Conclusions of UK Cabinet Meeting (henceforth: UK Cabinet), London, 29 April 1993 (UK National Archives, Kew, ref. [henceforth: Kew ref.] CAB 128/105/15), 2. See also Rathbun, *Partisan Interventions*, 130.

[14]On Mitterrand, see Rathbun, *Partisan Interventions*, 129–30; and Canivez, 'Mitterrand et la guerre en ex-Yougoslavie', 73. On Britain's leadership, see Brendan Simms, *Unfinest Hour: Britain and the Destruction of Yugoslavia* (London: Allen Lane 2001), 6–12; and Gow, *Triumph of the Lack of Will*, 174–77.

In the summer of 1992, Britain and France convened the International Conference on the Former Yugoslavia, which entrusted two elder statesmen with leading the peace negotiations: former US secretary of state Cyrus Vance (serving as the personal envoy of the UN secretary-general), and former British foreign secretary David Owen (acting on behalf of the European Community).[15] The Vance-Owen Peace Plan (VOPP), made public in January 1993, envisioned a highly decentralised Bosnia with 10 provinces, or cantons, each dominated by one of the country's main ethnic groups. Overall, the plan assigned 43% of Bosnia's territory to the Serbs.[16] Britain and France, as well as most other western European countries, gave their full support to the VOPP and asked the US administration under President Clinton to do the same. 'If it fails there is nothing else', Mitterrand told Clinton over the telephone.[17] Policymakers in London and Paris had concluded that, should the plan unravel, 'only partition of Bosnia … would be a stable outcome in the long term'.[18]

US preferences: Support the Bosnian Muslims and pressure the Serbs

During the 1992 US presidential campaign, Clinton, as the Democratic Party's candidate, had strongly criticised the incumbent administration's hands-off approach to Bosnia. Clinton's rhetoric indicated unequivocal condemnation of 'Serb aggression' and strong support for the Bosnian Muslims.[19] If elected, Clinton declared, he would consider bombing Bosnian Serb strongholds from the air.[20] After Clinton was elected to the presidency and took office in late January 1993, his administration made Bosnia a foreign policy priority. Anthony Lake, Clinton's national security adviser, almost immediately requested that the new team look into 'what would be required politically and militarily to halt further Serbian aggression'.[21]

It soon emerged that the new administration had serious reservations about the VOPP that its European partners supported. On 3 February 1993, Lake dismissed the Vance-Owen territorial map as 'unacceptable'.[22] Senior US

[15]Gow, *Lack of Will*, 224–27; Burg and Shoup, *War in Bosnia*, 211–13.
[16]Burg and Shoup, *War in Bosnia*, 230; Gow, *Lack of Will*, 235.
[17]'President Clinton Telcon with President Mitterrand of France' (henceforth: Clinton-Mitterrand telcon), White House, 17 March 1993, 2, https://clinton.presidentiallibraries.us/items/show/101349. On Britain's strong support for the VOPP, see Clifton Wharton Jr. (deputy US secretary of state), 'Meeting with Prime Minister John Major', 18 February 1993, https://clinton.presidentiallibraries.us/items/show/100490.
[18]UK Cabinet, 10 June 1993 (Kew ref. CAB 128/105/19), 5. See also Canivez, 'Mitterrand et la guerre', 74.
[19]Gow, *Lack of Will*, 212.
[20]Ivo Daalder, *Getting to Dayton: The Making of America's Bosnia Policy* (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution 2000), 6.
[21]Anthony Lake, 'US Policy Regarding the Situation in the Former Yugoslavia', Presidential Review Directive, 22 January 1993, 4, https://clinton.presidentiallibraries.us/items/show/12299.
[22]National Security Council, Principals Committee (henceforth: NSC-PC), 'Meeting on Yugoslavia', memorandum for the record, Central Intelligence Agency, 4 February 1993, 2, https://www.cia.gov/readingroom/docs/1993-02-04.pdf.

officials believed that the VOPP's blueprint for dividing Bosnia into semiautonomous ethnic cantons betrayed the ideal of a multiethnic state; moreover, they considered the 43% of the country's territory assigned to the Serbs too high. Secretary of State Warren Christopher expressed the concern in conversations with European allies that the VOPP 'simply appeases Serbian aggression'.[23] In private meetings, senior US officials also worried that implementing the plan would require a costly commitment of US ground troops.[24]

Nevertheless, Clinton and his advisers initially acceded to European requests that they support the VOPP. The administration decided that the United States would contribute troops to an international implementation force, 'if all the [Bosnian] parties voluntarily come to an agreement'.[25] To make the plan more acceptable to the Bosnian Muslims and turn it into something that the administration could 'support morally', it resolved to 'work with the Bosnian Muslims to redraw the V-O map'.[26] In the course of February and March 1993, pressure from Washington resulted in several revisions to the peace plan: important territorial concessions were made to the Bosnian Muslims, including a strip of land in northern Bosnia strategically located between the two main portions of Serb territory.[27] These changes, however, made the plan less appealing to the Serbs, the militarily dominant party on the ground. Then, in late March, the administration somewhat backtracked from its earlier commitment to contribute to an implementation force. It decided that there would be no US deployment 'during an initial period after signature of an agreement by all three parties', until the parties had demonstrated their willingness to comply in good faith.[28]

In short, Washington's support for the VOPP was highly ambivalent. Studies variously conclude that 'US policy helped create the conditions that led to [Serb] intransigence'[29]; and that the territorial changes to the VOPP of February and March 1993, in particular, 'ensured that the Bosnian Serbs would reject the plan'.[30]After the Bosnian Serb assembly failed to meet a late April 1993 deadline for endorsing the VOPP, senior US officials were

[23]Quoted in 'Putting Clinton in a Bind on Bosnia', *Newsweek*, 14 February 1993. See also Burg and Shoup, *War in Bosnia*, 229–34; and Gow, *Lack of Will*, 214–17.
[24]Joint Chiefs of Staff chairman Colin Powell warned his civilian colleagues that the mission 'would be expensive and could be open ended with no promise of getting out'. NSC-PC, 'Meeting on Bosnia', 5 February 1993, https://www.cia.gov/readingroom/docs/1993-02-05.pdf.
[25]NSC-PC, 'Meeting on Bosnia', 5 February 1993. See also Elizabeth Drew, *On the Edge: The Clinton Presidency* (New York: Touchstone 1996), 146.
[26]NSC-PC, 'Meeting on Yugoslavia', 4 February 1993, 2.
[27]Burg and Shoup, *War in Bosnia*, 234–37; David Gibbs, *First Do No Harm: Humanitarian Intervention and the Destruction of Yugoslavia* (Nashville, TN: Vanderbilt UP 2009), 146.
[28]NSC-PC, 'Meeting on Bosnia: Decisions', 24 March 1993.
[29]Gibbs, *First Do No Harm*, 147; for a similar assessment, see Gow, *Lack of Will*, 218.
[30]Burg and Shoup, *War in Bosnia*, 235.

quick to pronounce the plan 'dead' and sought to persuade the European allies to move on to a different policy involving military aid to the Bosnian Muslims and robust airstrikes against the Serbs.[31]

President Clinton favours 'lift and strike'

During March and early April 1993, the administration debate in Washington at first focused on the possibility of selectively lifting the UN arms embargo, imposed on the entire territory of the Former Yugoslavia in 1991, which was now putting the Bosnian Muslims at a disadvantage. (The Bosnian Serbs and Croats had their arsenals refuelled through illicit arms transfers from neighbouring Serbia and Croatia, respectively.) Secretary of State Christopher favoured lifting the embargo as a relatively low-cost way to 'level the playing field' among the warring parties: the goal would be to facilitate arms transfers to the Bosnian Muslims so as to enable them to better defend themselves and, ideally, recover some lost territory.[32] But Lake and other senior officials insisted that lifting the embargo should be combined with US airstrikes over a transitional period, to hold the Serbs at bay and degrade their military capabilities while the Muslims built up their own arsenal. The most hawkish administration members saw airstrikes as a tool to 'intimidate the Bosnian Serb militia and their patrons in Belgrade' and push the Serbs to become more amenable in the negotiations.[33]

In the course of April, Lake forged an administration consensus around what became known as 'lift and strike'. As Lake later recalled, 'lifting the embargo would allow [the Muslim-led government in] Sarajevo and the Croats to right the military balance themselves, and we would support them for some time by striking'.[34]

On 1 May, President Clinton endorsed lift and strike, which by then had the support of all of his top advisers.[35] According to a senior National Security Council staffer at the time, lift and strike 'was chosen because we believed it would give us an end point to the strike commitment' – the airstrikes would end after a certain period, and then the Bosnian Muslims 'would be on their own'.[36] Nevertheless, the expectation in Washington was that for their duration, the airstrikes would be fairly broad: targets would include not only Serb

[31]UK Foreign and Commonwealth Office (henceforth: FCO), 'Former Yugoslavia: Warren Christopher's Talks', telno 369, 7 May 1993 (Kew ref. PREM 19/4510); also 'Clinton-Mitterrand telcon', White House, 6 May 1993, https://clinton.presidentiallibraries.us/items/show/101351.
[32]Alexander Vershbow (deputy assistant secretary of state, European affairs, 1993–94), author interview, 12 October 2020; see also Drew, *On the Edge*, 148, 152.
[33]Madeleine Albright (US permanent representative to the UN), 'Options for Bosnia', memorandum for the national security adviser, 14 April 1993, 1, https://www.cia.gov/readingroom/docs/1993-04-14.pdf.
[34]Anthony Lake, author interview, 1 October 2020. See also Drew, *On the Edge*, 152.
[35]Daalder, *Getting to Dayton*, 15; Drew, *On the Edge*, 154–55.
[36]Jenonne Walker (NSC senior director for Europe, 1993–94), 'Creating the Safe Areas', *International Decision Making in the Age of Genocide*, conference transcript, session 1, The Hague, 28 June–1 July 2015, 20, https://www.thehagueinstituteforglobaljustice.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/11/Srebrenica-Transcript-Session-1.pdf.

artillery, which could easily be hidden, but also fuel dumps, airfields, bridges connecting Bosnian Serb territory to Serbia proper, and command and control centres across Bosnia.[37]

US consultations and European pushback

During the first week of May 1993, Clinton dispatched Secretary Christopher across the Atlantic to consult with the principal European partners face-to-face and ask them to support lift and strike. The expectation was that it would not be an easy sell – which is why the administration somewhat coyly referred to these meetings as 'consultations'.[38] But US leaders remained hopeful that the British and French, as well as other European partners, could be cajoled into backing a more robust approach involving the use of airpower. Clinton declared at the end of April that he saw 'a fair chance that we'll be able to get [the Europeans and] the UN to go along'.[39]

Secretary Christopher arrived in London on 2 May. During a five-hour meeting with British leaders, he explained that the US administration aimed to bring about a multilateral lifting of the UN arms embargo, after which the United States would 'supply arms, and training in the use of those arms, to the Bosnian Muslims'.[40] In addition, the administration proposed to carry out airstrikes for at least three months to repel Serb aggression and degrade Serb military capabilities; this would further the goal of 'achieving an equivalence in force' among the factions and facilitate an equitable settlement.[41] After hearing Christopher out, British prime minister Major declared that his government was opposed to 'lift' and had serious reservations about the US proposal for airstrikes.[42] The prime minister voiced concerns that lift and strike appeared difficult to implement, was bound to intensify the violence on the ground, and would likely threaten the UN humanitarian mission.[43] When Christopher met with French authorities in Paris on 4 May, President

[37]Gen. Martin Brandtner, Hearing, Armed Services Committee, US Senate, 103rd Cong., 1st sess., 29 January 1993, 90; also UK Embassy Washington (henceforth: UK-Wash.), 'Bosnia: US Military Options', telno 1822, 6 May 1993 (PREM 19/4510).

[38]Lake, author interview. US diplomats had noted as early as February 1993 that the British government 'dreads' airstrikes, because of 'fears that such action would trigger reprisals against UN (including British) troops on the ground, the collapse of the humanitarian effort, and eventual irresistible pressure for massive Western intervention'. Wharton, 'Meeting with Prime Minister John Major', 18 February 1993.

[39]William J. Clinton, 'Remarks Announcing the Appointment of the Director of the Office of National Drug Control Policy', 28 April 1993, https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/documents/remarks-announcing-the-appointment-the-director-the-office-national-drug-control-policy.

[40]UK Cabinet, 6 May 1993, 2.

[41]Roderic Lyne (private secretary to the British prime minister [henceforth: PM]), 'Bosnia: Warren Christopher's Consultations', note for ambassadors, telno 444, 3 May 1993 (Kew ref. PREM 19/4510), §7; also UK Cabinet, 6 May 1993, 4.

[42]UK Cabinet, 6 May 1993, 3.

[43]Lyne, telno 444, §10, 11.

Mitterrand voiced similar concerns. Lifting the arms embargo would worsen the humanitarian situation, Mitterrand declared, and he warned about the 'ill effects' of airstrikes.[44]

Transatlantic tensions and the desire to patch things up

After the Bosnian Serb assembly failed to endorse the VOPP, European leaders at first insisted that 'the international community should not acquiesce in the purported rejection … of the peace plan'; instead, the political and economic 'pressure on the Bosnian Serb leadership … should be stepped up'.[45] Nevertheless, by the second week of May, it was becoming clear that the VOPP had for all practical purposes failed.[46] European diplomats felt that the US administration's lack of wholehearted support for the peace plan and its reluctance to contribute troops, as well as the changes it pushed through on the V-O territorial map, had played a significant role in the plan's unravelling – souring the mood in transatlantic relations.[47]

Growing discord within the alliance

When Christopher embarked on his transatlantic trip, US-European disagreements over the VOPP and the use of airpower had already resulted in considerable friction among the allies.[48] US policymakers were nevertheless taken aback when, after Christopher's consultations, European diplomats leaked their reservations about lift and strike to the press. This perceived breach of an unspoken agreement that the allies should work out their differences in private significantly increased intra-alliance tensions. Britain's foreign secretary, Douglas Hurd, was given to understand that Christopher was 'clearly annoyed by US media reporting, on the basis of … "British sources", that Europeans had rejected US proposals'.[49] Senior US officials bluntly told their British colleagues that they 'had unhelpfully broken confidence'.[50]

[44]Lake, 'Telcon with President Mitterrand', background memo, 6 May 1993, https://clinton.presidentialli braries.us/items/show/57567.

[45]Statement by Tristan Garel-Jones, FCO minister of state, UK Cabinet, 6 May 1993. Russia advocated a UNSC resolution authorising 'progressive implementation' of the VOPP, but this was resisted by Washington. UK Mission to the UN (UK-UN), New York, telno 1711, 18 May 1993, 2–3.

[46]On 15–16 May, the Bosnian Serbs effectively sealed the plan's fate by voting overwhelmingly in a referendum to reject it. Burg and Shoup, *War in Bosnia*, 249.

[47]In early May, France and other European countries proposed a UNSC resolution endorsing the VOPP and advocated using pressure and inducements to gain Serb acceptance, but Washington opposed these steps. See J. S. Smith (FCO private secretary), 'Former Yugoslavia: PM's Bilateral with French PM', note for Roderic Lyne, 4 May 1993; also US Embassy Brussels, 'EC Main Points on Bosnia', memorandum for NSC, 12 May 1993.

[48]Gow, *Lack of Will*, 245.

[49]FCO, 'Former Yugoslavia: Foreign Secretary's Telephone Conversation with US Secretary of State', telno 472, 11 May 1993 (PREM 19/4510).

[50]UK-Wash., 'Bosnia', telno 1053, 10 May 1993, 2.

This set in motion a spiral of public recriminations: US officials called out the European allies for being 'indecisive', to which the Europeans replied by publicly challenging the United States to put troops on the ground in Bosnia, instead of just calling for airstrikes.[51] That, in turn, resulted in warnings conveyed by senior US administration officials that Clinton was plainly 'annoyed' with the allies.[52] The *New York Times* ominously reported that the 'impasse with the European allies' over Bosnia had left NATO in disarray 'at a time when the alliance is struggling to find a new purpose'.[53]

NATO's pull on the European allies

British and French leaders decided fairly quickly that they had to patch things up with the US administration and find a mutually acceptable compromise. Policymakers in London had concluded already before Christopher's trip that they probably could not outright reject US airpower proposals, because 'the wider interests at stake with the Americans were also fundamental'.[54] In particular, they worried, 'the costs of substituting for existing defence and security arrangements [with the United States] could not be contemplated. At a time when the future of NATO was being debated in the United States … these vital interests could be in real jeopardy'.[55]After the public falling-out among the allies in early May, British leaders considered it imperative to find an agreement with the United States on Bosnia.[56] Decision makers in Paris similarly recognised the importance of a good working relationship with the new US administration and did 'not believe that it would be possible to give a negative response [to the Americans on Bosnia] without causing serious damage to transatlantic relations'.[57]

In short, European policymakers – and British leaders in particular – felt that despite their reservations about lift and strike, they needed to show some flexibility and should as much as possible 'avoid taking up a position which might put strains on the western alliance'.[58] US diplomats, aware of these discussions and concerns among the European allies, understood that this was a source of leverage for Washington: as Secretary Christopher

[51]Thomas Friedman, 'Clinton, Short of Support at Home and Abroad, Sidetracks Bosnia', *New York Times*, 11 May 1993, A9.
[52]UK-Wash., 'Bosnia: Meeting with the National Security Adviser', telno 1070, 12 May 1993, 1.
[53]Craig Whitney, 'NATO Adrift? Allies Worry Over Bosnia Impasse', *New York Times*, 14 May 1993, A10.
[54]UK Cabinet, 29 April 1993, 6.
[55]Ibid.
[56]David Hannay (UK permanent representative to the UN in New York, 1990–95), author interview, 24 September 2020.
[57]As reported by UK Foreign Secretary Douglas Hurd, 'Former Yugoslavia: Response to US Initiative', note for PM, 26 July 1993 (PREM 19/4513).
[58]Hurd, UK Cabinet, 22 April 1993, 4.

subsequently put it to President Clinton, 'maintaining transatlantic unity is [British prime minister] Major's overriding concern in Bosnia policy. You should exploit this'.[59]

Clinton's commitment to alliance consensus

The US president, for his part, felt strongly that 'whatever we do [about Bosnia] we have to do our best … to proceed with our allies'.[60] After the administration opted for lift and strike as the best way forward, it could in theory have implemented that policy unilaterally. The United States could have stopped abiding by the UN embargo and begun funnelling arms to the Bosnian Muslims, either directly or through willing intermediaries.[61] As to airstrikes, Madeleine Albright, at the time the US ambassador to the UN and an avowed hawk on Bosnia, argued plausibly that these could be militarily effective whether 'unilateral or multilateral'.[62] However, proceeding without European backing and disregarding British and French concerns would have entailed significant risks for President Clinton and his administration.

Unilateral lift and strike probably would have prompted the European allies to withdraw their UNPROFOR peacekeepers from Bosnia, leaving the United States with primary responsibility for the humanitarian and political situation on the ground.[63] More generally, US intelligence warned, unilateral military action 'without further consultation' among the allies would be viewed in Europe as 'a major breach of alliance procedures' and 'would have very negative short-term and long-term consequences for … traditional and developing [US] alliances'.[64] Clinton also understood that tensions about Bosnia could harm transatlantic cooperation beyond security matters: 'We have a lot of other issues at stake with the Europeans … over the next several years, and the way we handle this [i.e., Bosnia] and the way it resonates will affect all that', the US president declared.[65] All this made Clinton sensitive to the importance of proceeding by consensus with the principal European allies and inclined him to compromise.

[59]Warren Christopher, 'Meetings with British PM', 25 February 1994, https://clinton.presidentiallibraries.us/items/show/36622.
[60]'Interview with President Clinton', *Washington Post*, 14 May 1993, A10.
[61]There was consistent support for unilateral 'lift' in the US Congress, and two years later, in the summer of 1995, the House and Senate voted to end US participation in the arms embargo. Daalder, *Getting to Dayton*, 61–64.
[62]Albright, 'Options for Bosnia', 14 April 1993, 2.
[63]'Likely Allied Reactions to Unilateral US Actions in Bosnia', memorandum for the Director of Central Intelligence (DCI), 5 August 1993, https://www.cia.gov/readingroom/docs/1993-08-05.pdf.
[64]Ibid.
[65]'Interview with President Clinton'.

How the United States and its allies became entangled in the safe areas policy

In the course of May 1993, the value that the United States and its European partners attached to the Atlantic alliance, and their desire to patch things up after a period of mutual recriminations, pulled them toward a different type of military commitment in Bosnia, in support of UN-proclaimed 'safe areas'. Britain and France agreed on the need to make concessions for the alliance's sake; yet they were unwilling to simply capitulate to US demands for lift and strike. London and Paris converged around an alternative, French-inspired proposal, according to which airpower threats should be narrowly tied to deterring Serb attacks on a handful of Muslim-majority towns that the UN had recently designated as safe areas. They then persuaded the United States to shelve lift and strike and go along with this more limited proposal.

Origins of the safe areas, and British concerns

The idea of establishing safe areas in Bosnia to protect vulnerable civilians had been circulating in humanitarian circles for months. The International Committee of the Red Cross issued a paper in October 1992 calling for the establishment of protected zones for civilians.[66] Around the same time, Austria and Hungary, then nonpermanent members of the UNSC, also recommended creating 'safe areas under military protection'.[67] Then, in March and early April 1993, the eastern Bosnian town of Srebrenica, surrounded by Serb-held territory, came under heavy Serb artillery fire. This prompted several members of the 'nonaligned' caucus at the UNSC – led by Venezuela and its energetic permanent representative, Diego Arria, as well as Pakistan – to propose that Srebrenica be designated a UN 'protected area'.[68]

Policymakers in London initially viewed the establishment of safe areas in Bosnia as 'a potentially dangerous distraction' that might draw the Western powers into the war on the Muslim side.[69] British diplomats felt that they could not outright resist the nonaligned push for safe areas at the UNSC in early April, given the dire humanitarian situation and related public pressure to act; however, they worked hard to soften the draft UNSC resolution

[66]International Committee of the Red Cross, 'The Establishment of Protected Zones for Endangered Civilians in Bosnia and Herzegovina', position paper, 30 October 1992, https://casebook.icrc.org/case-study/bosnia-and-herzegovina-constitution-safe-areas.

[67]McQueen, *Safety Zones*, 62; also David Harland (head of UN civil affairs, Bosnia, 1993–95), 'Creating the Safe Areas', conference transcript, 7.

[68]Diego Arria (permanent representative of Venezuela to the UN in New York, 1991–93), 'Creating the Safe Areas', 26; also David L. Bosco, *Five to Rule Them All: The UN Security Council and the Making of the Modern World* (New York: Oxford UP 2009), 179–80.

[69]Lyne, 'Note for PM: Bosnia/Yugoslavia' (ref. B.01382), 7 May 1993, 3. On British scepticism about the safe areas, see also Rathbun, *Partisan Interventions*, 61.

proposed by Venezuela and its partners.[70] Resolution 819, adopted unanimously on 16 April, merely demanded that 'all parties . . . treat Srebrenica and its surroundings as a safe area'. The resolution lacked any enforcement provisions. As the British Foreign Office observed, 'UNSCR 819 . . . is purely declaratory and without operational effect'.[71]

Around the same time that Resolution 819 was being finalised in New York, on the ground in Bosnia, Srebrenica's leaders, no longer able to withstand the Serb onslaught, agreed to negotiations with their assailants, mediated by UNPROFOR, which resulted in the town being declared a 'demilitarised zone' on 18 April.[72] As a UN document from this period pointed out, 'the demilitarisation of Srebrenica was a step agreed by the parties . . . [Consequently,] the onus remains on the parties to treat Srebrenica as a "safe area"'.[73] Over the next several weeks, however, the UNSC moved away from this consent-based model. On 6 May, it adopted another resolution, 824, declaring that the Bosnian capital, Sarajevo, and four other towns – Tuzla, Zepa, Gorazde, and Bihac – 'should be treated as safe areas by all the parties concerned and should be free from armed attacks'. No further demilitarisation agreements followed. In fact, several council members – including the nonaligned and, crucially, the United States – pushed back against disarming Bosnian Muslim militias inside the safe areas, because of concerns that this would leave the Muslims exceedingly vulnerable.[74]

David Hannay, then Britain's ambassador to the UNSC, recalled that when pressure mounted from the humanitarian community and nonaligned council members to establish UN protected areas, 'the London view, informed by the ministry of defence, was cautious in the extreme'.[75] UK defence officials estimated that a much-enlarged UN troop contingent would be needed to protect the safe areas, but that was unlikely to materialise.[76] Furthermore, British leaders worried that in many cases there would be 'no access to the

[70]Hannay, author interview. On Britain's role in shaping UNSC Resolution 819, see also Shashi Tharoor (special assistant, UN Department of Peacekeeping Operations [UNDPKO], 1991–95), 'Creating the Safe Areas', 33.
[71]FCO, 'Former Yugoslavia: Meeting with US Secretary of State', speaking note, 1 May 1993, §14 (PREM 19/4510).
[72]UNPROFOR, 'Agreement for the Demilitarization of Srebrenica, 18 April 1993, https://nsarchive2.gwu.edu/NSAEBB/NSAEBB519-Srebrenica-conference-documents-detail-path-to-genocide-from-1993-to-1995/Documents/DOCUMENT%2003%20-%2019930417.pdf. See also Tharoor, 'Creating the Safe Areas', 26–28.
[73]Kofi Annan, 'Srebrenica', UNDPKO cable no. MSC 676 to UNPROFOR Commander Lars-Eric Wahlgren, 23 April 1993, https://nsarchive2.gwu.edu/NSAEBB/NSAEBB519-Srebrenica-conference-documents-detail-path-to-genocide-from-1993-to-1995/Documents/DOCUMENT%2004%20-%2019930423.pdf.
[74]McQueen, *Safety Zones*, 73–74.
[75]Hannay, author interview.
[76]Hurd to PM (ref. PM/93/024), 10 May 1993, 3.

safe areas other than through Bosnian Serb held territory; so how on earth were you to defend a safe area, if supplying your troops there required Bosnian Serb agreement?'[77]

French policymakers, including the foreign minister, Alain Juppé, privately acknowledged that the safe areas policy would be 'difficult to implement'.[78] Nevertheless, the French were more supportive of the concept from early on. This was partly because a French UNPROFOR commander in Bosnia, General Philippe Morillon, had taken the initiative to symbolically raise the UN flag over Srebrenica in March 1993, challenging the world community to action (and putting French prestige on the line) by declaring the town 'under the protection of the United Nations'.[79] More importantly, however, French leaders – especially Juppé – concluded in the course of April that by pushing the safe areas policy as an alternative to Washington's lift and strike proposal, they were more likely to be able to resist the latter.[80]

Britain embraces the safe areas as an alternative to 'lift and strike'

By early May, British decision makers had reluctantly come to agree with the French that the safe areas policy could be a useful tool to limit the scope and scale of US-led airstrikes in Bosnia.[81] Already during the consultations with Christopher in London, Prime Minister Major 'put forward the possibility of the West issuing a warning to the Bosnian Serbs backed by the threat … of limited air attacks … reserved for carefully defined circumstances'.[82] According to Major, 'the warning would have to relate to specific named areas, such as the Muslim enclaves in [Serb-dominated] eastern Bosnia'.[83]

As Christopher was returning from his trip across the Atlantic, French and British leaders launched a concerted effort to persuade President Clinton and his administration to link any potential use of airpower in Bosnia to the safe areas. On 6 May, President Mitterrand told his US counterpart over the telephone that the NATO allies should 'create safe havens protecting certain cities in Bosnia with the authority to conduct air strikes to protect them'.[84] That same day, Major's advisers in London recommended that the prime minister follow up with a letter to

[77]Hannay, author interview.
[78]UK Permanent Representation to the European Community, 'Foreign Affairs Council: Ex-Yugoslavia', telno 1030, 10 May 1993 (PREM 19/4510), §12.
[79]Larry Hollingworth (UNHCR chief of operations, Sarajevo, 1993–95), 'Creating the Safe Areas', 8–11; also McQueen, *Safety Zones*, 58; and Tardy, *Conflits yougoslaves*, 218.
[80]Tardy, *Conflits yougoslaves*, 227, esp. fn. 128; McQueen, *Safety Zones*, 77.
[81]Hannay, author interview.
[82]UK Cabinet, 6 May 1993, 3.
[83]Lyne, telno 444, §17.
[84]'Clinton-Mitterrand telcon', 6 May 1993.

President Clinton 'to try to influence the shape of this package'.[85] Major's letter, sent on 7 May, suggested that the Western powers should take the recent UNSC resolutions on safe areas as a starting point and, 'building on Security Council Resolution 824, [issue] a formal warning to the Bosnian Serbs to desist from further attacks on Moslem enclaves'.[86] British authorities had concluded that they needed to endorse somewhat 'tougher action' involving the potential use of airpower, 'to have any chance of agreement with the Americans and deflecting them' from pursuing lift and strike.[87] Britain's UN ambassador at the time subsequently confirmed that for London and Paris, 'the strategy was not to do lift and strike … and hope for the best'.[88]

The impetus for redirecting Western policy on the use of airpower toward deterring Serb attacks on designated safe areas came from France's foreign minister, Juppé. In early May, when Venezuela and other nonaligned UNSC members called for establishing additional safe areas beyond Srebrenica, Juppé supported the idea. Indeed, he suggested that the next resolution on safe areas should contain a 'reference to the role of the P5 [the five permanent members of the UNSC] in ensuring the application of the resolution'.[89] No language to that effect made it into Resolution 824 of 6 May, which as noted proclaimed additional safe areas. Yet no sooner was 824 adopted than Juppé informed the UK Foreign Office that he 'was inclined' to push for 'a new Security Council resolution [aimed at] extending the concept of safe zones'.[90] Juppé then shared with the allies a detailed memorandum on the 'concept of safe areas': the French foreign minister proposed building on Resolution 824 with another resolution explicitly authorising military action, and he identified several potential trigger criteria for 'the use of air resources', such as 'bombardment of the safe areas by one of the factions, armed advance within the safe areas, and opposition to the free movement of UNPROFOR'.[91]

[85]Lyne to PM, 'Bosnia: Draft Message to President Clinton', explanatory note, 6 May 1993 (PREM 19/4510).
[86]'Message from PM Major to President Clinton', 7 May 1993 (PREM 19/4510), 3.
[87]Hurd to PM, 'Former Yugoslavia', 10 May 1993 (PREM 19/4510), §7.
[88]Hannay, 'Creating the Safe Areas', 5.
[89]UK Embassy Paris, 'Bosnia: French Reactions to Pale Decision', telno 462, 6 May 1993 (PREM 19/4510), 2.
[90]UK FCO, 'Bosnia: Secretary of State's Conversation with the French Foreign Minister', telno 159, 6 May 1993 (PREM 19/4510).
[91]French Foreign Ministry, 'Concept of the Safe Areas', attached to note by Pauline Neville-Jones (Defence Secretariat, UK Cabinet Office) for Lyne (private secretary to UK PM), 'OPD Operational Points', London, 10 May 1993 (PREM 19/4510). Previous studies claimed, incorrectly, that Juppé first shared his memorandum on the safe areas with the allies only on May 19. See Rathbun, *Partisan Interventions*, 135; McQueen, *Safety Zones*, 71–72; Tardy, *Conflits yougoslaves*, 221.

For the alliance's sake: Washington supports the safe areas policy

US authorities were at first wary of tying the use of airpower to the UN safe areas. Policymakers in Washington worried that the safe areas policy lacked an exit strategy, and that airpower could not effectively protect civilians within the areas. US intelligence had warned earlier in the spring that to ensure civilian protection in the safe areas, a ground force 'much larger than the roughly 7,500 UN troops now in Bosnia would be needed'.[92] US Defense Department analysts observed that 'ultimately only the US might be able to provide the credible "overwhelming force" threat' needed to keep the areas safe.[93] Yet the top brass in Washington opposed any deployment of US troops to Bosnia in the absence of a peace agreement; and President Clinton, under pressure from a risk-averse Pentagon and concerned about weak congressional support, ruled out that option.[94] When French foreign minister Juppé lent his support to the safe areas policy in early May, he requested that the United States deploy 2,000 to 3,000 of its own troops to the safe areas.[95] The US administration almost immediately turned down this request, having decided that 'the US should not offer US ground troops to secure safe havens'.[96]

Nevertheless, already on 6 May – the same day that the UNSC adopted Resolution 824, and practically as soon as French and British leaders had floated the idea of linking any potential use of airpower to the safe areas – Clinton's senior advisers recommended that the United States 'contemplate use of air power in Eastern Bosnia in support of the establishment of additional safe havens'.[97] Later that same day, when Mitterrand made his pitch to Clinton for using the threat of airpower to deter Serb attacks on the safe areas, Clinton replied that the French proposal had 'some attractive aspects', and he promised to 'explore the mechanics'.[98] By 8 May, the US administration decided not to keep pushing for lift and strike, and instead to engage in a 'further review of air power options' in line with recent European proposals.[99] Clinton seemingly realised fairly quickly that to move beyond recent transatlantic tensions and find common ground with the European

[92]DCI Interagency Balkan Task Force, 'Establish Safe Havens around Srebrenica and Other Bosnian Cities', 23 March 1993, https://www.cia.gov/readingroom/docs/1993-03-23C.pdf. On US concerns about the lack of an exit strategy, see also UK-Wash., 'Bosnia: Meeting with the National Security Adviser', telno 1070, 12 May 1993.
[93]Office of the US Secretary of Defense, 'Issue Paper: Lifting the Siege of Sarajevo', 23 March 1993.
[94]On how civil-military relations influenced US policy on Bosnia, see Stefano Recchia, *Reassuring the Reluctant Warriors: US Civil-Military Relations and Multilateral Intervention* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell UP 2015), chap. 4.
[95]UK Embassy Paris, 'Telephone Conversation with Juppé', 7 May 1993 (PREM 19/4510).
[96]NSC-PC meeting on Bosnia, 'Summary of conclusions', 6 May 1993; also UK-Wash., 'Bosnia: Meeting with the National Security Adviser', telno 1070.
[97]NSC-PC, meeting on Bosnia, 6 May 1993.
[98]'Clinton-Mitterrand Telcon', 6 May 1993.
[99]NSC-PC meeting on Bosnia, 'Decisions', 8 May 1993; also Drew, *On the Edge*, 158–59.

allies, his administration needed to 'recognize with some sensitivity their strong feeling', which required abandoning lift and strike and 'look at other options' such as the French-inspired proposal on safe areas.[100]

On 22 May, Secretary Christopher welcomed the foreign ministers of key European partners in Washington, where they adopted the grandly named 'Joint Action Programme' on Bosnia, designed to smooth over their differences and highlight points of commonality: the partners agreed to strengthen enforcement of UN sanctions against Serbia, place international monitors along the Serbian border, and, crucially, 'work to secure early adoption' of a new UNSC resolution authorising the use of force in relation to the safe areas.[101] European policymakers were painfully aware at the time that 'the risk of damage to transatlantic relations, though reduced, had not disappeared'.[102] The Joint Action Programme was explicitly designed to provide an image of US leadership and patch things up among the allies.[103]

Ambassador Hannay recalled that when London and Paris endorsed the Joint Action Programme, 'neither Britain nor France thought the safe areas policy was a good policy; but we decided that we were not going to have a great bust-up with the Americans, and that was why the safe areas were enacted the way they were'.[104] The US administration, for its part, had not changed its mind about 'the pluses and minuses of safe havens', as Secretary Christopher explained, but it 'decided to go along with the idea because the Europeans wanted it'.[105] Senior US policymakers believed that showcasing the alliance's ability to act together on Bosnia would be important to help 'preserve and bolster NATO'.[106] Less than a week later, the US administration agreed to support a 'French draft UN resolution on safe havens', including its provisions authorising air support to UNPROFOR.[107] The result was UNSC Resolution 836, adopted on 4 June 1993, which authorised 'all necessary

[100]'Interview with President Clinton'.

[101]'Joint Action Programme', available as annex to UN doc. S/25829, https://undocs.org/S/25829. See also Drew, *On the Edge*, 162; and Daalder, *Getting to Dayton*, 19.

[102]UK Cabinet, 20 May 1993 (Kew ref. CAB 128/105/18), 3.

[103]The British prime minister's top foreign policy aide advised during the run-up to the Washington meeting that UK proposals were more likely to have 'a measurable influence on Washington . . . if [the British] allow[ed] the Americans to claim credit for those ideas they pick up!' Lyne to PM, 'Bosnia: Weekend Round-Up', 14 May 1993 (PREM 19/4510), 2–3.

[104]Hannay, author interview. A Dutch report published in 2002 had already hypothesised that 'the joint action programme . . . had less to do with the reality of Bosnia than with the need to restore trans-Atlantic relations'. See 'Srebrenica: A Safe Area', report by the Institute for War, Holocaust, and Genocide Studies (Amsterdam, 2002), 794, http://publications.niod.knaw.nl/publications/srebrenicareportniod_en.pdf.

[105]Quoted in Elaine Sciolino, 'Allies Announce Strategy to Curb Fighting in Bosnia; US Offers Planes, Not Men,' *New York Times*, 23 May 1993, A1.

[106]Anthony Lake, 'Interview Transcript', Miller Center Presidential History Project, University of Virginia, 21 May 2002, 43, https://millercenter.org/the-presidency/presidential-oral-histories/bill-clinton.

[107]NSC-DC meeting on Former Yugoslavia, 'Memorandum for the Record', 3 June 1993, https://www.cia.gov/readingroom/docs/1993-06-03.pdf.

measures, through the use of air power, in and around the safe areas . . . to support UNPROFOR in the performance of its mandate' and specifically to 'deter attacks against the safe areas'.

A muddled compromise

Reflecting the Western powers' risk aversion, Resolution 836 mandated the (mainly European) UNPROFOR troops in Bosnia to 'deter' attacks against the safe areas by their presence, but not to defend the areas and the civilians within them. Consistent with this timid approach, UNPROFOR was authorised to use force, and request air support, only 'acting in self-defence' rather than for the explicit purpose of civilian protection.[108] UN planners pointed out in June 1993 that an additional 34,000 troops were needed 'to obtain deterrence through strength'.[109] However, given that none of the major powers was willing to step up to the plate, the UN Secretariat let itself be strong-armed into recommending a 'light option' of just 7,500 additional troops. By early 1994, less than half that number had been deployed.[110]

Furthermore, UNPROFOR commanders had stressed that the 'only way' of creating effective safe areas, short of a massive international deployment, would be to 'demilitarise agreed areas and monitor them', as foreseen in the original agreement on Srebrenica signed by the warring parties in April.[111] UN authorities underscored during the negotiations on Resolution 836 that an effective safe area policy required 'a sufficient degree of demilitarisation to assure the parties to the conflict that the safe areas represented no military advantage to the protected party'.[112] Yet the US mission to the security council, supported by the nonaligned, opposed any wording in the resolution calling for general disarmament of the safe areas.[113] US diplomats thus disregarded warnings by their own intelligence, which had cautioned earlier that year that in the absence of demilitarisation, 'Muslim hardliners almost certainly would attempt to mount military operations from the safehavens against Serb positions outside the zones'.[114]

[108]For a discussion, see Rathbun, *Partisan Interventions*, 61, 138.
[109]UN doc. S/25939, 14 June 1993.
[110]'Creating the Safe Areas', 49–51, esp. fn. 70; also Bosco, *Five to Rule Them All*, 181.
[111]UNPROFOR Bosnia HQ Kiseljak, 'Secco Visit to UNPROFOR', fax message, ref. no. CG/6000/93, 1 May 1993, 3.
[112]Fax message from Amb. Rick Inderfurth, US Mission to the United Nations, to NSC staff, 'Safe Areas: Working Paper by the UN Secretariat', 28 May 1993, 3.
[113]US diplomats reportedly were trying to define the safe areas 'in a pro-Bosnian [Muslim] way'. See McQueen, *Safety Zones*, 180–81, fn. 89.
[114]DCI Interagency Balkan Task Force, 'Establish Safe Havens'. UN authorities issued similar warnings. See, e.g., UNDPKO fax message to UK-UN, 'Clarifications Required in Regard to SCR 836', 14 June 1993, https://clinton.presidentiallibraries.us/items/show/62634.

These warnings proved sadly prophetic. Almost from the beginning, Bosnian Muslim fighters took advantage of the safe areas to regroup and rest.[115] Gradually, Muslim militias also began to use the safe areas as jumping-off points for high-risk offensive operations. The Muslims' hope was that they would eventually draw the United States and its allies into a more robust military intervention on their side.[116] In April 1994, Bosnian Muslim forces staged an attack out of the Gorazde safe area, triggering a Serb counter-offensive that inflicted heavy civilian casualties.[117] In October that year, Muslim forces launched an offensive out of the Bihac safe area that brought about retaliatory Serb shelling.[118] Evidence made available through the International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia (ICTY) indicates that Srebrenica, too, was used as a staging ground for Muslim guerrilla activity in eastern Bosnia, before the safe area was completely overrun by Serb forces in July 1995.[119]

Pinprick airstrikes

The principal 'new element' of Resolution 836, as Hannay, Britain's UN ambassador, put it at the time, was the authorisation of NATO airpower to help UNPROFOR deter attacks on the safe areas.[120] Yet the use of airpower was placed under tight international control.

836 specified that UN member states were authorised to use of airpower 'subject to close coordination with the [UN] Secretary-General and UNPROFOR'. As a condition for their backing, Britain and France had extracted a commitment from the United States that 'close coordination' meant any air support had to be explicitly requested by UNPROFOR, and would also have to be approved by the UN secretary-general or his representative in the Balkans.[121] The go-ahead for particular bombings thus had to be given not only by NATO, where the United States held significant clout, but also by UN authorities, who would act in consultation with the main UNPROFOR troop contributors – Britain and France. This 'dual key' arrangement enabled the British and French to repeatedly veto particular airstrikes. Over the next two

[115]McQueen, *Safety Zones*, 76.
[116]Recchia, 'The Paradox of Safe Areas', 378; Kuperman, 'Moral Hazard of Humanitarian Intervention', 60.
[117]McQueen, *Safety Zones*, 77–78; Burg and Shoup, *War in Bosnia*, 146–47.
[118]'The Fall of Srebrenica: Report of the UN Secretary-General', UN doc. A/54/549, 15 November 1999, 38–39; McQueen, *Safety Zones*, 79.
[119]ICTY, 'Prosecutor v. Radislav Krstic, case no. IT-98-33-T, 2 August 2001, 8–9, http://www.icty.org/x/cases/krstic/tjug/en/krs-tj010802e.pdf.
[120]UN doc. S/PV.3228, 4 June 1993, 57.
[121]George F. Ward (deputy assistant secretary of state, international organization affairs, 1992–96), author interview, 4 April 2011. See also Hurd to UK delegation NATO, 'Yugoslavia: Air support for UNPROFOR' 27 May 1993, §4/VI,https://nsarchive2.gwu.edu/NSAEBB/NSAEBB519-Srebrenica-conference-documents-detail-path-to-genocide-from-1993-to-1995/Documents/DOCUMENT%2006%20-%2019930527%20TeIno%20155.pdf and Walter B. Slocombe, letter to Senator Carl Levin, reprinted in 'International Peacekeeping and Peace Enforcement', Hearing, Armed Services Committee, US Senate, 103rd Cong., 1st sess., 14 July 1993, 32.

years, London and Paris on several occasions 'would agree to turn NATO's key, but each time they were then going to [UN Secretary-General] Boutros-Ghali and telling him not to turn the UN key', explained Robert Hunter, the US ambassador to NATO at the time.[122]

The UN's special representative for the Balkans, Yasushi Akashi, was for his part extremely reluctant to call in NATO airpower.[123] This to some extent reflected the UN's institutional culture – especially the desire to keep peacekeeping separate from peace enforcement. However, Akashi's reluctance was 'reinforced by the troop contributing countries'.[124] At some level, therefore, the UN – and Akashi and Boutros-Ghali as its representatives – became a convenient scapegoat that the European powers could use to dissimulate their own aversion to robust airstrikes. Hannay came close to acknowledging as much years later, when he stressed that '836 provided the authority [for using airpower] so long as the UN asked for it; that was a necessary requirement. But Boutros-Ghali was only going to do it if he was told by the three of us – Britain, France, and the United States – that we wanted him to do it'.[125]

In the summer of 1993, under US pressure, London and Paris accepted the principle of airstrikes initiated by NATO, which was a step beyond 'close air support' at UNPROFOR's request.[126] However, British and French officials pushed back against broader US airstrike proposals that reminded them of the 'strike' component in lift and strike, and they remained adamant that particular strikes, even though not specifically requested by UNPROFOR, would require the approval of UN authorities.[127]

NATO did not actually engage in limited aerial bombing until April 1994, when UNPROFOR called for air support and US aircraft dropped three bombs on Serb military facilities near the Gorazde safe area.[128] Subsequently, NATO employed limited airpower seeking to stop Serb advances on Bihac in November 1994 and Sarajevo in May 1995.[129] Such 'pinprick' airstrikes had no strategic impact on the course of the war. Indeed, the Bosnian Serbs gradually realised that the West's threat of punishing airstrikes was essentially a bluff, and in the course of 1994 and 1995, several of the safe areas came

[122]Robert Hunter (US permanent representative to NATO, 1993–98), author interview, 11 March 2010.
[123]See, e.g., Gow, *Lack of Will*, 149–50.
[124]Ian Johnstone (legal adviser, office of the UN secretary-general, 1994–95), author interview, 2 April 2010.
[125]Hannay, author interview.
[126]European leaders again worried that a flat-out rejection of US proposals could have 'potentially a very damaging effect on future attitudes towards NATO … in the United States'. Lyne to PM, 'Bosnia', briefing note, 25 July 1993, 4; also Hurd to PM, 'Former Yugoslavia: Response to US Initiative', 26 July 1993, 2 [Kew ref. PREM 19/4513].
[127]Neville-Jones to Lyne, 'Former Yugoslavia: US Initiative', London, 30 July 1993; Hurd to UKDEL NATO, 'Instructions for Probable 2 August NAC Meeting', 30 July 1993. On France's position, see Tardy, *Conflits yougoslaves*, 223–27.
[128]'The Fall of Srebrenica', 34.
[129]'Fall of Srebrenica', 38, 46; also McQueen, *Safety Zones*, 78–79.

under heavy attack. UN forces were largely impotent in the face of intense Serb shelling, and after NATO launched limited airstrikes in November 1994 and again in May 1995, the Serbs took hundreds of UN peacekeepers hostage.[130]

It was not until the summer of 1995, after Serb forces overran the Srebrenica safe area and killed more than seven thousand of its male inhabitants, that the Western powers agreed to more robust military action. Jacques Chirac, elected to the French presidency earlier that year, had for several months favoured tougher action on Bosnia and now agreed with Clinton that the allies needed to 'draw a line'.[131] Clinton then persuaded the still reluctant British leadership to acquiesce in a firm NATO warning that further attacks on the remaining safe areas would result in substantial airstrikes.[132] In late August 1995, after a deadly mortar attack on a Sarajevo marketplace that was attributed to the Bosnian Serbs, NATO launched a broader air campaign, Operation Deliberate Force, that facilitated a negotiated end to the war.[133]

Conclusion: The pitfalls of consensus seeking without a strategy

New evidence presented in this article supports the argument that the Western powers' diplomatic and military backing for the Bosnian safe areas was the result of mutual alliance entanglement. The United States, Great Britain, and France pulled each other into supporting the safe areas through the Joint Action Programme and UNSC Resolution 836, notwithstanding their grave reservations about the policy, in an effort to overcome their recent disagreements and showcase their ability to act together. Because the NATO allies did not consider their core national interests threatened by the humanitarian crisis in Bosnia, the policy represented the lowest common denominator. It was a muddled compromise that lacked a clear strategic purpose – beyond signalling alliance cohesion.

US-led alliances have important benefits for the United States and its partners, ranging from deterrence to enhanced diplomatic leverage.[134] Meanwhile, the risk of military entanglement, and mutual entanglement in particular, may be quite small. Nevertheless, this risk cannot be dismissed altogether. The odds of mutual entanglement are particularly high, when established alliances are undergoing a transition and their continuing value is

[130]Gow, *Lack of Will*, 151–52; Daalder, *Getting to Dayton*, 31–34, 40–42.
[131]'Clinton-Chirac memorandum of conversation', 19 July 1995. See also Daalder, *Getting to Dayton*, 68–71.
[132]William J. Clinton, 'Bosnia: Letter for PM Major', White House, 29 July 1995. See also Rathbun, *Partisan Interventions*, 68; and Daalder, *Getting to Dayton*, 75–80.
[133]The air campaign coincided with a joint Muslim-Croat ground offensive that put significant pressure on the Bosnian Serbs. Daalder, *Getting to Dayton*, 119–34; Burg and Shoup, *War in Bosnia*, 350–60.
[134]For a useful discussion, see Hal Brands and Peter D. Feaver, 'What Are America's Alliances Good For?' *Parameters* 42/2 (2017), 15–30.

questioned by influential voices from among its members. This was clearly the case for the Atlantic alliance during the initial post–Cold War period, when NATO sceptics argued that the Soviet Union's demise had left the alliance without a raison d'être. Such criticism made pro-NATO policymakers both in Europe and in the United States highly sensitive to the importance of showcasing unity and demonstrating that the alliance remained relevant in the face of new challenges – thus increasing the risk of entanglement.

As this article was being completed, Russia's aggressive behaviour in Eastern Europe – notably, its invasion of Ukraine – appeared to have given NATO a new sense of purpose. Yet questions are likely to be raised in the future about NATO's effectiveness both as a tool for burden sharing and for dealing with new threats. Members of the foreign policy establishment in the United States and Europe, who remain committed to NATO, may thus be willing to incur considerable costs to demonstrate the alliance's usefulness and prowess. Confronted with political and humanitarian crises in NATO's neighbourhood, the allies may at first differ on how to respond. Yet in the face of mounting pressures to 'do something', they may be tempted by military commitments and armed interventions they would otherwise shun, to showcase their cohesion, military vigour, and joint skill. Whenever such 'muscular' options are considered, the allies would do well to heed the lessons of Bosnia: International intervention in foreign conflicts may not necessarily ameliorate the situation on the ground, nor ultimately buttress the alliance, without an effective strategy backed by the political will to shoulder attendant costs in terms of manpower and matériel.

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