

NATO Secretary General Javier Solana and General George Joulwan meet at Brussels airport with Richard Holbrooke en route for Bosnia as Special Envoy for President Clinton (NATO)



# Back to Basics on Hybrid Warfare in Europe

## A Lesson from the Balkans

By Christopher J. Lamb and Susan Stipanovich

The complex mix of aggressive behaviors Russia used in Georgia and Ukraine is commonly referred to as *hybrid warfare*, defined

by one scholar as “a tailored mix of conventional weapons, irregular tactics, terrorism, and criminal behavior in the same time and battle space to obtain

political objectives.”<sup>1</sup> North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) leaders fear Russia will use hybrid warfare to destabilize or occupy parts of Poland, the Baltic states, or other countries. They are trying to devise more effective responses to counter such a possibility. Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg asserts that NATO must adapt to meet the hybrid warfare threat.<sup>2</sup> Speaking at the same event, U.S. Secretary

---

Dr. Christopher J. Lamb is Director of the Center for Strategic Research, Institute for National Strategic Studies (INSS), at the National Defense University. Ms. Susan Stipanovich is Program Manager for the Program on Irregular Warfare and Special Operations Studies at INSS. For an in-depth explanation of the Bosnia Train and Equip task force and its performance, see *The Bosnian Train and Equip Program: A Lesson in Interagency Integration of Hard and Soft Power*, Strategic Perspectives 15 (NDU Press, March 2014).

of Defense Ash Carter agreed and suggested “part of the answer” was “increased readiness, special operation forces, and more intelligence.”<sup>3</sup> Several months earlier, Carter’s deputy, Robert Work, declared the United States also needed “new operational concepts” to confront hybrid warfare.<sup>4</sup> Meanwhile some NATO countries are establishing special units to counter hybrid warfare tactics,<sup>5</sup> and the U.S. Congress has required the Pentagon to come up with a strategy to counter hybrid warfare.<sup>6</sup>

While senior leaders and scholars continue to debate the merits of the term and its defining characteristics,<sup>7</sup> NATO appears to be in danger of missing the most obvious aspect of hybrid warfare and what it demands. As the term implies, hybrid warfare fundamentally involves an integrated mix of previously separate instruments of power, whether military, diplomatic, intelligence, covert, informational, or other capabilities. An effective response to a multidimensional threat requires an equally well-integrated, multidimensional solution. To successfully adapt in response to Russian hybrid warfare, NATO needs a new cross-functional command and control mechanism that can quickly integrate the Alliance response across its multiple bodies of functional expertise.

Skeptics will doubt this is possible, but NATO has dealt successfully with hybrid threats before, most notably in the Balkans in the mid-1990s. NATO’s European and American leaders were initially flummoxed by sectarian fighting that mixed political warfare, propaganda, diplomacy, and military force in a “hybrid threat” to European peace. Eventually, however, NATO, with U.S. leadership, adopted a multidimensional approach to conflict resolution that involved some novel command and control arrangements. One such mechanism was the Bosnia Train and Equip Program. A review of this little-remembered but important success is instructive. It demonstrates why a multidimensional threat requires a multidimensional response, and how small, well-led, and integrated cross-functional teams can spearhead effective responses to hybrid threats.

## Countering Hybrid Warfare in the Balkans

In the early 1990s, Yugoslavia disintegrated in the wake of the Soviet Union’s demise, releasing a mix of nationalist and ethnic movements. Ill-disciplined combinations of regular and irregular forces struggled to control territory and protect or herd civilians in attempts to produce ethnically homogenous populations, a process widely referred to as “ethnic cleansing.” Serb forces, which had inherited the most personnel and weapons from the former Yugoslav army, captured 70 percent of Bosnia and laid siege to Sarajevo. By late 1992, it was clear that the better equipped and trained Serbs were particularly guilty of ethnic cleansing, having placed thousands of Bosniak men in concentration camps and women in “rape camps.” They also destroyed non-Serb cultural and religious sites and ransacked and burned non-Serb homes.

In February 1992, the United Nations (UN) Security Council had formed a protective force to facilitate a ceasefire in Croatia and secure conditions for peace talks. In June, the Security Council extended its mission to cover the Sarajevo airport and later widened it again to provide protection of humanitarian aid deliveries. By February 1993, 9,000 UN troops were protecting six specifically designated Bosnian “safe areas” or security zones from Serb forces: Sarajevo, Srebrenica, Goražde, Bihać, Žepa, and Tuzla. NATO backed up the UN forces with promises of air support in case military force was necessary to protect the enclaves.

Meanwhile, European diplomats struggled to find a political solution that would end the fighting. But after two primarily European diplomatic initiatives (the Carrington-Cutileiro and Vance-Owen plans) failed to quell the fighting or stop atrocities, pressure for U.S. intervention increased. Shortly after taking office in early 1993, President Bill Clinton decided on a “lift and strike policy” for Bosnia—that is, lifting the arms embargo and employing limited airstrikes against Serb targets. However,

staunch opposition from European allies reversed that decision.

The Clinton administration redoubled efforts to explore diplomatic options for conflict resolution and scored a success by brokering an agreement to end the Muslim-Croat conflict. In March 1994, the Washington Agreement formally brought the two warring ethnic factions together as a single political and geographic entity, creating a Muslim-Croat Federation. A year later, however, President Clinton’s chief negotiator for Bosnia, Ambassador Richard Holbrooke, observed that the federation “existed only on paper” and that “friction between the Croats and the Muslims was enormous.”<sup>8</sup>

By spring 1995, the Bosnian conflict had taken 100,000 lives and generated more than a million refugees. Concerns about the future of NATO as a strategic alliance and outrage over gross human rights abuses began to soften U.S. public resistance to intervention. Increasing numbers of government officials, Members of Congress, and prominent pundits called for action. Ambassador Holbrooke and an interagency team conducted Balkan shuttle diplomacy looking for a negotiated settlement, but Serb military advantages diminished their incentives for compromise. One event in particular convinced Holbrooke that more military force would be required to bring the Serbs to the negotiating table. In May 1995, NATO responded to Serb attacks on UN safe zones with “pinprick” airstrikes as it had the previous year. However, this time the Serbs responded by taking 350 UN peacekeepers hostage. Holbrooke encouraged the Clinton administration to increase the bombing, but Europeans, particularly those countries whose soldiers were hostages, opposed that course of action.

The Clinton administration began looking for ways to shift the military balance. While formally abiding by the UN arms embargo, the United States tacitly allowed arms to flow to the Bosnians, mostly from majority-Muslim countries in the Middle East. In addition, the United States supported Croatia’s efforts to build up its military forces. The Department of State quietly approved

nonlethal assistance to the Croatian Ministry of Defense. The Croatians were assisted by the U.S. company Military Professional Resources, Inc. (MPRI), which was led by former U.S. Army Chief of Staff Carl Vuono.

The United States also lobbied its European allies to accept a mix of diplomacy and military force. American arguments were strengthened by notorious mass killings of Bosniak civilians, including a mortar attack against the Markale marketplace in August 1995. The tipping point was the appalling massacre of more than 8,000 Bosniak men sheltered in the UN “safe zone” of Srebrenica in July 1995. Amidst widespread outrage over the horrific event, U.S. policymakers argued that such merciless disregard for human life and contempt for international peacekeeping forces called into question the continuing relevance of NATO and jeopardized transatlantic security relations.

In August 1995, several military developments finally pushed the Serbs to the negotiating table. First, Croatia launched punishing offensives against the Serbs. The Croatian army evicted Serb forces from the self-declared Republic of Serbian Krajina, producing a large number of Serb civilian casualties and refugee flows. Then, operating in concert with Bosnian army units, Croatian forces routed the Serbs who were occupying other parts of Croatia and Bosnia. And finally, on August 30, NATO launched airstrikes against the Serb targets. After 11 days of airstrikes, the Serbs stopped their attacks on Sarajevo.

Two months later, the United States hosted a peace conference in Dayton, Ohio. President Clinton justified U.S. involvement to the public, stating, “The Balkans lies at the heart of Europe, next door to several of our key NATO Allies and to some of the new, fragile European democracies. If the war there reignites, it could spread and spark a much larger conflict, the kind of conflict that has drawn Americans into two European wars in this century.”<sup>9</sup> American and European actors shuttled among the various Balkan factions promising security and aid and working through innumerable

contentious issues. Finally, the parties agreed to terms, and the Bosnian, Croat, and Serb leaders signed what became known as the Dayton Accords on December 14, 1995.

#### *The Train and Equip Program.*

A military assistance program for the Bosnians was part of the Dayton Accords, in part because Bosnian President Alija Izetbegović refused to sign the agreement without a U.S. commitment to train and equip his forces. But the program also had the support of several key Members of Congress and senior Clinton administration officials. As Secretary of Defense William Perry stated in justifying the program, “To achieve a lasting peace in the Balkans, it will be essential to achieve stable and balanced force levels within Bosnia-Herzegovina and among the states of the former Yugoslavia.”<sup>10</sup>

The Dayton Accords were widely judged to be fragile. The warring parties were expected to renew fighting if NATO forces left, so the initial 1-year duration for international peacekeeping forces (IFOR) was considered a “waffle of the first order,” an impractical, glaring signal that U.S. commitment was limited.<sup>11</sup> The precarious peace and short 1-year IFOR tenure underscored the sensitivity and urgency attached to the Train and Equip Program. The primary objective of the program was to create a military balance of power in Bosnia by offsetting Serb advantages. If IFOR was only going to stay a year, it was imperative the program begin immediately and be executed rapidly.

The United States also intended to use the Train and Equip Program to strengthen the Bosniak-Croat Federation. A key assumption was that cooperation between the Bosnian Croats and Bosniaks on security matters would facilitate progress in other sectors. Without agreement on security, it was difficult to imagine much political progress in the federation. The sooner the Federation Ministry of Defense was integrated and working smoothly, the more likely it was that other aspects of postwar reconstruction would gather momentum.

The final objective of the program was to orient Bosnia toward the West,

first by eradicating the growing influence of radical Iranian-sponsored mujahideen, and second by instilling Western civil-military norms and NATO military standards. Congress made the military and economic assistance to the Bosnian government contingent upon Iranian-supported foreign forces leaving Bosnia. Rapidly establishing the Train and Equip Program was meant to give the Bosniaks an incentive to take the politically painful step of dismissing their co-religionists who had flocked to Bosnia to fight with fanatical commitment. However, U.S. leaders would not permit the program to deliver training or weapons until the Bosnian government arranged the departure of foreign fighters.

The Train and Equip Program was controversial from the start. U.S. military leaders feared the program would undermine the impartial peacekeeping image they needed to execute the IFOR mission. They worried Serbs would view the program as blatant favoritism and attack U.S. peacekeeping troops. The Europeans shared this concern and mostly refused to participate. The Europeans believed that if a military balance was necessary, it should be established through arms reduction and control.

Many Balkan experts, journalists, and scholars thought the Train and Equip Program was misguided because the tenuous Bosniak-Croat Federation would be overcome with nationalist ambitions and crumble. The Serbs, of course, agreed that the federation was not viable and that Train and Equip was destabilizing. They promoted the narrative that Bosniak forces were Muslim extremists who wanted to see the establishment of an Islamic state in Bosnia. The Serbs were not alone in asserting that Washington was being duped by wily Muslims. Looking back, one former senior State Department and UN official concluded the Muslims played the United States “like a fiddle.”

In sum, other than the U.S. President, a handful of his top national security officials, some strong supporters in Congress, and those directly involved in the Train and Equip Program,



Bosnian President Alija Izetbegović and Croatian President Franjo Tudman sign Washington Agreement, March 1994 (Central Intelligence Agency)

most informed opinion in the U.S. Government and European leadership circles thought Train and Equip was destabilizing and counterproductive. Nevertheless, the program succeeded.

*Team Performance, 1995–1998.*

After the Train and Equip Program was in effect for 18 months, many observers considered it a juggernaut propelling the region toward renewed hostilities. Yet when it began in December 1995, the program seemed anything but a runaway success. Jim Pardew, who had headed the Pentagon’s Balkan Task Force and traveled with Holbrooke’s interagency negotiating team, led the program. He started with no staff, no budget, no clear requirements, and no committed international support. Armed only with a mandate and drawdown authority from Congress, Pardew went to work immediately after the Dayton agreement was signed. Over the next 2 years, Pardew and his team maintained a workaholic

schedule, traveling extensively, overcoming major setbacks, and beating back bureaucratic resistance to secure international donor funds and create a web of private- and government-sector entities to implement the program.

Pardew recruited a small team of seven other people from Defense, State, and the Intelligence Community, some of whom had to eventually leave government service and come aboard as contractors. By August 1995, Pardew had secured an interagency agreement that a Train and Equip Program should be “modest” and concentrate on “defensive capabilities,” but the exact size and shape of the program was disputed.<sup>12</sup> So an Institute for Defense Analyses (IDA) team was asked to travel to Bosnia and make a complete assessment of the military balance “to identify priorities for training and equipment improvements; and to develop alternative equip and train packages.”<sup>13</sup>

The IDA study team found the Croat and Bosniak armies in dire need of training and basic equipment. The young, battle-hardened troops in both armies suffered from a lack of formal training at all levels. Most of their weaponry was decades old and worn out from prolonged use. Pardew used the IDA assessment to inform a Deputies Committee meeting (a National Security Council staff meeting attended by the second highest officials from all the major departments and agencies) on his program requirements. The deputies approved Pardew’s five-page paper laying out policy, goals, leadership, objectives, concept, and next steps for the program on December 28, 1995. They stipulated that training and equipping required Bosniak and Croat commitment to the federation and for Bosniak leaders to sever ties with Iran and mujahideen fighters.

Pardew immediately began looking for financial support to the program. Most of the congressionally mandated

## Bosnia Train and Equip: Lessons for Syria?

In early October 2015, the Pentagon announced it was suspending the Syria Train and Equip Program about 9 months after it began. The decision came just 3 weeks after the Commander of U.S. Central Command testified to the Senate Armed Services Committee that only “four or five” U.S.-trained Syrian fighters remained on the battlefield and that the program would not reach its goal of training 5,000 fighters.<sup>1</sup> Labeled a “total failure” by congressional leaders, the demise of the program eliminated a key piece of the Obama administration’s strategy to end the conflict in Syria.<sup>2</sup> It is more likely the program would have succeeded if modeled after the Bosnia Train and Equip effort.

No two cases are alike, but there are enduring lessons from the Bosnia Train and Equip Program, both for managing complex foreign policy problems in general and security assistance programs in particular. To demonstrate why the Bosnia model would have improved chances for success in Syria, we need to identify the most prominent reasons why the Syria effort failed. Although we are still awaiting an Inspector General’s report or some equally authoritative explanation for the poor results in the Syria Train and Equip Program, we already have enough congressional testimony and press exposés to identify several key factors in the failure.

First, the President and some of his key advisors were notably skeptical about the program from the beginning. According to some reports, “President Barack Obama never seemed to want a train-and-equip program for Syrian rebels.”<sup>3</sup> “One former administration official whose views are closely aligned with the President,” stated the objective of the train and equip program was a “fool’s errand,” a way to make people feel better about themselves while they watched Syria disintegrate.<sup>4</sup> Lukewarm support from the White House for a controversial program ensures that it



Syrian soldiers who have defected to join Free Syrian Army hold up rifles as they secure street in Damascus suburbs, January 2012 (Freedom House)

will run into trouble with the bureaucracy, and reports indicate it did. One Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) contractor helping the rebels quit, stating, “They’re asking us to perform miracles, but they’re giving us nothing.” Now-retired Lieutenant General Michael Flynn, USA, and former Director of the Defense Intelligence Agency recalls that even small things were hard from the program. The process in Washington was “completely choked. It was always a ‘mother-may-I.’ And the ‘mother-may-I’ would take a long time.”<sup>5</sup> By contrast in the case of the Bosnia Train and Equip Program, the White House strongly supported the program—even intervening to secure difficult-to-find funding—and the bureaucracy largely got out of the way as a result.

Second, the administration assigned the complex Syria train and equip mission to lead agencies rather than configuring it from the beginning as an integrated interagency effort. It began as a CIA-run covert operation. Then the administration decided to increase the scale and profile of the effort and gave it to the Department of Defense (DOD). Accordingly, in the spring of 2015, Congressional Defense Committees approved \$500 million to “supplement

or replace a covert CIA-led arming and training program.”<sup>6</sup> A major lesson from the Bosnia Train and Equip Program is that security assistance programs in war zones are complex politico-military undertakings. They require multiple, tightly integrated instruments of power. An interagency approach similar to the one used in Bosnia is much better for such highly sensitive, situation-dependent missions. Lead agencies just do not have the breadth of perspective and collective experience to manage multiple instruments of power. They naturally follow their preferred approaches and procedures. A major study of the Afghan and Iraq wars by National Defense University scholars concluded that DOD made the mistake of “trying to create forces that mirror-imaged those of the West” in those conflicts. It “developed ministries and military forces modeled on U.S. institutions,” and failed to make the effort “transactional” and “conditional,” based on shared objectives and situational variables.<sup>7</sup> It appears likely that the same thing happened in Syria, which brings us to the third major reason for failure.

The third factor cited in critiques of the failed Syria train and equip effort is how divorced it was from local political

realities. Frederic Hof, a former senior advisor on Syria for the Obama administration, notes that the “formula of recruiting people [nationalist rebels] who had been hammered for four years by the [Bashar al-Asad] regime to fight exclusively against [the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant] was an elegant Washington maneuver totally disconnected from the reality on the ground inside Syria.”<sup>8</sup> Many others make the same point, including the Syrians we were trying to train and equip. The Syrian rebels’ elected commander, Amin Ibrahim, a former Syrian army lieutenant colonel, was candid about the trainees’ tense relationship with American trainers: “I told them the whole idea is wrong. I said, ‘We are Syrians. Our problem is with the [Asad] regime. Help us to get rid of the regime.’ The response was, ‘You should not shoot a bullet against the regime.’” So, he continued, “we all got up and walked out.”<sup>9</sup>

As others have noted, political correctness of this kind would have doomed efforts to support French resistance in World War II, where many fighters harbored communist sympathies. Ambassador James Pardew, who led the Bosnia Train and Equip effort, had been working the problem for years and knew all the circumstances and major parties involved well. He resisted political handicaps that would cripple his program—such as the early inclusion of Serbians—and successfully defended his approach multiple times before senior interagency bodies, warning them that a failed effort was worse than no effort at all.

Some will claim Bosnia and Syria are not comparable, and that Syria—an active war zone—presented a tougher set of conditions for security assistance. There are differences, of course, but the relative level of difficulty is not one of them. Bosnia, after all, was notably labeled as “the foreign policy problem from hell,” and too tough to tackle. Just like Syria, it involved incredibly brutal internecine conflict and the

presence of fighters sympathetic to extremist elements and terrorism who were fighting on “our side.” Moreover, American security assistance began while the fighting was still under way, and as the fortunes of war shifted against the Serbians, U.S. diplomacy used battlefield changes to help shape a peace that all parties could support. We cannot be sure that a program modeled on the Bosnia Train and Equip effort would have succeeded. However, it does not take much insight to see that White House support, a full-time interagency team to manage the effort, and program leadership with deep expertise on the Syrian crisis, would have significantly improved chances for success.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> “U.S. Strategy Against ISIS,” *C-SPAN.org*, September 16, 2015.

<sup>2</sup> Department of Defense, “Statement on Syria,” Release No: NR-392-15, October 9, 2015.

<sup>3</sup> Tara McKelvey, “Arming Syrian Rebels: Where the U.S. Went Wrong,” BBC News, October 10, 2015.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>6</sup> Julian E. Barnes, Adam Entous, and Carol E. Lee, “Obama Proposes \$500 Million to Aid Syrian Rebels,” *Wall Street Journal*, June 26, 2014.

<sup>7</sup> T.X. Hammes, “Raising and Mentoring Security Forces in Afghanistan and Iraq,” in *Lessons Encountered: Learning from the Long War*, ed. Richard D. Hooker, Jr., and Joseph J. Collins (Washington, DC: NDU Press, 2015).

<sup>8</sup> Joe Gould, “Was Syrian Train-and-Equip Effort Always a ‘Mission Impossible?’” *Defense News*, September 21, 2015.

<sup>9</sup> Roy Gutman, “What Really Happened to the U.S. Train-and-Equip Program in Syria?” *McClatchyDC.com*, December 21, 2015.

\$100 million in drawdown authority for Train and Equip would come from Army stocks, including rifles, machine guns, radios, tactical telephones, tanks, heavy artillery, armored personnel carriers, light antitank weapons, and utility helicopters. Otherwise, no taxpayer funds would be used for the program’s execution. Thus, Pardew had to appeal to other countries for cash and in-kind donations to finance the remaining \$700 million of the estimated \$800 million program.

Turkey agreed to host a donor’s conference in Ankara on March 15, 1996, shrugging off complaints from the European Union. The conference started well despite the absence of Russia and other key European countries.

Thirty-two nations and five international organizations attended, but the conference fizzled. The Europeans extolled the importance of arms control while Muslim countries asserted the right to self-defense. U.S. representatives made eloquent arguments about the fragility of peace and the need to build a deterrent force. In the end, concrete pledges of cash support did not materialize. In Pardew’s words, the conference “was a complete disaster.”<sup>14</sup>

With time ticking and criticism of the program splattered across newspapers, Pardew turned to the White House. He reminded senior leaders that the program was a personal commitment from President Clinton. The President dispatched his lifelong friend and counselor, Thomas “Mack” McLarty, to the Gulf with a personal request for assistance. A trip to Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates (UAE), and Kuwait on April 14 and 15 netted \$115 million in cash. With funding from the Gulf priming the pump, a second trip to Malaysia and Brunei eventually increased program donations to \$147 million. Although this was a far cry from IDA’s estimated program needs, the Train and Equip team doggedly pursued in-kind donations over the next 2 years, securing pledges from 14 countries valued at another \$129 million. In addition to the \$100 million in U.S. military assistance, the total value of the program was over \$400 million in cash, equipment, training, and technical support.



View of downtown Grbavica, a neighborhood in Sarajevo, March 1996 (Stacey Wyzkowski)

Successfully obtaining funds generated an unforeseen and pressing problem: how to legally spend other countries' money for an American-led foreign military program. Constitutionally, the Executive is not permitted to spend money without congressional approval. It took a unique legal construct and a joint effort by State, Treasury, and the Justice Department to allow those funds to be used consistent with U.S. law and the policy objectives of the Train and Equip Program. A winning formula was found after a number of false starts.

Legal advisors reasoned that because the funds had been given to the United States for a specific purpose, the Department of State could create a common law trust for them. Setting up such a trust allowed the U.S. Government to administer the money but did not give it ownership rights or direct control over how the funds were to be used. Washington would hold the funds in the U.S. Treasury with an affirmative

duty to protect the property on behalf of the donors, which meant ensuring the funds were allocated consistent with donor intent. Obtaining support from the Departments of Justice and Treasury ensured broad government support for the funding mechanism.

After securing interagency and donor agreement for this novel approach, the Bosnian Defense Fund was established on April 22, 1996. Through supporting arrangements for administering the funds, including a set of administrative procedures, the program was able to ensure donor funds never passed through Bosnian hands. The funds always went directly for training and equipment that the Bosnian defense leadership agreed was necessary.

Meanwhile, the Train and Equip team had worked hard to put a contract in place for training federation forces. Since the Department of Defense wanted to distance itself from the program, private contractors were used. The federation

awarded the contract to MPRI, a decision that had unanimous support. The company was well known for its work in Croatia, and Pardew believed that the company was committed to the mission and took pride in facilitating the execution of U.S. foreign policy. With experience working in the region, MPRI understood the conflict and the challenges it would be facing.

The Train and Equip staff also began negotiating with the Department of the Army on what material could be drawn down from Army stocks. Ultimately, the program secured a wide range of light lethal and nonlethal assistance, including 45,100 M16 rifles, 1,000 machine guns, an assortment of field radios and telephones, and other gear. The heavy equipment included 45 upgraded Vietnam-era M60A3 main battle tanks, 80 armored personnel carriers, 840 light antitank weapons, and 15 Huey utility helicopters.<sup>15</sup> Train and Equip also obtained other items from U.S. excess

defense articles, most notably 116 large towed howitzers.

In addition, team members went shopping throughout Europe and the Middle East, hunting for the best equipment at the best price. Pardew's team secured the help of some Army experts on foreign weapons systems to assess attractive buying options. When possible and cost-effective, the task force also wanted to stimulate the indigenous Bosnian defense industry. It let a contract for the production of Kevlar helmets and small caliber ammunition after ensuring the Bosnians could match a competitive price and obtained approval to buy Bosnian-produced 122-millimeter (mm) towed howitzers.

Most of the weapons had to be obtained elsewhere, though. Western European opposition to the program influenced some Eastern European countries, such as Poland and the Czech Republic, to decline participation. But others, such as Ukraine, Romania, and Slovakia, were eager to sell some of their excess Warsaw Pact equipment for cash. Egypt also offered a heavy equipment donation to the federation, thus seizing the opportunity to be a cooperative ally and possible future seller to the Bosnian military.

In December 1996, the first non-U.S. donation to Train and Equip arrived at the Croatian port of Ploče: 36 105mm howitzers with ammunition and spare parts from the UAE and 12 130mm field guns, 12 122mm howitzers, and 18 23mm anti-aircraft guns with spare parts from Egypt. Shortly thereafter, the UAE delivered 44 M190 armored personnel carriers and 42 French-built AMX30 tanks, and in October 1997, the United States delivered 116 refurbished 155mm field howitzers. As these arms flowed to federation forces, Western European diplomats and military leaders repeated their argument that Train and Equip was a "recipe for more war" and that "one day American-made tanks will be rolling across Bosnia's plains."<sup>16</sup>

MPRI moved to execute its contract as soon as it received U.S. Government approval. By any standards, it faced a tough task. MPRI personnel had to

augment their technical competence with deft diplomacy. Initially, meetings were fraught with ethnic tension and occasional threats of violence. But over time, the animosity was replaced by bureaucratic struggles over offices and furniture. Eventually, with a great deal of MPRI coaching and after-hours socializing, bantering and joking between the two sides became common. MPRI also faced enormous technical hurdles. It had to set up quickly in an austere postconflict environment with a tight budget, and it had to integrate and maintain diverse used equipment donations, which arrived at different intervals.

Yet within seven months of hitting the ground, an integrated Federation Army School and Computer Simulation Center for both soldiers and officers opened, and brigade- and battalion-level training began in earnest. By the end of the program's second year, 5,000 soldiers had concluded unit training, and 2,500 had gone through the school and simulation center. MPRI also taught small unit tactics, conducted battle management training with U.S. computer systems at a combat simulation center near Sarajevo, and established live-fire tank and artillery training at ranges in western Bosnia and Turkey.

Political tension between Bosniaks and Croats was a constant challenge. Both factions were "suspicious of American commitment," wondering if the United States was "in this for the long haul."<sup>17</sup> During the first year, much effort went into forging a working relationship between the two previously warring groups. The Train and Equip Program had to tackle high-level political problems, including passing new legislation so there would be a legal basis for the new federation command structure and suppressing usage of old nationalist symbols such as flags, insignia, and automobile license plates.

In the midst of all this political maneuvering, Pardew considered one issue important enough to risk his entire program: the removal of the Bosniak Deputy Defense Minister Hasan Cengić. As a Muslim hardliner, Cengić was perceived as close to but ultimately out of step with

the more moderate Izetbegović. His Iranian ties were well known, and in the postwar environment, removing radical Iranian fighters and persons of influence was a nonnegotiable, congressionally and Presidentially mandated prerequisite for the Train and Equip Program to begin. Pardew informed Izetbegović that keeping people such as Cengić around "was not a strategy for security" but a "road to isolation and partition."<sup>18</sup>

The situation came to a head as the United States prepared to deliver its first shipment of heavy weapons. Pardew insisted that a letter signed by Secretary of State Warren Christopher and Secretary of Defense William Perry be sent to Izetbegović demanding the removal of Cengić as Minister of Defense. State considered removing ministers in other governments extraordinary, inappropriate, and fraught with political risks. The idea went against State proclivities, and no immediate decision from Secretary Christopher was forthcoming. While waiting, Pardew learned one day that Secretary Perry was in the main State building for a ceremony. He button-holed Perry and made his case. Perry took Pardew to Christopher, who was hesitant. However, with Secretary Perry's encouragement, he agreed and added his signature to the letter.

Pardew went to Sarajevo and delivered the ultimatum to Izetbegović. The insistence on Cengić's removal began a tense period of high political drama involving numerous senior leaders in the U.S., Bosnian, and Croatian governments. While Izetbegović considered the implications of the ultimatum, the Train and Equip Program was put on hold, which meant the large U.S. merchant ship carrying U.S. weapons idled in the Adriatic from October 24 on, burning fuel and program dollars. For the task force, wasting drawdown dollars in such a fashion was agonizing. As weeks passed, Pardew orchestrated support from U.S. leaders who, whenever they met with Izetbegović or those close to him, encouraged the Bosnians to sever ties with Cengić.

After considerable delay, Izetbegović agreed to let his longtime associate go on

the condition that Bosnian Croat Deputy Minister of Defense Vladimir Šoljić also be dismissed. Pardew was eventually able to secure the cooperation of the Croats on this condition, and Šoljić resigned on November 18. Several days later, the U.S. ship offloaded the American weapons at the Croatian port of Ploče. For the Train and Equip team, the firing of Cengić had been a high-stakes gamble, but one that paid off. It sent a signal to federation officials: no more games and no more playing both sides.

Meanwhile, many Western European officials continued to oppose Train and Equip. The British, whose opposition was apparent from the beginning, were by far the boldest and most adept. They considered the program akin to “pouring gasoline on a fire.”<sup>19</sup> One British general in particular made a practice of harassing MPRI, disrupting meetings and undermining the program. British diplomatic personnel worked in lockstep with their military to prevent the Train and Equip Program from getting necessary permits and approvals. They were particularly successful in delaying combined live-fire training at the new Combat Training Center outside of Livno, which was located in the British-controlled sector of Bosnia. It took more than a year and a half to overcome British impediments before the center opened.

**Net Assessment.** It is not possible to enumerate all the administrative, technical, and political achievements of the Train and Equip task force here. The important point is that it achieved its larger goals, the most immediate of which was securing a military balance so the Bosnian Federation could defend itself. The program was supposed to provide a rough balance between the federation and the Republika Srpska. NATO forces would deter conflict among the larger regional powers. The point of the Train and Equip Program was local military stability in Bosnia, which reduced the demands on the program, and also meant the program was unlikely to precipitate a regional conflict because it was not a threat to Croatia or Serbia proper. The task force was highly successful in this respect and,

realizing it, the Bosnian Serbs were never tempted to renew hostilities.

The Train and Equip Program also helped orient Bosnia toward the West. Narrowly construed, this meant expelling foreign forces and detaching the Bosniaks from their relationship with Iran, which largely succeeded. Pardew forced the dismissal of Cengić to accelerate the process of severing Bosniak ties with Islamic radicals. Hundreds of Iranian Revolutionary Guards and mujahideen forces were expelled from Bosnia. In later years, the Bosnian government continued to cooperate with the United States in identifying and expelling extremists. In October 2001, six Algerians were arrested by the Bosnian police and later sent to Guantánamo Bay. In 2007, the government revoked the citizenship of over 420 people connected to “foreign forces.” Close observers have argued the United States largely succeeded in thwarting al Qaeda influence in Bosnia.

Broadly construed, orienting Bosnia toward the West meant imparting Western norms on civil-military relations and forging ties with Western leaders and institutions, which most would conclude is still a work in progress. Some participants in Train and Equip believed this happened, asserting the program proved the federation could integrate its militaries and professionalize them, which inclined military leaders to be more apolitical.<sup>20</sup> An International Crisis Group report in December 1997 supported this assessment, observing there was more evidence of cooperation in the federation Ministry of Defense than in other sectors, and that the program provided transparency for federation military developments. Because Train and Equip helped Westernize postwar Bosnia, the report concluded it “would be foolish to scrap this asset.”<sup>21</sup>

Bosnia’s future remains uncertain, but 20 years later, there is no doubt the program achieved its operational goals. In less than 2 years, the task force rectified the military imbalance between Bosnian Serb and federation forces, and did so with only about half of the resources originally estimated necessary. The program reassured the federation and eliminated any misconceptions the

Serbs might have had about the merits of renewing hostilities. If federation leaders ever harbored illusions about renewing hostilities, they diminished as the program’s limited scope and duration became clear to them. Both objectively, in terms of actual military capability, and subjectively, in terms of perceived relative capabilities, the program did not overshoot its mark as so many worried. On the contrary, it diminished the influence of extremists and foreign meddling in Bosnian politics and moved the political mainstream to favor greater integration.

## The Way Forward

NATO’s experience in Bosnia, including the Train and Equip experience, illustrates that hybrid threats to NATO are not new and that the Alliance has experience with successful mechanisms for managing them. Initially, NATO leaders hoped diplomacy alone would generate peace. Later, they hoped that positioning military forces around safe havens in Bosnia would suffice and, finally, that isolated airstrikes would do the job. But lurching from diplomacy to military force generated little progress. Resolving what one former Secretary of State called “the problem from hell” required a sophisticated and ongoing mix of diplomacy, military force, and other tools of statecraft.

Eventually, the United States put an interagency team together that could coordinate diplomatic, political, military, and informational activities quickly and to good effect. The first team was led by Holbrooke and the second by Pardew. Both pursued this integrated approach to great effect. Indeed, Pardew used a similar approach later to facilitate peace in Macedonia and Kosovo. Some NATO partners were slow to learn the necessity of a multidimensional response, but having ceded the lead to the United States, they had to follow the American approach to move forward, and it proved a success.

Russia is a much more capable and serious threat than Serbia but what the United States demonstrated in Bosnia, and what NATO must understand now, is that all hybrid threats require new command and control arrangements.

There is nothing wrong with the military steps NATO has taken to date to reassure Eastern European countries facing hybrid threats from Russia—for example, strengthening the Response Force and bolstering air policing and air surveillance in the Baltics. However, these military steps need to be integrated with informational, political, diplomatic, and economic measures. Russia will be much more easily deterred if it sees NATO can match its multifaceted aggression with multidimensional security measures that are well coordinated, mutually supporting, and quickly implemented.

Some will argue that what was achieved in the Balkans was more of a national effort than an Alliance success. It is true that some NATO countries resisted the multidimensional approach, but not all. In any case, the United States acted within the NATO framework, and NATO provided the peacekeeping forces. Other successful U.S.-sponsored cross-functional mission organizations such as Joint Interagency Task Force–South<sup>22</sup> operate on an international as well as an interagency basis, so NATO should be able to do the same.

Others will argue NATO is just a military organization. But NATO's founding treaty has political, economic, military, and organizational provisions, and a quick glimpse at the structure of NATO headquarters reveals diverse functional bodies of expertise. In the course of the Afghanistan campaign, NATO needed a better multidimensional approach and adapted its structures accordingly (for instance, by setting up the Comprehensive Crisis and Operations Management Centre at Supreme Headquarters Allied Powers Europe).<sup>23</sup> What NATO needs for tackling the hybrid challenge is to take this approach to the next level.

If NATO can learn from its own history, focus on the basics of hybrid warfare, and update its Strategic Concept document with a cross-functional mechanism for managing hybrid threats, then it will be able to counter hybrid threats much more effectively. NATO's senior political decisionmaking body, the North Atlantic Council, would have to work out its oversight procedures just as the U.S. National Security Council had to approve

and periodically review the terms of reference for the teams led by Hollbrooke and Pardew. Approving the mechanism and procedures would be a worthy objective for NATO's July 2016 Warsaw Summit. Certainly these steps would be more practical than more speeches on the importance of hybrid warfare or debates about the concept's definitional parameters. JFQ

---

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Frank G. Hoffman, "On Not-So-New Warfare: Political Warfare vs. Hybrid Threats," *WarontheRocks.com*, July 28, 2014, available at <<http://warontherocks.com/2014/07/on-not-so-new-warfare-political-warfare-vs-hybrid-threats/>>.

<sup>2</sup> Jens Stoltenberg, remarks at the World Economic Forum, January 22, 2016, in U.S. Department of Defense News Transcript, "Remarks by Secretary of Defense Ash Carter in Plenary Session at the World Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland," January 22, 2016, available at <[www.defense.gov/News/News-Transcripts/Transcript-View/Article/644253/remarks-by-secretary-of-defense-ash-carter-in-plenary-session-at-the-world-econ](http://www.defense.gov/News/News-Transcripts/Transcript-View/Article/644253/remarks-by-secretary-of-defense-ash-carter-in-plenary-session-at-the-world-econ)>.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.* These leaders have been making these same points over the past year. See Ashton Carter, "U.S., Germany, and NATO Are Moving Forward Together," speech, Atlantik Brücke, Berlin, Germany, June 22, 2015, available at <[www.defense.gov/News/Speeches/Speech-View/Article/606684/remarks-at-atlantik-brcke-us-germany-nato-are-moving-forward-together](http://www.defense.gov/News/Speeches/Speech-View/Article/606684/remarks-at-atlantik-brcke-us-germany-nato-are-moving-forward-together)>.

<sup>4</sup> Robert Work, "The Third Offset Strategy and America's Allies and Partners," speech, Royal United Services Institute, London, September 10, 2015.

<sup>5</sup> "Czech Rep; MoD Mulls Establishment of 'Hybrid Warfare' Unit," *Defense Market Intelligence*, January 19, 2016, available at <[www.dmlt.com/europe/czech-rep-mod-mulls-establishment-of-hybrid-warfare-unit](http://www.dmlt.com/europe/czech-rep-mod-mulls-establishment-of-hybrid-warfare-unit)>.

<sup>6</sup> Representative Mac Thornberry (R-TX), Chairman of the House Armed Services Committee, included a provision in the 2016 National Defense Authorization Act to this effect. See Thomas Gibbons-Neft, "The 'New' Type of War That Finally Has the Pentagon's Attention," *New York Times*, July 3, 2015.

<sup>7</sup> Compare, for example, Alexander Lanozka, "Russian Hybrid Warfare and Extended Deterrence in Eastern Europe," *International Affairs* 92, no. 1 (January 2016); and Patrick Duggan, "Man, Computer and Special Warfare," *Small Wars Journal*, January 4, 2016.

<sup>8</sup> Richard Holbrooke, *To End a War* (New York: Random House, 1998), 61.

<sup>9</sup> Bill Clinton, "Remarks on the Balkan

Peace Process and an Exchange with Reporters," Washington, DC, October 31, 1995.

<sup>10</sup> House Foreign Relations Committee, prepared statement of Secretary of Defense William Perry, *The Deployment of Troops to Bosnia*, November 30, 1995. Perry made the same point privately to President Izetbegović. Derek Chollet, *The Road to Dayton Accords: A Study of American Statecraft* (London: Palgrave/MacMillan, 2005), 169.

<sup>11</sup> David Halberstam in Chollet, 196.

<sup>12</sup> These and other attributes were repeatedly mentioned in discussions of the program and codified in the National Security Council (NSC) documents. See, for example, "Equipping and Training the Federation," tab C, September 29, 1995, Deputies Committee Meeting, Declassified Document C05961572, September 21, 1995, Bosnia, Intelligence, and the Clinton Presidency.

<sup>13</sup> Institute for Defense Analyses, "Assessment of Military Stabilization Options for Bosnia-Herzegovina," report summary, January 1996, 1. Also, NSC Memorandum, "Summary of Conclusions for meeting of the NSC Deputies Committee," Declassified Document C05962049, October 6, 1995, Bosnia, Intelligence, and the Clinton Presidency.

<sup>14</sup> Jim Pardew, U.S. Special Representative for Military Stabilization in the Balkans, personal journal (March 1996–February 1997), March 15, 1996.

<sup>15</sup> International Crisis Group, "A Peace, or Just a Ceasefire? The Military Equation in Post Dayton Bosnia," ICG Bosnia Project, December 15, 1997, 18.

<sup>16</sup> The *Washington Post's* John Pomfret was transparent in arguing that he believed European officials were correct. See John Pomfret, "Waiting for the War Next Time," *Washington Post*, June 1, 1997, C2.

<sup>17</sup> Pardew journal (December 1995–March 1996), January 7, 1996.

<sup>18</sup> Pardew journal (March 1996–February 1997), June 14, 1996.

<sup>19</sup> As early as 1992, a Central Intelligence Agency assessment noted, the United Kingdom "appears to be the most leery among West Europeans of any military involvement in Bosnia." "European Views on the Use of Force in Bosnia and Herzegovina," declassified intelligence memorandum, DCI Interagency Balkan Task Force, August 10, 1992, available at <[www.foia.cia.gov/collection/bosnia-intelligence-and-clinton-presidency?page=10](http://www.foia.cia.gov/collection/bosnia-intelligence-and-clinton-presidency?page=10)>.

<sup>20</sup> Interview with General Dzemal Najetovic by author, September 14, 2010.

<sup>21</sup> International Crisis Group.

<sup>22</sup> Evan Munsing and Christopher J. Lamb, *Joint Interagency Task Force–South: The Best Known, Least Understood Interagency Success*, Strategic Perspectives 5 (Washington, DC: NDU Press, June 2011).

<sup>23</sup> We are indebted to Alexander Mattelaer for this insight.