



Armed Peacekeepers in Bosnia

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By 1990, the Cold War was over and many Americans talked of the “peace dividend” that would befall the country once military spending and commitments could be reduced in what some referred to as the New World Order. Instead, world affairs proved as dangerous and intractable as ever, even more so perhaps than during the period 1945-1990 when the two competing superpowers managed to hold various tribal, ethnic, religious, and political conflicts around the world somewhat in check. Driving home how dangerous the world remained in the 1990s, the US military found itself fighting one major war, Operation Desert Storm, and participating in a variety of other military activities, including three major interventions: Somalia, Haiti, and the Balkans. The Combat Studies Institute has published scholarly accounts of the Gulf War (Lucky War), the Somalian venture (“My Clan Against the World”), and the involvement in Haiti (Invasion, Intervention, “Intervasion”). The publication of *Armed Peacekeepers in Bosnia* adds another case study to the Institute’s coverage of these post-Cold War US military operations. With the aid of a generous grant from the US Institute of Peace, Robert Baumann, George Gawrych, and Walter Kretchik were able to access and examine relevant documents, interview numerous participants, and visit US and NATO forces in Bosnia. As a result of their labors, they have provided the reader an analytical narrative that covers the background to the crisis in Bosnia, the largely ineffectual efforts of the UN Protection Force to stop the civil war there between 1992 and 1995, the Dayton Peace Accords of 1995 that produced a framework for ending the civil war and consolidating the peace, the frenetic planning that led to the deployment of US forces as part of the NATO-led multinational force (Operation Joint Endeavor), and the transition of that Implementation Force to the Stabilization Force a year later. The authors shed light on several of the critical military lessons that have emerged from the US experience in Bosnia—an involvement that continues as of this writing. In general, these cover the cooperation and contention present in virtually any coalition undertaking; the complexity of the local situation and the way in which strictly military tasks have political, social, economic, and cultural ramifications that the military cannot ignore or avoid; the inevitable adjustments peacekeepers have to make to dynamic and precarious situations; and the often unaccommodating role history plays when confronted with concerns about force protection, “mission creep,” “end states,” and early exits. In Bosnia, as in countless other operations, a US military force trained and equipped to fight a highly technological, conventional war found itself making adjustments that resulted in performing tasks that many officers considered unconventional and unorthodox. The ability to make these adjustments and to perform these tasks has thus far leant to the success of the US/NATO involvement in Bosnia. Now the United States is engaged in the Global War on Terror and, in the process, has already embarked on stability operations in Afghanistan and Iraq. The case of Bosnia is, of course, unique but the general lessons it provides are relevant to US officers fighting in the current war and should not be overlooked.

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