

Historically and politically, the Bosnians and the Russians are a perfect match. This history started in the middle of the first thousand years A.D. when the tribes called the Southern Slavs migrated into the southeast area of Europe known as the Balkans. The Slav people as they are known, were separated from the Northern Slavs, that is, related Slavs in Poland, Czechoslovakia, and Russia, by the non-slavic tribes that settled the lands of Austria and Hungary. The Bosnians original ancestors were the Southern Slavs. They raided areas through the Balkans including what is now modern day Serbia. This tribe eventually split up, mostly for religious and political reasons but also because the geography of the region is such that large groups of Slavs became separated and isolated from one another because of the difficult terrain. When religion came to the Balkans, where you were physically had as much to do with what religion you grew up with as other reasons. The Serbs who were closest to the Byzantine Empire geographically, took up the Eastern Orthodox Religion. The peoples in what is now Croatia, Slovenia and Bosnia were influenced by Rome and took up Roman Catholicism. However, the Bosnians, who were always being threatened politically by the Orthodox Christian Serbs as well as their Roman Catholic neighbors, by the fifteenth century had made a political decision to align themselves with the rising power of the Ottoman Empire, and converted to Islam. Russia, the country where most of the Southern Slavs came from had accepted the Eastern Orthodox religion at around the time the Serbs did. This religious bond between Russians and Serbs was very strong and the two groups supported one another for virtually their entire history up to and including modern times. The Serbs supported the Russians in almost all their wars and helped the Russians gain control of part of the Eastern Mediterranean from the Turks. This is why the Russians are deeply interested in this area and feel they have a special role to play in the current conflict.

The Balkans are the reason that World War I had started. The Serbs of 1914 was as determined then, as they were for centuries, of preserving their independence in the Balkans. A wider war in the Balkans could risk the security of Europe, and possibly draw Moslem nations into the war. On a more immediate level, the reason for peace in Bosnia is so urgent is because cities, roads, bridges, have been destroyed in the conflict. A good example of this is Sarajevo, ( a major muslim city) that was known for its cultural mixture. It was the site of the 1988 winter olympics which welcomed hundreds of athletes from all over the globe. The city is on the Bosnian-Serb border and has been shelled by both sides in the war. However, a far more important reason is to prevent this local war from starting a wider confrontation that would risk the security of Europe, and possibly draw in Moslem nations to support the Muslims in Bosnia.

Russian soldiers are going to be among the troops keeping peace in Sarajevo as well as in other towns in Bosnia. The Russians are trying to improve relations with the U. S. and are doing so by working with the U.S. on keeping peace in the Balkans. Both President Yeltsin of Russia and Clinton Of the U.S., have met several times over this issue. They decide that a good way to improve relations between the two countries. Part of the debate over Russian troops between Russia and the U.S. was who would command the Russian troops if they were sent. The Russians did not want their troops under a NATO command because they thought that Nato was anti-Russian. Another topic of their debate was where were the Russian troops to be deployed. The Russians wanted to be deployed in Bosnian Serb territory, and the U.S. wanted them deployed in Bosnian Croat territory. Finally an agreement was reached. The Russians would send fifteen hundred troops to Bosnia. They were scheduled to arrive in mid-December 1995. Both sides agreed that the Russian troops would report to their own commander, General Leonti P. Shetsov. Shetsov had worked with Nato in the past as well as the U.S. military and was seen as a good fit. He however would still be technically under Nato command as it is Nato that is overseeing the operation. Further the Russians are contributing troops to an international brigade that would include troops from France, the U.S. and other countries. After much debate it was agreed that the Russians would be deployed in the corridor that separates eastern and western parts of Serbian controlled Bosnia. In total close to four thousand

Russian troops will eventually be in Bosnia. Many people have questioned whether or not a Russian presence in Bosnia can help bring about a lasting peace. The signs are that it can. Before the peace treaty was signed President Clinton was able to bring about a cease fire. This cease fire lasted until the peace treaty was signed. One problem was getting the Bosnians to agree to a cease fire while gas supplies from Russia to Sarajevo were turned off. The American Ambassador Mr. Charles Pickering asked officials in Moscow to turn the gas back on. They did so and the cease fire began.