

# U.S. Foreign Policy: The Breakup of Yugoslavia

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## Contents

<b>1</b>	<b>Communist Yugoslavia, 1945–87</b>	<b>3</b>
1.1	Tito’s Rule, 1945–80 . . . . .	4
1.2	Internal Political Struggles and the Military . . . . .	6
<b>2</b>	<b>The Road to Dissolution, 1987–90</b>	<b>8</b>
2.1	No One Shall Dare Beat You! . . . . .	10
2.2	Anti-Bureaucratic Revolution, 1987–89 . . . . .	12
2.3	Collapse of the Federal Government, 1989–90 . . . . .	14
<b>3</b>	<b>The Secessionist Wars, 1991–95</b>	<b>17</b>
3.1	The War in Slovenia, 1991 . . . . .	19
3.2	The War in Croatia, 1991–92 . . . . .	19
3.3	U.S. Foreign Policy in Yugoslavia until 1992 . . . . .	20
3.4	The Wars in Bosnia-Herzegovina, 1992–94 . . . . .	22
3.5	Endgame, 1995 . . . . .	30
3.6	The Dayton Agreement . . . . .	35
<b>4</b>	<b>Kosovo and the Fall of Milošević, 1998–2000</b>	<b>39</b>

President Clinton inherited the problem of Yugoslavia from his predecessor but that problem would get much, much worse during his tenure in office. It would also be the occasion for the first ever military intervention by NATO and give Clinton one of his most prominent foreign policy successes. The **Wars of Yugoslav Succession**, the humanitarian disasters, and the genocide they produced — the first in Europe since the end of the Second World War — came as a surprise to many who believed that the end of the Cold War would usher an era of democratization and peace. They also starkly exposed the inability of the European Union to manage the security at its very doorstep at a time when its leaders were anxious to show that they could do so without their traditional reliance on the United States. It was this repeated failure and the escalating atrocities in Bosnia that eventually swung Clinton into decisive action, and the U.S. moved to stop the blood-letting and stabilize the region that had almost no strategic importance in itself. We now explore why the conflict in the Balkans was so explosive, so difficult to handle, and so impervious to foreign influence until NATO's military strikes.

There is another reason it is necessary to provide sufficient background and enough detail about the intricate politics of this episode, and it is to counter the dominant narrative that tends to “explain” these wars in terms of “ancient hatreds” that portray the Balkan peoples as lost in the grip of primordial ethnic or religious passions, barely able to control their primitive violent urges, and utterly incapable of civilized compromise. These accounts go back to the time Serbia fell to the expanding Ottoman Empire, to the struggles for independence and subsequent igniting of the First World War, to the unstable interwar period with the emergence of nationalist terrorism, the bloody collaboration with and resistance to the Nazi regime during the Second World War, to arrive, finally, at the 1991-95 and 1998–99 wars as some sort of inevitable and utterly predictable calamity. As we shall see, although hatreds were stirred aplenty, they were neither the cause of the violent disintegration nor the reasons peace could not be achieved before substantial killing had occurred. Instead, the mythical narratives about a glorious lost past, about subjugation and inequities, and about blaming the others were constructed by political entrepreneurs who sought to legitimize their rule by appeals to something other than economic performance (i.e., the way the Chinese communist party does it today) or procedural legitimacy (i.e., the way a democratic government does it).

That “something other” proved to be nationalism, which might only have worked as a motivating force for a small minority in Yugoslavia but which was potent enough to cause that small minority to trigger fears in the other groups, which in turn grew closer together and threatened each other, creating a combustible environment where even relatively unimportant disturbances had the potential to set off a conflagration. One nationalist-inspired (and in this, both ethnic and religious identity were intertwined) violence began, the target group closed ranks and responded in kind, causing the group of which the original perpetrators had been a minority to coalesce and escalate. Far from being inevitable, the Yugoslav

Wars of Succession resulted from the deliberate policies of politicians in Serbia, Croatia, and Bosnia-Herzegovina, all of whom tried to build new states on the ruins of Yugoslavia—states whose intended territories summed up to twice the land available—who wanted to monopolize power either in their person or in the group they belonged to, and who tried to legitimize their exclusionist policies through politics of fear; fear based on fundamental and deliberate misreading of history, the Security Dilemma, and the barbarity of a few key individuals, most of them criminals. Yugoslavia would not have survived as a federation because the entity created by the Communists was artificial and incapable of delivering economic development in its 1980s form. But Yugoslavia did not have to fall apart so violently, killing 260,000 and displacing nearly 4 million.<sup>1</sup>

## 1 Communist Yugoslavia, 1945–87

Yugoslavia — the land of the Southern Slavs — was initially created in 1918 as the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes that merged the Kingdom of Serbia (independent from the Ottoman Empire since 1878) with territories that had previously been part of the Austro-Hungarian and Ottoman Empires. The unstable conglomerate was divided among religious and ethnic lines: Orthodox Christian Serbs, Montenegrins, and Macedonians, Catholic Croats, Slovenes, and Hungarians (in Vojvodina), and Muslim Bosniaks and Albanians (in Kosovo). Renamed the Kingdom of Yugoslavia in 1929, the country was dominated by the Serbs who were the most populous group (but only about 40% of the total), who had been the only group with its own independent country, and whose royal house now ruled the rest. The King, in fact, attempted to establish a dictatorship but was assassinated by a Macedonian with Croat support in 1934. The country fell to the invading Axis Powers (Germany, Italy, Hungary, and Bulgaria) after 11 days of fighting in 1941. The Nazis established a puppet state in Croatia (which also included all of Bosnia-Herzegovina), whose fascist government, the **Ustaša**, proceeded to implement a murderous program against the Serbs, the Jews, and the Roma (pejoratively called “gypsies”).<sup>2</sup> With an avowed aim to kill a third, expel a third, and convert a third in order to achieve a national state with a “pure” identity, the regime murdered about 500,000 people, expelled 250,000, and forcibly converted 200,000 to Catholicism. The Germans occupied parts of Slovenia and Serbia, while the other Axis powers occupied the rest of the country. Hungary, Italy, Albania, and Bulgaria all helped

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<sup>1</sup>Much of the material in this lecture is based on Sabrina P. Ramet, *The Three Yugoslavias: State-Building and Legitimation, 1918–2005*, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2006. For the wars themselves, see also Mihailo Crnobrnja, *The Yugoslav Drama*, Montreal: McGill-Queens University Press, 2nd ed., 1996.

<sup>2</sup>The Ustaša was formed in 1929 after the King proclaimed a dictatorship. It was a nationalist fascist organization from its inception and its goal was to achieve independence for the Croats, who did resent the Serbian dominance in the Kingdom.

themselves to Yugoslav territories.

While their government surrendered in April 1941, many Yugoslavs did not. In July, the **Communist Party of Yugoslavia** launched an armed uprising that would grow into the most effective anti-Nazi resistance movement of the war. The **Partisans**, drawing as they were on a non-nationalist ideology, were open to everyone who wanted to resist the occupiers. This was not the case with the other insurgent group, the **Chetniks**, who were royalists and predominantly Serbs. The Chetniks had arisen from the Serb struggle against the Ottoman Empire in the 19th century, and had been active in the Balkan Wars and the First World War as well. During the interwar period, they had been instrumental in stamping out Bulgarian influence in Macedonia, where they “serbianized” the region by terrorising pro-Bulgarian leaders and suspect Macedonians. When the government collapsed, many units of the Yugoslav army refused to lay down their arms and joined the Chetniks. The Chetniks, however, quickly began collaborating with the Axis powers in an attempt to establish a Greater Serbia in rump Yugoslavia. This put them at odds with the Partisans, and they two groups became bitter enemies in late 1941. Many Chetniks defected to the Partisans, and by the end of 1942, the Communist forces were estimated at about 236,000. As the only organization fighting the Axis in Yugoslavia, the Partisans were recognized as the legitimate national liberation force by the Allies, who switched their aid to them in 1943. With Allied air support and help from the Soviet Red Army, the Partisans — who now numbered close to 800,000 — rapidly gained ground, expelling the Axis powers from Serbia in 1944, and gaining control of the rest of Yugoslavia by the time Germany surrendered in May 1945. Supported by about 6 million civilians, the Partisans had paid dearly for their victory: 300,000 dead and 400,000 wounded (Yugoslavia’s total losses in the war are estimated to be about 1 million).

### 1.1 Tito’s Rule, 1945–80

Whereas many in the West preferred to restore the Kingdom by uniting the Partisans with the royalists but the popular leader of the Partisans, **Marshal Josip Broz Tito**, had no interest in that. Since most of the royalists had been Axis collaborators, many had fled the country and the rest were seriously compromised. The only political organization with strong popular support and enormous reservoir of legitimacy were the Communists. The elections in November 1945 gave them all seats in the assembly, perhaps not a surprising result since their party, the National Front, was the only one that ran. Given their popularity, however, it is highly likely that they would have won the vast majority of the seats anyway. The Constituent Assembly then deposed the King later in the month, and declared the **Federal People’s Republic of Yugoslavia**. With Stalin’s support, Prime Minister Tito now proceeded to establish a one-party state that imitated Soviet policies, including collectivization, centralization, planning, and censorship. Unlike Stalin, however, Tito had no

desire to impose these policies at any cost: when collectivization met with strong resistance in the countryside, Tito abandoned it and allowed private ownership in agriculture to continue as before. He also refused to subordinate Yugoslavia to Soviet interests and soon fell out with Stalin, who had Yugoslavia expelled from the Cominform in 1948, which in turn caused Yugoslavia to turn to the Americans for financial and economic assistance (the U.S. obliged). Stalin and Tito came close to blows in 1950 when the Soviets geared up for an invasion only to cancel their plans after the outbreak of the war in Korea. Stalin also repeatedly tried to assassinate Tito but failed.

The new country's 1946 constitution established a federation of six republics — Serbia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Macedonia, Montenegro, Croatia, and Slovenia — and two autonomous provinces — Vojvodina and Kosovo — both in Serbia, which was thereby put in the unique position of not having its own unified assembly. Belgrade (in Serbia) became the federal capital. The Soviet-imposed embargo hit the country hard, but with American assistance the economy quickly recovered, and Yugoslavia had one of the highest rates of economic growth in the world during the 1950s. Although Tito had no truck with nationalism, a dangerous idea in a country as diverse as Yugoslavia, the Communists did manage to ensure Serbian dominance in the administration even in places like Croatia, Bosnia, and Kosovo where Serbs were a distinct minority. When the economy ran into trouble in the early 1960s, however, the party changed tack and introduced both economic and political reforms. The first was a system of “market socialism” reminiscent of what Czechoslovakia would attempt in 1968, and the latter was a more liberal constitution.

The new constitution, promulgated on April 7, 1963, renamed the country to **Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia** and named Tito President for Life. Tito dismissed the overtly pro-Serbian top administrators and even in Serbia the top communist officials pursued policies designed to treat the other constituent nationalities as equal. The reforms jump-started the economy and dampened social tensions although they did not eliminate them. Student disobedience in Serbia (1968) and Croatia (1970–71) drew the support of prominent party leaders and even though the regime suppressed the protests, it decided to make concessions. As a result, the country adopted yet another constitution in 1974.

The **Fourth Constitution** was very long but its arguably most important provisions were the changes it wrought in the political organization of the state. These changes greatly enhanced representation in all elections, and vastly expanded the autonomy of the republics and the two provinces. The Federal Presidency was reduced from 23 to 9 members, one for each of the eight federal units plus the president of the League of Communists (the ruling party led by Tito). In an attempt to reassure everyone that their interests would not be trampled upon during the inevitable power transition following Tito's death (he was eighty-two at the time), all federal decisions required unanimity. The Constitution proclaimed Yugoslavia

as “a federal republic of equal nations and nationalities, freely united on the principle of brotherhood and unity,” affirmed the sovereign rights of the federal units, and limited federal authority only to aspects specifically granted in it. Although the Constitution did grant the republics the right to self-determination, it made secession nearly impossible since any alteration of the borders of Yugoslavia required the unanimous consent of all eight federal units. Commentators complained that the Constitution was turning Yugoslavia into a mere geographical expression because of these decentralization tendencies. The Serbs were particularly incensed because the two provinces of Vojvodina and Kosovo now acquired a *de facto* veto power in the Serbian assembly.

The devolution of powers from Belgrade to the federal units temporarily calmed protests and the relative prosperity of the late 1970s made it seem that the arrangement could be made to work. When Tito died on May 3, 1980, the collective leadership of the League of Communists tried very hard to continue his policies and keep the country together. As it turned out, however, Tito had been the linchpin that had made the whole system work. Tito was a popular and charismatic leader and although he was of Croatian and Slovenian extraction, he pursued policies that tried to favor neither ethnic nor nationalist interests (religion was mostly a non-issue for communists). The problem was that in his purges of communist leaders who opposed some of his policies, he had eliminated many liberals, which would clear the way for nationalists following his demise. The opportunity to democratize the country in the 1970s was lost, and without the universally respected leader (who had, after all, presided over a long period of relative prosperity) the successors were bound to fail.

## **1.2 Internal Political Struggles and the Military**

The Communist Party had to confront several pressing problems. The economy had stagnated yet again and many blamed the visible deterioration of living standards either on the lack of direction from the center (blaming the Constitution for the institutional paralysis) or for insufficient powers for the constituent units to decide on effective policies (arguing that the Constitution had not gone far enough in devolution). The danger with both was that the positions permitted the emergence of politicians with nationalist agendas (the centralizers pushing for greater Serbian control and the decentralizers focusing on greater nationalist sovereignty). The Party was full of reformers but they were split between those who advocated more federal control, those who wanted further relaxation of Belgrade’s grip, and both camps were opposed to those who wanted to continue Tito’s policies as much as possible (arguing that they had been the only thing that had held the country together). Without Tito at the helm to make the ultimate decision, the Party became paralyzed and it was impossible to determine what the Party itself wanted. This, of course, fatally compromised its ability to govern.

The first challenge came in March 1981 when Albanian students in Kosovo staged protests demanding more autonomy for the province. These protests soon escalated into riots involving more than 20,000 people and tested the communist leadership. The Presidency implemented a state of emergency, declared the protesters Albanian nationalist separatists, and sent 30,000 troops to pacify the province. Kosovo remained under military occupation for a while and the Communist Party leadership there was purged in favor of hard-liners. The Party had gotten its act together on this one, but it would be a temporary solution and could only hold while the Party was willing and able to assert its authority through violence. This ability, of course, was crucially dependent on the Party's leadership collectively valuing the unity of Yugoslavia above everything else. The political currents of the 1980s that would generate the Revolutions of 1989 in Eastern Europe were pushing in precisely the opposite direction. Yugoslavia would not be the only country that disintegrated when the unifying coercive power of the ruling Communist party collapsed, and, unfortunately, it would not be the only one where the process would be bloody.

To understand the military balance behind the political maneuvering, one has to realize that the armed forces of Yugoslavia were organized in a very peculiar manner. The federal force, the **Yugoslav People's Army** (JNA), had an active duty personnel of about 180,000, with another million in reserves. This made the JNA one of the most powerful armies in Europe. Almost the entire officer corps was communist party members, was dominated by Serbs and Montenegrins, and was committed to Yugoslavia's territorial integrity and unity as its fundamental *raison d'être*. As we shall see, when many Croats and Slovenes defected to their respective republics during the initial constitutional crisis in 1988, the JNA high command will become nearly exclusively Serb, with serious implications for JNA's stance in the impending dissolution of the federation.

The operational doctrine of the JNA was unique among modern militaries because it called for defending Yugoslavia's borders against invaders long enough to give the people time to organize for total war through guerilla tactics. The doctrine grew out of the successful Partisan fight during the Second World War combined with the recognition that Yugoslavia did not have the military capability to withstand an onslaught by a European great power (or, more likely either NATO or the Warsaw Pact forces) with conventional tactics. Under this doctrine, Yugoslavia had additional armed forces that were separate from the JNA: the **Territorial Organization** (TO), which was formed in 1968 and initially subordinated to the JNA. The momentous constitutional changes of 1974 also affected the relationship between the TO and the JNA because they subordinated the TO to their republics and provinces. The TO was manned by former JNA conscripts who had completed their federal service. There were about 860,000 territorial defense troops actively trained during peacetime, with up to 3 million in reserve.

The commitment of the TO to the federal units rather than the federation made it

suspect in the eyes of the JNA top brass, which was keen on preserving the unity of Yugoslavia. They harbored the very real fear that if push came to shove, the TO forces might side with the republican or provincial governments and facilitate their secession from the federation. As the conditions deteriorated during the 1980s, the JNA forcibly disarmed the Kosovo TO (of about 130,000), and in 1988 the JNA also incorporated the Bosnian Serb TO, with its commander becoming the JNA Chief of the General Staff. For their part, the secessionist governments did convert the TO that remained loyal to them into the nucleus of their own national armed forces. The nationals from these TO, along with nationals who deserted from the JNA, formed the secessionist paramilitaries, which eventually became the armies of the newly independent states.

One final, and very important, aspect of the military balance was Yugoslavia's defense industry, which was a dominant sector in the economy (twice the size of the second largest sector, the tourist industry). It produced everything from aircraft, tanks, armored vehicles, and artillery to all sorts of weapons. It also was a major arms exporter, to the tune of about \$3 billion annually. The JNA was very well equipped and did not have to rely on foreign supplies to maintain operational capability. This would give it a distinct advantage compared to the various paramilitaries that would be pitted against the Serbs in the secessionist wars and who would have to import most of their weapons and equipment to supplement whatever they could capture or inherit from the JNA when it retreated from their territories. When international sanctions banned the sale of arms to the warring sides, the restrictions hurt the non-Serb forces far more severely than they did the Serbs. Thus, although the unusual JNA-TO arrangement did endow the federal units with their own forces to pit against the Serb-dominated JNA, it did not really provide for an even match — especially after international sanctions hit — and this imbalance would enable the Serbs to make large gains until another, yet more powerful force, intervened to oppose them. This would be one of the crucial reasons why NATO's entry on the side of the Bosniaks would prove so devastatingly effective.

## **2 The Road to Dissolution, 1987–90**

The Serbs had consistently complained that the votes of Vojvodina and Kosovo in the Federal Presidency had tied the hands of the government both in Serbia (where the 1974 reforms had given them what amounted to veto power) and in Yugoslavia (where the 1974 reforms had elevated them to *de facto* republic status). Serbia was therefore outvoted at the federal and republican levels, which they said had enabled the other federal units to reduce Serbs to second-class citizens (20% of all Serbs, or about 2 million, were living in other republics, mostly in Croatia and Bosnia), and limited them to policies that only the minorities of the two provinces would agree to.



The most inflammatory statement of these sentiments was in a memorandum drafted by the Serbian Academy of Sciences, which was leaked in 1986. It caused an outrage in the other federal units because nationalists there quickly interpreted it as a list of imagined grievances that would provide a blueprint for the resurgent Serb nationalism to impose Serbia's dominance on the federation. The authors of the memo vigorously denied any such intent and defended their statistics, which showed that the federal system had systematically privileged all other units at Serbia's expense. The memorandum was officially denounced by both federal and Serbian governments for inciting nationalism.<sup>3</sup> Ironically, the Serbs would turn the constitutional weakness to their advantage: if they could subvert the governance in the provinces and install pro-Serb sympathizers in the leading Party posts there, Belgrade would have three of the eight votes in the Presidency (the ninth position for the leader of the League of Communists was eliminated in 1988). If it could also get Montenegro's vote—not a far-fetched scenario given the fact that the Montenegrins were very close to the Serbs ethnically and were also Orthodox Christian—then Serbia would control half of all the votes in the federal government. It could then either exercise dominant authority within Yugoslavia or, at worst, manage the fragmentation to its advantage.

The person to implement this strategy would be **Slobodan Milošević**, a lawyer and a banker, who also happened to have been active in the communist party. He steadily rose through the party ranks, and in 1986 he was elected to lead the Serbian branch of the League of Communists of Yugoslavia. He was seen as the right-hand man of the Serbian President, **Ivan Stambolić**, a reform-minded president who championed that rights of Serbs in Kosovo and earned himself the label of Greater Serbian nationalist. Even though, both Milošević and Stambolić harshly condemned the SANU Memorandum in 1986: as communists, they strictly opposed any nationalism and endorsed Tito's legacy of suppressing any such tendency in favor of a unified Yugoslavia. Stambolić presented a somewhat nuanced position, simultaneously decrying the danger that Serbian nationalism could pose for the country but also accepting the view that the 1974 constitution was detrimental to Serb interests. Trying to stay in the median, however, exposed him to attacks from both sides because he failed to address the problems he himself had acknowledged were important (and thus could not appease the nationalists) without clamping down on the nationalists whose grievances he had endorsed as legitimate (and thus could not satisfy the liberals). Milošević would soon undergo a dramatic conversion on these very issues and outmaneuver Stambolić by committing irrevocably to the nationalist cause. The trigger was an event in Kosovo.

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<sup>3</sup>Excerpts of the memorandum can be found at <https://chnm.gmu.edu/1989/items/show/674>, accessed February 16, 2016. The response of the authors is available at <http://www.rastko.org.rs/istorija/iii/memorandum.pdf>, accessed February 16, 2016.

## 2.1 No One Shall Dare Beat You!

Kosovo remained troubled after the 1981 repression: the repeated Albanian riots caused a mass exodus of Serbs from the province, and those who stayed behind sent annual petitions to the federal government imploring for protection.<sup>4</sup> In April, 1987 the communist party responded to the deteriorating situation by holding a conference where delegates could coordinate on policies that might reduce the conflict. As the head of the Serbian branch of the party, Milošević was the highest-ranking communist to attend in Priština, but the vast majority of the rest were Albanians. Upon his arrival, Milošević delivered a speech with the standard communist line that nationalist hatreds and intolerance could not be progressive. He did tell the Kosovar Serbs that the party in Serbia was aware of their problems and promised to meet with them in three days, on Friday, April 27. Milošević then contacted his closest advisors to plan how to handle the situation. They resolved that the time had come to back the Kosovar Serbs.

At the appointed time, nearly 15,000 Serbs and Montenegrins showed up. When Milošević and the Albanian communist leadership arrived, some of them were allowed to come into the conference building to address them. Serb after Serb took to the podium to tell about discrimination, maltreatment, and threats against them. They claimed that Albanians wanted to create an “ethnically pure” Kosovo and they were being driven from their ancient homeland.<sup>5</sup> As the atmosphere at the meeting heated up, so did the tensions outside. According to a prearranged plan, the nationalist Serbs had parked two trucks filled with rocks near the building. When fighting broke out between the crowds and the Kosovar police, the Serbs pelted the police with rocks. The commotion brought out Milošević, who hesitated for a while: it was the moment of decision. He walked into the crowd and told people to speak up. People yelled that they were being beaten by the Albanians and the police. Milošević’s next words made him a legend in Serbia:

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<sup>4</sup>Albanian nationalism and discrimination against the Serbs by the nearly exclusively Albanian police force and government of the province had been pushing Serbs out for a long time. Between 1961 and 1987 over 100,000 Serbs left the province.

<sup>5</sup>Kosovo holds a special place in the history of Serbia. It was there, on June 15, 1389, that the Serbian Prince Lazar took a stand against the invading army of the Ottoman Empire commanded by Sultan Murad I. The Serbs were outnumbered almost two to one but launched a ferocious attack. The Ottomans counter-attacked and in the ensuing melee their superior numbers began to be felt. The Serbs eventually yielded the field but both armies were almost completely destroyed. Both Lazar and Murad I were killed in the battle, which was tactically a draw. However, whereas the Ottomans had vast territories to draw upon and quickly made up for their losses, the Serbs could not recover. In the following year, Lazar’s successor accepted Ottoman suzerainty. Despite its historical importance for the Serbs, Kosovo had become majority Albanian and Muslim by the early 20th century. The same trend persisted in communist Yugoslavia. The Serb and Montenegrin fraction of the Kosovo population was 27.4% in 1961, 14.9% in 1981, and 10.9% in 1991. The corresponding figures for Albanians were 67% in 1961, 77.4% in 1981, and 81.6% in 1991. As of 2011, the population was 93% Albanian, with only 1.5% Serbs remaining.

Niko ne sme da vas bije! (No one shall dare beat you!)

Milošević stayed for 14 hours to listen to the grievances of the Kosovar Serbs, and Serbian TV broadcast the scuffle and his words on all channels. He then delivered a speech, where he condemned Albanian ethnic nationalism, told the Serbs that they would stay in Kosovo, and promised them support:

This is your land. Your homes are here, your memories. You won't very well give up your land just because life in it is difficult, just because you've been pressured by crime and humiliation. It was never in the spirit of the Serbian and Montenegrin nation to bow before adversity, to demobilize when they need to fight, to demoralize when times are tough. You need to stay here because of your forefathers and because of your descendants. You would shame your forefathers and disappoint your descendants.

But I'm not proposing that you should stay tolerant, hold on, and bear this situation with which you aren't satisfied. Quite the contrary. You need to change it, together with all the progressive people here, in Serbia and in Yugoslavia. Don't tell me that you can't do it alone. It's understood that you can't alone! We'll change it together, we, Serbia and all of Yugoslavia! We can't in our time return the national fiber to the Kosovo population in the past tense.

[...]

All of Yugoslavia is with you. The issue isn't that it's a problem for Yugoslavia, but Yugoslavia and Kosovo. Yugoslavia doesn't exist without Kosovo! Yugoslavia would disintegrate without Kosovo!

Yugoslavia and Serbia will never give up Kosovo!<sup>6</sup>

He had embraced the cause of the Serbs, and nationalists now rallied behind him. Sensing his growing influence, many party members and state officials also threw in their lot with him. His supporters began organizing rallies to show solidarity with the cause. Stambolić attempted to halt the growing hysteria but was politically outmaneuvered by Milošević, who managed to convince the party to dismiss him from office on December 14. Without the President to oppose him (Milošević had his cronies hold the post until May 1989 when he himself assumed it), and in control of the Serbian branch of the communist party, Milošević began to consolidate his grip on Serbia. Troubled by the developments, the high command of the JNA contacted the leaders of Slovenia, Croatia, and Bosnia-Herzegovina to see if they would oppose Milošević's moves in Serbia. They would not as it seemed to be an internal Serbian matter, and the JNA went along. Milošević's popularity in Serbia soared, and with it, a cult of personality began to develop.

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<sup>6</sup>Speech of Slobodan Milošević at Kosovo Polje, April 25, 1987. An English translation can be found at [http://matrix.msu.edu/hst/fisher/HST150/unit9/mod/milosevic\\_speech\\_1987.html](http://matrix.msu.edu/hst/fisher/HST150/unit9/mod/milosevic_speech_1987.html), accessed February 18, 2016.

## 2.2 Anti-Bureaucratic Revolution, 1987–89

The 1974 Constitution had given Serbs a major cause for complaint in its elevation of the two provinces of Kosovo and Vojvodina to near-republic status. The two held veto power in the Serbian government, and each held a vote equal to Serbia's at the federal level. Milošević now set out to unify Serbia by stripping the two provinces of their rights to autonomy. He accused their communist leaders of planning to separate from Serbia and seek full republican status within Yugoslavia (although there was some support for this in Kosovo, there had been no such planning in Vojvodina), and his supporters staged mass demonstrations to denounce that separatism. These street protests were called "Rallies of Truth" and were ostensibly motivated by the need to replace the corrupt bureaucrats and ineffective government officials with progressive elements who would pursue the necessary reforms.

During the second half of 1988 alone there were over 100 of these protests, averaging 50,000 each, and involving a total of 5 million. Given these numbers, it was difficult to argue that they did not represent the voice of the people, which put the targeted leaders under intolerable pressure to do something. They warned that Milošević was about to take over the provinces and tried to have him ousted from his post by the party, but they failed. The reactions to the mass rallies by the other republics ranged from outright condemnation (Croatia and Bosnia-Herzegovina) to muted criticism (Slovenia) to compromise proposals (Montenegro) to silence (Macedonia). Yugoslavia's constitutional integrity was at stake, and the collective leadership could not get its act together to oppose Serbia's new leader. Milošević was also careful to reassure the republics that his ambitions were limited to Serbia only and that he had no territorial pretensions outside its borders.

When 100,000 protesters took to the streets in Novi Sad, the capital of Vojvodina, on October 6, 1988, the beleaguered communist leadership of the province resigned, followed by further resignations in most local communities. Milošević quickly installed his own people in all vacant posts. In November, many of the Albanian leaders of Kosovo were also forced to resign. When the president was replaced by a Milošević protégé in January 1989, strikes broke out. Milošević demanded that the federal government declare a state of emergency that would authorize the use of force in the province. The head of the Slovenian communists, **Milan Kučan**, not only walked out of the meeting but declared his support for the Albanians. This televised speech galvanized the Serbs and a huge crowd of over a million gathered in Belgrade to express their anger at Slovenia and to demand law and order in Kosovo. Afraid that the people might take up arms, the Yugoslav government caved in and authorized Milošević to use the JNA to pacify the province. The security forces entered Kosovo, arrested the head of the communist government, and quickly suppressed the disturbances. On March 24, 1989, the cowed provincial parliament voted to amend the constitution, transferring its powers to Belgrade. Kosovo had been taken over.

Montenegro was also subjected to severe strain with tens of thousands marching in its capital Titograd (now called Podgorica) and other major cities in August and September, 1988. The government dispersed some of the demonstrations and tried to bribe the workers with substantial pay increases. It did not work: on January 11, 1989, about 50,000 people took to the streets in the capital, and there were signs that more were coming. The collective presidency of Montenegro and its representatives at the federal level all resigned, and were supplanted by Milošević supporters.

By early 1989, Milošević had fundamentally altered the balance of power in the Yugoslav federal government. He now controlled four of the eight votes (Serbia, Montenegro, Vojvodina, and Kosovo) in the Presidency. Buoyed by his success, Milošević took over the Presidency of Serbia on May 8, 1989 as well (with a unanimous vote). Amazingly, it would take nearly two years for the other republics to register official dissent with these maneuvers.<sup>7</sup>

On June 28, Milošević returned to Kosovo for the 600th anniversary of the Battle of Kosovo, and delivered the now-famous **Gazimestan speech** to a roaring audience of a million and a half Serbs. He opened by celebrating Serbia's finally regaining "its state, national, and spiritual integrity."<sup>8</sup> He blamed the "lack of unity and betrayal" that first struck Kosovo for following the Serbian people "like an evil fate through the whole of its history," up to, and including, socialist Yugoslavia, where the "concessions that many Serbian leaders made at the expense of their people could not be accepted historically and ethically by any nation in the world." The Serbs, he asserted, were a great nation and even though they had not used this against others, they had failed to benefit from it too because of "their leaders and politicians and their vassal mentality." These times were now over, he declared, and while "disunity among Serb officials made Serbia lag behind," now "unity in Serbia will bring prosperity to the Serbian people in Serbia and each one of its citizens, irrespective of his national or religious affiliation." Within Yugoslavia, Serbia was finally "united and equal to other republics and prepared to do everything to improve its financial and social position and that of all its citizens." After noting that many different peoples and nationalities live in Serbia and asserting his belief that this was only to Serbia's advantage, Milošević argued that socialism, "being a progressive and just democratic society," tolerated no divisions along nationalist or religious lines. Moreover, as a multinational community, Yugoslavia itself could only survive if it offered "full equality for all nations that live in it." He then called for "unity, solidarity, and cooperation" that would bring the "mutual harmony" necessary for Serbia to function as a successful state.

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<sup>7</sup>In 1991, Croatia refused to recognize Kosovo's vote on account of Serbia having extinguished Kosovo's autonomy. It would be an empty gesture for by that time, Yugoslavia would effectively have had ceased to exist.

<sup>8</sup>Speech of Slobodan Milošević at Kosovo Polje, June 28, 1989. An English translation can be found at <http://emperors-clothes.com/milo/milosaid.html>, accessed February 18, 2016.

If one were to take the speech out of its context and read the words literally, Milošević would appear to be calling for ethnic and religious tolerance.<sup>9</sup> But it is not difficult to see why non-Serbs in Yugoslavia generally and in Serbia particularly did worry about the message he was sending. Coming as it was on the heels of the takeover of Vojvodina and Kosovo, the message about the end of a long period of disunity in Serbia was clear: having brushed aside traitorous politicians, Milošević had finally united Serbia in a way that would permit it to achieve its true potential for prosperity of its citizens. In this context, solidarity and cooperation within a united Serbia that admitted no ethnic or religious divisions meant toeing the line set by Milošević. Any opposition to his policies, especially when it had to do with rights of minorities, would be interpreted as an attempt to fragment the country again, dragging it back into the black hole from which it was finally about to emerge. Moreover, if Serbs had been marginalized because of that imposed disunity within Yugoslavia, then full equality among the republics could only mean that Serbia had to become stronger in order to assume its rightful place as equal. The jubilant crowds, who did after all live in the appropriate context, could not have mistaken the message: Serbia was going to assert itself under Milošević's leadership. Opposition to Serbia at the federal level — of the type Slovenia engaged in over the Kosovo takeover — would not be tolerated as it would constitute yet another sign of disunity, whose effect would be to weaken Yugoslavia. In those days, Milošević's rallying cry was "strong Serbia, strong Yugoslavia" for a reason. The days of internal disunity caused by provincial autonomy and external subjugation caused by the federal constitution were over.

### **2.3 Collapse of the Federal Government, 1989–90**

Slovenia's reaction to the Kosovo crisis in early 1989 had generated a fierce response in Serbia, which triggered fears in Slovenia about what Milošević's next steps might be, especially considering that one implication of the slogan "strong Serbia, strong Yugoslavia" could be a unified Yugoslavia under Serbian leadership. Milošević's Gazimestan speech, full as it was to references to unity for Yugoslavia, could easily be interpreted as a prelude to such unification. In July, Slovenia's Communist party asserted Slovenia's right to "comprehensive, lasting, and inalienable" self-determination. Although only Croatia expressed solidarity with this position (Montenegro stuck with Serbia, Bosnia-Herzegovina took a middle ground warning that this was a threat to Yugoslavia, and Macedonia stayed mum), the Slovenes

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<sup>9</sup>See, for instance, the interpretation offered by Francisco Gil-White, "How Politicians, the Media, and Scholars Lied about Milosevic's 1989 Kosovo Speech: A Review of the Evidence," in *Historical and Investigative Research*, rev. 8, September 2005, <http://www.hirhome.com/yugo/milospeech.htm>, accessed February 18, 2016. This is not to say that the media has not distorted the speech. As documented by Gil-White, many commentators somehow manage to uncover threats of violence and a blueprint for Serbian expansion through forcible redrawing of borders where none really exist in this speech.

forged ahead. In October, the Slovenian assembly passed a series of controversial amendments to the constitution. Among these were the right to secession, the sole authority to declare a state of emergency in Slovenia, and a ban on the deployment of any armed forces on its territory except by express permission of the parliament. The Serbs planned to send about 40,000 people to Ljubljana to protest these reforms, and when the Yugoslav government refused to ban the rally, Slovenia and Croatia ordered their railway unions to turn the trains around anyway. The rally never took place and Serbia started boycotting Slovenian businesses instead. In response, Slovenia reduced its contributions to the federal budget and cut off the disaster relief payments for Vojvodina and Serbia.

Slovenia's actions were clearly destabilizing Yugoslavia although at this point the idea seemed to be to form a looser confederation to replace the creaking federal order. However, one particularly ominous development was the position that was crystallizing in the JNA, whose constitutional mandate was to protect socialism and the integrity of Yugoslavia. Although the JNA was not homogenous ideologically, almost 70% of its general staff was Serb and Montenegrin. They tended to view all nationalism as inherently dangerous and believed that only a strong Communist party could hold the country together. They were certainly very suspicious of any political moves toward multi-party elections, especially if these had anything to do with nationalist aspirations (as they inevitably would). If Milošević could position himself as the one who was striving to preserve Yugoslavia in opposition to devolution tendencies by other republics, then the JNA was very likely to side with him, especially considering the strong Serb presence in its commanding staff.

The break came on January 23, 1990 when the Fourteenth (Extraordinary) Congress convened on Slovenia's urging. The dizzying changes in the East European Revolutions of 1989, where the communist parties lost their monopoly on power and where free multi-party elections were scheduled in all countries of the former Soviet bloc, had affected Yugoslavia as well. The proposals were quite radical, and predictably included provisions for multi-party elections, freedom of expression, and even possible entry into the European Economic Community (the predecessor of the European Union). With Serbia in the lead, however, all of Slovenia's 458 proposed amendments were rejected. The Slovenian delegation walked out of the meeting, and when Milošević tried to continue the proceedings as if nothing had happened, the Croatian delegates informed him that there could be no Communist Party of Yugoslavia without Slovenia, and walked out as well. The entire congress collapsed. When the Slovenian communists pulled out of the League of Communists twelve days later, the glue that had held Yugoslavia for forty-five years became unstuck. Without the unifying force of the Communist Party, there could be no political salvation for Yugoslavia. The communist parties in Slovenia and Croatia reorganized themselves and scheduled multi-party elections for April.

The free elections in April, 1990 had momentous consequences. In Slovenia, a coalition of anti-communist parties won the majority of the vote, but it was **Milan**

**Kučan**, the former chief of the Communist Party who had become the embodiment of Slovenia's resistance to Serbia, who won the presidency. In Croatia, the communists were soundly defeated despite high expectations of victory. Ironically, because they had thought that they would gain the plurality of the vote, the communists had rigged the formula that translated votes into parliamentary seats to give themselves a majority. Now the benefit went to the Croatian Democratic Community (HDZ), which took most seats. Its leader, retired general with solid nationalist credentials **Franjo Tudjman**, became Croatia's first non-communist president. Both republics declared themselves sovereign although they stopped short of independence.

These moves proved a bit too much for the JNA, and in May the army began confiscating weapons from the TO forces in Slovenia and Croatia. The Slovenes acted quickly and Kučan ordered the TO units to resist these confiscations. Since the JNA did not have authority to force the issue (and the confiscations themselves had been illegal), this effectively put an end to the policy. Still, by late May, the JNA had managed to remove 70% of Slovenia TO's weapons and equipment. It was even more successful in Croatia where it faced no organized resistance, and so effectively disarmed the TO more or less completely. In response, Tudjman began to press for the reorganization of the JNA and the dismantling of its party organizations. In July, Slovenia decided to assume sole command of its TO units. These reforms, of course, threatened the very core of the JNA just when it was failing in its mission as well.

Tudjman also set out to rectify the overrepresentation of Serbs in the Croatian police force (Serbs constituted 12% of the population there but filled 75% of the police). Many of the Serbs in Croatia rejected his authority under the leadership of the mayor of Knin. In mid August, they organized roadblocks to prevent the Croat "fascists" from entering the area to restore order. Tudjman wanted to disarm the rebels but since the JNA had confiscated their weapons and equipment, the Croat forces were helpless. Moreover, the rebels received external assistance when Milošević ordered the creation of paramilitary units in Croatia under JNA command. He diverted federal money to finance them, and the JNA began arming the rebels, all in direct contravention of the federal constitution. With the JNA taking the side of the Serbs, Tudjman could make no move against the rebels. Croatia first asked the U.S. to help, and when this was refused, they purchased arms from Hungary. The JNA intercepted the weapons at the border, forcing the Croats to resort to large-scale smuggling of arms to equip their forces. The government also followed Slovenia's example and placed the TO units under its own command.

On October 10, Slovenia and Croatia submitted a joint proposal to the Yugoslav presidency to reform the country into a confederation. For all practical purposes, federal Yugoslavia no longer existed, and it was now merely a matter if it would survive in a confederate form or not at all. Milošević had repeatedly said that confederation was unacceptable and had also noted that if Yugoslavia were to become a confederation, then the external borders of Serbia would become an "open ques-



tion.” In June, he had confided that his plan was to push Slovenia and Croatia out of the federation, and reconstitute Yugoslavia under Serb leadership while annexing Serb-populated areas of Croatia.<sup>10</sup> This plan for a “Greater Serbia” assumed not only that Croatia would be dismembered but that Bosnia-Herzegovina would follow suit. With the monolithic Serbian bloc opposed to the idea of confederation, and neither Bosnia-Herzegovina nor Macedonia prepared to abandon Yugoslavia in light of the implications this might have for their territorial integrity, the Slovene-Croat proposal failed.

### **3 The Secessionist Wars, 1991–95**

Their last hope to preserve some vestiges of the former union dashed, Slovenia and Croatia moved decisively toward secession. They stopped making tax payments to the federal treasury and refused to approve a loan the National Bank had given Serbia (or any further financial obligations assumed on behalf of Yugoslavia). In November, the Presidency ordered them to disarm their paramilitary forces, and in early December the JNA expressly ordered them to disarm their TO units. The last order came with a threat: if they refused to do so voluntarily, the JNA would use force to compel them. Slovenia and Croatia defied the orders, called up the reservists, and braced for invasion. The Yugoslav Presidency gave them a deadline of January 19, 1991 to comply with the disarmament orders. Kučan and Tudjman agreed that if either one of their republics was attacked, both would immediately declare independence and seek help from the U.N. Security Council. Last-ditch negotiations averted an immediate assault but failed to bring any resolution to the crisis. On January 24, Kučan and Milošević met privately and made a deal: Serbia would not oppose Slovenia’s independence and would not demand any territorial adjustments; in exchange, Slovenia would not stand in the way of Serbia’s attempt to unite all Serbs provided no other groups were hurt. On February 8, Slovenia declared that it would secede from Yugoslavia by the end of the month (the date was then pushed back to June 26 for logistical reasons). The endgame was on.

Shortly after the Slovenian declaration of intent to secede from Yugoslavia, the Croat Serbs seceded from Croatia (February 28, 1991). They had been in close contact with Belgrade and were now fully armed by the JNA and staffed by its officers. Fighting between Serbs and Croats had already broken out, and the JNA had intervened to separate the two sides. In March, large anti-war protests broke out in Belgrade but the Serb government cracked down on them. The JNA demanded that the Yugoslav Presidency declare a state of emergency and authorize it to prevent civil war. The Defense Minister warned that if the Presidency did not order the JNA forces into action, it would destroy the federation. Serbia needed five votes to get the authorization (out of eight since Slovenia was absent), and it already controlled

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<sup>10</sup>Cited in Ramet, pp. 359, 382.

four. With Croatia and Macedonia voting against the state of emergency, it came down to Bosnia-Herzegovina, and it also voted against. More threats followed but when two days later Milošević sought a new vote, the Kosovar delegate abandoned the Serbian bloc as well. The JNA proposal was dead. In response, Serbia resigned the chair of the Presidency and left the Yugoslav government altogether on March 15; Montenegro followed suit.

Milošević now sought to obtain JNA's intervention on Serbia's sole authority but the American ambassador warned him not to use force against Croatia. The Serbs then went to Moscow and asked the Soviets bluntly whether it was prepared to defend Serbia after the JNA intervened in Croatia. The hardliners at the Ministry of Defense assured the Serbs that they could safely ignore Western warnings as they were mere bluffs. Upon its return to Belgrade, the Serb leadership ordered the JNA to move in but the Defense Minister, who had been hawkish up to that point, refused to comply: without an authorization from the Presidency, he said, any JNA action would be illegitimate. Encouraged by this, Tudjman paraded Croatia's (mostly unarmed) military forces. It was the middle of March, and Croatia was also on its way to secession. For their part, the Serbs moved some forces into the Serb-controlled areas of Croatia.

Seemingly oblivious to the irony of his next move, Tudjman met with Milošević on March 25 at Karadjordjevo to discuss the three-way partition of Bosnia-Herzegovina, which had substantial number of Croats and Serbs. Tudjman tried to persuade Milošević to agree to Croatia's annexation of certain areas of Bosnia-Herzegovina while simultaneously offering to acquiesce to Serbia's annexation of the portions it wanted. The Muslim Bosniaks, not a party to these talks, would have to be satisfied with what remained. In other words, while Milošević was trying to annex parts of Croatia, the Croats were trying to make a deal with him to partition another republic among themselves. While details were being worked out, fighting in Croatia flared up and the JNA moved in to separate the two sides although this time it issued an ultimatum to Zagreb, which compelled Tudjman to withdraw his forces. More clashes followed, and nationalists in Belgrade demanded arms to defend their fellow Serbs in Croatia. For all intents and purposes, civil war was already underway in Yugoslavia although nobody called it that yet.

Between June 6 and 19, 1991 the presidents of the six republics held their final summits in Sarajevo, Split, and Belgrade. In a desperate attempt to save what was left of the union, Bosnia-Herzegovina and Macedonia made a joint proposal to organize Yugoslavia as a confederacy of sovereign states, which was essentially a reprise of the Slovenian-Croat proposal of October 1990. By now, however, Croatia was no longer interested in this and instead pushed for partition of Bosnia-Herzegovina. At the last summit, the proposal was explicitly rejected, and with it died the last hope of preserving Yugoslavia. On June 25, Slovenia and Croatia declared independence.

### 3.1 The War in Slovenia, 1991

Even though Slovenia and Croatia declared independence on the same day, it was Slovenia that would suffer the first military intervention. When the government took over the border posts, the JNA, apparently unaware of the deal Milošević had made with Kučan, crossed over to secure them. Milošević opposed the move and did not even want to see the JNA trying to secure the northern and western borders of Croatia as he no longer had any plans for keeping either republic in Yugoslavia at that point, and was far more interested in using the JNA to occupy Serb-populated territory in Croatia and Bosnia-Herzegovina. The Slovenes had hoped that the Croats would obstruct JNA's passage, but Tudjman abandoned them — this would not be the first or the last time where disunity among the secessionist republics would leave one of them in the lurch. The JNA vastly outnumbered the lightly armed Slovenian forces and could easily have crushed them but on June 30, the Serbs pressured the federal assembly to consider recognizing Slovenia's independence. This effectively delegitimized JNA's military action, and by June 5 the troops returned to their barracks. The ceasefire that Slovenia had declared unilaterally three days earlier held, and two weeks later the federal Presidency decided to pull all JNA troops out of Slovenia by the end of October. On January 15, 1992 the European Community recognized Slovenia's independence. This secession had proven relatively easy: 88.3% of the 1.6 million population were Slovene, and only 2.5% (about 47,000) were Serb; 97% were Roman Catholics, and 92% spoke Slovene at home. There were no ethnic or religious divisions for politicians to manipulate, and there were no significant minorities that external powers could claim were being repressed.

### 3.2 The War in Croatia, 1991–92

Croatia also had a dominant ethnic group — the Croats — who numbered 78% of the 4.8 million population, but this republic had 581,000 Serbs who constituted 12% of the population. The Serbs were also concentrated in several pockets, two bordering Bosnia-Herzegovina (in areas where they were dominant there as well), and one bordering Serbia. The Serbs in the Knin pocket had already been defying Zagreb's authority since August 17, 1990, and the JNA had participated in clashes with Croat forces in eastern Slavonia from March 3, 1991. Just as the war in Slovenia was winding down, hostilities erupted in Croatia when the JNA occupied part of eastern Slavonia on July 3. The incursion was still fairly limited and the Croat leadership seemed to believe that it would not spread. For their part, the Bosnian government was also stunningly short-sighted and refused to get involved. Dark clouds, however, were gathering: Serb irregular forces supplied by the JNA now began operating in Croatia, and over 40,000 volunteers joined the Serbian Guard, not to mention many others who joined the Serb paramilitary forces. The Serbian forces made rapid progress and besieged the city of **Vukovar**. Although the Croat

forces held out for three months, the city eventually fell to the Serbs, who expelled 22,000 civilians (about 2,800 Croats were killed during the siege).

Numerous ceasefires (ten by mid October) brokered by the European Community were violated by both sides. To rectify the severe imbalance of capabilities between their own forces (whom the JNA had disarmed) and the JNA-equipped Serb troops, the Croatian government blockaded JNA garrisons throughout the republic. When most of these surrendered, all their weapons and equipment fell to the Croats. Although this did help a bit, the Serbs continued their inexorable advance. By the end of October, they were within 30 miles of Zagreb and controlled over 30% of Croatia's territory—almost all the land they had wanted to annex. Both sides perpetrated atrocities and about 220,00 Croats and 300,000 Serbs were internally displaced in the first instances of **ethnic cleansing**. In December, the Croats began to turn the tide of the war and recovered some of the territory they had lost. Moreover, on December 16, the European Community announced that it was going to recognize the independence of all Yugoslav republics who wanted on or after January 15, 1992. These developments swung Milošević into action and he agreed to a U.N.-sponsored ceasefire, the fifteenth such attempt, on January 2, 1992.

The **Sarajevo Agreement** ended large-scale hostilities in Croatia for the next three years. It also appeared that the U.N. protection force, UNPROFOR, deployed in Serb-held territories was going to legitimize their occupation under the **uti possidetis** principle.<sup>11</sup> This satisfied Milošević's goal of securing these areas for incorporation into a Serb-dominated smaller Yugoslavia, which partially explains his willingness to end the fighting in Croatia (the other part is that he was about to launch his campaign in Bosnia-Herzegovina). Thus, in early 1992, Milošević was well on his way of accomplishing his design for Greater Serbia: the autonomous provinces had been reduced, the two republics most intent on secession had been let go, and the parts of Croatia where Serbs dominated had been taken and now held under the veneer of international peacekeeping. The fighting had already killed over 10,000 people, rendered over 400,000 homeless, destroyed 40% of Croatia's industry, and 80% of its tourism.

### 3.3 U.S. Foreign Policy in Yugoslavia until 1992

To say that the Bush administration paid little attention to the goings-on in Yugoslavia would be an understatement. The U.S. was entirely absorbed by the Eastern European Revolutions, the collapse of the Soviet Union, and the Gulf War against Iraq. Any concern for the Balkans was limited to not allowing Yugoslavia to dissolve, at least not yet, and certainly not if that involved shooting wars. Yugoslavia was on the back burner, and at any rate, it was a strictly European problem that the Europeans themselves appeared keen on solving without America. Whether

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<sup>11</sup>This is an old principle in international law according to which the party in possession of the territory at the end of the conflict gets to keep it unless explicitly stipulated otherwise by a treaty.

this was out of desire to show that the European Community could pursue effective foreign policy without the U.S. now that the Cold War was over or simply by default given the limit of American interests there is beside the point.

We have already seen that the U.S. ambassador had refused to help Croatia arm itself. When it became clear that Slovenia and Croatia were about to declare independence, President Bush sent Secretary of State **James Baker** to Belgrade on June 21, 1991. He threw the two republics in despair when he flatly stated that the U.S. would not recognize them, and that Washington wanted to see Yugoslavia remain unified. He did toss them a bone by elliptically suggesting that democracy was more important than unity but that all decisions had to be reached exclusively by negotiations and mutual compromise. He somehow contrived to offend both the Serbs — by saying that more authority and sovereignty had to devolve to the individual republics — and the separatists — by saying that their secession would not be recognized. When Kučan tried to explain that it was too late and independence was merely a few days away, Baker would not listen. The President of Bosnia-Herzegovina Izetbegović also attempted to impress upon Baker how dangerous this inaction was and begged him to consider vigorous American mediation, but Baker would not budge.

It was not for lack of imagination: this was the official U.S. policy, which at that time was not to encourage any nationalist separatism that could easily be construed as support for the movements rocking the Soviet Union. For instance, when President Bush visited the Ukraine on August 1, 1991, he informed the Ukrainian legislature that the U.S. would not support their bid for independence just so that they could “replace a far-off tyranny with a local despotism,” and would certainly “not aid those who promote a suicidal nationalism based upon ethnic hatred.” This became known as the “Chicken Kiev Speech” and was met with standing ovation in the Ukrainian parliament. It was severely criticized at home for betraying America’s long-standing commitment to ideals of liberty and self-determination. Bush, however, did have a good reason for this approach: he was trying to help Gorbachev stay in power to manage the peaceful transition of the Soviet Union to some sort of non-totalitarian state. (It did not help, of course, as only three weeks later the hardliners in Moscow launched their coup anyway.) As far as Yugoslavia was concerned, the American position was that if there was going to be any separation, it would have to be peacefully managed (like it would be in Czechoslovakia’s “Velvet Divorce” in 1993 when it split itself into the Czech Republic and Slovakia). Preferably, the peoples of Yugoslavia would find a way to stay together, perhaps in a confederate union. Since this idea had been floated for almost two years and was now dead as far as Croatia and Serbia were concerned, there was no chance of this policy amounting to anything more than verbal exhortations. The U.S. would remain detached from this conflict until President Clinton would be thrust into action by circumstances.

### 3.4 The Wars in Bosnia-Herzegovina, 1992–94

If both Slovenia and Croatia had dominant ethnic groups that vastly outnumbered the Serbs, Bosnia-Herzegovina was a ridiculously complex patchwork of different ethnic and religious groups, which were also split on nationalist and liberal lines. In 1991, Bosnia-Herzegovina had a population of 4.3 million. Of these, 43% were Bosniaks (Muslim), 31% were Serbs (Orthodox Christian), and 17% were Croats (Roman Catholic). The Bosniaks were Sunni Muslims but were fairly moderate and significantly secularized. In contrast to the Serbs and the Croats, they tended to dominate the large cities, and the urbanites were markedly less susceptible to extremist views than the rural population. They also had a long history of living side by side and intermarrying the other groups. In fact, Sarajevo (the capital) had by far the highest rates of these inter-group marriages. The foreign Muslim **mujahideen** who came to join the war brought with them Islamic extremism and were viewed with great suspicion by the locals, who were ethnically really Slavs and had nothing to do with the Arab practices that had been also imported through the new mosques built mostly with Saudi funds. Many rituals the Bosniaks practiced were quite similar to those of their Christian neighbors and had no basis in orthodox Islam. The war, however, would solidify the awareness of one's religious identity since the enemies insisted on treating one as a member of the Muslim group irrespective of one's actual personal observance.

The different groups were quite intermixed and although there were areas where one of the ethno-religious groups was dominant (e.g., in Banja Luka, the Bosniaks were a distinct minority among Serbs, as they were in western Herzegovina among Croats, whereas in the northwest the Bosniaks constituted 99% of the population), most of the territory did not constitute easily identifiable contiguous territories with a clear majority. This posed a serious problems for any scheme to partition the republic or split it into Swiss-style cantons. It would also be the reason for the strategy of ethnic cleansing — the attempt to drive out the other groups from the areas one of them wanted to control — that all sides, but especially the Serbs, would pursue. The thorniest problem for any government was that most of the Serbs who lived in Bosnia wanted to remain in Yugoslavia and, failing that, many wanted to be joined to Serbia instead of remaining a minority in a Muslim-dominated independent state. Not all Serbs held these views, of course: when the shooting started many remained loyal to the Bosnian government and fought fellow Serbs to defend the multicultural society they had grown up in. For its part, the government consistently tried to steer a *via media* between the extremes of Slovene/Croat secessionists and Greater Serb nationalists.

Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH) declared itself sovereign and democratic on August 1, 1990 following the actions of the Slovenes and Croats who had just kicked the communists out of office. The problem for BiH was clear: if these two republics were to secede, then the Serbs would come to dominate rump Yugoslavia and the

large Muslim population could become quickly marginalized along the lines of the Kosovar Albanians in Serbia itself. The elections on November 18 swept **Alija Izetbegović**'s Muslim party into a parliamentary majority. It was followed closely by the nationalist parties of the Serbs and the Croats (the latter was a branch of Tudjman's party now ruling in Croatia). The party of the anti-nationalist Serbs gained nearly as many seats as the reformed communists, and was quickly pushed aside politically. By prior arrangement, Izetbegović became the President although he had come in second **Fikret Abdić** in the popular vote. (We shall meet Abdić soon enough.)

He inherited an unstable and combustible mix of ethnic and religious tensions with subversion from Belgrade. Even before the elections toppled the communists, the JNA had begun to organize the Bosnian Serbs into militias, and by the time Izetbegović established a defensive armed force in March 1991, the JNA had distributed over 75,000 firearms to Serb volunteers. There is some evidence that the belated response and the absence of a legal challenge to JNA's illicit activities were due to collaborators the JNA had infiltrated into the BiH government.

The leader of the nationalist party of the Bosnian Serbs was **Radovan Karadžić**, who was in constant contact with Milošević and closely coordinated his actions with Belgrade. In August 1991, he met with Milošević to discuss the timing of the army attack on BiH. The preparations had started back in 1990 when the JNA had disarmed the Bosnian TO, had continued with the removal of several arms factories from Bosnia to Serbia, and were now nearing completion with the formation of paramilitary forces and the emplacement of artillery around the major cities. It did not help the Bosnian government that the second largest party in parliament was acting as a fifth column to advance Milošević's plan. After the two Serbs sitting on the collective presidency of Bosnia publicly quit that body permanently, the Bosnian Serbs appealed to the JNA for protection, and the JNA deployed troops in Bosnia on September 20, 1991. When Croats and Bosniaks erected barricades to block them, the JNA opened fire and dispersed the defenders. On September 25, the UNSC passed **Resolution 713**, which imposed an arms embargo on all Yugoslav nations. Milošević supported the embargo: since the JNA was well-equipped and Serbia manufactured its own weapons, the embargo would disproportionately hurt the other republics, especially BiH.

The parliament met in Sarajevo on October 14 to discuss how to handle the situation. All Serbian delegates walked out, and the remaining ones resolved that Bosnia would not allow itself to be joined to either Serbia or Croatia. They further prepared the way for seceding from Yugoslavia by approving a memorandum on sovereignty. By November, the Bosnian Serbs organized over 50 municipalities into a "state within the state" and in effect preemptively seceded from BiH. This *de facto* secession was given a veneer of legitimacy with a plebiscite they organized on November 9 in the areas under their control. Karadžić claimed that the majority had voted to remain in Yugoslavia instead of being in an independent Bosnia (even

though at this point the referendum on Bosnia's independence had not been held yet). On November 18, the Croat party proclaimed the establishment of the Croatian Community of **Herzeg-Bosnia** within BiH. On December 21, the Bosnian Serbs also announced the creation of a Serbian state within BiH. When Serbia, Montenegro and the Serb-held rebel territories in Croatia formed the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia on December 26, the Bosnian Serbs moved to attach themselves to it. Milošević had initially tried to draw BiH into his new Yugoslavia but the October resolution with its clear implications about independence had scotched that idea. The new Serb assembly in Banja Luka proclaimed the establishment of the Republic of the Serb People of Bosnia and Herzegovina on January 9, 1992 (renamed to **Republika Srpska** in August), and declared it part of Yugoslavia.

Neither the Croat nor the Serb self-proclaimed states were recognized by the government in Sarajevo, which went ahead with its own scheduled referendum on February 29 and March 1, 1992. Since most Serbs boycotted the referendum, the vote went overwhelmingly (99.7%) for independence, and the Izetbegović government duly proclaimed it on March 3. BiH was internationally recognized on April 6 and admitted to the United Nations on May 22. This made it impossible to implement the Serbo-Croat scheme to partition BiH among themselves (the deal that Milošević and Tudjman had tried to work out). Since this still remained the solution preferable to the supporters of the two self-proclaimed states within BiH, the partition would have to be effected by force.

Since the country was now formally independent, the JNA withdrew from BiH in mid May but not before transferring all its Bosnian Serb personnel (80,000 soldiers), high-ranking officers, weaponry and heavy equipment to the newly formed **Army of Republic Srpska** (VRS) under the command of General **Ratko Mladić**. The Serbs thus had about 85,000 troops, 300 tanks, 800 artillery pieces, and 700 armored carriers, and an air force with 4,000 men and 42 aircraft. An estimated 152,200 Serbian civilians were armed.

The Croats formed the **Croatian Defense Council** (HVO) as the army of their republic of Herzeg-Bosnia, which had about 50,000 troops, 75 tanks, 400 artillery pieces, 200 armored carriers, as well as helicopters, and transports. An estimated 51,800 Croat civilians were armed.

At this point, BiH really had no army, having just organized its sundry military units into the new **Army of the Republic of Bosnia-Herzegovina** (ARBiH). Its notional strength was about 110,000 troops — an amalgamation of civilian defense and paramilitary groups along with former TO soldiers and defectors from the JNA — with 1 tank (the number would eventually grow to 40) and 30 armored carriers, and no air force. An estimated 92,500 Muslims were armed.

Sarajevo became a focal point early on. The fighting had begun shortly after the March declaration of independence when a Muslim shot up a Serb wedding, giving the Serbs the excuse to set up roadblocks and demand that the Izetbegović government stop seeking international recognition. Since the government had no



significant forces to assert its control of the city, others took up arms, and soon the city was partitioned among rival militias. In the chaos, the government actually agreed to joint patrols by the JNA (Serbs) and police (Bosniaks). This restored a measure of calm to the city but demonstrations erupted again after international recognition came and brought Serb paramilitary attacks in its wake. The citizens of Sarajevo, long accustomed to living in multi-ethnic proximity, denounced the nationalism of both their own government and the Serbs. Fighting resumed and the government managed to attain control of the downtown while the Serbs took positions on the heights around the city. On May 2, 1992 the Serbs started shelling Sarajevo from their positions. The long siege of Sarajevo began.

By the summer of 1992, fighting escalated to large battles with more than 50,000 on either side. The Serbian forces (VRS) held a tremendous advantage in military capabilities and by the end of the year, they established control over 70% of BiH. With the Croat forces (HVO) holding another 20%, the legitimate government was barely holding onto a handful of cities. By November, the fighting had already killed over 100,000 people and displaced nearly 2.5 million. The killings and the displacements were deliberate. In areas it took, the VRS implemented a consistent policy of **ethnic cleansing** in order to achieve the objectives of the Milošević-Karadžić plan, which aimed at driving out all non-Serb peoples from territories that were to be annexed to Serbia. This strategy had several tactical components. Most obviously, many people were expelled from their homes, often with merely a 20-minute warning to gather whatever belongings they could. They were either forced to march outside the territory held by the VRS or bussed to detention centers to be moved against at a later date. To compel people to leave even areas not under their control, the VRS used widely publicized terror tactics; killing indiscriminately, gouging out eyes, and mutilating bodies. The paramilitaries had initially allowed access to TV crews that had documented their handiwork but as the war progressed, they banned cameras and clamped down on leaks of information that might have revealed the extent of their atrocities. Rape became common-place and was used as an instrument of terror. All of this was meant to frighten the Bosniaks generally and made them seek whatever safety they could find in areas under Muslim control. In the ethnically cleansed areas, the VRS also made efforts to erase any evidence of peaceful multi-ethnic coexistence: they destroyed mosques and burned libraries.

Bad as it was, the situation for the Bosniaks got even worse in October, when the tensions between them and the Croats escalated into a full-scale war between the HVO and the ARBiH. Up to this point, the Croats had been mostly content to hold the territory of Herzeg-Bosnia, and some their paramilitary troops favored BiH's territorial integrity and had actively assisted the Bosniaks. The HVO assassinated the command staff of these splinter Croat groups in August, and moved to implement Tudjman's scheme to redraw the borders of BiH. Because of the embargo, the republic was having trouble equipping its forces and without a head-start, like Croatia's, in smuggling it could not make up the difference. This made it a tempting

target, especially now that the VRS had pounded it into submission much elsewhere in the country. On top of this, ethnic tensions between Croats and Bosniaks were exacerbated for two other reasons. One was that the mass expulsions practiced by the Serbs drove many Muslims into Croat-dominated areas, increasing the competition for scarce resources and threatening to change the ethnic composition in favor of the Bosniaks. Another was the arrival of **mujahideen** from several Muslim countries. These volunteers, many of them veterans of the War in Afghanistan against the Soviet Union, had come specifically for fighting infidels, they tended to hold rather extreme Islamic beliefs, and they had no experience living side-by-side with Croats. They also rapidly made a name for themselves with their particular ruthlessness and beheadings.

The initial cooperation between the Croat and Bosniak forces — they had coordinated military action against VRS on many occasions — began to wobble. As the VRS gathered momentum, it became increasingly unlikely that BiH would maintain its territorial integrity. The leadership of Herzeg-Bosnia had initially committed itself to autonomy only, pledging allegiance to Izetbegović provided BiH remained independent and not a part of any version of Yugoslavia. As this eventuality became less and less likely, it declared the Republic of Herzeg-Bosnia in July, a move that was designed to pave the way to secession and subsequent incorporation into Croatia. Izetbegović also muddled the waters late in the year when he refused to step down after the expiration of his two-year term as president.

It was in this atmosphere that the international community presented its blueprint for peace. In January 1993, the co-chairs of the International Conference on the Former Yugoslavia, the American **Cyrus Vance** (who had served as Carter's Secretary of State) and the British **David Owen** (who had served as Foreign Secretary in 1977-79), attempted to mediate an end to the war with a peace proposal, which became known as the **Vance-Owen Peace Plan**. Under the scheme, the Serbs had to give up about a third of their conquests so that the country could be reorganized in 10 autonomous provinces along ethnic lines. It provided for the immediate cessation of hostilities, the dismantling of all self-proclaimed states in BiH, demilitarization of the entire republic, and international monitoring of human rights. All of this was to be followed by free and fair elections for local and national governments. The Croats with their compact area in southwest Herzegovina had nothing to lose from the arrangement, which would have ensured that any future partition of the country would allow them to join Croatia. Izetbegović was in no position to negotiate given the military impotence of his government at the time. Both sides therefore quickly agreed to the plan. The Bosnian Serbs, who stood to lose about a third of their conquests, objected to it. Karadžić in particular refused to agree either to the territorial distribution or the constitutional provisions.

In April, the European Community threatened to impose sanctions on Yugoslavia if the Bosnian Serbs derailed the plan. This was done on the assumption that it was really Milošević who had been pulling the strings behind Republika Srpska. It was

not an unreasonable assumption as Milošević was, in fact, paying the salaries of all VRS officers and providing the Bosnian Serbs with much-needed supplies they could not have otherwise gotten because of the international embargo. The threat worked: Milošević pressured Karadžić to agree to the terms, and on May 2 the three warring parties all signed up to the plan at a meeting in Athens, Greece. Karadžić, however, had only done so on the condition that the plan would be ratified by the assembly of Republika Srpska. Milošević traveled to Pale to urge the assembly to do just that. When Mladić, who advocated rejection spoke, Milošević addressed the delegates in no uncertain terms: “if you do not accept this plan, you will sacrifice your nation.” The assembly rejected it anyway, and Milošević announced that Serbia would no longer supply the VRS with weapons and ammunition. The Bosnian Serbs, whom he had so carefully cultivated, had gotten out of control.

With the Vance-Owen Plan in tatters, the Serbs and the Croats began to carve up BiH in a coordinated effort to deprive the Muslims of any say. The Croats turned on their former Bosniak allies. When the HVO advanced into territories allocated to it under the plan, the Bosniaks violently resisted, and the war between them entered a far deadlier phase, with the Croats engaging in ethnic cleansing in several occasions. As the fighting raged on, Croatia intervened on the side of the HVO and by the end of the year 30,000 Croatian regular troops operated in Bosnia. The ARBiH, however, began to turn the tide of war and by February 1994, the Croats lost 40% of the territory they had held a year earlier. Tudjman now ordered the Croat regulars to join VRS in their fight against the Bosniaks.

Adding to this confusion of allegiances, the Muslims themselves had become split. On September 26, 1993, Abdić (the person who had won the popular vote back in 1990) proclaimed yet another state-within-the-state in the Bihać enclave in northwestern Bosnia. This one was called **Autonomous Province of Western Bosnia** and was sandwiched between Republika Srpska and the Republic of Serbian Krajina (i.e., the Serb-controlled territory of Croatia). Abdić was very popular in the region, where he had run large agricultural and food-processing businesses. He had participated in an abortive attempt to depose Izetbegović and refused to recognize the legitimacy of the Sarajevo regime especially after Izetbegović failed to vacate the post after the expiration of his term. Given the position of his enclave and the opposition to Izetbegović, it was natural for Abdić to seek support from the Serbs and the Croats. Both sides happily agreed, and Abdić’s breakaway statelet indulged in brisk trade with both the Bosnian Serbs and the Bosnian Croats. It cooperated militarily with the VRS, which helped it repulse an attempt by ARBiH, which was holding the southern portion of the Bihać enclave, to regain control of the area.

As of September 1993, the Bosniak government in Sarajevo had lost nearly 90% of BiH territory to Serbs, Croats, and fellow Muslims. The Croats had intervened openly on the side of the HVO, and were now cooperating with the VRS, whose supplies Milošević had resumed despite his earlier threats to cut them off. Partition of BiH between Croatia and Serbia appeared imminent and inevitable. It was in this

context that President Clinton decided to send a personal envoy, **Charles Redman**, who proposed the creation of a Croat-Bosniak federation. This idea was dead on arrival despite an attempt to please Tadjman by loosening the proposed union to a confederation. The U.S. strategy was to settle what appeared to be the easier problem — the conflict between the Croats and the Muslims — before dealing with the deeper one involving the Serbs. For the strategy to work, however, Tadjman had to agree to abandon his idea of Greater Croatia and support the territorial integrity of BiH instead. The failure of Redman's plan showed that stronger incentives had to be provided, and that is precisely what the U.S. did next.

In mid February, Redman and the U.S. Ambassador in Croatia met with Tadjman and offered both the carrot and the stick. They threatened that if Tadjman continued the war with the Muslims, Croatia will find itself under serious sanctions. If, instead, he agreed to work with Izetbegović toward the creation of a federated BiH, then the U.S. would provide Croatia with financial and economic aid as well as political support for its accelerated integration in Western political and military alliances. Crucially, the U.S. promised to support Tadjman in his effort to regain the 27% of Croatian territory held by rebel Serbs. This was a deal Tadjman could not resist, and in March 1994, the Herzeg-Bosnian and Bosniak governments signed the **Washington Agreement** (it was also signed by Croatia). Under the agreement, the territory held by the Croat and Bosniak forces (about half of the total area of BiH), was reorganized into 10 autonomous cantons defined in a way to prevent the domination of one ethnic group over the other. The new entity was called the **Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina**, and it ended the Croat-Bosniak War as well as the existence of Herzeg-Bosnia.

The ending of the Croat-Bosniak War also undermined Abdić's breakaway statelet since he now lost one of his major sponsors. The Federation forces overran Western Bosnia before the end of August but a Serbian counter-attacked dislodged them again before the end of the year. This allowed Abdić to reestablish his rule, and this time he proclaimed the independent Republic of Western Bosnia. The Serb forces of Republika Srpska and the Republic of Serbian Krajina besieged Bihać in November, which prompted the U.S. to begin delivering on the promises it had made to the Croats. The U.S. unilaterally lifted the arms embargo against BiH, allowing its forces to be supplied through Croatia. By prior arrangement, Zagreb got to keep a third of the weapons and equipment that passed through Croatia, but the two-thirds that reached the Federation drastically improved its military capabilities. The U.S. also sent military advisors to Croatia to train its armed forces (since this happened while the embargo was still in place, these were supposedly provided by a private firm).

The Washington Agreement, a major breakthrough thanks to American diplomacy, altered the situation of the Serbs in BiH quite dramatically. The VRS had failed to take advantage of the weakness of the Muslims during the Croat-Bosniak war when it might have been able to finish off Izetbegović's government. Now they

faced a resurgent, better-armed and better-supplied ARBiH, which was closely coordinating with HVO and the Croatian regulars, all of whom were benefitting from American assistance. ARBiH's near-miraculous survival in 1992–93 was amply rewarded. Money came from Saudi Arabia, Iran, Sudan, Turkey, Brunei, Malaysia, and Pakistan, and Iran supplied weapons directly. The combined strength of the ARBiH and HVO was now nearly 200,000 with nearly 570 tanks against VRS's rapidly dwindling about 80,000 and now often malfunctioning heavy equipment. The VRS had not paid its troops in months and many now relied on looting to make ends meet. The rates of desertion increased, and the soldiers often tossed their weapons and ran instead of fighting. Serbia proved incapable of maintaining military readiness and even the Yugoslav army's battle-worthiness deteriorated. Milošević's confidence in a quick victory had led him to support the arms embargo, and now he came to regret. While the ever deeper involvement of the international community on BiH's side meant that its army would only get stronger, the VRS was doomed to becoming weaker and weaker. Time was not on the side of the Serbs.

President Clinton's new active strategy was not popular with all U.S. allies. On the international front, a major rift was opening between those, like Britain and France, who favored an immediate cessation of hostilities and allowing Republika Srpska to retain possession of all territories it occupied under the *uti possidetis* principle, and the U.S., which did not want the Muslims to be compelled to concede land lost to an invading army (under the U.N. principle that borders cannot be redrawn by force). The American perspective was that the Muslims should be able to recover these lands and that the Bosnian (and Croatian) Serbs should not be allowed to get away with aggression. The British and the French opposed Clinton's "lift and strike" strategy (lift the embargo against BiH and strike Serbian forces with NATO airpower), ostensibly because they had several thousand peacekeepers on the ground and feared for their safety. NATO, in fact, had been quite ineffective thus far because it was operating under U.N. authority and all strikes had to be cleared with the U.N. representative, Yasushi Akashi, who vetoed almost all of them. Since the Serbs confiscated more than half of the humanitarian aid and nearly 40% of UNPROFOR's fuel, Akashi's actions prolonged the war and de-legitimized the (new) idea that NATO could be the military arm of the U.N.

Matters came to a head on February 5, 1994 when the Serbs fired a shell into the Sarajevo marketplace, killing 69 people and wounding more than 200. The U.S. now pushed to authorize NATO to retaliate and put serious diplomatic pressure on the British to join in that demand. Faced with the choice of antagonizing their most important ally, the British caved in, and NATO issued an ultimatum to the Serbs to pull their heavy weapons back from Sarajevo. The VRS remained defiant and, worse, the Russians got angry: Yeltsin asserted that no solution in BiH would be possible without Russia's involvement. He then asked the Bosnian Serbs not to provoke NATO and dispatched Russian troops to protect them. The Russians arrived right before the ultimatum expired and with them on the ground, NATO's

air strikes became impossible. The VRS then complied with the NATO demand: they withdrew and turned in most of their heavy weapons to concentration points (from which they could easily take them when needed).

NATO's victory was only apparent: on March 29, the VRS attacked Goražde, a Bosnian town with a prewar population of 40,000. Mladić surrounded the U.N. troops and fired upon them. Two NATO aircraft struck VRS positions on the outskirts of town, but this only provoked Mladić to take hostages. He detained about 200 peacekeepers and threatened to harm them unless the air strikes were halted. By mid April, the Serbs had taken more hostages and blockaded U.N. compounds. Furious, President Clinton wanted to launch an immediate attack on the Bosnian Serbs to shore up NATO's credibility. On April 22, NATO issued another ultimatum to the VRS, demanding its withdrawal from Goražde. Akashi arranged another ceasefire and gave the VRS 48 hours to leave. The Serbs eventually complied but by this point the town had been reduced to rubble, and nearly 800 civilians were dead. Yet again the U.N. was standing in the way of stopping the killing.

With the U.N. peacekeeping repeatedly failing to deliver any results and apparently serving to prolong the war by giving the Bosnian Serbs access to food and fuel, the great powers decided to bypass the organization in order to mediate a peace by themselves. The U.S., U.K., France, Germany and Russia constituted a "contact group", conducted talks with the various sides, and on July 5 announced the **European Union Action Plan**. This proposal gave the Federation 51% of the territory, and allocated the remainder to Republika Srpska. Since this required the Serbs to evacuate areas under their control, Karadžić rejected the plan, and this despite Milošević closing, on August 4, the Serbian border with Republika Srpska to all but humanitarian traffic. Belgrade's grip on the Bosnian Serbs slipped further since Milošević would not cut off all assistance to them. For the remainder of the year, fighting between ARBiH and VRS moved the front lines back and forth although momentum was now clearly with the Bosniaks who steadily regained territory. The abject failure of yet another peace plan — this one backed not only by five great powers but by Serbia as well — underlined the need for more resolute action if the Bosnian Serbs were going to be brought to heel. NATO was also increasingly chafing under U.N. restraints that limited engagement to rarely authorized retaliatory strikes and protection of humanitarian convoys. NATO commanders wanted the alliance to send 40,000 of its own troops to evacuate the 24,000 U.N. peacekeepers and engage the VRS, which was still calling the shots.

### **3.5 Endgame, 1995**

With the international community swinging perceptibly to the Muslim side, the outcome of the war was becoming a foregone conclusion that was merely a matter of time. Milošević decided to cut his losses and in December, 1994 he indicated to Tudjman that he was prepared to recognize Croatia within its borders; that is, he

was going to abandon the Croatian Serbs to their fate. Since the U.N. had declared any attempt to integrate Croatian territories into Yugoslavia “illegal, null and void”, he did not have much of a choice now that the military effort had also stalled. Tudjman then began the preparations to finish the Serbian insurgency in Croatia: he informed the U.N. that UNPROFOR would no longer be allowed in Croatia from March 31 (January), and the Croatian Army started to mobilize and deploy for a decisive attack. In early May, the Croatian military launched a campaign to retake Western Slavonia (Operation Flash). In just a couple of days, the well-equipped and now well-trained Croatian force dislodged the Serbian rebels who desperately tried to halt its advance by lobbing shells at Zagreb. Although the Yugoslav army moved some tanks toward the border with Croatia, it was just a face-saving show. The Republic of Serbian Krajina had lost Belgrade’s support. On May 4, the UNSC condemned both the Croatian offensive and the attack on Zagreb, predictably failing to achieve anything. Almost all Serbs fled or were expelled from the reconquered province.

Since Milošević refused to lift a finger to defend the Croat Serbs, it was the Bosnian Serbs who escalated in BiH in retaliation for the Croatian attack. They fired on Sarajevo again, which provoked NATO air strikes, to which the Serbs responded by firing on Tuzla, which provoked more NATO air strikes. On May 26, the VRS took almost 400 U.N. peacekeepers hostage and shackled them to military targets NATO might conceivably attack. Mladić and Karadžić were escalating recklessly, and it proved too much for Milošević, who now threatened to have Karadžić assassinated if he kept the hostages. The VRS eventually relented in exchange for spare parts for their military equipment. When the British announced that they were sending another 1,200 soldiers to beef up UNPROFOR, Karadžić declared the U.N. resolutions affecting Republika Srpska to be null and void; that is, the Serbs would now regard UNPROFOR as a hostile force.

Karadžić’s statement implied that the six **U.N. safe havens** (Bihać, Goražde, Sarajevo, Srebrenica, Tuzla, and Žepa) could now be targeted with impunity. The Serbs had encircled most of them already and the Bosniaks had repeatedly launched attacks from these cities, creating the impression that they were using the safe havens as operating bases. From Srebrenica in particular, the forces of Naser Orić had made numerous sorties between 1992 and 1995, and raided Serbian villages in the region, killing several hundred civilians in the process. The Serbs had already decided to compel the capitulation of **Srebrenica** and had been interdicting supplies of food, medicine, and ammunition despite international pressure to allow access for humanitarian aid. More refugees arrived in Srebrenica, swelling its population to 40,000 and exacerbating the already precarious situation. By the summer of 1995, the conditions had become catastrophic: starvation had set in and fuel reserves were depleted. In June, Mladić, who had paid scant respect to the safe havens to begin with, now started shelling four of them openly to see how NATO would respond. When no response came, the VRS attacked Srebrenica on July 6, 1995.

The 400-strong Dutch peacekeeping garrison asked for air support but most of their pleas went unheeded. Eventually, after the VRS entered the town, NATO sent four warplans that destroyed one tank. Mladić threatened to kill all the peacekeepers if the airstrikes did not cease immediately, and Akashi complied. The Serbs then negotiated with the Dutch who agreed to step aside and even expelled the Muslims who had sought refuge in their compound. On July 12, the massacre began: within a day, Mladić's troops killed more than 7,000 civilians, mostly men and boys of military age; the soldiers who tried to refuse to participate in the slaughter were threatened with summary execution. By the time the killing stopped on July 22, over 8,300 people were dead, and about 30,000 Bosniak women and children were expelled, but not before many of them were raped.<sup>12</sup>

It is difficult to understand what the military or political purpose of the Srebrenica massacre could have been. It was deliberate, systematic, and planned. The Serbs murdered Muslims of military age and terrorized the fleeing civilians, both of which could be construed to have been strategies in their ethnic cleansing campaign. On the other hand, they did not implement these strategies consistently, as the attack on **Žepa** shows. The VRS turned on Žepa, a safe haven with about 15,000 civilians protected by only 69 Ukrainian peacekeepers, on July 17. The Serbs arrested the UNPROFOR soldiers and threatened to kill them if NATO launched any air strikes. Left defenseless, the town negotiated its surrender: the entire population was evacuated to safety after which the VRS looted the town and burned it down. The savagery of Srebrenica was not repeated here, which begs the question why it happened in the first place.

Srebrenica was also somewhat unusual in that the killings were organized by regular VRS forces. During the wars, all three sides — Serb, Croat, and Bosniak — perpetrated killings on a massive scale, but when the more or less regular forces had been engaged, the casualties were due to military operations. It was mostly the irregular paramilitary groups (most of them hardly different from any criminal gang) that perpetrated most of the wanton murder, torture, rape, and looting. These groups had arisen almost immediately from the outset of the war because of the near total collapse of central authority. In Sarajevo, the different neighborhoods were patrolled by ethnic gangs of thugs who started out by offering protection of their co-ethnics from the other rival gangs but then turned to extorting the civilians under their putative protection. Since the economy had all but ground to a standstill, black

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<sup>12</sup>The disgraceful behavior of the Dutch battalion, which stood by while the massacre took place in the “safe area” they had been tasked with protecting, enraged public opinion in the Netherlands. The official seven-year long investigation concluded that the political and military high commands in the Netherlands had been guilty of criminal negligence, and that both the Netherlands and the U.N. had failed to perform their duty. In the scandal that ensued in 2002, the Prime Minister resigned. Both Radovan Karadžić and Ratko Mladić were indicted by the International Criminal Tribunal for the war crimes committed in Srebrenica. Karadžić was arrested in 2008 and Mladić in 2011. As of February 2016, both remain on trial. On July 8, 2015 Russia vetoed a UNSC resolution condemning the massacre as genocide.



markets for smuggled goods emerged, and all of these were controlled by organized crime that masqueraded as ethnic-based paramilitary forces. These groups did not have to be very large to be effective. For instance, the most notorious of them — Arkan's Tigers (officially known as the Serb Volunteer Guard) — was formed by twenty football hooligans, was active without interruption from 1991 to 1995, and had a complement of about 500 to 1,000 at most. In most cases, the gangs only needed a few dozen thugs to hold entire towns under control. These groups (each side had them) were not really under control of the nominal rival governments in BiH, and certainly not responsible to the governments of the independent republics. They were sometimes told where to go and what objective to achieve but were neither told what methods to use nor monitored for the activities they indulged in. Most of the violence was, in fact, perpetrated by these small gangs whose ability to operate was entirely predicated on the collapse of government authority. It was not neighbors turning on neighbors as the standard "ethnic war" narrative would have it. There was no deep-seated hatred that made people who had been living side by side for centuries suddenly come to hate and kill each other. It is notable that once the central government regained its ability to assert authority in the areas it was supposed to govern, all these gangs were easily crushed (although many members returned to the criminal underground from whence they had emerged under supposedly nationalist banners).<sup>13</sup>

While the rampant ARBiH had been making gains in open fighting against VRS, which had proved itself more capable when it came to taking undefended towns, it was Srebrenica that became the turning point in the war for it finally galvanized the U.S. and much of international opinion, swinging them both toward direct involvement. The Senate voted to lift the arms embargo against the Bosniaks in contravention to the UNSC Resolution. The Russians protested, threatened to arm the Serbs, and warned that they were categorically opposed to any NATO bombardment. The British still refused to act, and so did the French who had at least become more bellicose under their new President Jacques Chirac (he stated that if the Western democracies did not respond to Srebrenica, they would discredit themselves). Still, NATO committed to the defense of Goražde in addition to its existing commitment to Sarajevo. It would be another Serb attack on Sarajevo on August 28 that would finally prompt the alliance into decisive action. It was the Croats, however, who now took the initiative.

With the U.K. and France unwilling to do anything dramatic, Clinton resolved that the solution would have to involve the partitioning of BiH into two consolidated territories; one held by Croats and Bosniaks, and the other held by the Serbs. This meant that enclaves would have to be eliminated and that population transfers would have to take place. It also meant that Zagreb would have to be allowed to eliminate the rebel Serb state in the Krajina. With considerable American assis-

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<sup>13</sup>John Mueller, "The Banality of Ethnic War," *International Security*, 25:1 (Summer, 2000).

tance and buoyed by the influx of equipment and weapons it was skimming from the transfers to BiH, the Croatian army had been readying its assault for months. On July 22, Tudjman and Izetbegović signed the **Split Agreement**, which committed the Croatian Army to intervention in BiH to relieve the siege of Bihać. This allowed the Croats to advance into Bosnian territory and take key positions that would come useful in the coming attack on the Republic of Serbian Krajina. These moves were not secret: both the Krajina Serbs and the Bosnian Serbs ordered general mobilization, and the U.N. announced its readiness to use air power against the VRS if it tried to take Bihać.

When the attack, dubbed **Operation Storm**, came, it was a *blitzkrieg*. The Croats had mobilized an army of 160,000 well-armed troops with high morale against about 25,000 demoralized Krajina Serbs with almost no equipment. The assault began on August 4, and since neither the VRS nor the Yugoslav Army came to the rescue of the Krajina Serbs, it was devastatingly fast. In three days, the Croat forces overran all of Krajina, and on August 11 the last pocket of Serbian resistance was eliminated. The military casualties were about 250 Croats and 500 Serbs, but in the immediate aftermath of the operation some 150,000 Serbs fled to BiH and Serbia. (In Serbia, the Yugoslav authorities separated the able-bodied males of military age and sent them to join the VRS.) The Croats looted the region, torched many villages, and killed some of the Serbs who had chosen to stay behind. ARBiH units also crossed over from BiH to participate in the looting. By mid August, Croatia had been ethnically cleansed of Serbs. The Croatian War was over.

The operation also boosted the position of the Bosniaks because the joint offensive on August 7 lifted the siege of Bihać, and wiped out (this time permanently) the self-styled Republic of Western Bosnia, whose ruler Abdić the VRS had helped re-install a year earlier. The area was incorporated into one of the Federation's cantons.

The success of the joint operations encouraged the Croat-Muslim allies to plan for a coordinated attack on Republika Srpska. The Bosnian Serbs had already seen the writing on the wall: the tide of war had turned, the Bosniaks had successfully internationalized the conflict, and Milošević was apparently quite willing to abandon erstwhile allies when it was politically expedient to do so. Hard-liners in VRS, however, tried to derail any potential negotiations by resorting to a provocation: on August 28, they fired at Sarajevo's market again. While this time the carnage did not reach the levels of the massacre in February 1994, it was nevertheless significant (43 dead and 75 injured), and it caused an outrage so extensive that the stratagem backfired. Coming as it was on the heels of the Croat-Muslim victories, which had made it possible to contemplate the decisive military defeat of the VRS, the massacre gave NATO the excuse it had been itching to find for months. On August 30, a sizeable squadron of 60 NATO aircraft thoroughly bombed VRS positions, facilities, ammunition dumps, and other sites. Even the Russians, the staunchest supporters the Serbs had, now distanced themselves from them and said that the

NATO strikes were justified.

As the bombing campaign, called **Operation Deliberate Force**, went on, the combined Croat-Bosniak armies also began rolling the VRS in western Bosnia. This, coupled with the obvious inability of the VRS to withstand NATO strikes much longer now threatened to undo all the gains they had obtained over three years of fighting. If the VRS continued to resist, there was a very real possibility that their entire position would collapse, and with it the last vestiges of Milošević's policy of consolidating Serb holdings. Milošević called Karadžić and demanded that the VRS comply with the NATO terms and that Republika Srpska accept him as their representative in the inevitable negotiations that the Americans were now pushing for. He had to threaten a full blockade of the Bosnian Serbs to get them to agree, but agree they did. On September 13, U.S. Assistant Secretary of State **Richard Holbrooke** presented his peace plan to Milošević and the Bosnian Serbs, which he followed with a visit to Tudjman. The ARBiH conquered several towns, as did the Croat army, whose offensive continued for another five days until it was halted by the VRS. Both the Croats and the Bosniaks had rushed to take as much territory as they could in the run-up to the cease-fire so that they could have a strong hand at the negotiating table. The Americans had to impress both on Tudjman and Izetbegović the folly of continuing the fight, but it was the VRS that managed to stop their campaigns. In October, all large-scale fighting ceased. All parties were exhausted and were ready to negotiate under American auspices, with Milošević representing the Bosnian Serbs, Tudjman representing the Bosnian Croats, and Izetbegović representing the Bosniaks.

### **3.6 The Dayton Agreement**

The negotiations opened on November 1, 1995 at the air force base near Dayton, Ohio. The participants were quick to agree on three fundamental principles that would be implemented in the final **Dayton Agreement** (signed on December 14, 1995 in Paris). First, Croatia would be a unified state within the internationally recognized borders. (This meant an end to the Republic of Serbian Krajina.) Second, BiH would be a unified state but a loose confederation consisting of the existing Croat-Muslim Federation of BiH and Republika Srpska. (This meant that the Croat statelet of Herzeg-Bosnia was now officially dissolved.) These constituent entities would be autonomous and share in the control of the central government. Third, the Federation would control 51% of the land, and the Serbs the other 49%. This actually represented a concession to the Serbs if the reference point was **uti possidetis** because the final Croat-Muslim campaigns had left the VRS with about 46% of the territory. Working out the details of the implementation of that division took 20 days: all sides would have to agree to land swaps, which was a difficult thing to do

when one's armed forces controlled territory one would have to give up.<sup>14</sup>

The Serbs were forced to surrender Sarajevo and about 1% of strategic territory in Eastern BiH. In return they were given 4% of mostly mountainous terrain, almost all of it from territories held by the Croats. The Bosniaks were the winners in that exchange as they ended up with about 30% of BiH, including Sarajevo, even though they held about 28%. The territorial division ensured that Republika Srpska would be contiguous (although there was a choke point around Brčko that could be used to split it in half), and the Federation had one exclave northeast of Brčko.

Although Karadžić had to agree to the deal Milošević had made on behalf of Republika Srpska, he was not particularly gracious about it. The Dayton Agreement barred indicted war criminals from holding public office, and this meant that he would have to give up the presidency. Instead, he kept the republic on a wartime footing (under the "state of immediate war danger") throughout 1996, which effectively allowed him to stay by suppressing any opposition, but in July 1996 he had to bow to the inevitable and resign due to considerable international pressure. This incident merely underscored the fact that the Dayton Agreement had effectively frozen the situation that had prevailed on the field. BiH would somehow have to incorporate two entities with different political, legal, and educational institutions. In fact, it would have to incorporate one entity that openly clung to its sovereignty with the obvious goal of seceding at the opportune time in order to join Serbia.

The first order of business after Dayton was the stabilize the country and enforce the cease-fire. The U.N. sent the 60,000-strong Implementation Force (IFOR), of which nearly half were Americans. For reasons we shall discuss shortly, it was very successful in ensuring that violence did not resume. The two constituent entities agreed on a balance of military capabilities in June 1996, leaving the Federation with roughly double the forces of Republika Srpska. The U.S. proceeded to train and equip the ARBiH, now renamed the Federation Army, in order to bring it up to VRS level. The fact that the Federation and the Republika maintained armed forces entirely to defend themselves against each other also signifies the intended temporary solution the Agreement was supposed to provide. It was not at all clear that this strange creation would last.

General wisdom has it that improving economic conditions could help with security. In that respect, BiH did not offer much hope either. The war had left BiH in ruins. Its GDP had fallen to 25% of its 1991 level, unemployment stood at 90%, and over 70% of the population was female (since most men either fled the country to avoid conscription into the various armed forces or had been killed), with up to 50,000 of the women (mostly Bosniak) having been raped at least once. The psychological trauma was immense, widespread, and lasting. Some of it was PTSD due to having lived in a war zone (the citizens of Sarajevo, which suffered the longest

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<sup>14</sup>The territorial transfers also occasioned the flight of thousands of Serbs who left the lands that were going to come under control of the Federation. The Croatian forces thoroughly looted the villages and razed some of the towns in the territories they had to relinquish to the Serbs.

siege in modern history), some of it was due to being a victim of abuse, torture, or rape, some of it was due to witnessing horrifying scenes, and some of it was due to having been forced to commit acts of brutality to escape a similar fate.

All sides had perpetrated barbarous acts, and all had engaged in ethnic cleansing, although the scale of their activities was directly proportional to the size of their forces and the territories they came to control. The Serbs were by far the most active perpetrators, followed by the Croats, and then the Bosniaks. The **International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia** (ICTY) established in 1993 investigated members of the Yugoslav government (e.g., Milošević), the JNA, the Croatian government (e.g., Tudjman), the Croatian Army, the Bosnian Croat government, the HVO, the Bosnian Serb government (e.g., Karadžić), the VRS (e.g., Mladić), the Croatian Serb government, Croat and Serb detention camp directors and staff, the Bosniak government (e.g., Izetbegović), and the ARBiH.<sup>15</sup>

This leads us to the question of ethnic violence, which is often used to depict the Yugoslav Wars of Succession, and which was the excuse the Europeans and, until 1995, the Americans used to justify their non-intervention. People often try to affect profundity by appealing to “deep causes” that are said to go back centuries; as in the bloody and complex history of the Balkans somehow producing these people who carry around deep-seated hatreds for each other (on religious and/or ethnic markers), and who, given the first opportunity to do so, set upon each other, neighbor or neighbor, despite having lived together peacefully for decades. There are also the references to the atrocities committed by the Croats during World War II (which were indeed massive) and, less often, to the atrocities committed by the Partisans and the Chetniks during the same period. Apparently, Tito had somehow suppressed all these violent tendencies but when he died, they all came back to the surface when unscrupulous politicians mobilized the populations along ethnic lines.

The problem with this supposedly deep-seated hatred is that there is no evidence of it being particularly widespread, just as the problem with this dormant extremist nationalism is that it was similarly limited to fringe elements. As noted previously, neighbors did not kill neighbors; instead, it was gangs of sadistic thugs that perpetrated most of the “ethnic” violence. It is true that Milošević used appeals to Serbian history to embrace the protection of Serbs who felt marginalized within Yugoslavia, and specifically in Kosovo. This enabled him to consolidate power in Serbia since it was quite difficult to argue against him except to say “this is not what Tito would have wanted” or “this might destroy Yugoslavia.” The economy was in serious trouble and the 1974 Constitution had deliberately reduced the influence of the Serbs in the Federation. Milošević tried to remake Yugoslavia with Serbia, as the largest republic, in the lead but ran into the determined opposition of Slovenia and Croatia, whose leadership was casting about to legitimize itself in the wake of

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<sup>15</sup>Milošević died while on trial and was found guilty of criminal negligence, Tudjman was found guilty posthumously, and Izetbegović’s investigation was revealed only after his death. Both Karadžić and Mladić are currently on trial.

the collapse of the communist party. Croatia, in particular, posed a serious problem because of its violent past: when its government moved toward secession under Tudjman's nationalist banner, the substantial Serbian minority there began to fear that it could be reduced to second-class citizenship. The memories of the Second World War played a role here because it provided a ready-made example that could be used to stoke these fears. These Serbs provided a ready support base to Milošević, whose failure to keep Yugoslavia together had only resulted in his reorientation to pursue a scheme for Greater Serbia. In order to incorporate Serb-held territories in Croatia and BiH, he had to engineer a conflict so that the threatened Serbs could appeal to him for protection — this is, in fact, a time-tested method for great powers to get themselves involved in various places where they lack the legitimacy to do otherwise. Croatia had given him the perfect excuse when the Serbs around Knin organized, but BiH was not so obliging. To get the conflict there, Milošević sent irregulars to terrorize the Muslim population until the Muslims retaliated with their own gangs, providing the JNA with the pretext for intervention on behalf of the Serbs. The plan actually worked quite well and 70% of BiH fell to the Serbs early on. No ethnic hatreds are necessary to explain any of this.

There was also widespread avoidance of military service, which undermines the ethnic and nationalist interpretations. Even in war-torn BiH, where Muslims could reasonably be considered the victims of aggression, many men fled to avoid being impressed into the army. Desertion rates from the VRS had left its ranks seriously depleted and made it necessary to resort to monetary incentives (e.g., from looting) to keep the rest in some semblance of battle-readiness. Draft-dodging was also so widespread in Serbia that only about half of the reservists reported for duty, and the figure for the major cities was even lower (15% in Belgrade). Many Serbs also emigrated to avoid having to fight. There were also many anti-Milošević demonstrations during the war (in Belgrade in particular.) It was, in fact, this lack of support for the nationalist cause (with so few, apparently, willing to die for it) that led Milošević to the tactic of arming irregulars and civilians to get the conflict going. Whatever they lacked in effectiveness, the paramilitary can make up with spontaneity and casual cruelty. Paramilitaries not only tended to sustain themselves through looting but also occasionally traded with the enemy as long as there was profit to be made. Once unleashed, they proved very difficult to control, as Milošević would find out to his chagrin. However, the very nature of these murderous gangs also made it very easy to halt them as long as they could be confronted with an actual order. This, in part, is the reason for the rapid success of the Croat Army, NATO, and IFOR.

## 4 Kosovo and the Fall of Milošević, 1998–2000

With the Dayton Accords, Tito's Yugoslavia officially and permanently dissolved into its six constituent republics, now independent states: Slovenia, Croatia, Macedonia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, and Serbia. But Serbia and Montenegro still clung to some of the Yugoslav legacy: they had created a new federal state, also called Yugoslavia, but in which Serbia unquestionably took the lead. While Montenegro chafed under Milošević's heavy-handed rule, it would be in Serbia itself that the final blow to Yugoslavia in any form would come. Just like it was Kosovo that put Milošević on the political scene — with the dreadful consequences we have examined — it was Kosovo again that spelled the doom not merely of his career, but of Serbia's unity as well.

The riots of the Kosovars had given Milošević the opportunity to embrace the Serbian cause and rise to dominance in the communist party. He had managed to wrest political control of the province from the regional (Albanian) communists, and his cronies had given him the votes to snuff out its autonomy. Kosovo's administration, economy, law and order, and security were all now handled in Belgrade, and soon a flurry of changes were imposed on the province from there. In August 1990, the new teaching curriculum effectively eliminated the Albanian language, history, and literature, replacing it all with their Serbian analogues. All Albanian students were expelled from the University of Priština, and soon Albanian professors were booted out as well. Albanian-language newspapers as well as TV and radio broadcasts were banned. The purges of Albanian professionals quickly extended to the courts, factories, hospitals, and the police. Since most government jobs also came with state-owned apartments, those who were fired also found themselves homeless. The vacant positions were filled with Serbs, many of whom were lured from elsewhere in Serbia with promises of a good career, affordable housing, and good economic prospects overall. In January 1995, Belgrade offered 40-year loans to Serbs who would build new houses in the province on the land they received from the government (almost invariably taken from Albanians who had been forced out). The authorities also engaged in frequent harassment of Albanians: beating them while in custody, ejecting them from their homes, and ransacking their businesses. Unemployment among Albanians reached 80% with the attending catastrophic poverty.

The policies quickly bore the initial fruit: by 1989, over 400,000 Albanians left Kosovo. This, of course, was precisely what they were intended to do: force the Albanians out of Kosovo, which (given the hostility they faced in Serbia and most other Balkan states) meant going either to Albania or to Macedonia, and "repopulating" the province with Serbs. But the policies had to run afoul of some very simple arithmetic: in 1991, the Albanians constituted 82% of the population in the province (their number was estimated — because they boycotted the official census — at about 1.6 million). If one adds the other Muslims (3.4%), the Roma (2.3%), and the Turks, (0.5%), none of whom were going to fare well under the new poli-

cies, the fraction of the population Belgrade intended to discriminate against was fully 88% of the total. There was bound to be a response.

In the spring of 1993, the Kosovar Albanians began to organize themselves in resistance groups. But the groups were small, disconnected with one another, and had very little in way of arms (which had to be smuggled from abroad). There was some hope that the Dayton Agreement would somehow address their plight, but of course it did no such thing. Since Milošević seemed intent on carrying on with his policies, the Albanians started to carry out attacks on Serbs, often targeting police and prominent individuals. By 1997, the dominant, but shadowy, resistance organization calling itself the **Kosovo Liberation Army** (KLA) was claiming responsibility for much of the violence. Although this was an army in name only, the group did manage to arm itself rather well by buying weapons at rock bottom prices from people who had raided the arms depots in southern Albania during an uprising there between December 1996 and March 1997.

Still, the KLA did not have any heavy armaments and was no match for the Yugoslav Army. The organization, therefore, decided on terrorist tactics designed to provoke Serbian reprisals that would, in turn, increase the support for KLA, and perhaps result in a foreign intervention (most likely NATO) to halt the bloodshed. The KLA duly ended up on the U.S. list of terrorist organizations although Washington did not do anything to curtail its access to funds. The Serbian security forces used the KLA as a pretext to suppress demonstrators during the periodic protests that now regularly rocked Kosovo. But by November, the U.N. General Assembly began to take note of the human rights violations by the Serbian police in Kosovo.

In July 1997, President (and long-ruling dictator) Berisha of Albania resigned and in the chaos that ensued many weapons found their way into the hands of the KLA. This enabled it to switch to a more acceptable guerilla strategy just when the Serbian security forces were getting mired. The KLA declared insurrection and quickly overran about 40% of the countryside. They had, however, badly underestimated Serbia's power and determination and seriously overestimated the international resolve to do anything on their behalf. The Yugoslav Army launched several highly successful operations and rolled back the resistance. By September 1998, more than 700 Albanians were dead, and now 265,000 were homeless.

The international community limited itself to condemnations of Serbia's actions and NATO issued a series of "last warnings", apparently oblivious to what the word 'last' meant. To no one's surprise, Milošević escalated the military's involvement in the province, beefing up the Yugoslav Army forces there to 29,000 by March 1999. The Yugoslav Army's chief of staff warned that Milošević's strategy would lead Serbia into a war with NATO, and was fired from his post for this trouble. As in the previous wars, Belgrade also organized paramilitary gangs with criminals it released from jail, hooligans, and assorted thugs. Attracted by the promise of quick loot and the ability to engage in as much violence as they wanted without fear of government prosecution, these elements lost no time plundering Kosovo.



The cycle of KLA attacks and Serbian reprisals continued throughout 1998, and culminated in the January 15, 1999 Račak incident with the murder of 45 people, some of them children. There is considerable controversy about what happened at the village. The generally accepted version is that after KLA attacks in the region had caused several fatalities, Serb police and Yugoslav army units moved to Račak to track and kill the guerillas responsible. The village was surrounded and shelled. Police then went door-to-door arresting about 20 people (later found murdered in a gully outside the village), and executed some in their homes. Although it was initially thought that all victims were Albanian civilians, later forensic examinations revealed that some of the bodies were of KLA fighters and some of Serb forces.

At any rate, the Račak incident was interpreted as a deliberate massacre in the West, and on the 30th, NATO issued a combined ultimatum to Yugoslavia (that it would be bombed) and the Kosovars (that they would be abandoned to the Serbs) to force them to the negotiating table. The solution envisioned by the West would restore Kosovo to its pre-1990 autonomy, and introduce democratic reforms in the region under international supervision. The resulting Rambouillet (France) talks started on February 6, 1999 and broke up on March 19 without reaching an agreement. This was not surprising, however, since both sides negotiated in bad faith: the solution that was being imposed on them was not acceptable to either one. The Kosovars did not want to go back to being part of Serbia, and the Serbs did not want international presence in the province. In the end, the Kosovars, having discerned the anti-Serbian tilt of the West, were rewarded for their intransigence. The **Rambouillet Accords** they signed with the Americans and the British called for NATO administration of an autonomous province of Kosovo, along with assorted insults to Yugoslav sovereignty (such as free passage of NATO troops, and immunity from Yugoslav law). The Serbs rejected this (along with the Russians) and countered with their own unacceptable proposal, and the talks ended in mutual recriminations for their failure.

While the talks were dragging on, the Serb forces continued their offensive in Kosovo. The total number of Albanians killed in the province now topped 2,000, and the number of homeless reached 459,000 (of whom 199,000 had fled abroad). As the NATO deadline for Serbian compliance approached, Milošević reinforced the Serb forces in Kosovo with heavy equipment, including tanks. The strategy was to use the cover of military operations to cleanse Kosovo of Albanians.

On March 24, NATO began its bombing campaign against targets in Serbia, Kosovo, and Montenegro. The goal was to force the Serbs back to the negotiating table and compel them to agree to the Rambouillet Accords. The campaign did not go well at first because of bad weather, and because the Serbs intensified their scorched earth policies, causing a widespread exodus of Albanians from Kosovo. The refugees now exceeded 855,000, and they fled to neighboring Albania and Macedonia, greatly destabilizing the latter. NATO attacked military targets, as well as bridges, factories, roads, and communications across Serbia. As the aerial

bombardment continued, NATO began to contemplate seriously a ground invasion. However, the campaign finally persuaded Milošević that NATO would not abandon its goals. When he realized that despite their brave talk the Russians would not help Yugoslavia, he agreed, in principle, to U.N. military presence in Kosovo. The ceasefire went into effect on June 9, ending the military operations that had resulted in about 5,000 military dead in Kosovo, about 1,500 civilians in Yugoslavia, and another 1,500 in Kosovo on the Serbian side; along with about 5,000 dead Albanians.<sup>16</sup>

Since the KLA had not been party to the agreement between the U.N. (NATO) and Yugoslavia, the fact that the agreement banned paramilitary groups means that the KLA might refuse to abide by its terms. After tense negotiations with the NATO commanders, the KLA agreed to disarm and disband although evidence suggests that compliance has been far from complete. The Yugoslav forces withdrew from the province in accordance with the agreement. The **Kosovo International Security Force** (KFOR) arrived on June 12, and Kosovo became a U.N. protectorate although still technically part of Yugoslavia. According to its **Resolution 1244** of June 10, 1999, the UNSC committed to the “sovereignty and territorial integrity of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia,” and guaranteed Kosovo’s autonomy. Of the KFOR’s peak force of 42,500 troops, the Americans had contributed the most (7,000), followed by the Germans (5,800), and the French (4,700). All in all, 27 countries send troops to stabilize the province. Reconstruction was going to be difficult: over 120,000 houses were destroyed and five years later unemployment was still at 60%. Many Kosovars, especially the young, emigrated abroad, further diminishing the prospects for indigenous recovery. During the first year after the war, the European Union and the United States contributed 88% of the province’s budget (75% by the Europeans).

Milošević did not survive the debacle for long: in the summer of 2000, he had the former Serbian president Stambolić kidnapped and murdered, and when he rejected the opposition’s victory in the elections in September 2000, mass demonstrations in Belgrade led to the collapse of his regime, and the installation of the opposition’s leader Kostunica as President of Yugoslavia on October 6. Milošević was arrested on April 1, 2001 and handed over to the U.N. International Criminal Tribunal at The Hague to be prosecuted on charges of genocide in Bosnia and war crimes in Croatia and Kosovo. The trial began in February 2002, but Milošević died of a heart attack in his cell on March 11, 2006.

The Federal Republic of Yugoslavia also fell apart when Montenegro formally declared independence on June 3, 2006.<sup>17</sup> Serbia declared its own independence

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<sup>16</sup>The largest mass grave uncovered thus far contains Serbs and anti-KLA Albanians, who were probably still alive when NATO forces moved into the province. The aftermath was also somewhat embarrassing for NATO because even though the Albanians returned, close to 250,000 Serbs fled or were expelled from the province.

<sup>17</sup>It was already renamed in 2002 to the “State Union of Serbia and Montenegro”.

two days later and became the legal successor to Yugoslavia. With this, Serbia's territorial integrity should have been guaranteed by UNSCR 1244, and so any revision of the borders would have to be only with its consent. In February 2007, the U.N. envoy proposed "supervised independence" for Kosovo, but the Russians threatened to veto any resolution that was not acceptable to the Serbs. Although the U.S. favored independence for the province, Washington backed down and the draft resolution was withdrawn.

On February 17, 2008 Kosovo declared independence and as of today (February 2016), its status is uncertain. A number of entities recognize it as an independent state: 108 U.N. member states (56%), 23 E.U. member states (82%), 28 NATO member states (86%), as well as the IMF, the World Bank, and the EBRD. Three of the permanent members of the U.N. Security Council also recognize it (U.S., U.K., and France), with China and Russia considering the declaration illegal and supporting the principles of sovereignty and territorial integrity.<sup>18</sup> The only major Western European country that does not recognize Kosovo's independence is Spain, for the obvious reasons what precedent such an action could set for its own separatists in Catalonia and Basque Country (who all have strongly supported Kosovo). For analogous reasons, Ukraine has also refused to recognize it. Bosnia and Herzegovina does not recognize it because Republika Srpska is opposed. Of course, Serbia does not recognize it either although its government has normalized relations with the authorities in Kosovo.

Clinton's refusal to commit ground troops for the Kosovo campaign has been roundly criticized but it was a good decision. Kosovo was no Iraq, the difficult mountainous terrain would prevent the easy deployment of armor and its use with overwhelming power like in the desert. In practical terms this would mean serious fighting and body bags coming home, which in turn would raise the possibility of another Somalia, giving Milošević bargaining power to exploit. As it was, the NATO strikes compelled him to withdraw his forces from Kosovo and NATO troops moved in to keep the peace. When done properly, judicious intervention could be successful.

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<sup>18</sup>Russia's position was complicated by its own actions in 2014 when it recognized the declaration of independence of the Republic of Crimea. The declaration, ironically, explicitly referred to Kosovo's declaration of independence and cited the decision of the International Court of Justice that such unilateral declarations are not inconsistent with international law.