

For Afghanistan's Peacekeepers, a Few Balkan Guidelines U.N. Official in Bosnia Says West Should Prepare For a Long, Hard Stay

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As international peacekeepers embark on a mission to secure Afghanistan's interim government, a voice of experience in nation building echoes from another trouble spot.

"Don't expect too much too soon," says Wolfgang Petritsch, the top international official in the Balkans. "These are long-term efforts, and nothing can be achieved in the short term. What you need is political will behind it to make it succeed."

Mr. Petritsch should know. He has been knee-deep in the quicksand of Balkan politics for years. The Austrian native was the European Union's chief negotiator at the last-ditch conference that failed to reach a settlement with Serb leader Slobodan Milosevic and prevent war in Kosovo. Then he became head of the United Nations Office of the High Representative in Sarajevo and took charge of implementing the civilian aspects of the 1995 Bosnia peace agreement.

From this view, he sees a main lesson from the Balkans that could help ensure that warring factions in Afghanistan lay down their guns for good: Peace can come only when locals feel they have more to gain by living together than by killing each

other.

"In Bosnia, four years of fighting led to a kind of exhaustion and realization on all sides that more war is not going to help them," says Mr. Petritsch. In Kosovo, he says, efforts to impose a peace failed "because both sides thought they could gain by continuing the fighting."

War-weary Afghans seem tired of fighting, too, but the situation in Afghanistan isn't directly comparable to the Balkan experience. For one thing, Afghans have no common language, which complicates unifying dozens of tribal groups into a multiethnic state. It also lacks a positive historic model. Unlike the Balkans, though, rival Afghan groups weren't trying to annihilate each other; there is no history of ethnic cleansing.

The details of the international peacekeeping force for Afghanistan are beginning to emerge. Yesterday, the U.N. Security Council unanimously approved a mandate for a force of 3,000 to 5,000 troops under British command. Deployment is expected to begin Dec. 28. Full implementation could take several weeks. It isn't clear how long the troops will stay in Kabul.

But, if Bosnia is any guide, the troops will stay longer than anyone is now willing to say. Five years after the North Atlantic Treaty Organization deployed 32,000 troops to keep Serbs, Croats and Bosnian Muslims from fighting, there are still about 18,000 in Bosnia-Herzegovina.

Bosnia is still an emotionally divided country; ethnic animosities from a war that claimed 200,000 lives and drove millions from their homes remain acute, above and below the surface. International workers there are convinced that the troops are still needed to keep a lid on the emotions and to buy more time for efforts to rebuild civil society.

That becomes increasingly difficult when politicians in the

West threaten to cut resources or withdraw troops altogether. Just this week, Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld suggested that NATO reduce its Balkan forces by a third to free up troops for the U.S.-led antiterror campaign.

Mr. Petritsch warns against pulling out troops too soon. "For a few more years, the military component of our operations needs to remain in Bosnia-Herzegovina, even if it's going to be reduced," he says. "Substantial tasks remain, including the apprehension of indicted war criminals." Mr. Petritsch points to former Bosnian Serb leaders Radovan Karadzic and Radko Mladic.

In addition to the blue-helmeted peace forces keeping enemies apart, political and diplomatic troops are needed to rebuild the country. Mr. Petritsch and his colleagues are trying to create an independent judiciary and a legal framework for economic development, including clear rules on returning property to people forced from their homes, to encourage the return of refugees.

But no matter how many troops are keeping the peace, they can't assure a peaceful society. In Bosnia, says Mr. Petritsch, some local politicians are still trying to disrupt the peace process, and they need to be isolated. In March, he removed a Croat representative from Bosnia's collective presidency for being obstructive and acting counter to the aims of the peace treaty.

Military might "was overwhelmingly important to stop the war," says Mr. Petritsch. "But it alone cannot do the trick."

A slightly amended version of this story was published on the same day in the European edition of The Wall Street Journal under the headline: "Balkan Official Has Advice for Peacekeepers – Petritsch Says Locals Need to See They Have More to Gain From Living Together Than Killing – 'These Are Long-Term Efforts and Nothing Can Be Achieved in the Short

Term''.