American Engagement

By Bill Clinton

Ten years ago, at the Wright-Patterson Air Force Base outside Dayton, Ohio, the leaders who had waged a brutal four-year war in Bosnia—at the center of a volatile region that had launched two world wars—finally agreed to peace. They took this momentous step only after intense international military and diplomatic pressure led by the United States. At the time, almost everyone predicted that the Dayton Peace Agreement would fail.

To enforce the agreement, I sent 20,000 U.S. soldiers to Bosnia as part of a 60,000-troop NATO peacekeeping force, because it was the only way to ensure that the Dayton Agreement was more than words on a page. For three winters, the people of Sarajevo had inspired us all with their courage in the face of snipers, hunger and bitter cold. After the genocide of 1995, when more than 7,000 men were murdered in Srebrenica, it was clear that only NATO under America's leadership could ensure peace.

Still, a large majority of the American public opposed my decision. Some expected heavy casualties; some feared another round of war, with Bosnia split in two and the need for our troops never-ending. On the day before the Dayton Agreement was to take effect, the House of Representatives voted three-to-one against an American troop deployment to Bosnia. Despite this opposition, I felt the United States had to act in order to stop the atrocities and try to bring peace and stability to the region.

Ten years later, the people of Bosnia have validated those who stood with them. Dayton ended the war. It will not resume. The region is now stable and peaceful, and the brutal killings are only a memory, albeit a painful one for the many families who lost loved ones. In 10 years there have been no American or NATO casualties from hostile action and troop levels are now down to 7,000 overall, of which fewer than 200 are American.

Bosnia is one country. It does have two distinct entities, one Serb and one a Croat-Muslim Federation, but movement is unimpeded across the boundary line and there are no troops or roadblocks on that line. The country has a single currency and a single economy. Bosnia had more than 400,000 people under arms in 1995; today it has fewer than 10,000. Just under half the displaced people have returned, many of them to areas where they constitute a minority. Almost no one dared to predict these successes a decade ago.

To be sure, Dayton was not a perfect peace. It is hard to imagine such a thing. But it achieved vital national security interests. It ended the worst war in Europe in half a century, which threatened the peaceful integration of Europe after the Cold War. It, and subsequent events in Kosovo, laid the basis for a multiethnic state, which has lived in peace for a decade with its neighbors. It triggered the events that led to the dictator Slobodan Milosevic's removal and trial at The Hague for war crimes.

Additionally, at the time of Dayton we estimated that there were more than 1,000 Islamic extremist fighters in Bosnia, and Iran had forged close ties to some in Bosnia's government. Special provisions that we wrote into the military annex of the Dayton Agreement gave us the opportunity to use NATO troops to clean out those cells, even as al Qaeda was building its organization in the heart of Europe.

> U.S. missions abroad require patience and coalition-building at home and abroad.

We were well aware of Dayton's shortcomings. For example, the agreement allowed for a three-person presidency and three separate armies in Bosnia, neither of which we wanted, but we hoped to make improvements over the years. Our chief negotiator, Richard Holbrooke, spoke of these and other issues at the announcement ceremony in 1995, and he called on the enforcing powers (the so-called Control Group: Britain, France, Germany, Russia and the United States, joined later by Italy) to strengthen the Dayton Agreement with annual review conferences. But the conferences lapsed after 2000.

Regrettably, one major Dayton task remains to be met. While this year the authorities in the Serb republic of Bosnia and Herzegovina have assisted in the transferral of some 12 indicted war criminals to the International War Crimes Tribunal, this is not enough. The Republika Srpska authorities, together with those of Serbia and Montenegro, must continue to do their part to close this chapter of history. Without the arrest and transfer of all indicted war criminals, especially Radovan Karadzic and Ratko Mladic, justice will not have been done and the Balkans will be unable to leave the past behind them.

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Bosnia's 10-year path since Dayton reminds all of us privileged to lead U.S. foreign policy of a simple truth: Every one of us who starts a large initiative will be out of office before America's job is done. Progress takes time, and speed is often the enemy of progress. Therefore, we cannot undertake an initiative without preparing to hand it off—by building support across the aisle at home, and by finding international partners who will pick up the job when America is occupied by new challenges. To this end, my administration built our policy around gaining allied support and adding international help over time.

In October, the European Union took the tremendous step of inviting Bosnia to begin the process of becoming a member of the EU. For centuries empires collided in and around Bosnia. Today Bosnia and its neighbors are on their way to becoming part of a Europe whole and free—something every American president since Harry Truman has wanted. This could not have happened had America not sustained our partnership with Europe during the difficult process of making peace. And all of Bosnia's neighbors would not today be on the doorstep of a new prosperity if Bosnia and her citizens had not worked hard to make the Dayton peace a success.

Today, the United States is again showing leadership in the region. When Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice and Undersecretary Nicholas Burns invited Bosnia's leaders to Washington to commemorate the 10th Anniversary of Dayton this week, it was not just for ceremony; it was an important move to improve the accord. I commend them for yesterday's agreement to adopt meaningful constitutional reform; all of those involved in the original effort believed in continued American engagement to improve on our efforts. After this week's focus on Bosnia, I look forward to the far more daunting task that lies ahead for Balkan negotiators: resolving the final status of Kosovo. The long delay and rising tensions will make negotiations harder, but they must proceed with strong American involvement.

Looking back, it is clear that the United States and our European allies should have acted in Bosnia earlier. But when America did act, with bombings followed by the diplomatic initiative that culminated in Dayton, we made a decisive difference. As Mr. Holbrooke wrote at the time, "Had the United States not intervened, the war would have continued for years and ended disastrously. The Bosnia-Muslims would have either been destroyed, or reduced to a weak landlocked mini-state . . . Europe would have faced a continued influx of Balkan refugees. And tens of thousands more would have been killed, maimed or displaced."

Although no American troops have been killed or wounded, our involvement cost the lives of three of our finest diplomats. Robert Frasure, Joseph Kruzel and Nelson Drew died in the negotiating team's first attempts to reach Sarajevo over the dangerous and disputed Mount Igman road on August 19, 1995. When I met with their families and the only survivors of the original negotiating team—Mr. Holbrooke and Gen. Wesley Clark—at Arlington National Cemetery a few days later, I asked the reconstituted negotiating team to return immediately to the region to show our commitment and determination to end the war. A week later, the Bosnian-Serbs mortared the Sarajevo marketplace and I immediately authorized a serious and sustained NATO bombing campaign, which played a vital role in bringing the parties to Dayton.

Was it worth it? Absolutely. While there is still work to be done, the Dayton Accords brought a long-awaited peace to a volatile region, where ethnic minorities now feel safe and children play on streets where they used to hide from snipers and mortar shells. And the dream of a Europe united, free and at peace, is still alive.

Mr. Clinton was the 42nd president of the United States. He is the founder of the William J. Clinton Foundation.

Burma's Plight

By Ian Holliday

Recent weeks have witnessed a flurry of interest in Burma. In September, a report commissioned by former Czech President Václav Havel and Bishop Desmond Tutu called for U.N. Security Council action to promote national reconciliation and oversee a transition to democracy. More recently, the world has bemusedly watched as the paranoid ruling military junta, fearful of seaborne attack, relocates the national capital inland to Pyinmana, some 350 kilometers north of Rangoon.

The limelight is welcome. For too long, this country of 55 million people, positioned at the heart of Asia and sharing long borders with China, India and Thailand, has been ignored. Periodically the U.S. and her allies renew or upgrade economic sanctions or plea for the release of opposition leader Aung San Suu Kyi. But few prominent leaders take a sustained interest.

The recent push for change faces major roadblocks. Both China and Russia have signaled that they will veto any attempt to put a Burma initiative on the U.N. Security Council agenda. Other members, such as the Philippines, have expressed reservations. There's a long history of intransigence, too. Burma debates have rumbled along to no apparent effect for 15 years since an abortive 1990 general election saw the military junta reinforce its stranglehold on the country.

If this initiative does fail, Burma will continue to struggle with low-grade civil wars, booming narcotics industries, incipient health crises, extensive environmental degradation and desperate, grinding poverty.

At present, too much faith is placed in quick political fixes. Burmese activists and Western commentators in liberal think tanks frequently insist that with just one more ratcheting up of sanctions, the junta will fall and a transition to democracy will ensue. Yet for every Western corporation that fails to invest, there are many Asian companies lining up to go in, and the regime is probably as strong now as at any time since 1990. In Asia, observers often naively believe that the junta will eventually succeed in striking a political deal that stabilizes the country and enables reform to take place.

For real change to occur, the focus has to move beyond politics to the economy and society. Burma does not now possess sufficient internal resources to undertake a successful transition to democracy. This country, repressed by military rulers for nearly 45 years since a March 1962 coup, needs to be rebuilt from the bottom up if it is to have a reasonable stab at a post-authoritarian existence.

Across much of Asia, it is businesses that are currently pushing the envelope of social development. In China, no more democratic than Burma—but generally held to be an acceptable venue for investment— worker terms, conditions and rights have been upgraded by inward investors who are responsible corporate citizens and monitor compliance down their supply chains. In the long run, it is only on these sorts of foundations that political reform and democratization will take place across the region.

While investment flows in Burma remain small, similar developments are taking place. Take, for instance, the involvement of Western oil corporations in the Yadana gas project. Though highly controversial, Western oil corporations have created well paid jobs, established microcredit schemes to boost indigenous entrepreneurship, and reached out to local communities. They have made considerable investments in education and healthcare, on a local and national scale. All in all, they have gone a long way to setting new standards for socio-economic engagement in difficult settings.

While any major investor of course has to do business with an odious and incompetent junta, investing companies are also uniquely placed to help reconstruct and reenergize the society. But it's a fine balance to strike. In the short term, inward investment may well reinforce the position of the junta. In the longer term, responsible corporations under the spotlight of shareholders and non-government organizations can help sow the seeds for a sustainable transition to democracy.

No rapid political remedy is available for Burma. Economic sanctions cannot work. The net they cast is simply not watertight. Despite the immense moral standing supplied to sanctions by the unstinting support of Aung San Suu Kyi, they must be abandoned. Equally, the complacency that continues to pervade much of Asia is a recipe for stalemate and, quite possibly, disaster.

Only an active policy of committed, long-term political engagement and inward investment can set Burma on the path to prosperity and democracy. The journey will not be easy, clean or pretty. But it is hard to think of alternative ways forward for this miserable country.

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Turkey Talk

Meghan Cox Gurdon, a writer for The Wall Street Journal's Weekend Edition, disputes displays of Thankgiving meals *sans* the ubiquitous turkey.

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