

Is the 'Tarnoff doctrine' now U.S. strategic policy?

by Scott Thompson and Edward Spannaus

After the publication of Undersecretary of State for Political Affairs Peter Tarnoff's May 25 remarks to the Overseas Writers Club, which first surfaced without attribution in the *Washington Post* and other news outlets, senior White House officials and Secretary of State Warren Christopher scrambled to control the damage. What Tarnoff had revealed was the effort of some circles to force a reevaluation of U.S. strategy, aimed at selective U.S. disengagement from world leadership, allegedly so that the Clinton administration could concentrate upon the collapsing domestic economy.

Some leading European figures took Tarnoff's speech as an after-the-fact rationalization for the Clinton administration's capitulation to a genocidal European-Russian "solution" to the Bosnian crisis over the May 21-23 weekend. While it was certainly this, *EIR* has learned that the "Tarnoff doctrine" of U.S. disengagement from its moral responsibilities of leadership had already been promulgated, with at least the tacit support of Secretary of State Christopher himself, almost two months earlier, at the U.S. State Department's "Open Forum" on March 31. This was long before Christopher came back empty-handed from efforts to win allied support for President Clinton's policy of surgical bombing strikes against Serbian forces and for lifting the arms embargo against Bosnia.

Still, Tarnoff's remarks created a furor that led other administration officials to try to distance themselves from Tarnoff's speech. Both Christopher and an unnamed "senior White House official" quickly denied that Tarnoff represented President Clinton's policy. On May 28, White House spokesman Dee Dee Myers said: "This official clearly does not speak for the administration on the U.S. role in the post-Cold War world."

However, at the same time, Christopher appeared on the

ABC News program "Nightline" to state: "We can't do it all. We have to measure our ability to act in the interests of the United States, but to save our power for those situations which threaten our deepest national interest, at the same time doing all we can where there's humanitarian concern."

Then on June 1, Christopher set forth the most explicit version of a new "Clinton doctrine" in a lengthy interview on the MacNeil-Lehrer News Hour, in which he repeatedly said that the United States will lead, but in a "multilateral" way. Christopher also tried to justify U.S. abdication of its leadership around Bosnia by asserting that Bosnia "does not affect our vital national interests," except in a humanitarian way (calling for a multilateral response), and "except as we're trying to contain it"—which could involve unilateral U.S. action in Kosova or Makedonija.

What did Tarnoff say?

Until his nomination as undersecretary of state for policy, Peter Tarnoff had been president of the Council on Foreign Relations (CFR), and before that he served with Christopher as a senior official in the Carter State Department. His wife, the former Mathea Falco, had also served in the Carter administration, where she gained notoriety for peddling drug decriminalization. While Tarnoff was heading the CFR, its 1990s project entitled *Imperial Temptation* stated that the United States must never again engage in major military operations like the Persian Gulf war, regardless of the purpose of the conflict. As former Kissinger crony Helmut Sonnenfeldt at the Brookings Institution put it with regard to Tarnoff's speech: "He is just following the program of the previous institution with which he was affiliated."

Among the policies Tarnoff attributed in his speech to the Clinton administration were the following:

Our "approach is difficult for our friends to understand. It's not different by accident, it's different by design. . . . We're talking about new rules of engagement for the United States. There will have to be genuine power-sharing and responsibility-sharing."

Tarnoff spoke of "setting limits on the amount of American engagement in Bosnia and around the world." Tarnoff said that how Secretary of State Christopher handled negotiations with the allies on Bosnia was a demonstration of a real U.S. commitment to share power and responsibilities:

"People were genuinely disarmed at the fact he was there to consult. . . . He was there to talk about what we thought would make sense. He was there to listen. He did not have a blueprint in his back pocket. He had some things that we favored and the reason that he did this . . . is that we were setting limits on the amount of American engagement in Bosnia and around the world."

Explaining why the United States had abdicated leadership to sign onto the European-Russia agenda in Bosnia, Tarnoff said: "I believe, and more importantly the President and secretary believe, that for major international interests of this sort where other regional players have a great stake, we should make it very clear that we will play a role, we will have a leadership role, but we are not going to be so far out in front so as to allow them to defer to the United States, when it comes to making the very hard decisions and the commitment of men, women, and resources to these conflicts."

The rationale that Tarnoff gave for capitulating to genocide against the Bosnian Muslims and similar conflicts was the "ascendancy of economic issues" in all areas of U.S. government policymaking. He argued that in an era of budget deficits and cuts, the "importance of money" meant that there was a "constant preoccupation" with justifying how it would be spent.

The May 26 *Boston Globe* reported that Tarnoff "said that the U.S.-led coalition that drove Iraqi forces from Kuwait was not the first battle of the 'new world order.' Rather, he said, it was the last battle of the Cold War. In the new era, 'there are Bosnias, Cambodias, Haitis. . . . All three nations have been beset by civil war and none holds the strategic importance of oil-rich Kuwait.'"

'Multilateralism'

Tarnoff's May 25 remarks should have come as no surprise. Two days earlier, the *Washington Times* had reported: "In a speech to U.S. diplomats two months ago, a senior Clinton administration official declared a change in more than 40 years of U.S. policy toward western Europe and East Asia. The time when Washington was the leader on every issue, telling its global allies what to do, when to do it, and how, is gone." (*EIR* has confirmed that it was Tarnoff who also gave this speech.)

This approach is sometimes called "multilateralism," said the *Times*; it implies "more equal relationships with

western Europe, Japan, the United Nations, and other international groups." Around Bosnia, this new policy "underwent a baptism of fire last week," the article continued. "In a sequence of events that would have been unthinkable two or three years ago, Mr. Clinton allowed Britain, France, and Russia to veto U.S. proposals to arm the Muslims in Bosnia and use force against the Serbs."

Then, on the morning of Tarnoff's May 25 speech, the London *Guardian* also reported that on March 31, U.S. diplomats summoned home from overseas had been treated to an exposition on the new U.S. strategy. They were told, among other things, that "the post-Cold War world was going to be a messy place, and from now on Washington was going to pick and choose its issues."

According to *Guardian* Washington correspondent Martin Walker, the deal on Bosnia was part of this policy of "creeping U.S. disengagement" devised by Christopher et al., with the aim of "educating America's allies into their new responsibilities in a post-Cold War world, in which U.S. leadership will no longer be automatic."

Again, in a May 27 lead editorial entitled "The Clinton Foreign Policy, 1977-81, 1993-97," the *Washington Times* referred to the March 31 briefing, arguing that it was a result of the "Carterization" of the Clinton administration. The *Times*, which had earlier featured an analysis by the former head of German military intelligence, Gen. Paul A. Scherer (ret.), that Soviet hardliners triggered the drive for a "Greater Serbia" and would be emboldened by such a western display of weakness, wrote: "The administration has now ceded the initiative to the Russian government, which has chosen to feed the Bosnians to the Serbian wolves to placate domestic hard-line opposition. . . . And now, the loss of credibility engendered by Mr. Clinton's Bosnian capitulation has its costs as well. It should surprise no one that the Russians are beginning to be more assertive on the international scene. . . . The Soviets made their move on Afghanistan in 1979 after concluding that the United States was too weak to respond."

A strategic catastrophe

There is no question that the Tarnoff-CFR doctrine has, to a degree, been carried out by the Clinton administration, as the worse-than-Munich capitulation to the genocide against Bosnia illustrates. But, it is also creating a reaction in the opposition. And, already, the May 22 five-power agreement is falling apart. The "safe haven" proposal is widely recognized as unworkable, and some sources contend that the Clinton administration hopes that its previous proposals will be revived as the British-French-Russian plan fails.

The introduction of legislation into both the House and the Senate on May 27, which would mandate unilateral U.S. assistance to Bosnia in direct contravention of the U.N.-imposed arms embargo, has great potential to reverse the five-power capitulation and to pull the administration back to a policy of moral and strategic leadership.