

foreign policy *in focus*



Interhemispheric Resource Center
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U.S. and the Former Yugoslavia: Improving on Dayton

When war erupted in the former Yugoslavia in 1991, the U.S. kept its distance. "We do not have a dog in that fight," Secretary of State James Baker said at the time. When war spread from Serbia and Croatia to Bosnia in 1992, Democratic Party candidate Bill Clinton attacked the Bush administration for its aloofness, urging swift intervention on the side of the Bosnians

Key Points

- The Clinton administration has gradually accepted the partition of Bosnia.
- The administration negotiated the Dayton Accords in part to improve Clinton's re-election chances.
- The Dayton Accords have largely stopped the bloodshed in Bosnia, but remain deeply flawed.

("Bosnians," here and below, refers to Muslims, Serbs, Croats, and others who live in Bosnia and believe in a unified country).

Once in office, Clinton called for lifting the arms embargo on former Yugoslavia that had hand-

icapped the arms-poor Bosnians, and ordered air strikes on Bosnian Serb targets. But Clinton declined to commit ground forces either to support the Bosnians or to implement a series of peace plans brokered by international mediators (prompting one negotiator, David Owen, to criticize the U.S. president for wanting "power without responsibility"). As the Bosnian conflict wore on, the Clinton administration backed away from "lift and strike," pressed the Bosnians and the Bosnian Croats into the shotgun marriage of federation, and began to accept the de facto partition of Bosnia.

While failing to resolve the Bosnian crisis, the U.S. did contribute to containing the conflict, by providing troops for a UN "tripwire" force deployed in Macedonia and helping to prevent Greece from escalating conflicts with both Macedonia and Turkey. The larger conflagration that many feared would envelop the Balkans did not materialize. But containment did not prevent the war from intensifying within Bosnia. The death toll rose to more than 200,000, while roughly 2 million Bosnians became refugees.

In summer 1995, after three years of failed negotiations, the balance of power dramatically shifted. A successful Croat military operation retook rebel Serb areas in the Krajina, a joint Bosnian-Croat offensive reduced Serb control of Bosnia from 70 to 50 percent, and NATO bombed Bosnian Serb positions for two weeks. After dissuading the Croats and Bosnians from pushing deeper into Serb-controlled areas, the U.S. prepared the ground for a negotiated end of fighting. The Dayton Accords, signed in December 1995, gave the Clinton administration an apparent foreign policy victory and strengthened the president's hand going into an election year.

The Dayton Accords consist of four interlocking components: military disengagement, a just peace, democratic elections, and economic reconstruction. The military provisions, implemented by the 60,000 troops of the NATO-led Implementation Force (IFOR), have been largely successful. The armies of the respective sides have been withdrawn from a four-kilometer zone of separation and heavy weapons have been cantoned. Most prisoners of war have been released, and the strength of the militaries has been disclosed. No major outbreaks of violence have occurred since December 1995.

Still, the Dayton Accords remain deeply flawed. A central tension remains between the goal of keeping the peace and achieving a modicum of justice through the prosecution of war criminals. And the Accords have not clearly specified a desired future for Bosnia, whether ethnically partitioned or fully integrated. Finally, the U.S. has not clarified its role in the region. The Clinton administration has used the Dayton process to demonstrate the importance of NATO's role in Europe. Yet the U.S. continues to want to exercise power without shouldering the concomitant moral, financial, and military responsibilities.

The Dayton Accords, for all their success in halting the bloodshed, have failed to repatriate refugees, guarantee territorial integration or freedom of movement, ensure free or fair elections, prosecute war criminals, demilitarize the region, or follow through with economic reconstruction. Moreover, the one concrete achievement of the Accords—the cease-fire—may well be undone should peacekeepers pull out in 1997.

While the U.S. has rhetorically supported a multiethnic country, it hasn't attempted to guarantee this result on the ground. Since Dayton few refugees have returned home—almost none to areas under the control of rival ethnic groups. Centrifugal forces are still strong; the main Bosnian Serb party favors a strict division of the country and ultimately, secession; Bosnian Croats have been slow in dismantling their Republic of Herceg-Bosna and seem to have no intention of reversing their gradual incorporation into Croatia proper; the Bosnian-Croat Federation is a U.S.-sponsored myth with two separate militaries, no single currency, and no commitment to refugee repatriation.

The September 1996 Bosnian elections only codified these divisions. Because of the accelerated electoral pace, the inherent divisiveness of competitive contests, and the tragically weakened state of Bosnian civil society, the elections consolidated the power of nationalist elites in the respective regions. The resulting government, led by a three-person presidency with few instruments to integrate the country, has already been plagued with the same paralysis that handcuffed the Yugoslav federal system. Neither the presidency nor the divided parliament has begun to govern. The problems that made national elections neither free nor fair—restricted freedom of movement, manipulation by elites of electoral loopholes—have prompted a postponement of local elections until spring 1997.

Desperate to prevent incidents that would have damaged Clinton's reelection prospects, the U.S. contingent in IFOR (roughly 20,000-strong), has been reluctant to detain suspected war criminals for prosecution by an international tribunal. Radovan Karadzic and Ratko Mladic remain significant political forces in Republika Srpska, while Croatia also continues to harbor its own war criminals. The parties to the Dayton Accords have thus not adhered to the minimum requirements of justice spelled out at Dayton.

Hoping to balance Serbian power in the region, the U.S. made a significant moral and tactical mistake in actively promoting Croatian interests. When Croatia retook the Krajina and 150,000 ethnic Serbs fled the region, the U.S. pointedly ignored the largest instance of ethnic cleansing during the whole conflict. Arms transfers to Bosnia, tacitly approved by the Clinton administration despite the official arms embargo, built

up the military of Croatia. The U.S. has also looked the other way as Croatian President Franjo Tudjman's ruling apparatus has violated human rights, restricted opposition politicians, and muzzled independent media. This double standard—condemning Serbian President Slobodan Milosevic as a dictator and bolstering Tudjman's dubious image as democrat—undermines the future stability of the region and the credibility of the U.S. as an effective arbiter.

Meanwhile, U.S. policy toward Republika Srpska has been wholly punitive. Washington has pledged aid only for the Croat-Bosnian Federation and has limited its relations with Srpska to demanding the detention and prosecution of war criminals. By isolating Srpska, the U.S. only intensifies resentment of the peace accords and pushes the region into the hands of Serbia. While the prosecution of war criminals is a key component of the Dayton dispensation, the U.S. must find a way of persuading Srpska to participate in the new Bosnian entity.

Perhaps the most disturbing U.S. policy is "train-and-equip." The U.S. has promised to build up Croat-Bosnian defenses to equal those of the Bosnian Serbs. With its dismissal in November of a top official linked to Iran, Bosnia cleared the way to receive \$100 million in U.S. military hardware.

This arms shipment will bolster Croatian forces at a time when hardliners, strengthened by the illness of Tudjman, advocate the dissolution of the federation. Bosnia will be made no safer by this influx of weapons. While the instinct to protect the most victimized people in the conflict is laudable, the objective of the peace accords—and one embraced by European countries—should be the demilitarization of all sides. In short, the train-and-equip policy will spur an arms race in the former Yugoslavia.

Finally, the U.S. has focused more on "mission creep" than on "conflict creep." Its concern over extended involvement in the Yugoslav dogfight seems to overshadow any concern that the conflict might flare up again. After many months of misleading statements, the Clinton administration finally announced shortly after the presidential elections that the U.S. was sending a new force to Bosnia that would participate in a smaller multinational mission for at least 18 months. What remains unclear is how a smaller force will succeed in implementing key provisions of the Dayton Accords—refugee return, freedom of movement, arrest of war criminals—that IFOR failed to guarantee.

Key Problems

- The Dayton Accords have not provided for freedom of movement or the repatriation of refugees.
- The Accords have not substantially demilitarized former Yugoslavia.
- The recent elections consolidated the control of elites in the ethnic Serb and ethnic Croat regions of Bosnia who reject a unified Bosnia.
- The U.S. has unwisely buttressed the autocratic regime of Croatian president Franjo Tudjman.

While the Dayton Accords have yielded mixed results, they have at least ended the bloodshed (if only temporarily) and involved the U.S. in the peace process. This commitment must be extended—albeit at diminished troop levels—and must include U.S. troops as a demonstration of a trans-Atlantic commitment to peace. The Clinton administration has proposed a modest extension until March 1997. This commitment to a multinational presence must be extended even further. Money devoted to this extension—U.S. commitment is already estimated at \$3 billion for 1996-97—would be a better investment than funds for an expansion of NATO (see *In Focus: NATO Expansion*).

The U.S. has extended its commitment to stopping the violence in Bosnia. Sending troops is not enough, however. The U.S. can pursue several policies to improve upon the Dayton Accords in the realm of security policy, economic reconstruction, dispensation of justice, and regional engagement.

Instead of training and equipping Bosnian forces, the U.S. should galvanize the regional players into genuine

arms-control negotiations. The objective should not be to raise Bosnian forces to the level of the Serbs and Croats but to shrink other forces to the Bosnian level. The Dayton Accords also include a provision for regional arms control. But the Accords are binding only for its signatories; neighboring countries will reduce their militaries only after Croatia and rump Yugoslavia take the first steps.

Reconstruction would be more productive for Bosnia than rearmament. The war destroyed half of Bosnia's assets; the GDP and per capita income plummeted by 75%. But the international community has offered Bosnia the same dubious recipe for development—stabilization, liberalization, privatization—that hastened the disintegration of Yugoslavia in the 1980s. Instead of supporting an austerity program that will tear at the fragile country, the U.S. must provide funds to ensure long-term peace. Specifically, we recommend the following:

- The U.S. should shift its focus away from military hardware and toward funding civilian projects. Handled properly, this civil aid will also boost the economies of neighboring countries (Hungary

and Bulgaria) by providing manufacturing and construction contracts.

- The U.S. should ensure that economic aid helps rebuild all parts of the country, providing jobs for returning refugees, facilitating NGO work on reconstruction, and integrating the country by repairing rail lines, highways, and common electrical grids. By concentrating on nationwide reconstruction, the West can offer the Bosnian Serbs a stake in the peace process.
- The U.S. should focus on using economic levers to compel true democratization. Though flawed elections have produced flawed results, the Clinton administration should help facilitate the growth of nonexclusive institutions of civil society from human rights groups to small businesses. It should also speak out against instances of censorship and help strengthen independent media.

Common infrastructure will not, however, ensure common trust. One of the key elements of the Dayton Accords is the acknowledgment of the role of the International War Crimes Tribunal. It is critical for the U.S. to continue supporting the Tribunal, which has handed down 75 indictments—18 Croats, 3 Muslims, 54 Serbs—and currently holds six accused. Without justice, as many have pointed out, a stable peace may prove impossible. The U.S. must pressure Serbia and Croatia to arrest its war criminals. Washington should lobby for amnesty for conscientious objectors and support a recent Croatian law that provides amnesty for Serbs who fought against Croatia in 1991.

Finally the U.S. must adopt a regional approach. After the Bosnian conflict, the Albanian question remains perhaps the thorniest. Ethnic Albanians in Kosovo (in Serbia) and Macedonia have demanded greater cultural and political autonomy. Instead of waiting for these conflicts to boil over, the U.S. must press for a regional discussion of the problem. It must induce compromises now, not when it will be too late.

By committing to long-term stabilization for the entire Balkan region and by working hand-in-hand with European and international organizations, the U.S. can play a constructive role and assume the necessary responsibilities that should accompany military power.

Written by John Feffer, National Writers Union, Philadelphia. Author of Shock waves: Eastern Europe after the Revolutions. Co-editor of Europe's New Nationalism.

Key Recommendations

- Support an extended multinational force in Bosnia to keep the peace and support territorial integration.
- Engage in a process of demilitarization of former Yugoslavia.
- Provide sufficient funds for the reconstruction of Bosnia.
- Address the issue of ethnic Albanians in Serbia and Macedonia.

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