

Statement of

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Mr. Chairman, it is a pleasure for me to appear before you and your colleagues to discuss the Administration's efforts to bring an end to the tragic conflict in Kosovo. I will focus my statement on four themes:

the U.S. stake in Kosovo;
recent U.S. and international efforts to address the Kosovo crisis;
the negotiations at Rambouillet; and
where we go from here.

U.S. Interests

Mr. Chairman, some Americans have questioned the U.S. stake in Kosovo and why we are preparing again to deploy U.S. forces in the Balkans, should the President decide to do so. President Clinton and Secretary Albright have addressed these concerns and laid out clearly the important interests the U.S. has at stake in Kosovo. They are four:

First, we have a clear interest in protecting stability in a key part of Europe and our investment in Bosnia. If we don't stop the conflict in Kosovo, it could draw in Albania and Macedonia, potentially threaten our NATO allies in Greece and Turkey and thereby divide the alliance.

Second, we have an important interest in averting another humanitarian catastrophe in Kosovo. Continued conflict in Kosovo also would create new opportunities for international terrorists, drug smugglers and criminals as well as for those who seek to exploit ethnic and religious conflict for their own purposes.

Third, America has a clear interest in ending years of Serb repression by strengthening democracy in the FRY, upholding the rule of law including the valuable contribution of the International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia, and protecting human rights.

Finally, persisting conflict in Kosovo would undermine NATO's credibility as the guarantor of peace and stability in the Balkans, and U.S. credibility as one of the leaders of NATO.

The Rambouillet Negotiations

Mr. Chairman, the past three weeks have marked a period of intense diplomatic activity as we and our allies backed the efforts of the negotiators to forge an agreement between the parties on the Interim Agreement for peace and self-government in Kosovo.

The broad terms of the durable and fair interim agreement the negotiators are seeking to finalize are by now familiar. They include:

a high degree of self-governance for Kosovo with its own elections and with legislative, executive and judicial branches;

the demilitarization of the region monitored by a NATO force deployed with the consent of the parties;

full judicial protection of human rights and the rights of all national communities in Kosovo; and

a local police force with an ethnic makeup that reflects that of the Kosovo population.

Let me summarize briefly some of the significant milestones of the Rambouillet negotiations. The first was Secretary Albright's travel to Rambouillet at the end of the first week of talks to send an unambiguous message to both sides that they must make rapid progress toward an agreement or face serious consequences.

The Secretary brought the parties together for their first non-ceremonial meeting on February 14. She then met with Serb President Milutinovic in Paris to tell him bluntly that the FRY delegation had to engage seriously.

Later the same day, the Secretary and her Contact Group counterparts agreed that while progress had been slower than expected, the parties had accomplished essential groundwork. The Contact Group therefore extended the negotiating deadline until February 20 at noon Rambouillet time.

Following the Secretary's return to Washington, the U.S. intensified its diplomatic efforts to move the parties to agreement. Secretary Albright called President Milosevic twice to explain he had a stark choice between pushing the FRY into further confrontation and violence or getting his country back on the path to joining the ranks of respected countries. She also dispatched Ambassador Hill to Belgrade to reinforce the message that Milosevic should in no way doubt allied resolve to proceed with NATO air strikes if Serb intransigence persisted.

To maintain allied unity and make clear to the parties allied resolve to see a successful conclusion of the Rambouillet negotiations, the Secretary and other Administration officials maintained daily contacts with their Contact Group, NATO, and OSCE counterparts.

Last weekend, Secretary Albright again traveled to Rambouillet to press both parties to sign the agreement before the noon deadline and to consult with Contact Group Ministers on next steps.

The negotiators reported to the Contact Group that the parties had made very substantial progress in reaching agreement on the Framework and political chapters of the Interim Agreement. On the basis of the negotiators' recommendation and their own assessment, Secretary Albright and her CG colleagues concluded that the parties' progress justified an extension of the negotiating deadline until Tuesday.

The Secretary stayed in Rambouillet to lead personally U.S. efforts to push the parties toward an agreement. On Tuesday, Contact Group Ministers announced the conclusion of the Rambouillet phase of the negotiations. The Ministers noted that:

a political framework is now in place;
 the groundwork has been laid for finalizing the civilian and military implementation chapters of the agreement; and
 both sides have agreed to attend a conference in France on March 15 to discuss all implementation aspects.

The Rambouillet results reflected the markedly different approaches taken by the two parties to these negotiations. The Kosovar Albanians engaged seriously from the outset. They had serious concerns regarding the determination of Kosovo's final status and provisions for disarming the KLA. But they showed willingness to compromise for peace, and committed to sign the agreement after it is reviewed by technical experts and discussed with the people of Kosovo.

In stark contrast, the Serbian delegation failed to seize this important opportunity for progress. They stalled, raised side issues, and sought to avoid serious discussion. In the end, they accepted many of the basic elements of self-government for Kosovo but continued to reject discussion of a NATO-led military implementation force, which is the sine qua non of the draft Interim Agreement.

Mr. Chairman, we did not achieve all we had hoped on a very ambitious set of goals for Rambouillet. But Rambouillet was an extremely important building block in what we believe can be final agreement by the parties when the talks reconvene. The proposed interim settlement is the best deal either side will get and should be accepted by both.

Looking Ahead to Next Steps

The key challenge in the runup to the March 15 conference will be to minimize military activities by both sides in Kosovo so the parties can focus on finalizing the terms of the settlement. Secretary Albright and her Contact Group colleagues underscored the need for military restraint in their public remarks Tuesday by:

noting the Contact Group's concern about recent movements of Serb forces;

calling on both sides to respect the ceasefire in Kosovo and refrain from provocations that could jeopardize the results of Rambouillet; and

noting that the parties must ensure the conditions necessary for the OSCE's Kosovo Verification Mission to carry out its vital work.

The KVM's role in monitoring and verifying activities in Kosovo will be an essential element in the international community's efforts to maintaining a stable situation on the ground in Kosovo. The U.S. condemned strongly Serb harassment of KVM members earlier this week and insists that the KVM be permitted to carry out its vital role without interference from either side.

NATO also will have an indispensable role in this sensitive interval leading up the March 15 talks. In her remarks Tuesday, Secretary Albright reaffirmed that NATO's January 30 decision permitting NATO Secretary General Solana to authorize airstrikes remains in effect. Solana himself issued an important statement at the conclusion of the Rambouillet talks:

calling on the parties to respect the ceasefire and avoid provocations; and

affirming that NATO stands ready to use whatever means are necessary to bring about a peaceful solution to the Kosovo crisis and prevent further human suffering.

Mr. Chairman, if the Kosovar Albanians and the FRY agree to sign the interim agreement at the conference beginning on March 15, there is broad consensus that a NATO-led military force will be an indispensable element in ensuring effective implementation of the agreement.

In his weekly radio address on February 13, President Clinton told the nation that the U.S. should contribute troops provided three important conditions are met.

The parties must agree to a strong and effective peace agreement that provides for an immediate cease-fire, rapid withdrawal of most Serb security forces, and demilitarization of the Kosovo Liberation Army.

The parties must be committed to implementing the agreement and to cooperating with NATO.

Lastly, the mission of any NATO operation will need to be carefully defined with a clear and realistic exit strategy.

Undersecretary of Defense Walter Slocombe and General Ralston have already discussed the military rationale, the tasks to be performed, and the scope of any U.S. troop contribution. But allow me to comment briefly on the diplomatic and political considerations that we are weighing regarding American participation in the military implementation force and our exit strategy for that force.

First, while our European allies would contribute 85% of the troops to any NATO ground force, American participation in such a force will be a key factor in the willingness of the Kosovar Albanians to accept the interim political settlement and lay down their arms.

Second, as I indicated above, NATO's credibility as the guarantor of peace in Europe is at stake in Kosovo. Our NATO allies naturally look to the U.S., as one of the leaders of the alliance, to play its role in defending the interests that the U.S. and NATO have in containing the Kosovo crisis.

An additional important element in ensuring an effective and sustainable agreement will be international assistance for Kosovo. The EU has announced that it will take the lead in this area by hosting a donors' conference on Kosovo reconstruction, broadly understood to include civil society and democratization assistance as well as economic reconstruction, within a month after a political settlement is in place. Our EU partners already have indicated they will contribute the bulk of the needed funds. This is an area where their leadership has and will continue to make an important contribution to a peaceful solution to the conflict.

The U.S. plans to make a substantial contribution to bolster EU efforts. We have requested \$50 million as part of the FY 2000 budget request. If the March 15 talks reach a successful outcome, we anticipate identifying additional funding needs to support the civilian implementation aspects of the agreement including funds to:

- support the OSCE;
- repair damaged infrastructure;
- stimulate economic growth in Kosovo, including through micro-lending;
- support free elections; and

assist in the establishment both of communal police units and an independent judiciary system, both of which will inspire and reinforce trust at the local level.

Mr. Chairman, with respect to our exit strategy, we have learned from our experience in Bosnia that we should not set artificial deadlines. Rather, we should seek to create the conditions for self-sustaining peace so that the timing and circumstances for the reduction and ending of the presence of an international military force is well defined. There are a series of core conditions that will help us measure progress toward such a peace. They include:

military stability including the swift and orderly departure of all Serb forces except those required for border security;

replacement of Serb security forces with a functioning, local, representative police force;

elections that meet international standards; and

establishment of legitimate political institutions that would provide for substantial and sustained Kosovar autonomy.

Adjustments to force levels will be linked to regular and on-going assessments of progress toward the core conditions and the security situation in Kosovo. When the core conditions requiring a military presence have been satisfied, we should transition any residual tasks to the appropriate Kosovar authorities, but consider maintaining over-the-horizon capability as necessary. The agreement text and our plans will develop this idea for implementation.

Mr. Chairman, this concludes my opening remarks. I would be pleased to take your questions.