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NATO Forces Want Karadzic Before Leaving Bosnia

By REUTERS

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SARAJEVO (Reuters) - The NATO-led peace force in Bosnia hopes to arrest former Bosnian Serb leader Radovan Karadzic and 20 other indicted war crimes suspects before ending its mission, its commander said Tuesday.

Gen. William Ward said the task of uniting and shrinking Bosnia's oversized, ethnically based armed forces was also incomplete.

"There is still some unfinished business. There are still persons indicted for war crimes who are out there that we want to apprehend -- Karadzic, Mladic and others," he said in an interview.

Karadzic and Bosnian Serb Army commander Gen. Ratko Mladic have been indicted by the U.N. war crimes tribunal for the 1995 Srebrenica massacre and siege of Sarajevo. Both have been on the run since 1996.

The European Union, which took over the alliance's much smaller mission of 350 troops in Macedonia two months ago, has hinted that it could take over NATO's 12,000-strong Bosnia mission next year.

Ward said he did not know if his Stabilisation Force was going to be replaced by an EU-led force in 2004. The U.S. general said he did not expect cuts in SFOR this year or next but such a decision was subject to twice-yearly NATO review.

The EU said this week that its new rapid reaction force, designed to field up to 60,000 troops for crisis management, was ready for peacekeeping and would consider a U.N. call for troops to quell fighting in eastern Congo. There was no mention of an imminent Bosnia role.

ONE ARMY

Karadzic has evaded at least two NATO attempts to arrest him and is widely believed to be hiding in eastern Bosnia or in neighboring Montenegro. Mladic is believed to live in Serbia.

The war crimes tribunal's Chief Prosecutor Carla del Ponte, visiting Sarajevo Tuesday, called on Karadzic to voluntarily surrender or face arrest.

"I believe that NATO is doing a lot and there will be an imminent arrest and that is the reason why I'm calling for voluntary surrender," Del Ponte told reporters.

SFOR is also supervising the process of restructuring and reducing Bosnia's ethnically-based armed forces as part of the defense and military reforms needed for the country's admission to the NATO Partnership for Peace program.

The armies of the Muslim-Croat federation and Serb Republic, the two halves of postwar Bosnia, should submit their proposals on the future armed forces by the end of this week, Ward said. The total force for Bosnia should not exceed 12,000.

Ward said substantial progress has been made with the adoption of a state-level territorial defense policy doctrine but admitted that military reforms have been slowed by "political factors."

The Muslim, Croat and Serb army components each have a different approach: Muslims want a single, multi-ethnic army, Serbs want to keep a separate force and Croats prefer one army consisting of three ethnic components.

"From NATO's prospective ... the structure has to be amended and controlled from a state-level organization that provides effective command and control down to the structures. And that is not negotiable," Ward said.