Speech by Principal Deputy HR Larry Butler to NATO Senior Officers: “Post-Conflict Reconstruction is a Joint Political-Military Undertaking”

Ten years ago next month, 60,000 NATO-led troops began deploying across Bosnia and Herzegovina . IFOR entered the country in force and in good order. Within days of its arrival, military bridges had been erected at strategic river crossings, helicopters dominated the skyline; and tanks and other fighting vehicles had taken up advance positions along the former confrontation line. The full deployment of IFOR troops between the opposing forces was completed in the space of three weeks.

It was an impressive display – and it worked.

Ten years on, the size of the international military deployment – which has metamorphosed from IFOR through SFOR to EUFOR – has been scaled back to a force of 7,000.

Successive troop reductions have been directly calibrated as a response to the improving security situation. EUFOR is today the military guarantor of a robust peace sustained by political consensus and by social, institutional and economic progress that at the end of 1995 would have been almost unimaginable.

These developments represent the context in which military intervention by the International Community and military

reorganisation by the BiH state have been able to take place.

Military reorganization is a basic element in BiH's postwar recovery.

It also has a direct bearing on the arms control theme of today's discussions.

At the end of 1995 BiH was wholly militarized. Political activity was subordinate to, and dictated by, the disposition of forces on the ground. What remained of the economy – very little – was given over to food production and military supply. And, of course, large swathes of the country were either under direct military control, with the civil authority *de facto* if not *de jure* displaced, or were actual battle zones.

More than a million citizens were under arms – almost half the adult population. The configuration of the front lines represented a complex grid comprehensively dissecting the country.

Rationalising BiH's military structure and making it compatible with participation in Partnership for Peace and eventual NATO membership therefore represented a distant goal, which few were confident could be reached.

Following a conflict, most soldiers just want to go home, and part of the immediate postwar peace dividend was the understandable enthusiasm for demobilization among conscripts. The presence of international peacekeepers removed any political rationale for maintaining troop strength at wartime levels. This was in any case beyond the financial means of any of the BiH signatories to the Dayton Peace Agreement.

After the initial demobilization, however, resistance to wholesale downsizing came from serving members of the armed forces, and it came for clearly material rather than political reasons.

The job market was unable to absorb the mass influx of former soldiers in 96 and 97 and it was unable to absorb smaller numbers in the years after that.

In this respect, SFOR and the OSCE developed innovative schemes to ease the financial and economic impact of downsizing – making it easier for the domestic authorities to do the right thing.

SFOR inaugurated a scheme to purchase obsolete weapons, expediting the disarmament process and making funds available to help demobilized soldiers establish themselves in civilian life. The OSCE likewise has run programmes to provide re-training and new-skills acquisition opportunities for demobilized soldiers.

The aim of these exercises has been to capitalize on a momentum for positive change – to go with the flow. They have, in consequence, enjoyed an encouraging measure of success.

The political – as opposed to the practical – flow has not been as consistently helpful.

In the years after Dayton the military – particularly in the case of the RS and the Croat component of the Federation – emerged as key holdovers of the nationalist agenda that dominated politics during and just before the war.

In this respect, opposition to efforts to reform the armed forces shared many of the same characteristics as opposition to full implementation of Dayton.

In addition, the armed forces were seen by some as guarantors of communal security rather than as components of a BiH-wide security system.

Up until the late 1990s this was enough to offset growing *political* pressure for a rightsizing of the armed forces.

But after 2000 it was not strong enough to resist *economic*

pressure for rightsizing.

Maintaining the armed forces had become a clearly intolerable burden for the Entity budgets.

The most ardent nationalists could not find a way round this, short of calling on citizens to make more sacrifices, a call which some nationalists might have been prepared to make but which few citizens would have prepared to accept.

By 2003 the dynamics for accelerated and more profound military reorganization had changed fundamentally.

There were three reasons for this.

The first was that the RS military industrial complex was implicated in a major arms-dealing operation that clearly and seriously violated the international weapons embargo on trade with Iraq.

This pointed up in a way that was thoroughly unarguable the fact that the armed forces had to be brought under the clear political command and control of the BiH state, the signatory of international treaties and the liable party in respect of any violation of international obligations.

The second was that in other key areas of postwar rehabilitation the Entities had constructively and pragmatically reached agreement on transferring competencies to the State – notably in the field of taxation and economic management.

As BiH has come to resemble a modern European democracy with institutions and systems of political organization that are compatible with EU membership, it has become increasingly incumbent on its armed forces to adapt to this positive trend.

Thirdly, citizens had come to view future participation in Partnership for Peace and eventual membership of NATO as real

guarantors of security in BiH, much more plausibly so than the maintenance of two distinct military forces on the same territory.

And to get into NATO the armed forces have to merge.

A Defence Reform Commission, which brought all the BiH stakeholders together under international chairmanship, agreed the text of a draft BiH Defence Law in September 2003. The Law, which placed the existing armed forces under authentic state control for the first time, establishing a BiH Defence Ministry, the position of BiH Minister of Defence, and a BiH General Staff, and making the BiH parliament solely responsible for declaring states of war or states of emergency, was enacted in December 2003.

Since then the Defence Reform Commision, under an extended and expanded mandate, has worked on putting the political agreement into practice. Significantly, the focus has shifted, from political debate over defence doctrine to practical debate over how to finance the new system and make it work.

The emphasis is on modernising the BiH armed forces so that they can operate effectively in the context of NATO integration and regional security. By the end of this year both Entity Ministries of Defence will cease to exist, and their functions will be carried out by the State. Already, every soldier in BiH salutes the same flag, and swears loyalty to the same state.

The armed forces have been transformed into a factor for stability.

What have we learned from this decade-long process?

- That military rightsizing cannot be viewed as a purely military exercise. It depends on a variety of factors *including* military factors. Defence reform is a civilian/political exercise. Civilian leadership and

experience are essential for the core task of institution building. The success of IFOR and then SFOR and EUFOR created the circumstances necessary for political evolution in BiH, which in turn created the circumstances necessary for military reform.

- The nature and requirements of military reform were distinct from reforms in other sectors – obstacles included a preponderance of national opinion in some sections of the military, and a perception among some sections of the public immediately after the war that military rather than political provisions represented the best guarantee of communal security.
- Just as politics can be subordinated to military considerations, so military considerations can be subordinated to economics – there has been a compelling political case for rightsizing the armed forces, an even more compelling economic case.
- The prospect of joining NATO has been *the* most compelling inducement to press ahead with military reform. NATO membership has come to be viewed not only as a sign that a country has moved forward decisively with its transition process, but as a guarantee that that process will not be reversed.

This last is particularly significant. The prospect of NATO membership means a great deal to BiH.

But what does the prospect of having BiH as a member mean to NATO?

Well, I would argue that its deepening association with BiH may mean more to NATO than is generally appreciated.

We need only cast our minds back to the disquieting (and that's the mildest term that can be used) incapacity of Europe to stop the fighting in former Yugoslavia to understand the progress that has been made in the last decade.

The NATO-led intervention at the end of 2005 began with an impressive display of military strength but an equally substantial element of political uncertainty. Ten years on, NATO, and particularly its European component, is able to look at a track record of political coordination and engagement, and practical day-to-day peacekeeping and nation-building that demonstrates the potential for the Alliance to expand and adapt its activities to meet changing circumstances. The European Union is developing and applying a coherent Defence and Security Policy, and we are seeing the results in BiH, where the EU family is coming together – a military mission, a police mission, a political mission, and other missions on fiscal and border issues, for example. All these tools, we now know, are necessary in a post-conflict situation, and all have to be applied in an interlocking way.

In other theatres, notably Iraq , we have seen a dichotomy – not in my view a fundamental dichotomy but a dichotomy nonetheless – between France , Germany and Spain on the one hand, and the rest of Europe on the other. In BiH we have seen no such division. Old Europe, New Europe, the whole of Europe, have joined forces, and done so to great effect.

BiH has been a notable success for NATO.

And NATO has been a notable success for BiH.

I mentioned Iraq . Does our experience in BiH offer any pointers for the way forward there?

In a word: no.

The two theatres are fundamentally different. Yet, perhaps there are three broad lessons from BiH that can be applied not just in Iraq but anywhere else where peacekeeping and nation building have been undertaken as a component of international intervention.

- It takes time. It has already taken a decade in BiH. The

number of troops has been reduced by more than 90 percent, the bulk of international aid was disbursed in the first five years, the number of international agencies directly and substantially involved has gone from perhaps a hundred at the peak to around 15 or 20 today – but the job is not yet finished. This is not an indication of failure; it is simple evidence of the fact that rebuilding a shattered country can't be done in months. That was the lesson after World War Two; the reality hasn't changed since then.

- It takes money. BiH benefited from an international aid effort worth somewhere in the region of US$ 5 billion between 1995 and 2000. A substantial sum – but a modest and very wise investment if you consider the interests of the country's neighbours and potential trading partners. Faced with the prospect of a black hole in Southeast Europe – a haven for drugs, weapons and people trafficking – or a healthy democratic trading partner, which would you choose?
- It takes coordination. On the civilian side the early international intervention was characterized by a huge amount of overlap in terms of programmes, personnel and funding. Successive High Representatives have sought, with increasing success, to rein in the sprawl of organizations that report to head offices elsewhere and whose institutional thinking is often disparate, sometimes mutually exclusive. By contrast, the military effort has from the beginning been characterized by the kind of intra-unit cooperation that NATO can guarantee.

Time, money, coordination, and a military and civilian capacity to seize every opportunity offered by a constantly changing political situation. It has worked in BiH. It can surely work elsewhere.

Thank you