Troops to Kosovo; Terror for Americans?

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The very day after his acquittal, Bill Clinton moved quickly to change the subject and wag the dog by announcing plans to send U.S. ground troops into the civil war in Kosovo between Serbian authorities and ethnic Albanians fighting for independence. The Americans would be part of a 27,000-strong NATO force under non-American command.

Clinton is overriding major concerns of senior Pentagon officials that the Administration has no clear-cut military goals and that this will soon involve twice as many U.S. troops as he predicts. They believe this will seriously overburden U.S. ground forces already committed to missions in the Persian Gulf, Bosnia, and Korea.

The claim that our expedition into Kosovo is to guard a "peace settlement" is another Clinton lie because there is no peace to keep, there is no hope that our involvement can eliminate the causes of the conflict, and there are even questions about who is at fault in the civil war. Clinton's Kosovo war will, like Bosnia, become an open-ended, permanent, costly U.S. project, and it will probably degenerate into a Somalia-type fiasco.

The Joint Chiefs have warned against casualties in Kosovo because, first, the fighting will get bloodier as the weather improves, and secondly, U.S. troops in Kosovo will be at grave risk from terrorist attacks by Islamic radicals connected to Saudi renegade Osama bin Laden, who has declared a worldwide war on Americans. Fanatics bent on jihad against the "Great Satan" United States could hardly ask for a more tempting target than several thousand Americans deployed so close to their bases in northern Albania.

It's not only our U.S. troops who will be put in mortal danger; bin Laden has stated unequivocally that all Americans, including "those who pay taxes," are targets. At a recent Senate hearing, CIA Director George Tenet warned against the danger of a stepped-up terrorist campaign, saying, "There is not the slightest doubt that Osama bin Laden, his worldwide allies, and his sympathizers are planning further attacks against us."

We should not underestimate the deceit and deviousness of Clinton's plans to "move on" by getting headlines for aggressive presidential actions to replace coverage of his impeachment trial. He fully understands how entering the Kosovo war may provoke terrorist retaliation within the United States, and he is using that risk as the excuse to create a Domestic Terrorism Team headed by a military "commander in chief," with a $2.8 billion budget.

Clinton has already issued a Presidential Decision Directive to authorize military intervention against terrorism on our own soil. Secretary of Defense William Cohen said in an Army Times interview that "Terrorism is escalating to the point that Americans soon may have to choose between civil liberties and more intrusive means of protection."

Deputy Secretary of Defense John Hamre has been floating the idea of designating a unit of U.S. troops as a Homelands Defense Command to take charge in case of a terrorist attack on U.S. soil. Hamre argues that the military's role should be formalized under a four-star general, and he has even speculated about creating a bi-national command with Canada and calling it the "Atlantic Command."

The arrogance of the plans being discussed within the Clinton Administration is indicated in the Autumn 1997 "Parameters," the scholarly publication of the Army War College. The article predicts that "the growing prospect of terrorism in our own country . . . will almost inevitably trigger an intervention by the military."

The article casually adds, "legal niceties or strict construction of prohibited conduct will be a minor concern."

The Posse Comitatus Act of 1878 is supposed to protect us against a President using the Army to enforce the law against civilians. The spectacle of the military patrolling the streets of U.S. cities is something that should happen only in totalitarian countries and in movies like "The Siege."

Later laws, however, have carved out a number of exceptions. The 1984 Stafford Disaster Relief Act authorizes the President, after proclaiming a state of emergency, to send active-duty soldiers to respond to a crisis and serve under the direction of the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA).

On June 3, 1994, Clinton issued Executive Order 12919 entitled National Defense Industrial Resources Preparedness. It invests FEMA with plenary and dictatorial authority over communications, energy, food, transportation, health, housing, and other resources.

Our limited experience with law enforcement by the U.S. military is not reassuring. When U.S. Army tanks stormed the Branch Davidian compound in Waco in 1993, scores of innocent people were killed, and when the Marines patrolled the Texas border in 1997, an 18-year-old goat herder was shot and killed.

If Republicans allow Clinton to go ahead with his unconstitutional, costly, foolish and dangerous expedition to Kosovo, where we have no national security interest, they are forfeiting any claim to lead America. This issue should be a litmus test for all candidates for President.