

Bosnia and Herzegovina's (BiH) security protects America's interests in the Western Balkans

Rising geopolitical tensions and increasingly aggressive influence by foreign malign powers imperil decades of U.S. investment in the security and stability of Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH) and the Western Balkans. Renewed American leadership in BiH's reform processes, and material support to bolster the country's defense capabilities, will not only provide for a more secure, prosperous future for BiH but also protect vital American interests in the region.

What is at stake for the United States in the Western Balkans?

American regional primacy in the Western Balkans is under threat.

In the 1990s, the United States played a vital role in securing peace, security, and stability in Bosnia and Herzegovina and Kosovo, widely recognized as America's greatest foreign policy successes. However, in more recent years, weak American leadership and an absence of a cohesive policy towards the region have created a vacuum that Russia and China exploit for their own expansionist ambitions.

In Serbia, Montenegro, and Bosnia and Herzegovina, the United States has backed governments with known Russian proxies, including politicians on the U.S. sanctions list.

In Serbia and Croatia, U.S. appeasement of radical, nationalist leaders has weakened American power and emboldened sectarian actors to foment violence with their neighbors.

In Bosnia and Herzegovina, recent U.S. interventions in general elections and its support of anti-democratic reforms by the Office of the High Representative have left the populace bewildered and questioning the U.S. commitment to its security and stability. In Kosovo, Montenegro, and North Macedonia, a muddled U.S. approach to diplomatic aggression and violence by Serbia and Bulgaria have raised questions for the role of the United States and NATO in the region.

The vacuum of American leadership not only undermines its position in the Western Balkans, but also threatens its credibility as a regional power player in the face of rising geopolitical tensions that imperil U.S. interests.

Why is BiH critical to a sound U.S. strategy in the region?

As the legal architect and guarantor of the 1995 Dayton Accords, the United States has worked to ensure rule of law, democratic governance, and the security and stability of Bosnia and Herzegovina for almost 30 years.

Given BiH's small size and population and the serious threats it faces from foreign malign interference, strengthening its own defense capabilities and support for its NATO membership are critical to securing the country's future against potential adversaries.

The 1990s genocide and ethnic cleansing in Bosnia and Herzegovina fomented by its neighbors, Serbia and Croatia, has not passed from memory especially in the face of the persistent glorification of war criminals and calls for a reprisal.

U.S. regional interests in the Western Balkans are safer when Bosnia and Herzegovina is able to defend itself, by itself against any form of aggression.

How can the U.S. protect its regional interests and BiH's future?

The U.S. has an incredible degree of power to influence politics in Bosnia and Herzegovina and to check Russian, Chinese and other foreign malign interference in the country.

Critical to the protection of the security and stability of the Western Balkans, and to a future where no American troops lose their lives in a second Russian front, is a renewed American commitment to deepening democratic representation, strengthening the rule of law, and buttressing the security capabilities of its allies.

In BiH, the U.S. must support transparent, democratic reforms that prioritize legally binding rulings by the European Court of Human Rights that end discriminatory practices and a system based on ethnic representation.

The U.S. must also acknowledge Serbia's destabilizing role in the region and isolate local collaborators that further pro-Russian and pro-Chinese political influence within BiH, Montenegro, and Kosovo.

Finally, support for BiH's NATO accession is critical to a Euro-Atlantic bloc in the Western Balkans that will put intense pressure on rogue regional actors. The U.S. and Bosnia must enhance their military partnership and work to establish a NATO interoperability center in Bosnia's strategic Brčko District as a security bulwark.

