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April 23, 1994

TO: Our Friends in the Media  
FROM: [REDACTED]  
RE: Op-Ed on Bosnia

I thought you might like to see the attached op-ed by  
Jack Valenti on the President's efforts in Bosnia.



# To Readers of History, Bosnia is Poison . . .

## ■ Foreign policy: Lyndon

Johnson was destroyed by a war entered with too little thought. Clinton should resist the clamor.

By JACK VALENTI

It isn't necessarily so that one should pay attention to history lest one repeat it. But, as Damon Runyon would have commented, "That's the way to bet."

To my eye, tutored by intimate White House experience, President Clinton should be admired and supported for being reluctant to get this nation bogged down in excursions far from home, in unwholesome terrain amid uncongenial folks armed with guns and anger, however misguided we fathom them to be. Clinton obviously is a devoted reader of history.

Those who declare we have a world responsibility to incite democracy where none exists or to face down disruptions and disorders of the human spirit on whatever continent they occur should understand that the sum total of America's interests and obligations is much bigger than our capacity to defend them all simultaneously.

I am one who lived through the dismal grind of Vietnam. I was there at the side of a President who found himself caught in an unwinnable mess that lost the support of the American people. Because he didn't heed the warnings of his inner political instincts but instead followed the counsel of those who urged him on, his presidency

unraveled and his grasp on greatness softened and slipped.

President Lyndon Johnson learned that Americans soon grow tired of a confusion whose end is not in sight.

What is so hypnotic is that the cries about Bosnia pelting against the presidential chambers this very hour are the same sounds that caromed off the walls of the Cabinet Room during L.B.J.'s presidency. "We can't cut and run" . . . "Our credibility is at stake" . . . "We have obligations as the world leader" . . . and on and on. There is an absence of memory among the shouters and too many reminders of the Bourbon kings—who never understood where they had been, which is why they never knew where they were going.

To what end do we aim in Bosnia? Geography and history illuminate it as a collection of societies inhabited by ancient feuds and the surliest of landscapes. No wonder that in World War II, 20 crack Nazi divisions were still stumbling over Yugoslavia in futile frustration when the war ended.

We weep at the brutal inhumanity being inflicted on innocent people. Our hearts break at the sight of suffering. But what shape will our hearts be in when the body bags of young American warriors start coming home? We cannot adjust the world to our frame of reference. We have neither the resources as a nation nor the tenacity as a people to absorb the pain required to settle all the global brawls, to staunch all the ethnic bloodletting, to repair all the imperfect governments, to pour spoonfuls

of Uncle Sam's democratic elixir through the clenched teeth of unwilling societies. Does that mean we haul up the drawbridge, as good isolationist burghers are wont to do? Not at all.

What it does mean is if ever there appears a compelling need to intervene somewhere, the President has to make publicly clear the objectives we seek and why these objectives are in the long-range security interests of this country. Then he must make certain that whatever he does has the support of a majority of our people. Absent the last, the adventure is doomed.

One alternative is to quickly arm the Bosnians. And then sooner rather than later, enlist the world community to supply and fund the United Nations' blue-helmeted divisions, whose deployment would be authorized by the Security Council and under its command, and populate that force not with the armies of the various members but with volunteers from all countries, trained by professionals from member countries. Otherwise, the United States becomes the world policeman, dispatching its legions to faraway places and filling airport ramps with flag-draped coffins.

President Clinton's judgment is sound; he is far wiser than those who admonish him. Foreign policy is too important to be left to the experts. President Clinton was elected by the people. Let him exercise that responsibility. With great caution.

*Jack Valenti, president of the Motion Picture Assn. of America, was a special assistant to Lyndon Johnson.*