

Hill Leaders Wary Of Bosnia Plan; Serbs Order Vote

Assembly Votes For Referendum On Peace Plan

By David B. Ottaway
Washington Post Foreign Service

MOUNT JAHORINA, Bosnia, May 6 (Thursday)—An assembly of Bosnian Serb nationalist leaders here sidestepped a decision on whether to accept a U.N.-backed peace plan for the battered republic, voting early today instead to put the plan to a referendum of the Serb population of Bosnia.

The 51 to 2 vote followed 16 hours of rancorous debate on the issue and represented rejection of a forceful plea by Serbian President Slobodan Milosevic for the assembly to ratify the peace plan and thus accept deployment in Bosnia of tens of thousands of peace-keeping troops from the United States, Russia and NATO countries.

"There is no alternative—peace on one side and nothing on the other," said Milosevic, whose government has provided vital military support for the Bosnian Serbs' 13-month-old war against the republic's Croats and Slavic Muslims. His appeal was echoed by the presidents of Yugoslavia and Montenegro and the premier of Greece, all of whom traveled to this mountain town to lobby the Bosnian Serbs' self-styled parliament.

Following the referendum decision, Yugoslav President Dobrica Cosic, visibly shaken by the turn of events, declared that the assembly had made "the worst decision this nation has ever seen. Political reason has been defeated; this country

See BOSNIA, A41, Col 1

Support Lacking For Sending GIs, Clinton Is Told

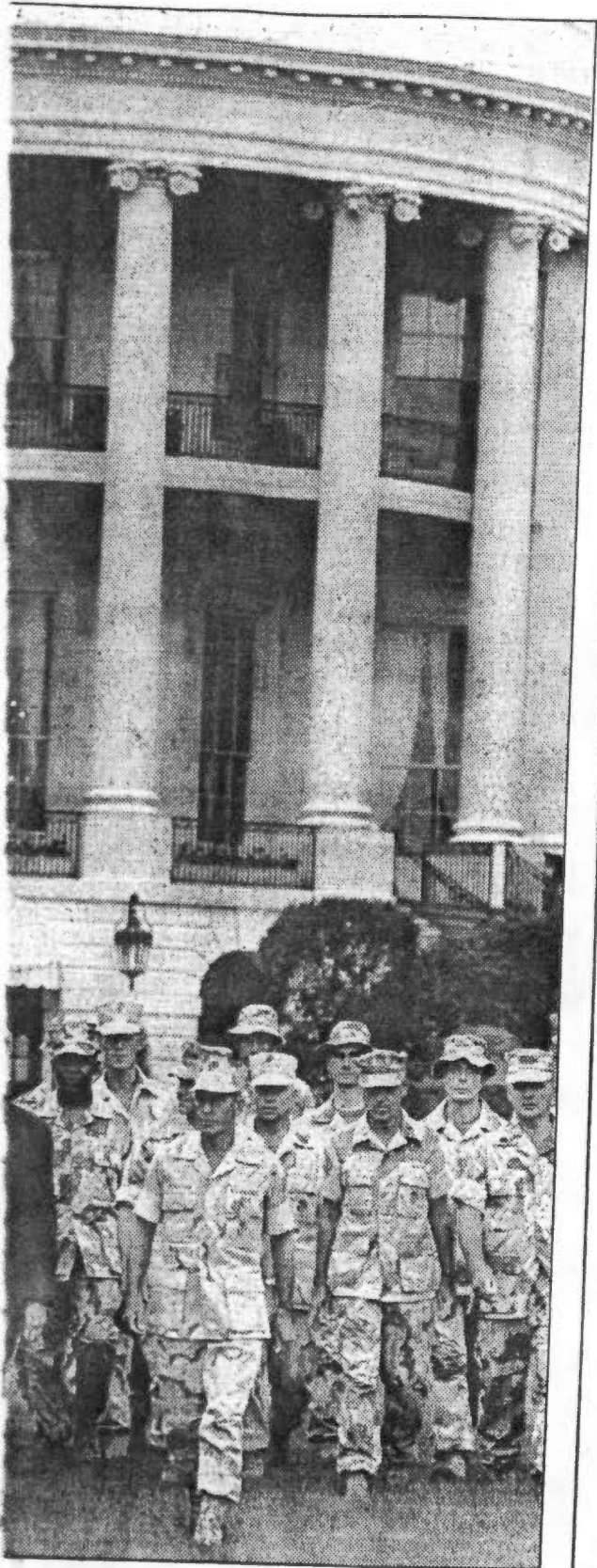
By Ruth Marcus
Washington Post Staff Writer

House leaders of both parties warned President Clinton yesterday that he does not yet have the support of the American people for sending large numbers of troops on a peace-keeping mission to Bosnia. They told the president that Congress would have to vote on the plan, sources familiar with the meeting said.

Clinton's meeting with the congressional leadership was dominated by discussion of a peace-keeping plan that the administration hopes to put into effect if the Serbs approve a United Nations-brokered peace accord, the sources said. NATO has drafted a peace-keeping plan that envisions the deployment of roughly 20,000 U.S. soldiers as part of a multinational force of about 60,000 troops who would enforce the peace agreement among the Balkan republic's three warring factions.

The meeting came as Russia offered to participate in the proposed peace-keeping effort but failed to endorse Clinton's call for military measures against the Serbs if they back away from the accord already endorsed by Bosnia's Muslims and Croats. The Clinton administration continues to hold out the threat of air strikes against Serb military positions, as well as help in arming the Muslims, if the Serbs continue to resist a peace settlement. But Secretary of State Warren Christopher

See TROOPS, A40, Col 1



BY DAYNA SMITH—THE WASHINGTON POST

U.S. troops just home from Somalia yesterday and thanked their U.N. command patrolled the streets. Story, Page A31.

Bosnian Serbs Sidestep Vote On Peace Plan

BOSNIA, From A1

and this people are from tomorrow in great uncertainty. I do not know what the next night will bring."

The assembly, which rejected the peace plan by a unanimous vote 10 days ago, set May 15 as the date for the referendum, but it was not immediately clear how such a vote would be carried out, whether Serb civilians on all sides of the complex battle lines would be permitted to cast ballots and if such a vote would be monitored by neutral observers.

More important, it could not be ascertained what effect the assembly's decision would have on U.S. planning to force the Bosnian Serbs to make peace by launching air strikes against their artillery positions and supply lines and by permitting Bosnia's Slavic Muslims to acquire weapons equal to those of the more powerful Serbs. The White House, which has been trying to attract international support for such action if the assembly voted down the peace plan, had no immediate comment on the proposed referendum.

Before the assembly action, there were reports that the body was prepared to accept it, but with conditions—such as a demand that U.N. trade sanctions against Yugoslavia—now composed of Serbia and its satellite, Montenegro—be lifted.

With Serbia and Montenegro staggering under the tightened sanctions and the Bosnian Serbs facing the threat of U.S. air strikes, Milosevic apparently had decided to apply maximum pressure to dissuade the assembly from rejecting the peace plan. His speech, opening the assembly session at this former Olympic ski center southeast of Sarajevo near the Bosnian Serbs' headquarters at Pale, came as Secretary of State Warren Christopher traversed Europe seeking to organize support for military action against the recalcitrant Serbs.

Milosevic had demanded that the nearly 80 delegates present—12 abstained on the referendum vote—endorse the action of their leader, Radovan Karadzic, who initialed the plan last weekend at an international summit conference near Athens.

The plan, drawn up by U.N. special envoy Cyrus Vance and European Community negotiator David Owen, has been signed by Bosnia's Muslim-led government and the republic's Croat leaders. It would create 10 semiautonomous provinces, with three likely to be dominated by each



ASSOCIATED PRESS

Bosnian Serb commander Ratko Mladic, right, talks with officials: from left, deputy leader Nikola Koljevic, assembly chief Momcilo Krajanik, Yugoslav Foreign Minister Radoslav Jovovic and his Bosnian Serb counterpart, Aleksa Buha.

of the warring groups. Had the assembly ratified it, the United States and its NATO allies were prepared to pour in thousands of peace-keeping troops to enforce its provisions.

Karadzic, whose willingness to make a public defense of the plan had been uncertain, implored the assembly to support it. "I have to ask you to sign these papers," he said repeatedly. "As I said before, we have real threats confronting us, and we're in a very difficult situation now."

Karadzic warned the assembly that if it rejected the plan and the war continued, NATO forces are ready to become involved, with possibly disastrous consequences for the Bosnian Serbs. If the assembly endorsed the plan, on the other hand, he promised that changes could be negotiated later in the areas allocated to the Serbs.

"After we sign, we can negotiate about our borders and everything else," Karadzic said. He assured the assembly that none of the plan's provincial borders would have binding, legal status unless all three warring parties—Serbs, Croats and the Muslim-led Bosnian government—agree to them.

Some members had predicted to Serb-controlled media that the plan would be accepted with "certain conditions" attached, including a lifting of the sanctions within three weeks and guarantees that the Serb-held regions of Bosnia would be linked by land corridors, the Reuter news service reported.

[In Washington, a Clinton administration official said of such reports: "We are wary of conditions on the Vance-Owen plan and have urged that the Serbs accept Vance-Owen" as it is.]

As the assembly met, Sarajevo came under the heaviest concentrated bombardment in days. For two hours, scores of artillery shells fell on

the Bosnian capital's downtown and historic district, and tank rounds rocked the area around the high-rise Holiday Inn on the road to the airport. Officials at Sarajevo's Kosevo Hospital said two people died and 17 were wounded in the shelling.

Under the Vance-Owen plan the Serbs, who now control more than 70 percent of Bosnia, would have to settle for 43 percent. They would also have to recognize the independent Bosnian state and give up their at-

tempt to create their own separate republic.

In his campaign to pressure the assembly to approve the plan, Milosevic brought along Greek Prime Minister Constantine Mitsotakis, Yugoslav President Cosic and Montenegrin President Momir Bulatovic. Cosic, widely regarded as the father of contemporary Serbian nationalism, bluntly told the Bosnian Serbs that "we're not in a position any more to support this war. We need peace."



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Clinton Cautioned on Plan To Send Troops to Bosnia

TROOPS, From A1

has had difficulty selling the bombing plan to major European allies.

Sources familiar with the White House meeting said discussion of what the United States would do if the Serbs reject the peace plan took a back seat to concern about the proposed peace-keeping operation, with House Speaker Thomas S. Foley (D-Wash.) and Majority Leader Richard A. Gephardt (D-Mo.) joining Minority Leader Robert H. Michel (R-Ill.) and Minority Whip Newt Gingrich (R-Ga.) in expressing misgivings about the plan and its prospects in Congress.

Senate leaders at the meeting, including Majority Leader George J. Mitchell (D-Maine) and Minority Leader Robert J. Dole (R-Kan.), were far more sanguine about the prospects for approval of the plan, participants said.

Foley emerged from the meeting to tell reporters "there would be congressional support for what the president determines to recommend to Congress," but the House Speaker was reported by others who attended to have been far more downbeat behind closed doors.

"Foley said the country isn't behind [the peace-keeping plan] and that the House isn't behind it and that there would have to be a vote," said one participant in the meeting. Another source said Foley "expressed extreme caution in terms of potential military actions" and "raised a lot of questions of concern about the open-ended nature of it and sending Americans into harm's way."

Speaking to reporters outside the White House, Michel said Congress would "absolutely" have to vote to approve the deployment of peace-keeping forces in Bosnia. Asked whether Congress would support such measures, Michel said simply, "We're not at that juncture yet."

Foley, speaking to reporters later, said he expected that "whatever decision is taken by the president will probably come in here in some way for a vote, or for at least debate, most likely a vote."

Clinton was noncommittal about that subject at the meeting, saying only that he would seek congressional approval for air strikes if he decides to go that route, sources said. While the president wants to maintain his flexibility and preserve the prerogatives of the executive branch to commit U.S. forces, the sources said he would in fact submit the deployment of peace-keeping troops to a vote in Congress.

Michel spoke of the difficult job the president faces selling the idea of U.S. peace-keeping forces in Bosnia to the American people. In contrast to the 1991 Persian Gulf War, he said, "quite frankly many of them [the American people] are not aware of the importance, as we as leaders can see, attaching to that particular conflict" in the Balkans.

One person familiar with the meeting said Foley's expressions of concern were not his personal opinion but rather meant to give the president "his read of the House."

"He raised the questions: we have to make sure it's multilateral; you have to get the support of the American people; it is difficult to get votes in the House for military action," the source said.

However, one White House official said, "Foley has told Clinton he supports this fully. He was just giving his analysis. He will get the votes, and that's what he pledged the president."

Gephardt, one congressional source said, "kept hammering away about how we're in uncharted waters . . . and we need to realize how we proceed is setting precedents, and that we have to be very thorough in our planning." Although Gephardt "would ultimately support the president," he is also frustrated that the cost of such an extensive operation has not been discussed outside the administration, the source said.

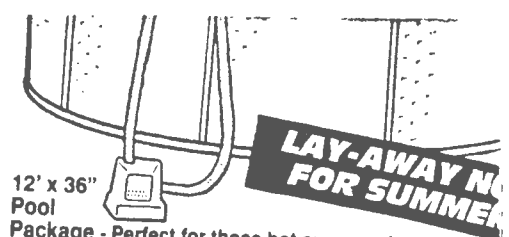
The meeting with the congressional leadership followed a South Lawn ceremony at which Clinton welcomed home U.S. troops from their peace-keeping mission in Somalia and alluded to the decision facing him now.

"You have proved again that our involvement in multilateral efforts need not be open-ended or ill-defined, that we can go abroad and accomplish some distinct objectives and then come home again when that mission is accomplished. . . ," he said. "Some will ask why we must so often be the one to lead. Well, of course we cannot be the world's policeman, but we are and we must continue to be the world's leader. That is the job of the United States of America."

On Capitol Hill yesterday, House Democrats passed a resolution belatedly authorizing the five-month-old deployment of American forces in Somalia, and House Foreign Affairs Committee Chairman Lee H. Hamilton (D-Ind.) noted the "many parallels between this situation and what may happen in Bosnia."

Staff writer Eric Pianin contributed to this report.

North America's Best-Kept Theater Secret
Sunday, May 9, in the Travel section

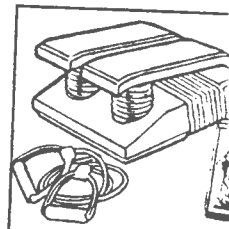
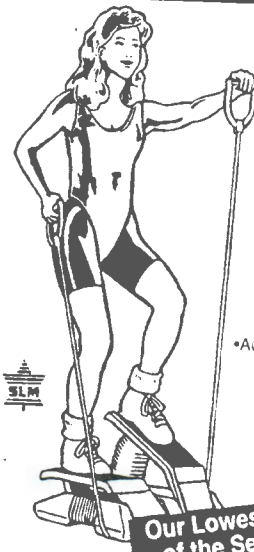


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