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**LATEST DEVELOPMENTS IN THE US STANCE
TOWARDS THE YUGOSLAV CRISIS**

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* Following the launching of the Christopher initiative, the US has undertaken several initiatives which has placed it at the centre of the international action to deal with the conflict. These initiatives include increased pressure for a peaceful settlement among the three parties; daily air-drops of humanitarian supplies; establishment of an allied military posture for the enforcement of the no-fly zone over the Bosnian territory; strengthening of the sanctions against the Serbs. Although these initiatives were all designed to exert a growing pressure on the Serbs, they do not constitute a clear and consistent strategy and do not manifest the characteristics necessary to modify the course of the conflict.

* The US attitude towards the Vance-Owen plan has remained ambiguous. On 31 March the Clinton administration rejected a proposal advanced by Britain and France for a Security Council resolution endorsing the peace plan. The main reason for this refusal was a desire to maintain a greater room for manoeuvre if - as was the case - the Bosnian Serbs rejected the plan. Washington abstained from working out an alternative proposal or suggesting changes in the Vance-Owen plan; In fact, the international community, including the US, has continued to pursue its mediating efforts on the basis of this plan.

* There has also been a strong reluctance to engage in a military intervention for several reasons: First, the European allies have repeatedly stressed the risks associated with a military action. The French and the Britons, in particular, fear that their forces acting under the UN aegis could become hostages of the Serbs. Second, opinion polls have shown little support for military action. A clear majority of the respondents oppose the idea of a US military involvement in the Yugoslav conflict, including air strikes against Serb targets in Bosnia. Third, many military officials, including the US chief of staff Powell and the NATO Saceur Shalikashvili, have expressed serious doubts about the effectiveness of air strikes against the Serb forces. Fourth, President Clinton has shown also recently a clear interest in keeping the attention of the US opinion concentrated on the domestic affairs, especially after new difficulties have emerged for his economic plan. In a press conference held on 12 May he declared his confidence in the support by the American public for this «clear, disciplined restraint» in the use of US military forces. The US administration has declared it will uphold two principles: (i) the US will not intervene in Bosnia-Herzegovina without the support of the European allies; (ii) it will not send troops for ground operations.

* The most recent strategy worked out by the Clinton administration seems to have a more modest objective than previous ones. It aims essentially at changing the balance on the ground, by enabling the Bosnian Muslims to fight effectively on their own, rather than at stopping the conflict. Once the Bosnian Serbs no longer have their military superiority, so the argument goes, it will be easier to induce them to accept

the peace plan. This strategy implies the lifting of the arms embargo for the Muslims, and the launching of air strikes against Serb military targets in Bosnia with the limited purpose of allowing the Muslims to organize their reaction. The air strikes would cease once this goal is reached. The Clinton administration would thus be able to specify when, or at least how, the US intervention would end. This strategy clearly implies that the diplomatic action would be moved to the background at least for the time needed to level the playing field and force the Serbs to change their negotiating position substantially. For this reason, the US administration does not consider it a priority to clarify its position on the Vance-Owen plan.

* At the same time, the US administration has shown a growing awareness of the need to undertake initiatives aimed at preventing the spillover of the conflict into other areas, in particular towards the South (i.e. Kosovo and Macedonia, with the unavoidable involvement of Albania, and the possible involvement of Bulgaria, Greece and Turkey). This now appears a top priority on the US agenda. The Clinton administration, like the Bush administration, has so far limited itself to warning the Serbs that an attack beyond Bosnian territory would trigger a military reaction. This warning has however been losing much of its credibility as the Western allies have proved unable, because of lack of cohesion and resolve, to mount a military action in Bosnia. The idea of a preventive deployment of US troops in Macedonia or Kosovo as a means of containing the war has thus gained consensus. Yet, this move does not appear imminent. Even for this mission, the Clinton administration appears reluctant to dispatch ground troops. Furthermore, although Washington has declared its support for a UN resolution calling for the sending of troops to ensure that Serbia keeps its promise not to deliver arms to the Bosnian Serbs across the borders, it has excluded, at least for time being, a US participation in this operation.

* The strategy worked out by the EC foreign ministers at their meeting of 11 May is substantially different from that outlined by the Clinton administration. The two-track approach proposed by the US - arming the Bosnian Muslims and launching air strikes on Serbian targets in Bosnia - was rejected. Unlike the US, the Europeans think that a policy that would allow them to put Milosevic's good faith to test is still worth pursuing. They proposed imposing safe areas in Bosnia, protecting them from the aggression of the Bosnian Serbs. The EC leaders have appealed to the US administration to agree to send troops to this mission. The second measure advocated by the EC countries is the dispatch of UN troops to patrol the Serbian-Bosnian borders. This divergence of view between the US and the EC, which may also be attributed to their different levels of involvement in the crisis - the former does not have, in fact, troops on the ground - , threatens to make impossible any effective action e to paralyse the UN. There is thus an urgent need to settle this divergence. It is also essential that the Western allies speak with a single voice with the other partners, in particular Russia, whose policy towards the Yugoslav conflict is still subject to its domestic struggle for power.