

The Disintegration of Yugoslavia

Author(s): Lenard J. Cohen

Source: *Current History*, Vol. 91, No. 568, Europe (NOVEMBER 1992), pp. 369-375

Published by: University of California Press

Stable URL: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/45316718>

Accessed: 01-04-2022 21:38 UTC

JSTOR is a not-for-profit service that helps scholars, researchers, and students discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content in a trusted digital archive. We use information technology and tools to increase productivity and facilitate new forms of scholarship. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of the Terms & Conditions of Use, available at <https://about.jstor.org/terms>



University of California Press is collaborating with JSTOR to digitize, preserve and extend access to *Current History*

JSTOR

"Two... factors... are particularly significant for understanding the violent dissolution of the Yugoslav federation. One is the persistence and intensification of deep antagonisms among the country's diverse ethnic and religious groups.... The second is the failure of political leaders... to agree on a new model of political and economic coexistence."

The Disintegration of Yugoslavia

BY LENARD J. COHEN

Once again the vexatious political problems of the Balkans have resulted in regime breakdown, ethnic violence, and human suffering. Between the summer of 1991 and the spring of 1992 the Yugoslav federation designed by Josip Broz Tito's Communist regime completely disintegrated, and was replaced by several successor states. Three of the republics in the former federation—Croatia, Slovenia, and Bosnia and Herzegovina—established their independence through unilateral "disassociation" from the Yugoslav state and, despite the armed struggles that then ensued on their territories, were soon recognized by the international community.* A fourth republic, Macedonia, also proclaimed independence, but its recognition was postponed after Greece complained that a state with that name would have territorial aspirations to its northern province of Macedonia.

International acceptance also eluded the two remaining republics, Serbia and Montenegro, which endeavored to inherit the mantle of the former Yugoslav state. This "remodeled" Yugoslavia failed to obtain international recognition because of the widely held belief that Serbian President Slobodan Milosevic was masterminding military aggression against Croatia and Bosnia.

Why did Yugoslavia collapse, and why has that collapse generated so much violence and suffering? Answers to those questions abound, ranging from conventional observations that the state was doomed to disintegrate as a result of internal contradictions to recent arguments that the international community failed to prevent the spread of violence. Two other

factors, however, are particularly significant for understanding the violent dissolution of the Yugoslav federation: one is the persistence and intensification of deep antagonisms among the country's diverse ethnic and religious groups. The second is the failure of political leaders, who came to power in multiparty elections in 1990, to agree on a new model of political and economic co-existence that could have preserved some form of Yugoslav state unity, but would have also permitted expanded "sovereignty" of the federation's territorial units and ethnic groups. The combined impact of heightened ethnic and religious animosities and failed political leadership not only contributed to the demise of Yugoslavia, but also unleashed the violent ethnic strife consuming the former federation.

IN THE "PRISM OF HISTORY"

Balkan society is known for its pronounced religious and ethnic diversity and for its intractable pattern of group antagonisms. Throughout much of Balkan history the region's heterogeneity has been nurtured to maintain authoritarian rule. For example, the contending Ottoman and Hapsburg empires, which asserted hegemony over the various South Slav ethnic groups between the late fourteenth and early sixteenth centuries, maintained political control until the early twentieth century through several divide-and-rule strategies, including the segmentation of religious communities.

Despite those imperial policies, some members of the nonruling intelligentsia sought to forge closer ties among different ethnically related communities. One such initiative, the "Yugoslav idea," elaborated by Croatian intellectuals during the first part of the nineteenth century, advocated closer cultural and political ties among the various South Slav peoples. Although it attracted considerable support among the South Slav intelligentsia, and provided an important option for political change as imperial rule waned just before and during World War I, the Yugoslav idea enjoyed little support from others in the region.

Its limited popular support notwithstanding, a unified Yugoslav state was created in 1918, bringing together several South Slav and non-Slav ethnic groups.

LENARD J. COHEN is a professor of political science at Simon Fraser University in Canada. His books include *Political Cohesion in a Fragile Mosaic: The Yugoslav Experience* (Boulder, Col.: Westview Press, 1983), and *The Socialist Pyramid: Elites and Power in Yugoslavia* (Oakville, Ontario: Mosaic Press, 1989). He is currently completing *Broken Bonds: The Disintegration of the Yugoslav State* (Boulder, Col.: Westview Press, forthcoming).

*In this article, Bosnia is used as the shortened form of the country's name.

"If we have to fight, well then we will fight. But I hope they are not going to be crazy enough to fight with us. For if we don't know how to work and produce that well, at least we will know how to fight well."

**Slobodan Milosevic, President of Serbia
March 16, 1991**

While the state's Belgrade-based political regimes largely abandoned the earlier imperial policies of group division, their attempts to induce a pan-ethnic "Yugoslav" consciousness during most of the next 73 years only aggravated ethnic antagonisms. Whether under the Serbian dominated unitary state between the two World Wars, or the more ethnically balanced but oppositionless Communist federation established by Tito, ethnic grievances continued to accumulate. Short-lived periods of political contestation or liberalization—such as the fragmented multiparty system of the 1920s, and the factionalized one-party socialist pluralism Tito reluctantly permitted in the second part of the 1960s—proved to be episodes of ethnic and political rivalry that did not offer the opportunity for the reconciliation of group animosities. Pre-Communist and Communist political elites in Belgrade, just as earlier rulers in Constantinople, Vienna, and Budapest, managed to constrain widespread ethnic conflict for long periods of time, but deep-seated ethnic resentments persisted, simmering beneath the façade of stability and cohesion.

Historically, the potential for ethnic- and religious-based violence in the Balkans has been most evident during periods of regime crisis and breakdown (for example, the last phase of Ottoman control leading to the Balkan Wars, the final throes of Hapsburg rule, and the collapse and dismemberment of the Yugoslav state in 1941). Discussing his native Bosnian society in the period just before World War I, the Nobel Prize-winning author Ivo Andric captured how seemingly tranquil group relations have exploded into an orgy of mutual blood-letting when the political system has broken down. In an illustrative case, Andric describes the "Sarajevo frenzy of hate" that erupted among Muslims, Roman Catholics, and Orthodox believers following the assassination on June 28, 1914, of Archduke Franz Ferdinand in Sarajevo:

Adherents of the three main faiths...hate one another from birth to death, senselessly and profoundly.... [O]ften, they spent their entire lives without finding an opportunity to express that hatred in all its facets and horror; but

whenever the established order of things is shaken by some important event, and reason and law are suspended for a few hours or days, then this mob or rather a section of it, finding at last an adequate motive, overflows into the town...and, like a flame which has sought and has at last found fuel, these long-kept hatreds and hidden desires for destruction and violence take over the town, lapping, sputtering, and swallowing everything, until some force larger than themselves suppresses them, or until they burn themselves out and tire of their own rage.¹

An even more widespread frenzy of hatred among nationalities and religious groups during World War II resulted in the loss of approximately one-tenth of Yugoslavia's population. The wartime atrocities and political polarization bequeathed a pattern of emotional scars that were masked by the Communist system's promising slogans ("Brotherhood and Unity," "Equality of Nations"), pan-ethnic strategies, and political uniformity.

THE POLITICS OF INTRANSIGENCE

The important role played by tradition and other historical factors in the violent disintegration of Yugoslavia is closely linked to the country's recent political leadership. The future of the Yugoslav federation was profoundly affected during the late 1980s by the ascendance of nationalist political leaders devoted to the radical alteration or even dissolution of the state. Many of these nationalist leaders first appeared within the higher ranks of the ruling League of Yugoslav Communists (LCY), where their emergence was connected with the failure of Tito's heirs to find a way out of the country's serious economic and political crisis. Thus, as Yugoslavia's standard of living deteriorated sharply in the second half of the 1980s, quarrels among the country's regionally based and ethnically divided political elites intensified. Without the presence of a powerful figure such as Tito to maintain cohesion, regional leaders took advantage of the formally decentralized structure of both the LCY and the state in order to develop their own strategies for crisis management and reform.

In Serbia a relatively new figure on the political scene, Slobodan Milosevic, was able to quickly mobilize strong support in the second half of the 1980s by capitalizing on Serbian grievances regarding Albanian nationalism in the province of Kosovo, as well as Serbia's alleged lack of influence in the Yugoslav federation. As members of the nationality that had been the core force in the creation of the Yugoslav state in 1918, had been the predominant group in the wartime Communist movement, and also composed the largest ethnic group in the country, most Serbs believed their interests were inadequately recognized at the federal level.

¹Gospodjica (Zagreb: Mladost, 1961), p. 77.

Through his brash articulation of Serbia's political discontent, and particularly his populist mobilization of Serbian ethnic consciousness at mass rallies—sometimes referred to as “street democracy”—Milosevic challenged the oligarchic Titoist style of managing the “national question” and also provoked a sharp nationalist backlash from Yugoslavia’s other republics and ethnic groups. In Slovenia, for example, where popular support for enhanced regional and ethnic autonomy and opposition to the federal system had been growing for several years, reform Communists soon crossed swords with Milosevic on matters such as constitutional change, the reorganization of the LCY, and the problem of Kosovo. Citizens and leaders in Croatia and the other republics also watched the growing Serbian nationalism with trepidation, but until the disintegration of the LCY in early 1990 did little to advance their own ethnic or regional concerns.

As the aftershocks of the democratic earthquake that rocked eastern Europe in the fall of 1989 reached the Balkans, Yugoslavia’s failed and fragmented Communist elites were forced to grudgingly embrace the concept of party pluralism. Unable to resolve the country’s serious economic and political crises, or to even maintain the party’s unity, Communist leaders could no longer defend the contradictory admixture of one-party monopoly and “self-management” that had been the hallmark of Yugoslav socialism. The result was the multiparty elections held throughout Yugoslavia’s republics from April to December 1990 that marked a watershed in the country’s political development. In several republics (Slovenia, Croatia, Bosnia, and Macedonia) the ruling Communists were defeated by non-Communist, center-right parties. In other areas (Serbia, Vojvodina, and Montenegro), former Communist elites and party organizations—reconfigured and sometimes newly labeled “socialist”—retained power, but were now forced to deal with a small but vocal parliamentary and extra-parliamentary non-Communist opposition. By the fall of 1990 over 200 political parties had been formed, the majority of which were small, regionally based organizations striving to advance specific ethnic interests.

Although the elections of 1990 were an impressive exercise in regime transition, the results left the country even more politically fragmented than it had been during the last days of Communist rule. Thus, whether born-again Communists or non-Communists, both the newly elected political authorities and the bulk of the opposition forces in all regions of Yugoslavia were committed to programs of regional and ethnic nationalism that seriously challenged the power of the federal system. Yugoslavia’s prime minister, Ante Markovic, attempted to reorient the government’s policy along post-Communist lines and carry out country-wide economic reforms, but his ability to implement these measures was persistently stymied by the policies of contending ethnic and regional groups. Moreover,

“There is a tradition of oral aggression in the Balkans. Someone will say ‘I’m going to kill him. I am going to kill him.’ But then they will add ‘please stop me before I kill him’ . . . If the killing starts nobody will be able to stop it.”

**Slaven Letica, Adviser to the President
of Croatia**
March 26, 1991

the fact that the most influential republics (Serbia, Croatia, and Slovenia) were now governed by popularly elected political leaders devoted to sharply conflicting visions of the country’s future constitutional organization, also undermined Markovic’s efforts to introduce any long-term reforms.

In Croatia, for example, the new government led by Franjo Tudjman’s Croatian Democratic Alliance supported—along with the new post-Communist government in Slovenia—the transformation of the existing Yugoslav federation into a “confederation of sovereign states.” Leaders in both republics said they were prepared to unilaterally “disassociate” from the Yugoslav federal structure should planned negotiations in 1991 among the republican leaders on the country’s future prove unsuccessful. In Serbia, Milosevic, who had finally consolidated his power in a competitive (albeit not fully democratic) election, remained strongly committed to what he termed a “modern federation,” that is, an arrangement in which the country’s dispersed Serbian population would remain united in a single state and would enjoy enhanced political influence. Milosevic’s views on constitutional questions, and particularly his opposition to the idea of a confederation, were shared by the large Serbian contingent in the country’s military establishment, as well as by top “Yugoslav-oriented” officers from other ethnic groups who—either because of their Communist political backgrounds or professional self-interests—strongly objected to proposals by new non-Communist elites advocating military depoliticization, cuts in the armed forces, and a further devolution of political power.

THE ANSWER TO THE “SERBIAN QUESTION”

It did not take long for the various positions concerning the constitutional transformation of the country to become entangled with the emotionally charged “Serbian question”—disputes concerning the rights and status of the 25 percent of Yugoslavia’s Serbs living outside the Serbian republic. The majority of these dispersed Serbs—who were concentrated in Bosnia and in Croatia, where they had suffered greatly at the hands of the Croatian fascist regime during World War II—feared proposals by the newly elected nationalist government in Croatia to divide the country

into separate states, and also its suggestions that Croatia and Bosnia become more closely associated. Angst among Croatia's Serbs intensified when the Tudjman regime adopted new constitutional provisions in 1990 that referred to the republic as the sovereign state of the Croats and other nations living in Croatia, but no longer explicitly recognized the republic's Serbian community (12.2 percent of Croatia's population in 1991) as a major ethnic group. The constitutional provisions also designated the use of traditional Croatian ethnic symbols (a coat of arms, flag, and national anthem) as the republic's official insignia.

While the new symbolism was offensive to many of Croatia's Serbs, their deeper fear was that Tudjman planned to sever Croatia from the Yugoslav state—either by creating a loose confederation or by outright secession—which would leave the Serbs at the political mercy of a Croatian majority and nationalist government. The anxiety of the Serb minority was particularly intense in the Krajina area, where it constituted a majority of the population. Statements by Croatian authorities that minority rights in the republic would be respected were deeply mistrusted in the Serb community, and were at odds with the nationalist and anti-Serb rhetoric frequently adopted by President Tudjman and certain quarters of his party's leadership. Serbian anxiety was also fueled by the steady and sensational campaign of anti-Croatian propaganda emanating from Serb nationalists in Belgrade.

For the Milosevic regime—obsessed with the idea of preserving the federal state and enhancing Serbian influence—support for the “unity” of the Serbs and particularly the protection of the large Serb communities in Croatia and Bosnia, was a crucial bargaining chip in discussions about Yugoslavia's future. Thus, Milosevic claimed that he did not oppose the self-determination of Yugoslavia's nations, or even legal secession by the republics, as long as those rights did not infringe on the equal right of Serbs in a particular republic to exercise self-determination. Accordingly, Milosevic maintained, if a majority of citizens in Croatia or Bosnia, for example, desired their independence from the Yugoslav state, the borders of those republics must be changed in order to protect the interests of local Serb inhabitants.

Driven by his broader goal of assuring Yugoslav unity under Serbian influence, Milosevic encouraged the country's diasporic Serb communities to push for self-determination while still carefully withholding Serbia's full recognition of their political autonomy or acceptance of their plans to become part of the Serbian republic. By keeping the Serbian question on the front burner and opening the issue of border changes, Milosevic and his allies in the Yugoslav People's Army (JNA) hoped they could prevent Croatia's Tudjman—and also the closely allied Croat and Muslim leaders of Bosnia—from making any hasty decisions about leav-

ing the Yugoslav federation. Moreover, should negotiations collapse, Milosevic calculated that the Serbian question could serve as a pretext for federally sponsored armed intervention that would forestall either Croatia's or Bosnia's secession. The tactic of directing attention to the dispersed Serbs in Yugoslavia also suited Milosevic's domestic agenda: by turning a spotlight on the alleged plight of the Serbs, Milosevic hoped to deflect attention from his socialist regime's authoritarian cast and also to appeal for political unity and support against the Serbs' putative internal and external enemies.

For Tudjman, if there was any real Serbian question at all worth considering, it was essentially whether the Serbs in Croatia—and particularly the roughly one-quarter of that group living in the Krajina—would acknowledge the republic's sovereignty, or whether Croatia's authorities would have to take stronger measures to maintain law and order. Claiming that from August 1990 to March 1991 his government had refrained from using force against the armed Krajina Serbs who had blocked roads, seized control of local facilities, and established autonomous enclaves, an exasperated Tudjman threatened on April 4 that Croatia would no longer accept such behavior: “We have played democracy for long enough and it is high time to say that Croatia is a republic and that it has a right to establish order.”

As talks among the leaders of the republics on Yugoslavia's future proceeded between January and June 1991, the Serbian question became a major impediment to any compromise between the advocates of federalism or confederalism. Progress was also obstructed by the inability of most republic leaders to move from fixed positions or retreat from maximum goals.

This intransigence created a vicious cycle of escalating tension and an inevitable drift toward disintegration and violence. Increasingly pessimistic that they could negotiate the creation of a confederation, and fearing they might have to fight their way out of the existing federation, the leaders of Slovenia and Croatia began to expand their own armed forces (including importing arms, which was technically illegal under federal laws). Meanwhile, the leaders of Serbia and their allies in the JNA, unwilling to compromise on their goal of preserving Yugoslavia as an only slightly remodeled federation, exerted unrelenting pressure on the new governments in Ljubljana and Zagreb to abandon their plans for sovereignty and to disband their budding armies.

Disputes concerning the question of imported arms and the buildup of military forces by the republics cast a shadow over the interrepublic summit meetings during the first half of 1991, with Slovenia and Croatia calling for the depoliticization of the JNA, and the JNA working both overtly and covertly to undermine the position of the non-Communist nationalist leaders in

Zagreb and Ljubljana. For their part, Croatian authorities were particularly enraged over growing cooperation between federal military forces and local Serb militias, a relationship that had developed after JNA units had intervened in Croatian communities in which there had been outbursts of Serb-Croat violence.

When Serbia, together with its two provinces and Montenegro, connived in mid-May 1991 to block the planned rotation of the collective presidency's Croatian representative to the annual post of state president, Croatia became even more determined to leave the Yugoslav federation. Slovenia's problems with the JNA—which had focused on who would control the republic's Territorial Defense forces (a local militia established by the Tito regime in the late 1960s) and had led to several face-offs in 1991—also propelled that republic's nationalist leadership into a more intransigent position.

While most of the country's major civilian and military leaders recognized the danger of violence if they failed to reach agreement, they proved woefully inept in finding a way out of the looming disaster. The posturing on the seemingly intractable federation-confederation dispute, saber rattling by all sides, and leadership mishandling or outright manipulation of the explosive Serbian question hastened the destruction of an already fragile country. An awkward last-ditch Bosnian-Macedonian proposal, designed as a compromise between the contending federal and confederal options, was given short shrift by the negotiating parties and did nothing to halt Yugoslavia's slide toward disintegration. In late June, when Slovenia and Croatia finally made good on their frequent threats to unilaterally declare independence, the JNA responded with force and the country entered a new phase of military struggle and civil strife.

THE INTERNATIONALIZATION OF THE CRISIS

The first armed conflict precipitated by the dissolution of the Yugoslav federation was a ten-day war in mid-1991 in which Slovenian forces defeated units of the JNA. That war was followed by more protracted hostilities, first in Croatia and then in Bosnia, involving remnants of the JNA, military and police units under the command of those states's new political authorities, as well as armed groups linked to various local ethnic communities (Serbs versus Croats in Croatia and Serbs versus Croats and Muslims in Bosnia). The military struggles in Croatia and Bosnia triggered the eruption of ethnic violence on a scale not seen in those regions since World War II. By the summer of 1992—after thousands of people had been killed and injured and more than 2.5 million people had been forced to flee their homes—the international community had become actively engaged in a frustrating effort to dampen hostilities, provide humanitarian relief, and negotiate a long-term political settlement among the region's new states.

The violent dismemberment of Yugoslavia occurred just as the cold war ended, but before new mechanisms for conflict management had been established to deal with a crisis of this proportion. As a result, the international response to the Yugoslav breakup has been incoherent and hastily contrived. For example, the European Community (EC) and the United States in June 1991 sent signals encouraging Yugoslavia's unity and strongly discouraging Slovenia's and Croatia's planned unilateral disassociation from the existing federation for fear it might set a dangerous precedent for the Soviet Union, which probably encouraged the Yugoslav federal government and the JNA to employ force against the two breakaway republics. While Secretary of State James Baker 3d may have evenhandedly expressed American opposition to secession by the republics and the use of armed force to settle political disputes during a visit to Belgrade on June 21, the JNA top command apparently chose to view Washington's emphatic support for Yugoslavia's cohesion as a green light for military intervention should secession occur.

Shortly after hostilities began in Slovenia, the EC successfully negotiated a cease-fire and an agreement that provided for a three-month moratorium on further moves toward independence by Croatia and Slovenia. The agreement also included EC-sponsored negotiations among the republics about their future, and an understanding that Stipe Mesic, the Croatian representative in the collective state presidency, would finally assume his post as state president.

However, when JNA forces subsequently retreated from Slovenia into Croatia a short time later, the EC, lacking its own joint military forces and internally divided about the best method for handling the crisis, proved helpless to prevent an escalation of the conflict. Divisions in the 12-member Community—a newly assertive Germany, for example, strongly advocated the immediate recognition of Croatia and Slovenia and expanded EC involvement, while Britain and France urged a more cautious policy and further negotiations among the former Yugoslav republics—sent mixed signals to the warring parties, who exploited the international disagreements to pursue their respective agendas. Other multilateral organizations also initially failed to manage the Yugoslav crisis. NATO rules said the crisis was an “out of area conflict”; the Conference on Security and Cooperation on Europe (CSCE) was untested, lacked military forces, and could take action only by consensus; while the Western European Union (WEU), perceived as a kind of EC security arm, had never undertaken a major venture.

As the war in Croatia intensified in late 1991, the Zagreb government pleaded for international intervention in the crisis, viewing the deployment of foreign troops in Croatia as the best chance for reasserting sovereignty in its war-torn multiethnic regions. For their part, the Serbian government, the JNA, and local

Serb militias regarded the EC's immobility as a positive, providing their forces with an opportunity to crush Croatian independence or, at a minimum, expand the territory under Serb control.

As the international community floundered in its attempts to resolve the crisis, over a dozen EC negotiated cease-fire agreements collapsed in rapid succession. Meanwhile, EC-hosted negotiations at The Hague and later in Brussels concerning Yugoslavia's future also failed to devise a peaceful model of disassociation and cooperation among the parties. By early December, Croatia's Mesic, who had formally abandoned his post as Yugoslavia's last president, announced to the Croatian Assembly: "I have fulfilled my duty—Yugoslavia no longer exists."

In January 1992, as the fighting continued, Germany decided to recognize the independence of Slovenia and Croatia, thereby prodding the EC and its member states to follow suit.

Having proved unsuccessful at peace-making and peacekeeping, the EC turned its latter mission over to the United Nations, which previously had remained on the sidelines because of its own divisions about the propriety of intervening in a sovereign state's internal disputes. Exhausted by the war, having already seized considerable territory in Croatia, but now faced with the prospect of UN intervention and European support for the Zagreb government, Serbia and JNA leaders finally committed themselves to a cease-fire agreement that was negotiated by special UN envoy Cyrus Vance.

Leaders of the militant Serb community in the Krajina felt betrayed by the Belgrade government's decision to end hostilities and submit to the deployment of international troops in their region, but Milosevic rationalized his action by pointing to provisions of the agreement stipulating that Serb enclaves in Croatia would remain outside the direct control of Zagreb authorities. Milosevic and the remnants of the

federal army had no intention of abandoning their efforts to settle the Serbian question on their own terms. For the moment, the venue of warfare would simply be transferred from Croatia to Bosnia.

WAR COMES TO BOSNIA

Bosnia, with its complicated mosaic of ethnic and religious communities, had long been recognized as the Balkan's most explosive powderkeg (in 1991 its population was 43.7 percent Muslim, 31.4 percent Serb, 17.3 percent Croat, and 5.5 percent Yugoslav—that is, those who did not consider themselves a member of any ethnic group). When, following a referendum held at the end of February 1992 in which Muslims and Croats voted overwhelmingly for Bosnia's independence (a vote in which the republic's Serbs abstained), Serb officials, working in close association with locally based JNA forces, proceeded to prepare for hostilities. Mistakenly believing that recognition of Slovenia and Croatia by the EC and UN in January had been the principal factor dampening hostilities in those republics, and still chafing

from earlier criticism about its initial commitment to Yugoslav unity in mid-1991, the United States recognized in April the independence of Bosnia and Herzegovina along with that of Croatia and Slovenia.

Ironically, while criticism of Washington's overly cautious policy on secession in 1991 was warranted, the unique circumstances in Bosnia actually justified a prudent approach. The United States expectation that diplomatic recognition of Bosnia would calm matters seriously underestimated the history of ethnic and religious violence in that republic, the claims to the region by Serbs and Croats, and the tenuous authority of Alija Izetbegovic's Bosnian government. The fact that Bosnia's various ethnic and religious groups had coexisted during the authoritarian Tito era, and that



most inhabitants of the republic deplored ethnic rivalry, did not detract from the intense latent hatred and psychological distance existing among the various groups. Assessments of ethnic relations in Bosnia based on the cheerful atmosphere observed in Sarajevo during the 1984 Winter Olympic games, or other glib claims that the area had been an oasis of harmony for 500 years, seriously misjudged the real situation.

Faced with the growing possibility that the largest Serb community outside Serbia would become formally separated from it, the Belgrade government, Serbs in Bosnia, and JNA forces in the area decided to use whatever force necessary in order to forestall such an event. The war that ensued in Bosnia has led to even more casualties than the previous struggle in Croatia. Terrified at the prospect of being once again dominated by a Croatian-Muslim alliance strongly supported by Germany, Serb forces attempted to alter the demographic structure of the republic by brutally employing their superior military strength to forcibly oust Croat and Muslim inhabitants from Serb controlled territory—the notorious and internationally condemned policy of “ethnic cleansing.” Croat and Muslim paramilitary forces often defended and advanced their own interests with equal brutality, re-creating an all too familiar pattern of violence and atrocities against civilians.

Angered by Belgrade’s apparent role in the aggressive Serb onslaught against Croats and Muslims in Bosnia, the UN and EC imposed harsh economic sanctions against Serbia in May 1992. However, as unrelenting violence with tragic consequences for the civilian population continued throughout the summer and into this fall, the absence of an established international security force and political differences among members of the international community on how to resolve the crisis hampered peacekeeping efforts. Except for a small number of officers already posted in Sarajevo (as headquarters staff for the peacekeeping forces in Croatia), UN forces were not deployed in Bosnia until hostilities were well under way, and then only a small force was used to open the airport in Sarajevo.

Although NATO and the WEU altered their constitutions so they could provide military assistance to nonmilitary multilateral organizations (leading to the July deployment of Western naval forces in the Adriatic Sea to assist in the implementation of sanctions against Serbia), most leading members of the international community were extremely reluctant to become deeply enmeshed in what had become an exceptionally complex and bloody struggle. By July a dispute had even emerged between the UN’s Security Council and UN Secretary General Boutros Boutros-Ghali about whether further resources should be expended on the Yugoslav case when so many other international conflicts and humanitarian crises deserved attention. As the violent consequences of Yugoslavia’s disintegration continue unabated in Bosnia and threatens to spill over into

other regions of the former federation (the predominantly ethnic Albanian province of Kosovo, which has been under Belgrade’s tight control for several years, is the next most likely flashpoint), the international community continues its clumsy, albeit well-meaning, improvisation of a new “security architecture” for the post-cold war period.

In late August 1992, at a meeting in London sponsored by the UN and the EC, the belligerents and foreign states created a permanent conference in Geneva to deal with the Balkan crisis, but agreements reached to end the fighting were not implemented. The UN subsequently expelled the new Serbo-Montenegrin Yugoslavia, authorized sending additional troops to Bosnia, and created a War Crimes Commission in September to investigate atrocities, but hostilities and “ethnic cleansing” continued. As winter approached, it was feared that the trickle of humanitarian aid reaching Bosnia would be insufficient to avoid a heavy loss of civilian life.

BALKAN COOPERATION AFTER YUGOSLAVIA?

Developing a coordinated and consistent international response to Yugoslavia’s collapse presents a major challenge as the fierce fighting and carnage continue. Apart from the immediate problem of containing the blood-letting, other significant issues also need to be addressed before there can be any long-term resolution of the crisis. In view of the decisive role played by Balkan political leaders in generating the present difficulties—especially the major actors from the two largest ethnic communities, Slobodan Milosevic and Franjo Tudjman—the question naturally arises whether political forces in Serbia and Croatia will be able to find new leaders who can transcend the politics of intransigence and find solutions to the serious problems faced by the region. For different reasons, Milosevic and Tudjman have been politically weakened by the war, and opposition forces in both their republics have been growing in strength, but neither leader appears ready to leave the scene.

Looking beyond the current warfare and disruption, it also remains unclear whether the various successor states to Yugoslavia can successfully resuscitate the extensive economic linkages that previously existed among the republics and regions. The imperatives of economic survival and geography suggest that such cooperation will eventually resume, even after the most recent episodes of violence. Determining how to do this will require considerable time and commitment, and will also require a change of political leadership. Thus, until the current frenzy of hate either subsides or is extinguished, and until a broader solution is found for resolving the conflict in Bosnia—possibly a radical decentralization of the region into three ethnic territorial enclaves, each closely associated with its preferred neighboring state—the violent aftermath of Yugoslavia’s disintegration seems destined to continue. ■