

Update on Yugoslavia

Bosnia

The fighting in Bosnia described in these readings was not easily brought to a halt. As definitive evidence of genocide mounted, the United Nations and North Atlantic Treaty Organization finally moved to stop the bloodshed. A “no flight” zone was declared over Bosnia, and international economic sanctions were imposed on Yugoslavia. Eventually, the ban on weapons imports into Bosnia—originally designed to douse the fire—was lifted to enable the Muslims to defend themselves. The Bosnian Muslims then joined forces with the Croats to mount a counteroffensive against Serbian strongholds. The Croats successfully regained control of the Serb-populated regions of Croatia, and the Muslims succeeded in reestablishing some territorial corridors between their safe havens.

Finally, an on-again, off-again cease-fire was reached, and U.N. peacekeeping forces from a variety of countries, including the United States and Canada, moved in. Bosnian Serbs at that time controlled about 70 percent of Bosnia, with the Muslim-Croat alliance controlling the rest. As the economic embargo began causing real hardship, Yugoslavia’s President Milosevic pressured the Bosnian Serbs to the peace table.

In 1995, U.S. Secretary of State Warren Christopher brokered a peace deal known as the Dayton Accords that all parties reluctantly accepted. Bosnia was to remain a multination state but divided into two autonomous parts. The Bosnian Serbs received 49 percent of the territory, which they renamed Republica Srpska, with 51 percent for the still-combined Muslim-Croat Federation (see Figure 13.12). Notice how the boundaries were designed to make each group’s territory a contiguous whole, even if it means having a narrow corridor as a connector. This way, there is free unrestricted movement within each ethnic republic and one less excuse to restart the war.

In the Muslim-Croat Federation, the predominantly Croatian area of Bosnia known as Herceg-Bosna had evolved into a mini-state of sorts, with stronger ties to Zagreb than to Sarajevo. While all three nations have some “multiculturalists” who favor a unified Bosnia and nationalists who favor separatism or irredentism, a July 1996 poll found that 95 percent of Bosnian Serbs and two-thirds of Bosnian Croats opposed a unified country. Only Muslims favored keeping Bosnia whole. The U.S. Department of State’s policy was that, unless indicted war criminals are brought to justice, per the Dayton Accords, the festering rivalries that produced the war in the first place would prevent a lasting peace. Some European governments, however, argued that punishing the Serbs would be counterproductive because it is more important to rebuild Bosnia economically so that when the peacekeeping troops do pull out, there will be a functioning economy so that all three ethnic groups will have a stake in preserving the peace. A large contingent of U.S. troops participate in the Bosnia

Peacekeeping force (SFOR), and the United States has poured billions of dollars into Bosnia to help with reconstruction, humanitarian assistance, economic development, and military reconstruction. As of early 2001, however, the new U.S. president, George W. Bush, was questioning whether to keep U.S. peacekeeping troops in Bosnia.

Kosovo

The United States and its European allies bear some responsibility for the Kosovo crisis. The Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA) was a small fringe organization with little popular support for armed insurrection in Kosovo until after the Dayton peace conference. The conference excluded any Kosovar Albanian delegates, and many Albanians concluded that “the reward for nonviolence was international neglect” (Hooper, 1999).⁶ When increased Albanian unrest led to a Serbian crackdown in 1998, the U.S. unwillingness to follow through on its threats of air strikes against Yugoslavian military targets emboldened the Serbs and helped convince the Albanians to take matters into their own hands. International attempts to broker a peace settlement in February 1999 failed dismally, as Yugoslavian military, police, and paramilitary units amassed within and around Kosovo.

Having learned its lesson in Bosnia, NATO responded to Serbian attacks much faster in Kosovo, although not fast enough to stop the Serbs from ethnically cleansing most Albanians from Kosovo (see U.S. Department of State reports). On March 24, 1999, two weeks after the start of the Serbian offensive, NATO began launching air strikes against Yugoslavian military, police, television, transportation, electricity, and water supply targets. The air war eventually crippled Yugoslavia, and two to three months after the fighting began, Yugoslavia accepted a cease-fire and began to withdraw. Peacekeeping troops have been contributed by 19 NATO members (including the United States, Canada, and almost all of their European allies) as well as 18 non-NATO countries (including Russia, other Slavic former Soviet states such as Ukraine, other Muslim former Soviet states such as Azerbaijan, and Islamic Middle Eastern states such as Jordan). Peacekeeping forces are involved in rebuilding infrastructure and institutions and removing land mines but have been unable to completely prevent Albanians from revenge attacks and ethnic cleansing against the remaining Serbs. An estimated 500 to 1,000 Serbs have been murdered since the Yugoslavian Army pulled out. Many Kosovar Serbs have abandoned their homes and fled to Serbia proper, fueling another chapter in the long annals of Serbian victimhood. As in Bosnia, a de facto partition has taken place, with Serbs concentrating in North Mitrovica, an area adjacent to Serbia and home to a vast gold and zinc mining complex.

The UN Security Council Resolution 1244 calls for preparing Kosovo for “substantial autonomy and self-government.” In interim elections in October 2000, Ibrahim Rugova’s Democratic League of Kosovo (LDK) won the majority of seats over two other parties run by former KLA leaders. All three

major parties advocated eventual independence for Kosovo. As of March 2003, though technically still part of Serbia, Kosovo continues to be governed by the UN Interim Administration Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK), as it has been since June 1999.

Macedonia

In March 2001, ethnic violence erupted in Macedonia, one of the six former republics of Yugoslavia. Bordered by Albania, Kosovo, Serbia, Bulgaria, and Greece, Macedonia's population is 23 percent Albanian (Figure 13.8, Table 13.1). Macedonia had been lauded as the only former Yugoslavian republic that had seceded without bloodshed. Its multinational population was thought to coexist peacefully. Less than two years after the war in Kosovo ended, however, Albanian nationalist fighters and their weapons began crossing the border from Kosovo to attack Slavic Macedonian targets in the mountainous Albanian majority zone. The rebels called for a change in the Macedonian constitution to upgrade the status of the Albanian minority—a change that would essentially partition the country along ethnic lines. Although the situation sounds hauntingly familiar, Macedonia's situation contains some unique elements. When Macedonia seceded from Yugoslavia, the neighboring state of Greece refused to recognize its independence until it agreed to change its official name to the Former Yugoslavian Republic of Macedonia (FYROM) to distinguish it from the Macedonian region of Greece. Meanwhile, the neighboring state of Bulgaria has questioned whether Macedonians are a nation at all or really an offshoot of the Slavic Bulgarian nation. There is also a small Serbian minority (2 percent) in Macedonia.

Yugoslavia

In one of the most unexpected and dramatic events of the entire saga, the Serbian people succeeded in overthrowing President Slobodan Milosevic, the architect of a decade of ethnic cleansing. The Serbian people, although still strongly nationalistic, had grown tired of war, air raids, poverty, and ostracism from the international community. Average income had dropped to \$40 per month, and the streets of Belgrade had become one large flea market. Elections were held in September 2000, and by all reports the opposition party triumphed, although the government denied it. In early October 2000, after a general strike, massive crowds began gathering in the streets of Belgrade for speeches and protests. On October 5 the crowd stormed the Parliament building, and with Serbian troops unwilling to fire on their own people, the Milosevic era came to a quick, bloodless end. In new elections on December 24, 2000, moderate reformer Vojislav Kostunica was elected President of Yugoslavia with the promise to complete democratic reforms. Many thorny issues faced the new regime, including international war crime indictments against former Serbian leaders, economic reconstruction, trade relations with other former Yugoslavian republics, and pressure for unification with, and protection of, Serbs in Bosnia and Kosovo. Yugoslavia was readmitted to the United Nations in 2001.

Montenegro

Meanwhile, the party in Montenegro favoring independence from Yugoslavia and its Serb majority narrowly won national elections in April 2001. Montenegrins, who comprise about two-thirds of the population, share a similar religion and language with the Serbs but historically have developed separately from them (Figure 13.8, Table 13.1). Prior to the downfall of Milosevic, the United States was encouraging Montenegrins to seek independence as a way of weakening the Milosevic regime in Yugoslavia. Now that Milosevic has fallen, however, the United States has done an about-face and is discouraging them because independence for any new Balkan nation could send a “green light” to the others and precipitate new wars.

In 2002, the Serbian and Montenegrin regions of Yugoslavia began negotiations to forge a looser relationship. These talks became a reality on February 4, 2003, when their parliament restructured the country into a federation of two republics; The new state is now officially called Serbia and Montenegro. The two confederate republics agreed to hold a referendum in each republic in three years on whether to opt for full independence.

That the road to peace and reconstruction is not smooth was made abundantly clear on March 12, 2003, only one month after the new confederation was formed. A sniper killed the prime minister of Serbia, Zoran Djindjic, the charismatic philosopher-politician who rallied the people to oust Slobodan Milosevic in 2000. Former members of the Milosevic regime now involved in organized crime are believed to be behind the assassination. The reform-minded and pro-Western Djindjic had threatened to arrest Gen. Ratko Mladic, who is wanted by the tribunal for war crimes in Bosnia.