
Abroad at Home

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Pressure on Serbia

BOSTON

In the last days of his Presidency, George Bush has altered his course on the tragedy in Bosnia. From a posture of seeming indifference, his Administration has moved to strong condemnation of Serbian aggression. It is using open pressure, indeed threats, to stop the killing.

Secretary of State Lawrence S. Eagleburger gave dramatic evidence of the new policy this week when he told an international conference that Slobodan Milosevic, President of Serbia, was among those who should face possible trial for "crimes against humanity." The listing of his and other names was an extraordinary step: about as somber a warning as one can imagine in international life.

The world has "a moral and historical obligation," Mr. Eagleburger said, "not to stand back a second time in this century while a people faces obliteration."

The United States also took the lead in calling on the U.N. Security Council to enforce an earlier resolution banning military air flights over Bosnia. NATO ministers began planning for possible military action. The Pentagon let it be known that American forces are making their own preparations for possible air strikes.

Why the sudden stiffening of the Administration's position? I believe Mr. Bush was moved by a number of factors. First, President-elect Clinton has gone out of his way in recent days to express concern about the human disaster in Bosnia. There has been what one Clinton aide called "an escalation of seriousness."

Incoming and outgoing Adminis-

Mr. Bush finally alters course.

trations do not try to coordinate policies during the transition. As Mr. Clinton has repeatedly said, "We have only one President."

While Clinton transition representatives have talked with the Bush people about the Bosnian situation, and been briefed on developments, the new decisions have been entirely Mr. Bush's. But I believe the policy has been affected by the strength and urgency of the Clinton statements. And of course they have helped to clear the political ground for a stronger U.S. position.

Second, Republican heavyweights have been pressing Mr. Bush to stop the Serbian aggression. Former President Reagan spoke out. Former Secretary of State George Shultz compared what the Serbs are doing in Bosnia to what the Nazis did at Auschwitz.

Third, religious leaders with rare unanimity have condemned the Serbians' "ethnic cleansing" of Bosnia: killing Bosnian Muslims and driving them from their homes. B'nai B'rith and other Jewish organizations have been especially active. Elie Wiesel, who survived the Holocaust, met Secretary Eagleburger last week to appeal for action to save the Bosnians.

Fourth, Serbia holds an election this Sunday, and Mr. Milosevic is opposed by a candidate who calls for

peace, Milan Panic. Much of the strong new American rhetoric is evidently designed to make Serbian voters think of the consequences if they re-elect Mr. Milosevic. Mr. Eagleburger seemed to be speaking to them when he said Serbs must understand that they will face "economic ruin and exclusion from the family of civilized nations for as long as they pursue the suicidal dream of a Greater Serbia."

Fifth, the facts on the ground have dashed what may have been the Bush Administration's hope that somehow the Serbs would stop of their own accord, having gobbled up 70 percent of Bosnia.

The siege of Sarajevo continues, as do Serbian attacks on pockets of Muslim resistance containing large numbers of refugees. To the other horrors we know, there were added this week, on The New York Times Op-Ed page, accounts of rape so ghastly that it was difficult to read them.

Robert Gates, Mr. Bush's Director of Central Intelligence, used a speech this week to list some of the terrible statistics of devastation in the former Yugoslavia: more than 100,000 dead, 500,000 refugees fled from the country, three million Bosnians driven from their homes. In the winter ahead, he said, "nearly 1.7 million people are at risk of starvation in Bosnia."

Perhaps, in the end, the dimensions of the horror were too great for George Bush to push aside. He did not want to be remembered in history as the President who, in Mr. Eagleburger's phrase, stood back while a people was obliterated. □

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