

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

October 11, 2022

The Honorable Antony Blinken
Secretary of State
The United States Department of State
2201 C Street NW
Washington, D.C. 20520

The Honorable Lloyd J. Austin
Secretary of Defense
Department of Defense
1000 Defense Pentagon
Washington, D.C. 20301

Dear Secretary Blinken and Secretary Austin,

We are writing to express our concern for peace and stability in Bosnia and Herzegovina. The fragility of the peace established under the Dayton Peace Accords is evident and alarming. Vladimir Putin's war in Ukraine has emboldened actors in Bosnia and Herzegovina who have long been supported by the Kremlin and other external actors, and the risk of violence cannot be ignored. The United States must focus on maintaining peace in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

On November 22, 2004, United Nations Security Council Resolution 1575 established Operation Althea, the European Union Force in Bosnia and Herzegovina (EUFOR) as the legal successor the NATO-led Security Force (SFOR) that had kept the peace in Bosnia and Herzegovina since the end of the war nine years prior. At the time of the handover, NATO troops numbered 7,000, and thus EUFOR began with a similar number of forces. Over the years, the number has steadily decreased, as it should if progress were made toward a lasting peace. Recent destabilizing political events in the country, however, point to a clear reversal of the situation that demands a more concerted strategic response from EU member states, the United Kingdom, and the United States on how to sufficiently source the EUFOR Althea mission.

The United States should call on its European partners to step up during the EU's November 10 force generation conference and pledge the troops and equipment necessary to maintain the current EUFOR posture of 1,100, at a minimum. At this time, the United States should also reexamine its support to EUFOR to determine whether more can be done, that goes beyond logistical support and training. In the last year, Bosnian Serb leader Milorad Dodik has increased his rhetoric for the secession of Republika Srpska from Bosnia and Herzegovina. Tensions are high, and the risk of a small provocation triggering further destabilization and even violence is real, and the need for effective deterrence immediate.

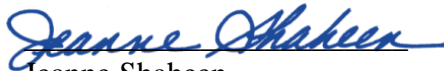
While U.S. forces are not part of EUFOR, the NATO headquarters in Sarajevo maintains a strong relationship with the force, and the presence of NATO sends a strong signal across the country and the region. The United States and our NATO Allies must work together to strengthen NATO HQ Sarajevo, and that starts by ensuring Madrid Summit deliverables, namely

the tailored support measures and Defense Capacity Building program, are responsive to needs and well-resourced. Russia continues to claim the Western Balkans as within its sphere of influence, and Russian officials have issued numerous statements of support for regional actors opposed to both European integration and NATO. The United States must not turn a blind eye to these threats; we must demonstrate our commitment to European security by maintaining an effective presence in the Balkans as we continue to respond to Russia's unprovoked war in Ukraine.

We also urge the Biden administration to develop a strategy, in coordination with the European Union, for how to maintain peacekeeping forces in Bosnia and Herzegovina in the event of a Russian veto of the EUFOR mandate. A Russian veto, possibly with support from China, is expected when the vote for renewal of the mandate comes before the United Nations this November. It is our view that there is a legal basis to maintain a peacekeeping presence in Bosnia and Herzegovina that does not require UN approval. While we should certainly work to ensure a seamless renewal of EUFOR's mandate, we must prepare for a continued peacekeeping presence. Serious NATO contingency planning is critical, generating important leverage at the UN to deter a potential Russian veto and in Bosnia and Herzegovina and convey an important message to leaders in the country. Therefore, we respectfully request a briefing from the Departments of Defense and State to better understand the interagency strategy to prepare for a continued U.S. commitment to the Dayton Peace Agreement and peace in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

The United States has spent decades investing in peace and stability in Bosnia and Herzegovina. We must not let our attention fail now.

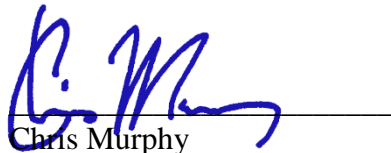
Sincerely,



Jeanne Shaheen
United States Senator



Thom Tillis
United States Senator



Chris Murphy
United States Senator



Roger F. Wicker
United States Senator