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NATO'S ROLE IN BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA

One of NATO's biggest challenges this decade has been to help keep the peace in Bosnia and Herzegovina by leading a multinational military force there.

The Stabilisation Force (SFOR), which now numbers around 32,000 troops drawn from 38 nations, supports the efforts of the international community and the United Nations aimed at:

- implementing the peace agreement in Bosnia
- preventing the conflict spreading
- ending the humanitarian crisis and
- helping create conditions for the country to rebuild itself.

NATO's priorities in Bosnia in 1999 are as follows:

- maintaining a continued military presence to deter hostilities and providing a secure environment and support for civil implementation;
- achieving progress in returning displaced persons to their homes in 1999;
- taking steps to promote reconciliation between the armed forces of the Bosniac-Croat Federation and the Republika Srpska, and to develop the role of the Standing Committee on Military Matters established under the Dayton Peace Agreements, as an effective, centralised defence institution for the country as a whole.

From 1992 until the signing of the Dayton Peace Agreement at the end of 1995, the Alliance supported United Nations objectives in the former Yugoslavia through various maritime and air operations including:

- the monitoring and enforcement of U.N. sanctions by NATO naval forces in the Adriatic (in conjunction with the Western European Union (WEU));
- the monitoring and enforcement of the U.N. no-fly zone over Bosnia by NATO air forces;
- providing close air support to the U.N. Protection Force (UNPROFOR) in Bosnia;
- carrying out air strikes to relieve the siege of Sarajevo.

Decisive action by the Alliance in support of the U.N. together with a determined diplomatic effort led to a genuine cease-fire and made a negotiated solution to the conflict possible in autumn 1995.

In December 1995, the North Atlantic Council launched the largest military operation ever undertaken by the Alliance, Operation JOINT ENDEAVOUR. The Implementation Force (IFOR), a NATO-led multinational force of some 60,000 personnel, was deployed to implement the military aspects of the Dayton Peace Agreements. IFOR brought together NATO and non-NATO countries in an unprecedented coalition for peace.

In December 1996, IFOR was replaced by SFOR, then a force of approximately 30,000-strong personnel. In the summer of 1998, a transition strategy for SFOR was agreed, to permit a gradual and progressive reduction in the size, role and profile of the force to match the transition from military to civil implementation of the Dayton Peace Agreement. A process of regular, formal reviews of the scope for force reductions was initiated.

In December 1998, it was decided to begin streamlining SFOR - given that it is not intended to maintain indefinitely SFOR's presence in Bosnia at existing levels - and to examine options for more substantial adjustments in the size and structure of SFOR in the longer term.

Moreover, recognising that an international military presence cannot be the sole basis for security and stability in Bosnia in the longer term, NATO has initiated a Security Cooperation Programme (SCP) which is making concrete, practical contributions to strengthening stability and promoting reconciliation within the Bosnian defence community.