

# Clinton abandons promises on Bosnia

by Edward Spannaus

After months spent building expectations that his administration would take a more aggressive stance against Serbian genocide in Bosnia-Herzegovina, President Bill Clinton and Secretary of State Warren Christopher gave in on Feb. 10 to European Community and Russian pressure, and adopted the fundamental premises of the negotiating process being conducted by Cyrus Vance and David Owen.

Indeed, the Clinton plan incorporates about the worst options from the range of alternatives that were under discussion. It assures the Serbs that they will retain the fruits of the massacres, rapes, and "ethnic cleansing" which they have directed against the Bosnian Muslim population. And it further guarantees that if U.S. troops are deployed to the former Yugoslavia as "peacekeeping" forces, it will be under conditions which threaten to repeat the Lebanon debacle of the early 1980s, when the Marines, lacking a military mission, became sitting ducks.

The administration's plan, announced at the State Department on Feb. 10 by Christopher, rejected the two key options which Clinton had promised to consider during his election campaign: lifting the arms embargo, and using U.S. air power to deter Serbian aggression. And whereas Clinton had promised not to use ground troops in any capacity, he has now taken the first step toward sending U.S. troops in, under United Nations auspices, to enforce a negotiated settlement.

The principal thrust of Christopher's announcement was that the United States would put its full weight behind continuing diplomatic efforts to attain a negotiated settlement. It was in this context that the administration said it may deploy ground troops—to implement and enforce a negotiated settlement.

Christopher and Clinton declared that the United States will not enforce a settlement unless all parties agree to it. What is not explained is the paradox that if all sides agree to the settlement, why foreign troops should be needed to enforce it—unless the settlement isn't worth the paper it is written on, which would, indeed, be the case.

It seems clear that, by diving head first into the negotiations swamp, the administration will sooner or later be putting pressure on the Bosnians to accept a plan which deprives them of their homes and territory, and sooner or later will

deprive them of their national sovereignty altogether.

The Clinton-Christopher announcement followed about 10 days of the most obscene pronouncements by European Community negotiator David Owen, accusing the United States of prolonging the Bosnian war and demanding that the new administration jump on board the Vance-Owen plan. Part of the pressure package was to insist that the U.S. commit troops as part of the U.N. "peacekeeping" force, alongside the British, French, Canadians, and others.

At the same time, Clinton and top administration officials held a series of discussions with the Russian leadership, which has fully backed the Vance-Owen plan. And why not, for the Vance-Owen plan gives the overextended Serbs the territory they want and the breathing space to consolidate their ill-gotten gains? Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Vitaly Churkin told the U.N. Security Council on Feb. 10 that "we have only two hopes in this situation. One is Cyrus Vance and the other is Lord Owen."

## No ground troops needed

Bosnian officials and Croatian spokesman have stated repeatedly that they are *not* asking for U.S. ground troops. They want two things from the West, and from the U.S. in particular: 1) a lifting of the arms embargo, so that they can defend themselves, and 2) use of U.S. air power to enforce the no-fly zone and to destroy Serbian artillery concentrations and logistics capabilities. With this, the victims of the Serbian aggression and genocide could roll back the Serbian conquests.

Bosnian President Alija Izetbegovic has repeatedly stated that his country does not want U.S. ground troops, just the right to defend itself.

Speaking on Capitol Hill in Washington on Feb. 4, Bosnian Foreign Minister Haris Silajzic told a group of U.S. senators and representatives that the Bosnians could obtain sufficient arms to defend themselves within two or three weeks if the arms embargo were ended, and that they could turn the military situation around within two or three months.

Silajzic stressed that the other essential steps are to place all heavy weaponry under strict international control, to break the siege of Sarajevo, and to conduct air strikes against Serbian artillery positions.

A measured use of military force—by whatever western nations are prepared to go with it—combined with arming of the Croatians and Bosnians, could bring the war in the former Yugoslavia to an end relatively quickly.

But to substitute the negotiating process for the decisive application of military force, means that the United States has now capitulated to the very process of appeasement which Clinton had promised to reverse. And by limiting any use of U.S. military force to that of enforcing an unprincipled negotiated settlement, U.S. troops could soon find themselves in a Beirut-type of situation where they are hostages to the Serbian thugs.