

**Presidential Radio Speech: U.S.-Russian Peacekeeping Cooperation in Bosnia**

*President Clinton, late December 1995*

Good evening. As I stand here before you today, our American troops are stationed in Bosnia alongside twelve other nations in Task Force Eagle. One of our former enemies is part of this multinational formation. Before I explain why we are cooperating with Russia and how this unusual and groundbreaking collaboration will work, let me remind you of why we are involved in the Bosnian Peace Implementation Force.

Conflicting religions and cultural differences have been historically embedded in the Balkans region. In April of 1992, Serbian rebels conducted “ethnic cleansing” of Bosnian Muslims and non-Serbs, while Croat nationalists did the same to create an all-Croat homeland. However, after U.N. ultimatums and air strikes, the warring parties withdrew and hostilities ceased as a peace agreement was reached in Dayton, Ohio. The Dayton Peace Accord, formally known as The General Framework Agreement, defines a separation zone and permits a NATO-led military Implementation Force, a.k.a. the IFOR, into Bosnia. The IFOR consists of 60,000 international troops, 20,000 of which are our soldiers, who will help make sure all parties follow the agreement.

Therefore, the international crisis in Bosnia and Herzegovina does not require us to go to war, but rather participate in a peacekeeping operation. The purpose is to provide a secure environment for the local institutions and organizations to carry out the rebuilding process. Vital U.S. national interests are at stake. Security, economic, and political interests are tied to this European conflict. Also, it involves humanitarian concerns and a chance to stop the horrible atrocities. We are the only NATO nation that can lead peace enforcement in these circumstances, and I am convinced this is the right decision. Once again, we are not going to

war; we are protecting peace. From the words of one of our own selfless heroes at Eagle Base, specialist Christina Campbell, we can be certain of our purpose. Campbell declared, “No, this is not our soil and it’s not our own fight. But if you’ve seen what I have, then you know that it’s right.”

Now that you understand why we are participating in the Bosnian peacekeeping operation, I will briefly describe how the collaboration with Russia will work. The Partnership for Peace Program will serve as a middle ground for Russian connection with NATO. This allows them to engage in NATO activities without becoming an official part of the group. Also, Russia is a fellow member of the six-nation Contact Group that has already directed international cooperation in the post-Yugoslavia crises. Most importantly, Russia will work with our American troops in Operation Joint Endeavor. The Task Force Eagle is a powerful, multinational formation within the IFOR that will carry out this operation. About 2,000 Russian troops will be participating in the U.S. division. A single chain of command will be followed as they receive their operational directions from American generals, but their own Russian general will deliver the orders. The task force will perform the duties that I just stated moments ago.

Now let me clarify why we are cooperating with a previous enemy. I’m sure the uneasy days of the Cold War still linger in the back of your minds. However, the imminent threat of the Reds invading or attacking us has disappeared. No longer are we neck and neck in an arms race. In fact, we are cooperating with the states of our former enemy to reduce their number of nuclear weapons. It’s been about four years since the Iron Curtain was lifted and the Soviet Union collapsed. After the Berlin Wall crumbled and communism diminished, Russia emerged as an independent republic – a nation that favors democracy just as we do. Russia is no longer an

ideological and strategic challenger. It is at the top of our agenda to continue improving relations with Moscow.

Currently, we remain a world superpower with no rival enemy. Our adversary of the past can now become an ally – our Eastern partner in peace. Russian President Boris Yeltsin acknowledged our new relationship in February of 1992 when he said, “Russia sees America not just as a partner, but as an ally and friend.” The benefits of this partnership are numerous as we further our common effort to achieve lasting peace and promote reconstruction in the conflicted regions. It is both of our obligations to help Bosnia, Croatia, and Serbia create more open, accepting, and democratic societies. Of course it is important for Russia to promote stability and reconciliation within its own territory, and that’s why ensuring a positive future for the broader Europe through this peacekeeping mission is essential.

As we learn from each other, we will profit in mutual ways. We have a lot to gain from constructive relations with Russia, especially in terms of security matters. Greater communications between our countries will reduce fears and misperceptions. Also, improved relations would help Russia get back on its feet economically, as it is trying to build strong ties with its neighbors and be seen in a better light within the international arena. Another crucial reason why we need the Russian involvement is because they have ethnic and cultural ties to Yugoslavia’s Slavs and this will help facilitate the mediation. Furthermore, our revitalized partnership will hopefully smooth over any negative sentiments remaining from Russia’s poor reception to NATO enlargement. Finally, without the help and hard work of our Russian counterparts, the Dayton Peace Accord would not be in place today. It was their support and co-chairing of the negotiations that aided us in persuading the warring nations to choose peace.

My fellow Americans, Operation Joint Endeavor will go down in the history books as a time when enemies worked together as friends. It will be the first time since World War II that Russians and Americans strived for a common goal. If we don't pursue this collaboration, the consequences could be grave. Allowing the war to continue would be more disastrous than the risks we are willing to take through the peacekeeping operation. Even worse, war could spread to Slovenia and Hungary, or even south to Macedonia and Kosovo where it would endanger our NATO allies Turkey and Greece. Upon the advice of my Secretary of Defense William Perry, we must not allow these new threats to emerge. It is imperative that we adhere to our preventive defense stance in order for our national security policy to be successful.

I believe it is safe to say we would rather have the Russians working with us than against us. If it produces the desired results, this combined peacekeeping operation could set the precedent and inspire more collaboration with Russia in the future. In January of 1992, former U.S.S.R. President Mikhail Gorbachev proclaimed, "The end of the Cold War is our common victory." With the support of you, the American people, I am confident that we can share many more victories with Russia, starting with this peacekeeping mission in Bosnia. Thank you!

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