

# 'No Good Options' on Balkans\*

## Clinton Administration Is Divided Over What Action to Take

By Daniel Williams  
Washington Post Staff Writer

The Clinton administration searched intently yesterday for a forceful step to take in Bosnia-Herzegovina, but no consensus for further action emerged within the government or with European allies.

Disarray was evident in comments to reporters by two top administration officials. Secretary of State Warren Christopher said the Bosnian war "has a very high degree of urgency within our government and we'll be moving forward" in considering options.

But Defense Secretary Les Aspin expressed doubt about the effectiveness of any option. "These are big-time choices for [President] Clinton, and none of them are any good," he said.

Aspin described a series of meetings Saturday by senior administration officials, including a 2½-hour lunch he had with Christopher and national security adviser Anthony Lake, followed by a meeting in which the three were joined by CIA Director R. James Woolsey, Gen. Colin L. Powell, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, and Madeleine K. Albright, U.S. ambassador to the United Nations.

"Seven straight hours on Bosnia gives you a splitting headache," Aspin told reporters.

The meetings produced plenty of disagreement, he added. "People are all over the lot. Everywhere you turn, the downsides are there. . . I have never seen a government problem before with totally no good options. It's awful. They all look awful," Aspin said.

Among the options under consideration, according to White House officials, are a lifting of the arms

embargo on the beleaguered Muslim-led government of Bosnia and an allied bombing campaign against the Serbs to pressure them into signing a peace accord.

Lifting the arms embargo is viewed by some State Department officials as the most likely next step because it would avoid a commitment of U.S. ground troops while satisfying calls that the Muslims be allowed to defend themselves.

But such a move poses several difficult questions. Can the embargo be lifted on the Muslims and not the Serbs? Would Russia, which has strong historical and cultural ties to the Serbs, permit such a measure to pass the U.N. Security Council? Who, ultimately, would arm the Muslims, and how would the material be delivered? Would lifting the embargo be a license for Iran, which has championed the Muslim cause, to get involved in the war?

Moreover, neither Britain nor France has shown enthusiasm for lifting the embargo—or for air strikes. Both European allies have troops on the ground as part of U.N. peacekeeping efforts, and it is not clear that either would support what would amount to a switch from a humanitarian to a partisan role.

Clinton spoke for 50 minutes Sunday with British Prime Minister John Major reviewing the options.

Yesterday in the House of Commons, British Foreign Secretary Douglas Hurd restated his government's opposition to military measures, saying that lifting the arms embargo might "prolong the conflict," while punitive air strikes would have "limited military value" and probably would cause civilian casualties.

But the British minister appeared

to leave a door open for reconsideration, saying, "We cannot refuse to look at all ideas, including those which have been considered before but not adopted."

Clinton tried yesterday to reach French President Francois Mitterrand and intends to try again today, a White House spokesman said.

At the United Nations, meanwhile, the Security Council opened a scheduled two-day debate on Bosnia. Muhamed Sacirbey, U.N. envoy of the Bosnian government, bluntly accused the council of shirking its duties. He said the U.N.-sponsored peace negotiation had "lost its utility," and he called on the council to lift the arms embargo against his government, authorize foreign troops to seize Serb artillery and interdict Serb military supply lines.

Adding to congressional support for U.S. military action in Bosnia, Sen. Joseph R. Biden Jr. (D-Del.), chairman of the Foreign Relations subcommittee on European affairs, said Western air power could be used to eliminate Serb heavy artillery and destroy bridges along the Drina River, used by Serbs for resupply routes. In a report on his recent five-day trip to the Balkans, he also recommended deploying "a major multinational force" in Macedonia to forestall Serb aggression against that neighboring republic.

"The international community can no longer hide behind the excuse that this is a Balkan civil war," Biden said. "The plain facts remove the fig leaf behind which the West has sought to hide its own confusion and timidity."

Staff writer David S. Broder in Washington and correspondents Eugene Robinson in London and Julia Preston at the United Nations contributed to this report.