

# **The War and War-Games in Bosnia and Herzegovina from 1992 to 1995**

*The main events, disagreements and  
arguments, resulting in a “de facto”  
divided country*



**Magnus Bjarnason**

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**Magnus Bjarnason**

Anonymous cover photo:  
Media images make world politics and one picture is worth a thousand  
“facts”.

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This book is intended for academic purposes and for those wishing to  
study the different aspects of the Yugoslav War of Disintegration.  
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views expressed are those of the author and may diverge from current  
NATO policy in the Balkans.

***The author expresses his sorrow over how politicians have caused such enormous unnecessary suffering to so many individuals.***

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## **SUMMARY.**

This book describes the build-up to the Bosnian War which took place from 1992-95 and the relation it had with the war in Croatia between 1991-95. In it the Bosnian war is viewed from two different angles: firstly the perspective from inside the conflict area, notably the war in the field and its effects; and, secondly the perspective of international high politics, where Former Yugoslavia is just an object in the world power-game.

It describes the Bosnian War's four phases (author's definition), the first phase being the Serbs' struggle to keep as much as possible of the disintegrating state, the second phase being the uncontrolled ethnic war, the third phase being that of corruption and stagnation where the war had a life of its own without much real fighting, and the last phase is when the dividing boundaries were redrawn and formal fighting ended, almost like a pre-planned game of chess.

The book argues that the realities on the ground with a division of Bosnia and Herzegovina into three parts are basically irreversible, despite much international effort to the contrary and, it concludes by discussing possible further future division of Former Yugoslavia based on the Bosnian example.

## Background

# **I. GENERAL BACKGROUND TO THE YUGOSLAV CIVIL WAR OF THE EARLY 1990s.**

## **1. Introduction.**

Sometimes it is claimed that the state of Yugoslavia was bound to disintegrate sooner or later. It is easy to be wise afterwards, but today it is an irreversible fact that it broke up, and both former Yugoslavs as well as the rest of the world, must make the best possible out of the current situation. It is universally accepted that Yugoslavia in its post World War One to 1991 form has disappeared. However, for some strange reasons, most of the world does not seem to realize, or at least does not want to accept, that the Socialist Republic of Bosnia and Herzegovina, one of the 6 republics of the now former Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (SFRY), basically fell apart right after its independence in 1992, for better or for worse, pending on which ethnic group one belongs to. The world community has contributed an enormous effort to keep Bosnia and Herzegovina together, while slightly earlier, very few, at least in the Western World, mourned Yugoslavia's death, or for that sake the break up of the Soviet Union or Czechoslovakia. This could be because of how the break up of Bosnia and Herzegovina started and was fuelled from outside the republic,<sup>1</sup> but also because so many ill-

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<sup>1</sup>UN Security Council Resolution no 752 of 15 May 1992, point 3, (footnote continued on next page)

## Background

informed foreign politicians and government officials have advocated keeping Bosnia and Herzegovina together by force, that they now cannot make a 180 degree policy turn without losing credibility. Nevertheless, we cannot go back in time and replay the events in Bosnia and Herzegovina in a different way - so the question is - what can or should be done next, if anything?

## 2. Background.

After centuries of occupation by the Ottoman Empire, which introduced Islam to Bosnia, Bosnia and Herzegovina was annexed by the Austro-Hungarian Empire in 1908.<sup>2</sup> After the end of the First World War in 1918, the Treaty of Versailles and the fall of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, Yugoslavia started its birth as the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes and in 1929 the name Yugoslavia<sup>3</sup> was applied. Yugoslavia was a composed country from the beginning, an artificial creation, and not a nation state, just like so many other problem-ridden countries in the world. However, the country stayed together until the Second World War, despite considerable political problems, including Serbo-

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demanding "that all forms of interference from outside Bosnia and Herzegovina, including by units of the Yugoslav Peoples' Army (JNA) as well as elements of the Croatian Army, cease immediately and that Bosnia and Herzegovina's neighbours take swift action to end such interference and respect the territorial integrity of Bosnia and Herzegovina;"

<sup>2</sup>Bosnia came under Austro-Hungarian administration already in 1878 but the annexation was not proclaimed until 1908. See Bosnia, a short history, chapter 11, Bosnia under Austro-Hungarian Rule 1878-1914. See also Bosnia and Herzegovina, a tradition betrayed, chapter 6, Austro-Hungarian Rule 1878-1918.

<sup>3</sup>Yugo in Serbo-Croat means south.

## Background

Croat antagonism. During the German occupation in the Second World War, the then German Nazi government granted independence to Croatia, which is still much appreciated by Croats in modern Croatia, even though the independence then lasted only until the end of Hitler's War. But this independent Croatia, between 1941 to 1945, which included also the territory of Bosnia and Herzegovina, was a dictatorship. In addition, the Second World War was also much of a civil war on the territory of Yugoslavia. Amongst many atrocities committed in Yugoslavia during the Second World War, Croats committed atrocities on Serbs, and the Serbs, having a relatively strong national culture and character, cannot forget this, just like they cannot forget that they lost the Battle of Kosovo against the Ottoman Empire over 600 years ago.

Following the end of Hitler's War in 1945, Yugoslavia continued in more or less its pre-war form, however with some of the adjustments and changes of borders which were carried out all over Europe.<sup>4</sup> Josip Broz "Tito" became president, socialism was introduced, and eventually the country became the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia. Tito was a strong leader and nationalist movements were not tolerated. In fact, just like in other communist countries, no opposition or free press was allowed. The economy did not do well under socialism, but the Yugoslav socialism was substantially more liberal than in the Warsaw Pact countries and Albania, resulting in less tension and better economic conditions than in any other socialist state in Europe during the Cold War.

After Tito's death in 1980 there was a period of further economic decline, followed by slight prosperity, especially under Markovic's leadership.<sup>5</sup> However, the economic fundamentals

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<sup>4</sup>The largest change was that Istria was added to Yugoslavia.

<sup>5</sup>See Nationalism and Federalism in Yugoslavia, chapter 8, Controversies in (footnote continued on next page)

## Background

were not right and, overspending with rise in living-standards beyond production, led to continued financial difficulties compared to Western Europe's free and semi-free market economies.<sup>6</sup>

At the end of the 1980s there was increased talk of independence in the Socialist Republics of Slovenia and Croatia. There was more industrial production in these two Yugoslav republics than further south and they had a better standard of living than the rest of the Federation. These two republics found that they were in fact economically supporting the poorer republics in the southern part of the country. In addition there was, and still is, a considerable cultural difference between the ethnic groups of Former Yugoslavia, both mentally, in work ethics and entrepreneurship, as well as in social behaviour and religion. It was becoming clear that the problems could not be hidden any longer. Socialism was officially dropped and replaced by nationalism both in Serbia as well as in Croatia and Slovenia.<sup>7</sup> Soon independence declarations in Slovenia and Croatia would be followed by war, started by those who felt that a break up of Federal Yugoslavia would cost them more than what they could benefit from it, namely the Serbs. At that time the cohesion of the federal state was also supported by (ignorant) Bosnians who did not understand the political trend, not knowing that in two years time they would, themselves, be declaring independence and be

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the Economic Sector, 1965-90.

<sup>6</sup>The socialist economic problems of the 1980s were not only in Yugoslavia, but all over socialist Europe, eventually contributing to the collapse of the "system".

<sup>7</sup>Slovenia became a "western" country very quickly, but in Serbia it was merely a change of name and adding nationalism to the socialist system. In Croatia and Slovenia independence tendencies had been brewing under the surface for decades. See also: Croat Separatism, Nationalism, Dissidence and Terrorism printed in 1979.

## Background

fighting the Serbs.<sup>8</sup>

The Federal Government of Yugoslavia was located in the largest city, Belgrade, which is also the capital of Serbia. Serbs in Former Yugoslavia numbered about 10 million, or just under half of the total Yugoslav pre-civil war population of 23 million. Slovenes are about 2 millions, Croats almost 5 million, and pre-civil war Bosnia and Herzegovina had about 4 million inhabitants, whereof about 44% were Bosnian Muslims, 31% Serbs and 17% Croats<sup>9</sup>. Other minorities in former Yugoslavia were Montenegrins about ½ million, Albanians about 2 millions, Macedonians about 1 ½ million, Hungarians about ½ million, Gypsies, Jews, and some people declared themselves simply as Yugoslavs, often because they were children of a mixed marriage, even though the nationality of the father was an important factor in determining nationality.

Not every ethnic group was isolated in their "homeland". Some of the borders between the six Yugoslav republics were arbitrary,<sup>10</sup> drawn up by Tito's government, and many people had moved around in the Federal Republic. However, when the civil war started, nationalists would eventually solve this problem through ethnic cleansing.<sup>11</sup> Despite Serbs representing just

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<sup>8</sup>In Bosnia there are numerous jokes about Mujo and Suljo, typical Bosnian Muslim names, about their naiveté. These jokes are all much older than the 1992-1995 war and refer to simple situations, but one may wonder if the Bosnian peasant's naiveté is at all a joke in reality. An alternative, albeit rather unlikely explanation, is that the Bosnian authorities knew that a break up of the Federal State would mean civil war.

<sup>9</sup>According to the 1991 population census in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

<sup>10</sup>Arbitrary borders are not unusual. Many other post World War Two borders in Europe are also arbitrary.

<sup>11</sup>Soft ethnic cleansing through letting the minorities lose their jobs, not get their portion of food and other aid, school harassment etc; and hard ethnic cleansing by expelling the minorities by force, killing them and burning (footnote continued on next page)

## Background

under half of the population in former Yugoslavia, they were more often than not in key positions as factory directors, police commissioners or army officers. About 75% of the officers of the Yugoslav Peoples' Army (JNA)<sup>12</sup> were Serbs<sup>13</sup>. Not surprisingly, many Serbs felt being just Yugoslavs rather than Serbs. Yugoslavia was in a way a synonym with Greater Serbia,<sup>14</sup> even though this was never mentioned nor even thought of at the time. Most people of mixed ethnic background also felt being Yugoslavs, along with a large part of two million Bosnian Muslims who were either Serb or Croat until Tito allowed them to declare themselves as a Muslim nationality in the 1970s.<sup>15</sup> Needless to say, many of the Bosnian Muslims today prefer to call themselves just Bosnians or Bosniacs, depending on whom they speak to.

It was inevitable that Slovenian and Croatian independence would mean loss of power and revenue for Serbs as a whole. A proportionally big part of the industry would be lost

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their houses in order to ensure no return. The biggest losers of ethnic cleansing were of course people of mixed marriages who had nowhere to go except to leave the country. Ironically, today some of them earn the same (around 1000 DM per month) being on generous Western European social security, as they did working in Socialist Yugoslavia and consequently can be partially classified as economic refugees.

<sup>12</sup>"N" in JNA stands for Narodna, which is people, not National. Some documents of the Islamic Conference showing solidarity for Bosnia and Herzegovina have this wrong.

<sup>13</sup>Officially, the officer corps of the JNA was supposed to be composed in proportion to the size of the respective populations in the Federal state.

<sup>14</sup>Yugoslavia was a country where all Serbs could live together, considering Serbian populations outside Serbia but within Yugoslavia.

<sup>15</sup>If they had called themselves Bosnians from the beginning, not Muslims, it would possibly have increased European support for Bosnia and reduced Islamic support during the war years. Today, however, both Bosnia (and Kosovo) have been turned into European protectorates, at least for the time being.

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and the lucrative tourism on the Adriatic coast would also go. In addition, nationalists would undoubtedly replace Serbs in leadership positions of government corporations and state agencies outside Serbia.

Tensions escalated to war but the armed struggle was short in Slovenia. Very few Serbs lived there and the 1991 war for independence, fought between the Slovenes and the Yugoslav Peoples' Army (the Federal Army), lasted only 10 days, the Yugoslav Peoples' Army retreating upon orders from Belgrade.<sup>16</sup> Slovenia became a "de facto" independent state in the summer of 1991 and was internationally recognized in January 1992.<sup>17</sup>

Croatia also declared its independence in the summer of 1991 and was internationally recognized at the same time as Slovenia. Germany was first to recognize Croatia<sup>18</sup>, soon to be followed by the rest of the European Union. Germany's quick recognition of Croatia suggested continued German support for independent Croatia, just like in the Second World War. This created all sorts of conspiracy theories amongst the Serbs, including blaming the Vatican because Croatia is Catholic and under the Pope, - the Serbs being Orthodox<sup>19</sup>. But the Croatian case was more complicated than Slovenia because of the large Serbian minority population, Serbs representing close to 15 % of

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<sup>16</sup>Slobodan Milosevic, the Serbian President at the time, had indicated that he wouldn't object to Slovenia leaving the Yugoslav federation, even though Croatia would be a different matter.

<sup>17</sup>Recognized first by Germany and then by the EU. Slovenia, Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina did not become UN members until 22 May 1992. See UN General Assembly resolutions 46/236, 46/237 and 46/238 based on the recommendation of the UN Security Council.

<sup>18</sup>Iceland recognized Croatia at the same time as Germany.

<sup>19</sup>Many Yugoslavs were atheists after years of communism, but many individuals suddenly started to show religious affiliation which was more often a sign of nationality than religion.



## Background

the pre-war population in Croatia. Croatian Serbs created an independent republic within Croatia, a puppet state of Serbia proper, consisting of about 30% of Croatia's territory, to be known as the Republic of Serbian Krajina<sup>20</sup>. Its population in 1991 was estimated at 300.000, but due to bad conditions there, perhaps only about half were still left when it ceased to exist in 1995. Soon more trouble would be ahead and some of the unfinished fights of the Second World War would be resumed were they had stopped at the end of Hitler's War almost half a century before.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>20</sup>Krajina, meaning borderland, had always been the military borderland between the Catholic Austro-Hungarian Empire and the Muslim Ottoman Empire. It is the territory along the current Bosnian-Croat border in the west, about 50-150 km inland from the Adriatic coast.

<sup>21</sup>Some would argue that the unfinished fights go much further back, even much before the First and the Second Balkan War. Others argue that there were no unfinished fights and the 1991-95 war is a new chapter. Note also accounts on Serbian extremist, Mr. Gavrilo Princip in: Bosnia, A Short History, and on Mlada Bosna (Young Bosnia). In 1914 Princip fired the shots that triggered the First World War and the discontent amongst Southern Slavs at the time was increasing. When arrested, Princip said that he was Yugoslav, even though Yugoslavia as a country did not exist (yet). (footnote continued on next page)

## Background

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The activities before 1914 were not a Serbo-Croat confrontation like in the Second World War, but resistance to Austro-Hungarian rule.

## **II. THE YUGOSLAV WAR OF DISINTEGRATION BETWEEN 1991-1995 AS SEEN FROM INSIDE THE CONFLICT AREA. THE WAR IN THE FIELD.**

### **3. The Republic of Serbian Krajina, 1991-1995.**

The Bosnian War in 1992-1995 was very closely linked to events in the self-proclaimed Republic of Serbian Krajina<sup>22</sup> and consequently its history will be briefly reviewed here. When it became clear in 1991 that the Serbian controlled Yugoslav Peoples' Army could not keep Croatia in the Yugoslav Federation by force, despite their superiority in arms, they occupied or retained, (depending on from which side one looks at it), 30% of Croatia's territory, which included those areas which had been traditionally inhabited by Serbs for centuries. Through superiority in armaments, the Yugoslav Army occupied more, rather than less, because many areas had a mixed Croat and Serbian population, and the stronger side, the Serbs, had the benefit of the doubt. These areas included Eastern Slavonia on Croatia's border with Vojvodina<sup>23</sup> and the area referred to as Vojna Krajina, the military

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<sup>22</sup>In Serbo-Croat: Republika Srpska Krajina.

<sup>23</sup>Vojvodina was an autonomous province in the Yugoslav Federation but had recently been stripped of its autonomy and annexed to Serbia, including its 500.000 ethnic Hungarian population. The Hungarians were, however, almost immune to the dangers of ethnic cleansing and harassment, perhaps because of the mere existence and power of the Hungarian Army, next door. Following difficulties Hungarians in Slovakia (footnote continued on next page)

## The War in the Field

borderland from the Ottoman times, following the borders between Croatia and Bosnia on Bosnia's North Western and Western sides, carving out a large chunk of Croatian territory there and disrupting Croatia's transport and communication lines.

The Serbian Republic of Krajina had a government of its own but was totally dependent on Serbia for its existence. The Serbian Republic of Krajina, being divided between two parts not geographically linked, undermined the country's potential to survive as a state. However, the Serbs living there demanded independence and integration into Serbia proper, whereas Croatia claimed it as a legitimate part of Croatia, being within its former Yugoslav Federal borders, and now internationally recognized borders.

Krajina's army was nothing but the Yugoslav Peoples' Army boosted by locally drafted citizens and voluntary population, as well as Serbian gangsters and paramilitary units from Serbia proper. The paramilitary units objectives were mainly to plunder and rob Croatian houses, which was indeed a lucrative business in the beginning, as well as to participate in some perverted atrocities, drinking and having fun.<sup>24</sup> Under the Yugoslav Peoples' Army command structure, the armies of Krajina and the Serbian Republic in Bosnia<sup>25</sup> were very closely integrated operationally,

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faced, Hungary had indicated that they would protect Hungarians outside Hungary's borders. It was ensured, as a precautionary measure, that the Serbs would get this message. Others would certainly argue that Serbs and Hungarians are civilized people who have nothing to fight over anyhow. Kosovo also lost its autonomy to Serbia in the South at the same time as Vojvodina.

<sup>24</sup>See accounts on Arkan's and Seselj's men in Yugoslavia's Bloody Collapse.

<sup>25</sup>The Serbo-Croat name for the Bosnian Serb Republic, Republika Srpska, is often used in English to avoid confusion with the Republic of Serbia (Serbia proper).

## The War in the Field

most notably in the surrounding of the Bihac pocket<sup>26</sup>.

Many Serbs living on the Croatian controlled side of the front line dividing Croatia, had little option but to flee into Serbian Krajina or face Croatian discrimination and atrocities, which took place as well<sup>27</sup>, albeit on a considerably smaller scale than on Serbian territory<sup>28 29</sup>. During this war it became almost impossible to distinguish between soldiers and civilians, many of the new soldiers having no uniform in the beginning, especially in Croatia<sup>30</sup>. However, the Yugoslav Peoples' Army quickly supplied the Serbs with armaments and uniforms.

The Serbian Republic of Krajina had agriculture and there was enough food production in Serbia proper to supply the Krajina Serbs. However, with the trade sanctions on the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (Serbia and Montenegro)<sup>31</sup>, fuel became an expensive commodity, costing three times more than in Croatia, and electric power supply was cut off in many places, eventually though to be restored through the Serbian Republic in Bosnia<sup>32</sup> later on.

The Republic of Serbian Krajina became an unusual mixture of anarchy and a police state. The army and the police were directly inherited from communist Yugoslavia with its lack of

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<sup>26</sup>Source: UN Civil Affairs in Bihac, year 1995.

<sup>27</sup>Photographs of atrocities shown by victims to UN Civil Affairs in Korenica in 1993.

<sup>28</sup>UN Civil Affairs unofficial assessment at the time.

<sup>29</sup>According to a UN local source in Croatia, as of 1993, most of the Croatian fanatics went to Herzegovina to cleanse out Serbs and Muslims there, leaving more peace in Croatia proper.

<sup>30</sup>And later in Bosnia also.

<sup>31</sup>Trade sanctions were only a part of the economic problems. Communist mismanagement and a disintegrating centrally administered state was also a major economic problem.

<sup>32</sup>Republika Srpska.

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human rights and free speech. For the Croat minority population in Krajina, life became terror. Many Croats were either expelled, killed or put into concentration camps, constantly fearing for their lives, not to even think of their property. The Serb authorities intended to clean the Serbian Republic of Krajina of minorities. Paramilitary units had a free hand. The United Nations Protection Force had a dampening effect but was in reality powerless. Not surprisingly, Serbs in Croatia on the Croatian side were being harassed and many left for Serbia, which housed up to 500.000 refugees from both Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina<sup>33</sup>. During the 1991-1995 war in Croatia there were constant skirmishes between the Serbs and the Croats. However, the front line was much unchanged until 1995 when it was clear that a negotiated solution was impossible. The Belgrade government had decided already in 1993 that continued support of the Serbian Republic of Krajina was of little use<sup>34</sup> and the focus should be on the Serbian Republic in Bosnia<sup>35</sup> and how to divide Bosnia and Herzegovina between Serbs and Croats<sup>36</sup>. However, many people were heavily involved in the continuing existence of the Serbian Republic of Krajina, namely the local population whose houses and property were there, black marketers and other war profiteers, local politicians whose life and careers were in Krajina, as well as Yugoslav Peoples' Army officers having "fun".

It was obvious that Krajina would not be given up by

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<sup>33</sup>Note that one in twenty persons in Serbia was a refugee, forced to leave the newly independent states.

<sup>34</sup>According to a high ranking Yugoslav Peoples' Army Officer (name withheld) who was a corps commander in Krajina and a career officer of the Yugoslav Peoples' Army, after returning from talks in Belgrade in late 1993.

<sup>35</sup> Republika Srpska.

<sup>36</sup>Second World War Croatia had all of Bosnia under its administration, but this time it would be different with half of Bosnia for the Serbs. The Bosnian Muslims were totally ignored.

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those still left there, which could be estimated to have been about 150.000 in 1995, (compared to 300.000 in 1991). During those four years, most educated intellectuals with some initiative had left, contributing to a brain drain, leaving only the old behind.<sup>37</sup>

Despite the arms embargo on Former Yugoslavia, the Croatian Army received large numbers of arms from some of the former Warsaw Pact Armies, mainly the former East German Army and from Hungary<sup>38</sup>. By 1995, after four years of military buildup, it was becoming a formidable fighting machine, matched only by the Yugoslav Peoples' Army. But the Yugoslav Peoples' Army had no longer the political backing from Belgrade to enter into an all out war with Croatia<sup>39</sup>, - knowing that the Western World's sympathy was on the Croatian side and Serbia's hopes of having Orthodox Russia as an ally would be unrealistic, due to Russia's increasing domestic problems.<sup>40</sup> After all, Krajina was little but infertile rocks and stone, the exception being Eastern Slavonia which had fertile soil and some oil production. Nevertheless, the oil fields were like the rest of the communist industries in Former Yugoslavia, - basically either not working or producing at a low and uneconomical capacity.

In 1995 the strength of the Croatian Army and Belgrade's response was tested in Western Slavonia after a semi-staged incident on the recently reopened motorway going from (free)

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<sup>37</sup> And perhaps the politically blind also.

<sup>38</sup> Yugoslav Peoples' Army intelligence source, released to the UN Civil Affairs in 1993 for political purposes.

Also: Bosnia and Herzegovina, A Tradition Betrayed, chapter 10, The Twilight of Yugoslavia, subchapter on Arms Race.

<sup>39</sup> It was also clear that the Tudjman-Milosevic deal to partition Bosnia and Herzegovina (discussed later) meant that the Republic of Serbian Krajina would go to Croatia.

<sup>40</sup> It was the Serbs who dragged Russia into the First World War in 1914, following Austria's ultimatums towards Serbia.

## The War in the Field

Croatia through Serbian Republic of Krajina territory<sup>41</sup>. The Croatian Army attacked the Serb held territory there and, not surprisingly, Serbian territory in West Slavonia was wiped out in a couple of days in the spring of 1995 without any significant political uproar from Belgrade nor military resistance<sup>42</sup>. In the summer of 1995 Croatia had managed to show the world that it had exhausted all possibilities of a negotiated settlement on reintegrating Krajina into Croatia. With an apparently unofficial green light from Croatia's sponsors, notably the United States and Germany, the Croatian Army wiped out Serbian Krajina in 2 days in a brilliantly executed military operation in the middle of the summer of 1995. Croatia's President, Franjo Tudjman, had formerly been a general in the Yugoslav Peoples' Army and therefore knew the enemy inside out. The Serbian soldiers who had been boasting a few years earlier that they were more courageous and better soldiers than the Croats fled literally as fast as they could when the attack started, in some cases looting what could be looted before leaving. Only one unit resisted substantially for 3 days in the area around Slunj. Following the attack came revenge and many of those Serbs who stayed behind, either because they were old, or did not recognize the realities, were "deliberately killed"<sup>43</sup> by the Croat soldiers. The Croats were extremely quick to clean up after the attack, remove the bodies, and repair war damaged things, knowing that the world's eyes were on them. In fact, the efficiency of the civilian "follow up" after the attack was astonishing<sup>44</sup>. It was also noticeable that some "big

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<sup>41</sup>The motorway was initially opened through negotiations, not by force.

<sup>42</sup>However, see also later in this book "Looking for Scapegoats" about Martić and the War Crimes Tribunal.

<sup>43</sup>"Massacred" in less diplomatic language.

<sup>44</sup>Author's own account, being a UN field officer in Former Yugoslavia at the time.



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brother” had suggested to the War Crimes Tribunal to keep quiet, unless the prosecutor was politically blind<sup>45</sup>.

Eastern Slavonia, bordering directly with Serbia, was to be attacked next. However, because of international concern regarding a direct Serbo-Croat confrontation, it became a subject of a negotiated settlement. It was returned to Croatia 2 years later without a fight, under diplomacy which was only possible because it was supported by the threat of force. But the war in Croatia, albeit being serious, was only half as complex and intense as the Bosnian War in 1992 and the war-games that followed until the “de facto” division in 1995.

### **4. The Bosnian War in 1992. The first phase. The start of the war and the Serbs’ struggle to keep as much land as possible. (Milosevic's war<sup>46</sup>).**

After watching the break up of Federal Yugoslavia in Slovenia and Croatia, Bosnians were surprised and concerned over the future of the state. Even though the Federal Government in Belgrade claimed that Slovenia and Croatia just seceded from the Yugoslav Federation, it was becoming increasingly clear that they were in fact just two of several successor states to Federal

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<sup>45</sup>In order to protect Croatia and its leaders, it appears that the War Crimes Tribunal accepted that the Croats called this a police operation, but not a war operation.

<sup>46</sup>“Milosevic’s War” because in the first phase of the war, he as Serbia’s president, gave Serb nationalists and the Yugoslav Peoples’ Army free hands to grab as much as possible of the rapidly disintegrating state. The Bosnian and Krajina Serb leaders were nothing but (sometimes disobedient) puppets.

## The War in the Field

Yugoslavia<sup>47</sup>. The next republic in the Yugoslav Federation to look for independence was Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bosnia being the geographical northern part of the republic, and Herzegovina the southern part. Following the first multi party elections in Bosnia and Herzegovina in 1990, party politics and a media war, Mr. Alija Izetbegovic became president of Bosnia and Herzegovina<sup>48</sup>. Mr. Izetbegovic was a dedicated pacifist Muslim, even though later he brought horrendous sacrifices upon his people in order to defend his new state. During Tito's time he had spent time in prison for political disobedience. Mr. Izetbegovic also wrote a book named "The Islamic Declaration", which has led to claims that he is a fundamentalist. However, political imprisonments were not unusual in communist Yugoslavia, and in fact General Tudjman, the first president of modern<sup>49</sup> independent Croatia, also served his term in a communist prison for politically subversive ideas. Despite being Muslim, Mr. Izetbegovic realized that the Republic of Bosnia and Herzegovina had to remain multi-ethnic and multi-cultural in order to survive as a state<sup>50</sup>. Even on the eve of the war in 1992, he believed that there would be a political, but not a military solution, to the country's growing problems.

The same war-game with the same reasons as were used for the wars in Slovenia and Croatia was repeated in Bosnia and Herzegovina, except on a gradually stronger and larger scale. The

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<sup>47</sup>UN Security Council resolutions stating that Serbia and Montenegro could not automatically keep the seat of Former Federal Yugoslavia in the UN, but had to apply for membership like the other newly independent republics. But note the contrast with other cases, e.g. where the Russian Federation is USSR's automatic successor state.

<sup>48</sup>Mr. Fikret Abdic got more votes than Mr. Izetbegovic, but the Muslim Party (SDA), which both gentlemen were members of at the time, decided on Izetbegovic as president.

<sup>49</sup>1990s Croatia, not 1940s Croatia.

<sup>50</sup>See "Bosnia and Herzegovina, A Tradition Betrayed".

## The War in the Field

Serbian population in Slovenia was insubstantial, and so was their 10-day war. Serbs in Croatia represented around 13% of the population or roughly 700.000, but in Bosnia and Herzegovina they were 31% of the population or around 1.3 million. In addition, many of the Serbs, being farmers and peasants, lived on the countryside and Serbian areas covered large parts of the territory. But to complicate things, the Serbs were also very mixed with Muslims and Croats in other parts of the country.

In March 1992 when it became clear that Bosnia and Herzegovina would also declare independence and leave the Yugoslav Federation, despite the media war and heavy federal government influence and control over the media, the Yugoslav Peoples' Army engaged in its largest war to date<sup>51</sup>. The media war went beyond just propaganda and censoring the press. The Yugoslav Air Force attacked the broadcasting communications tower outside the Bosnian capital, Sarajevo, and the war gradually became "more shooting and less talking".

The federal government structure was totally manned by former communists. Mr. Slobodan Milosevic, Serbia's President (later Yugoslav President), was the man "de facto" holding all the power in the Federal State. He was and is a communist, but since communism was not fashionable any more, he, along with all the communist apparatchicks, simply turned nationalists in order to keep the population's support for a common goal<sup>52</sup>. In 1992 Bosnia and Herzegovina split into two factions, the Serbs on one hand, and Croats and Muslims on the other. The Serbs, being

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<sup>51</sup>Leaving out Partisan, Usthasa and Chetnik fights of the Second World War since they were not (yet) the "peoples" army. In the 1999 Kosovo War the Army never got to fight the NATO troops.

<sup>52</sup>The Serbian communists were not the only ones to change their face. There is a saying also that the Muslim leaders just went from red to green, that is from the communist colour to the islamist colour.

## The War in the Field

Orthodox in religion, stuck much to the authoritarian behaviour and much slower changes from communism than seen in the Catholic world. The Muslims and the Croats were more pro independence. The Muslims constituting around 44% of the population and the Croats about 17%, formed a majority. Bosnia and Herzegovina declared its independence in March and was recognized by the European Communities on 6th April and the United States on 7th April 1992<sup>53</sup>. The Bosnian capital, Sarajevo, split into two parts, Serbian Sarajevo and Sarajevo. Republika Srpska or the Serbian Republic<sup>54</sup> was formed within Bosnia and Herzegovina, supported by the Yugoslav Peoples' Army. Dr. Radovan Karadzic became president, but was much dependant on Mr. Slobodan Milosevic, president of Serbia. In the same way, the Bosnian Serb Army Commander, General Ratko Mladic, depended heavily on Serbia and the Yugoslav Peoples' Army for supplies, despite being a strong leader and a very respectable soldier<sup>55</sup>. Then, again, General Mladic was a Yugoslav Peoples' Army career officer and a dedicated communist, but Dr. Karadzic was a medical doctor turned politician who even voiced a vision for a market economy.

The Croats and the Muslims had very few arms, and the arms that came in despite the arms embargo on Yugoslavia ended up mostly in Croatia which controlled the access to non-Serb Bosnia. The Croatian government felt that the war at home was of a much higher priority than the war in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

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<sup>53</sup>The referendum on independence was on 29th February and 1st March 1992, but the Bosnian government had applied for EC recognition before that date. See Bosnia and Herzegovina, A Tradition Betrayed.

<sup>54</sup> Not to be confused with The Republic of Serbia (Serbia proper).

<sup>55</sup> Being on the list of indicted war criminals does not reduce ones qualifications as a soldier. Recall that the main reason the United States has reservations about an International Criminal Court is not to put an "unnecessary legal burden" on their soldiers.

## The War in the Field

The Serbian Army, consisting of local Bosnian Serbs and Yugoslav Army conscript units, boosted by volunteers, engaged in military operations against only a minimal resistance in order to gain control of those territories in Bosnia and Herzegovina which they believed were rightfully theirs. Wherever doubt existed if a territory was Serbian or not, nationalist ideas like wherever one Serb lives there is Serbia, ruled the game. Minority populations in the Serb Republic were often expelled or killed.<sup>56</sup> Concentration camps were put up for Croats and Muslims<sup>57</sup>. Atrocities, human rights' violations and plundering took place on a large scale, which is the standard procedure in most wars, despite all sorts of conventions on war ethics<sup>58</sup>. This was a war to create a pure Serbian homeland. Moderate Serbs were looked upon as traitors of the Serbian cause, and the newly formed nationalist Serbs inherited the police and the police state of communist Yugoslavia, effectively shutting-up all free media.

The capital of the Serbian Republic<sup>59</sup> was in Pale, just outside Sarajevo. Pale village is not much more than a small ski resort. It is only 15 minutes drive from Sarajevo, but conveniently out of range of the fighting taking place in the city, where Yugoslav

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<sup>56</sup> Don't mix the (Bosnian) Serb Republic with The Republic of Serbia (Serbia proper). No large scale terror happened there until the 1999 Kosovo War.

<sup>57</sup>The year after, in 1993, Croats and Muslims would do the same, including camps for each other. Concentration camps were referred to as prisons. Concentration camp is a media word for large or improvised prisons. Concentration camps are NOT the same as extermination camps, even though deaths may happen there because of harsh conditions.

<sup>58</sup> Experience indicates that most conventions on war ethics are more useful to punish the loser, rather than change the nature of war and soldiers behaviour. Civilized nations at war need no conventions, and the Barbarians don't care.

<sup>59</sup> Republika Srpska.

## The War in the Field

Army artillery on the hills around regularly shelled the Muslim-Croat part and basically surrounded the city.<sup>60</sup>

In 1992 and early 1993 the Serbian Army took control of 70% of the territory of the Republic of Bosnia and Herzegovina. The Republic of Bosnia and Herzegovina still existed and had a government in Sarajevo, but controlled only 30% of the country. Approximately 200.000 to 300.000 people were killed, most of them Muslims.<sup>61</sup> Several hundred thousand others fled to territories still controlled by the Sarajevo Government or to third countries, mostly to Croatia and to Western Europe. Serbs were internationally condemned for atrocities and the United Nations established six so-called safe areas, the cities of Bihac, Tuzla and Sarajevo, as well as the small enclaves of Zepa, Srebrenica and Gorazde which were supposed to be safe from armed attack and disarmed.<sup>62</sup> In fact the safe areas were neither completely safe nor disarmed, but towards the end of 1992 and at the beginning of 1993 the Serb advance more or less stopped, mainly because they felt they had achieved what they wanted.

The Serbs were adamant not to live as a minority in the newly independent Bosnia and Herzegovina. The Serb leadership fuelled popular hatred against Croats because of Croatian atrocities on Serbs in the Second World War, but the Serbs' concern about the rise of Islam and a Muslim president amounted to paranoia at the time.<sup>63</sup> Following centuries of occupation by the

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<sup>60</sup>It appears that the Bosnian Serbs were adamant to move their government into Sarajevo in the future, rather than to the other large Serb city in Bosnia, Banja Luka.

<sup>61</sup>Later research has indicated that the death toll might be considerably lower, perhaps 100.000 dead. However, we do not agree with estimates which have been as low as 10.000 dead.

<sup>62</sup>UN Security Council resolution no 824 from 6th May 1993. However, nobody ever defined exactly the boundaries of the safe areas.

<sup>63</sup>Many Bosnian Muslims are considerably more liberal than a lot of (footnote continued on next page)

## The War in the Field

Ottoman empire, Serbs, just like some other non-Muslim nations in the Balkans, disliked the Turks and everything associated with Islam. Muslims were to be cleansed from the Serb Republic by all available means. Despite trade sanctions and official United Nations and world condemnation, the Serbs got away with it, perhaps because of the increasing dislike of Islam in the Western World, even though that nobody would officially admit that.

The newly formed Bosnian Serb Army, aided by the Yugoslav Peoples' Army, successfully created the Serbian Republic<sup>64</sup>, which consisted of Eastern Bosnia, Eastern Herzegovina, Northern Bosnia and Western Bosnia. The only areas they did not control were those traditionally inhabited by Croats in Western Herzegovina and the traditional Muslim areas in Central Bosnia and around Bihac city in the North West. The Serbian Army<sup>65</sup> could have taken all of Bosnia and Herzegovina by force, despite increasingly heavy resistance and the military advance being slowed down due to NATO enforcement of Bosnia and Herzegovina as a no-fly zone. This effectively grounded the Yugoslav Air Force, but the Serbian feeling at the time was that they now had their fair share of the cake<sup>66</sup>. The Serbian Army could also easily have leveled Sarajevo, just like they did in Vukovar in East Slavonia in Croatia, but despite enormous harassment shelling and sniping, they avoided doing too much damage to Sarajevo city because they intended to live there afterwards themselves.

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Christians. But it is the lurking fundamentalism which scares not only Christian Europeans, but also many secular Muslims.

<sup>64</sup> Republika Srpska.

<sup>65</sup>The Serbian Army in 1992 was basically the same as the Yugoslav Peoples' Army, unreliable and non-Serb generals having been retired early.

<sup>66</sup>And perhaps some reserve also to give up as a bargain chip in an eventual negotiated settlement.

## The War in the Field

Most people in the Serb Republic in Bosnia saw formal unification with Serbia as a goal. This was delayed, however, because of the Government of Serbia proper feeling that they would thereby be confirmed as being the aggressor, whereas now they only unofficially supported their Serbian brothers in their struggle for independence in Bosnia. In addition, such unification could have meant the end to the political career of the Bosnian Serb government, - everybody thinking of keeping their jobs and political influence. However, Krajina Serbs requests in 1993<sup>67</sup> and later, to be a part of the Bosnian Serb republic were quietly ignored in Pale, since Bosnian Serbs would only have increased their problems by adding Krajina as a liability when it was already being dropped by Belgrade as a viable Serbian territory in the long term.

### **5. Sarajevo as an international symbol of the war.**

Sarajevo became the symbol of the war, despite circumstances in some other parts of the country being much worse. The Muslim-Croat part of the city was surrounded by units of the Bosnian Serb Army and Yugoslav Peoples' Army. It was difficult to get water and food at normal prices in the city, partially because of the Serbs surrounding the city, partially because the Sarajevo Mafia wanted to keep the city closed in order to keep black market food prices up, and partially because the Bosnian Muslim government wanted to let the world see that they were victims of Serbian aggression. However, government dignitaries, their friends and relatives and people with money and

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<sup>67</sup>A Senior Yugoslav Peoples' Army officer (name withheld), in private talks with UN, end 1993.



## The War in the Field

connections traveled in and out of Sarajevo all the time, mostly through the tunnel which was strictly controlled by the government, but also through the United Nations controlled airport on foot or by car, by air, and for a very small part, through Serbian territory<sup>68</sup>. The war-games in Sarajevo therefore became more a symbol of the war than a real war, and a symbol of suffering of normal people<sup>69</sup> who had nothing to do with the war, but were unable to stop it. Most of the international media was based in Sarajevo, ignoring much of the rest of the country. Not surprisingly, most Croats left the city for a much better life in Herzegovina or Croatia. But the average (Muslim or Serb) citizen was denied the possibility to leave by the Bosnian Muslim government mainly in order to prevent them all from fleeing, where after the Serbs could easily claim all of Sarajevo, the city being empty<sup>70</sup>. In fact Sarajevans were kept as hostages by their own government, resulting in 10.000 killed and 50.000 wounded by Serbian artillery and selective sniping.<sup>71</sup> Serbs offered to sell food to Muslim Sarajevo, which was denied. Food and fuel was always available, it just being a question of price, but the average citizen had little money. Sometimes short-lived agreements were negotiated through the good offices of the United Nations to establish gas, electrical- and water supplies for the benefit of both halves of the city. But for the next three long years under the

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<sup>68</sup>Ref. numerous interlocutors of UN Civil Affairs.

<sup>69</sup>“Normal people” being civilians without privileges or connections to dignitaries

<sup>70</sup>One of the sick jokes in Sarajevo at the time, ironically describing the situation, being Mrs. Izetbegovic asking her husband, the President; "Why don't you open the city for our people ?" The President replying: "My dear, in that case we would be the only ones left".

<sup>71</sup>The reader should reflect upon who is responsible for war deaths when human shields are used (volunteers or involuntary), the attacker or the defender.

## The War in the Field

longest siege in modern history, the city where the first shots of the Great War<sup>72</sup> were fired by Gavrilo Princip on Archduke Franz Ferdinand in 1914; the same city which had hosted the Winter Olympics just a few years prior; had once again become the world's media focal point.

The famous bombing of a market place in Sarajevo in early 1994 was the event that led to a more direct NATO involvement in the war and in enforcing a reduction in Serbian shelling of the city. One bomb killed several Sarajevans on the Muslim side; according to the Bosnian Muslim authorities about 70 killed and 200 wounded. The Muslims claimed this was a Serbian mortar or artillery-shell<sup>73</sup>. United Nations military observers could not prove this and some witnesses claim this was in fact a bomb planted by the Muslim authorities in order to get more public sympathy<sup>74</sup>. Some estimates state that the amount of people killed were fewer than the Muslim government stated and the Muslim authorities had brought in dead bodies from other places. If this was a Serbian shell, it is difficult to say if it only landed on the market place by accident or if it was intentional. Nevertheless, whichever side was responsible for this single mass killing, because

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<sup>72</sup>More commonly known as the First World War, 1914-1918.

<sup>73</sup>Technically a single conventional mortar or artillery-shell with an impact fuze like the Serbs normally used is unlikely to have such a drastic effect. However, under ideal impact conditions, using 120mm or larger, it is possible. Ref. authors previous military career and consultations with an ex-Yugoslav Peoples' Army soldier.

<sup>74</sup>During the war the Muslims were sometimes accused of shelling their own people. Some reports of the United Nations Military Observers confirm that. However, it has never been proven if this was only mistakes by amateur artillery-men or intentional in order to get public sympathy and blame the Serbs. See also comments on this in the introduction to *Relations Internationales* by Pascal Boniface and *Civil War in Bosnia, 1992-1994*, chapter on unexpected initiatives.

## The War in the Field

of the media publicity, NATO became involved. The Serbs got the blame because, after all, they were responsible for so many other atrocities. The Serbs were given an ultimatum to withdraw their heavy weapons from within a 20-km circle around the city or alternatively to face NATO air raids. The Serbs reluctantly complied, but as the Muslims increasingly attacked the Serbs over the coming months, the heavy weapons were gradually moved back into the 20-km exclusion zone. But because of this massacre, - whoever was responsible, - the shelling of Sarajevo largely stopped for almost a year, which definitely saved more lives than were lost on the market place. The Serbian shelling of Sarajevo resumed full scale again only in the Muslim 1995 spring offensive discussed later, which eventually led to the Rapid Reaction Force being deployed and the Serbs finally losing the Serbian parts of Sarajevo, through negotiations, but presented with a "fait accompli".

### **6. 1993: The second phase of the Bosnian war, - the ethnic war begins.**

Following the Yugoslav Peoples' Army actions and struggle during early 1992 in keeping Bosnia and Herzegovina as a part of Federal Yugoslavia, or as a minimum to keep control of the Serb areas, the second phase of the Bosnian war started - the ethnic war.

By early 1993 the Serbs, through the Yugoslav Peoples' Army, having failed to keep Bosnia and Herzegovina as a part of the Yugoslav Federation, certainly had succeeded in creating a "de facto" Greater Serbia. When the allmighty, and in fact very intelligent, Serbia's "Sloba", President Slobodan Milosevic, realized that it would be difficult to keep and annex all of the

## The War in the Field

Serbian parts of Bosnia, facing international condemnation, there was a secret meeting between him and the President of Croatia, Mr. Franjo Tudjman.<sup>75</sup> By this time, Milosevic realized that Croatia was here to stay and he had to make the best out of it. Because of the war, these two Presidents were certainly not friends, but “realpolitik” was the issue. There exists a picture, true or falsified, of these two strong-men toasting together and it is widely believed that they reached an understanding on which parts of former Yugoslavia should go to whom. There is no reason to think there was a written agreement, but Serbia's support for Krajina started to dwindle slowly and Croatia quietly accepted Serbia controlling large parts of Bosnia and Herzegovina. But Croats in Bosnia and Herzegovina would also get their share of the cake in Western Herzegovina and the bottom line was how to divide Bosnia and Herzegovina between Serbs and Croats. Needless to say, there must have been many disagreements on where the boundaries should be and the local population should not get the idea that they would be ignored by their own leaders. However, it is widely believed that there was an understanding that the Republic of Bosnia and Herzegovina would be divided between Serbia and Croatia, which would be in the interest of Serbs and Croats living there, but not in the Muslim interest. It appears that the Muslims were not consulted. There is no public record of this meeting, but both presidents' actions in the years to follow, indicate that they were not really fighting an all out war any more, but more moving around like chess players to get a better position (and perhaps sacrificing some “pawns” in the process).<sup>76</sup>

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<sup>75</sup>Some sources claim that the Serb and Croat presidents started their “secret” dialogue on how to carve up Bosnia and Herzegovina already in 1992. We are unable to comment on such rumors.

<sup>76</sup>The content of this meeting was given to the author by one of the UN interlocutors in Bosnia late in 1994. There is, at least for the time being, no (footnote continued on next page)

## The War in the Field

But there were also indications already in 1993 that Serbia would enter into a confrontation with the West. Serbian television at the time was showing propaganda pictures against the United States. First they showed the Germans bombing Yugoslavia in the Second World War, then the Americans bombing Belgrade in the same war, and then they mixed the pictures together showing American B-52 bombers dropping bombs, leaving it to the imagination they were landing on Serbia. And Milosevic's crystal ball was right. Later in the Yugoslav War of Disintegration, notably in 1995, American jets and cruise missiles fired in anger bombed Serbian positions and communications in Serbian Krajina (now Croatia)<sup>77</sup> and targets around Banja Luka and Pale in Bosnia. This time the air raids were more symbolic than of a destructive nature. However, in the 1999 Kosovo War, US and NATO air power inflicted considerable damage on Serbia proper.

In 1993 the Bosnian Croats and the Bosnian Muslims, in their joint struggle against the Serbs, were being pushed into a corner. This resulted in disputes between these two allies. Not many seem to know or understand exactly why the Muslim-Croat war started in Bosnia and Herzegovina and all through the war there was mutual recognition between the Republic of Bosnia and Herzegovina and the Republic of Croatia, with embassies in Zagreb and the Muslim part of Sarajevo. But the fighting between Muslims and Croats started and Croat hatred of Muslims in Bosnia and Herzegovina became as fierce as the Serb hatred of Muslims. In fact, Serbs and Croats, both being Christians, strongly disliked the increased Islamisation and attempts to replace socialism with Islam<sup>78</sup>. Now the war had entered its second

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reliable reference material available.

<sup>77</sup>Udbina airport in Serb held Croatia, used to attack the UN declared safe area around Bihac in Bosnia.

<sup>78</sup>Many moderate Muslims did not like Islamisation either. Despite Croat (footnote continued on next page)

## The War in the Field

phase, - the ethnic war<sup>79</sup>.

All through the remaining war years there was a general understanding between the Serbs and the Croats in Bosnia and Herzegovina which territory belonged to whom. Croats owned Western Herzegovina where they had always been a majority. Eastern Herzegovina, Eastern and Northern Bosnia were Serbian and Serbs had been living there for centuries, partially pushed westwards by the expanding Ottoman Empire at the time<sup>80</sup>. There were also several Croatian enclaves in central and northern Bosnia, surrounded by Muslims and Serbs. But in 1993 dividing lines between Croats and Muslims appeared in a strange way. The Muslim-Croat war started, with the Serbs as spectators, but passively fuelling and supporting this fight between their enemies, showing the world that Serbs were not the only troublemakers. Graffiti on walls in Southern Croatia, bordering Herzegovina, which previously said: "Serbs go home" was amended with "and Muslims too".

Western Herzegovina, fully supported by Croatia, established the Croat Republic of Herceg Bosna, its capital being West Mostar. Croats in Bosnia and Herzegovina could get Croatian passports. To get a Bosnian passport became very

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and Serb propaganda, there are extremely few fundamentalists in Bosnia.

<sup>79</sup>It should be noted that despite the rise of Islam, during the war, as a generalisation, the Muslims were considerably more tolerant than the Serbs and the Croats. If this is their nature, because they wanted a multi-ethnic state, or simply because they were in the losers position, is difficult to judge.

<sup>80</sup>There was a problem with Western Bosnia which was, at the time, also a part of the Serbian Republic, (Republika Srpska) because it bordered the Republic of Serbian Krajina, supplying Croatian Serbs in their fight against Croatia. But for the time being that area would be untouchable for the Croats. The Croatian Croats not liking it for strategic reasons, but Herzegovinan Croats having minimal interest in it.

## The War in the Field

difficult for everybody because the Muslim government in Sarajevo wanted to prevent its population from leaving the country and fleeing the war. The self-proclaimed Croat Republic of Herceg Bosna became a flourishing state with goods arriving from Croatia, further boosted by duties and transit taxes put on all goods going through to the Muslims. This finally ended in no goods going through at all in order to strangle what the more fanatic Herzegovinian Croats now referred to as the Muslim Republic<sup>81</sup>. In many respects Bosnia became a true Muslim republic because Serbs and Croats were not relevant or had nothing to say any more in the Sarajevo Government<sup>82</sup>. The Republic of Bosnia and Herzegovina had now effectively ceased to exist as a true multi-ethnic state.

Of the Croat enclaves in Bosnia, the most strategically important were those with no land connection with the Republic of Croatia<sup>83</sup>. Not surprisingly, the Muslim Army, officially referred to as the Army of Bosnia and Herzegovina, tried to strangle these enclaves. As a strange contradiction, the Usora Croats took the Muslim side and fought with them. The Croats within the Muslim Bihac area had a separate military headquarters, not far away from the Muslim Army headquarters there, but had no disputes, mainly because of the importance the Muslim Bihac pocket had to the Republic of Croatia in its fight against the Krajina Serbs<sup>84</sup>. The Croats in Vitez and Zepce were surrounded and had to fight back, but were never overrun because of the stranglehold the Republic

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<sup>81</sup>The term "The Muslim Republic" was used by the most radical press in West Mostar.

<sup>82</sup>First many Serbs left the Bosnian parliament and as the war progressed, many Croats left to. However, some remained, either to have a job, or because they believed in a multi ethnic country.

<sup>83</sup>The parts with land connection to Croatia and Serbia were already "de facto" parts of Greater Croatia and Greater Serbia, respectively.

<sup>84</sup>Ref. UN Civil Affairs in Bihac

## The War in the Field

of Croatia had on all access by land to Muslim areas. The Dastansko and Kiseljak Croats were, in fact, supported and helped by the Serbs. The Kiseljak Croats have expressed their gratitude towards the Serbs for giving them food aid<sup>85</sup> while fighting against the Muslim Army<sup>86 87</sup>. The Dastansko Croats were eventually evacuated through Serbian territory when pressed too hard by the Muslim Army, further indicating a chess play rather than an all out war.

Black market trade around every enclave started to flourish. Electricity came across certain front lines. The braver persons with the right connections also traveled across front lines.

The Muslim-Croat war was fierce in places, especially in Mostar. Croats rightfully claimed that of the main cities in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Mostar was the only one Croats had a claim to.

Serbs had Banja Luka and a part of Sarajevo, the Muslims had Tuzla, Bihac, Zenica and the bulk of Sarajevo.

Mostar split up. East Mostar became the Muslim part and West Mostar the Croat part. East and Central Mostar lay in ruins with rubbish everywhere like a shantytown, the Muslims having neither the means nor the initiative to repair war damaged things. However, West Mostar was quickly repaired, most of the buildings still standing because the Muslim Army lacked heavy weapons. In Croat held West Mostar water and electricity was connected, restaurants opened, curfew was lifted, mail services started, banks opened and even credit cards became accepted in some places. Croatian currency was used along with the “de

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<sup>85</sup>Most likely also some arms were included.

<sup>86</sup>Gratitude expressed by the then Mayor of Kiseljak town. After the war the Muslims wanted him indicted for “war crimes”.

<sup>87</sup>Serbs did this of course not out of love for Croats, but to let them fight the Muslims who were their common enemy. However, it prevented the Kiseljak Croats from starving.



## The War in the Field

facto” Bosnian money, German Marks. West Mostar became a magic town, next to the front lines and next to the ruins of Muslim East Mostar<sup>88</sup>. The Croat Republic of Herceg Bosna was cleansed of Muslims, mainly the hard way, but world politics being as unfair as they are, there were no sanctions imposed, just criticism.

By this time the original government of the Republic of Bosnia and Herzegovina in Sarajevo, which so bravely had declared its independence the year before, with its President, Mr. Alija Izetbegovic at the time stating there would be no war, now effectively controlled only 20% of the republic’s former territory, the bulk being in Central Bosnia, but also four enclaves, the Bihac pocket in north west and Zepa, Srebrenica and Gorazde in the east. The Bosnian government, still being the “de jure” government, claimed its interest in maintaining Bosnia and Herzegovina as a multi-ethnic and a multi-cultural state. Saying anything else would have been political suicide, meaning instant death of the republic, resulting in “de jure” partition, since the Muslims were losing the war and the country being “de facto” partitioned. Secondly, in a multi ethnic Bosnia and Herzegovina, Muslims would be a majority population, albeit not an absolute majority, having 44% of the population<sup>89</sup>.

But after the fall of communism people looked for new ways to unite. Some choose Islam and Islamic countries in the world pushed for Islamisation by sending copies of the Koran and Islamic Fighters (Mujahiddeen). This Islamisation was not appreciated by all Bosnian Muslims who were firstly European Yugoslavs and only secondly of Muslim religion. However, soon splits between hard-liners and moderates appeared in the Bosnian

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<sup>88</sup>Sometimes refered to as Bosnia and Herzegovina's version of Dodge city.

<sup>89</sup>This pre-war number no longer applies as a percentage. Many Muslims are dead and many citizens of all nationalities have left.

## The War in the Field

government. Ethnic cleansing now also started in the Muslim parts. Most but not all of this ethnic cleansing, in contrast to the Serbo-Croat model, was soft ethnic cleansing, people being harassed, not getting their aid packets, losing their jobs, being drafted into the Muslim Army to fight against their ethnic kin and in other ways made understand that they should leave.<sup>90</sup> By the end of 1993 and in 1994 the idea of a multi-ethnic and a multi-cultural Bosnia and Herzegovina was in reality dead. Over a million people were refugees or displaced within the country and the longer they were away from their former homes, the less likely it was that they would ever return.

### **7. 1994: The Bosnian war enters its third phase, that of corruption and stagnation.**

1994 was a waiting period in a stagnant war. Fatigue was setting in on all sides. People were fed up but nobody saw a solution acceptable to everybody. The fighting was limited and often shooting was more to show that the front was active, but more often than not, the guns were silent. Rumors went that Serbian artillery-men in some areas, when shelling, fired one warning shot that missed, in order for people to get into shelter, before firing for effect<sup>91</sup>. Officially this was called bad marksmanship<sup>92</sup>. The shelling was normally more for harassment

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<sup>90</sup>To quote a prominent Muslim in Konjic: "One day we will manage to get them (Serbs and Croats) all out".

<sup>91</sup>UN local source.

<sup>92</sup>The border guards on the Berlin wall in its last years were plagued by a similar bad marksmanship when officially ordered to shoot on fleeing people. A soldier can be punished by his superiors for not shooting, but (footnote continued on next page)

## The War in the Field

than for killing and this was most likely official policy on all sides. Sometimes the Muslims would provoke the Serbs by shelling Serb civilians in order to wage a media and a propaganda war, claiming Serbian aggression. The Serb military leadership, being brought up with state controlled media, never understood the principle of free media power and usually retaliated in front of the world's cameras, complaining afterwards that the international media was against them, added to by more conspiracy theories about the Petro-dollars, CNN International, American interests in the Middle-East etc.<sup>93</sup>

The damage and deaths inflicted in 1994 and 1995 were minimal compared to the 1992 Serb led war and 1993 Muslim-Croat War. There was some test of strength but no decisive battles. The Serbs intended to eliminate some of the Muslim enclaves, including Gorazde and Sarajevo, but were stopped by threat of United Nations sanctioned air raids to be executed by the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO).

In February 1994 the United States, by threatening reduced political and economic support for the Republic of Croatia, forced Croats in Bosnia and Herzegovina into a federation with Bosnian Muslims<sup>94 95</sup>. Bosnian Muslims liked this

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not for not hitting his target.

<sup>93</sup>It is true that the Serbs lost the international media war and the media turned against them. This was partially their own fault, not understanding how to handle uncensored free media, and partially because of some truth being in the conspiracy theories. We prefer to refer to some of the conspiracy theories as international high politics.

<sup>94</sup>Bosnia and Herzegovina, A Tradition Betrayed, chapter 11, Bosnia in The Wars of Yugoslav Succession.

<sup>95</sup>The reason for the United States actions were to halt the slaughter and contain the conflict, which was official US Policy in the Balkans (Ref. US Policy in the Balkans, US Army War College) and protecting interests in the Middle East by showing Muslim support in order to prevent (footnote continued on next page)

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idea since this would not only stop the Muslim-Croat War, but in the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina, Muslims would outnumber Croats by three to one. In order to keep Herzegovinian Croats happy, there was a provision for a confederation between Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina. The idea of a confederation was never intended to be anything but empty words<sup>96</sup>, especially since this was the time for Federal Yugoslavia's disintegration, not reintegration. However, in a confederation, Croats would outnumber Muslims by three to one, which was not liked by the Muslim side. This newly created Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina gave the Republic of Croatia, which was the sponsor of the self-proclaimed Croat Republic of Herceg Bosna, increased influence in the Muslim government in Bosnia. But Herzegovinian Croats disliked the idea, after all they had fought to be free from Muslims, and the Federation remained, and is today nothing but a practical joke. The sponsors of the Federation were the United States, Germany as Croatia's patron (also fed up of receiving more Ex-Yugoslav refugees), and Turkey, being a secular Islamic country trusted by the United States and a strong ally of the Muslim Bosnia.<sup>97</sup>

There was no longer any industrial production in Bosnia

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fundamentalist Islamic countries getting too much foothold and influence in the Muslim parts of Bosnia. Another explanation is just that the United States wanted to show the Europeans from the Atlantic to the Urals, that the US is a major European political power, able to influence European wars more than any European power can or wants.

<sup>96</sup>Comments of a Croat diplomat in Brussels in the spring of 1994.

<sup>97</sup> It can be noted here that the Turkish United Nations battalion in Bosnia and Herzegovina, being of little use on the front line because the Serbs saw them as Islamic occupiers and not as neutral peace-keepers, besides helping the Bosnians, also kept an unofficial lid on the more fanatic Islamic fighters from more fundamentalist countries based in Zenica in Central Bosnia.

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and Herzegovina. There was never much industry in Herceg Bosna anyhow, the Bosnians Muslims had almost lost the war, and the Serbian economy was in ruins from years of communist mismanagement, made even worse by international trade sanctions and the loss of revenue from Slovenia and Croatia. The war brought with it some starvation but, in some cases, it could be argued that health actually improved since the tremendous pollution spat out by Yugoslavia's East European style industries disappeared. Cases of lung diseases amongst infants were reduced in areas like Zenica, and Sarajevo could be seen in the valley from the mountain tops around because the haze and smog was gone. Ironically, the war was good for the ecological environment.

The war was getting a life of its own by 1994. All those who had made a political career based on the war, such as young men appointed to high military positions, black marketeers, as well as highly paid international civil servants, all had little interest in ending the status quo. On all three warring sides, people either became very poor, or a selected few became extremely rich. Black market sales flourished. In many areas the black market became the only market. For instance fuel in Croatia cost about 1 German Mark per liter. In the Serbian Republic<sup>98</sup> the price was about threefold and in enclaves like Bihac the price tripled again, up to 10-15 Marks per liter<sup>99</sup>. Needless to say, personnel of military units from parts of the world much poorer than Bosnia and Herzegovina engaged in corrupt trade in many cases. Bosnians of all ethnic backgrounds had little respect for uninterested and incompetent United Nations personnel from the Third World, claiming they were there just to earn money with little interest in the Bosnian situation. The United Nations were harassed by all sides,

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<sup>98</sup> Republika Srpska.

<sup>99</sup> UN Civil Affairs Bihac.

## The War in the Field

by the authorities through restrictions on free movement, occasionally also shooting United Nations military personnel, and by individuals and the authorities through hijacking of cars. Many of the hijacked cars were later painted green and used by the Muslim and Croat Armies. The Serbs normally sold their bounty for profit since there was no lack of military hardware there, thanks to the huge amount of reserves the Yugoslav Peoples' Army had. But for international aid workers, with appropriate cautions, Bosnia was safer than many other parts of the world where there is no war at all. In fact, the harassment was not directed against individuals but against the United Nations as an organisation, letting out frustrations because of lack of progress in stopping the war. A United Nations military officer at the time claimed, in his frustration with the warring parties, that he was fed up of their ungratefulness towards the international community, never saying thank you but always asking for more and constantly blaming outsiders for their own problems, that "this war was God's way to reduce the number of assholes in the world"<sup>100</sup>. The more cautious international personnel just described the locals as "very wild people". Indeed the United Nations was becoming increasingly frustrated and eventually some new steps had to be taken, either to solve the war and the disputes, or at least get the United Nations out of an operation that was costing up to five million dollars *every day*, whereof the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) was spending around half a million dollars every day on food alone<sup>101</sup>. In order to stimulate

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<sup>100</sup> Those were strong words, but to us they were not surprising at all.

<sup>101</sup> United Nations figures are normally quoted on a yearly basis. However, this is only one dollar per Bosnian inhabitant per day, which is not overwhelmingly much considering the problems and the destruction involved.

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local authorities to do something themselves<sup>102</sup> rather than just begging, they were tasked to distribute the food aid themselves. The food certainly got eaten, but unfortunately some people had to pay the corrupt local distributors and some other parts ended up with the armies, either directly through distribution, and indirectly when the soldiers came home on leave and took food with them back to the front line. In fact, only a very few people had a healthy diet, but then again, not many died of starvation either<sup>103</sup>. This United Nations Operation named the United Nations Protection Force (UNPROFOR), which started with the original Vance plan to deploy 10.000 peace-keepers in Croatia, was now employing almost 50.000 people in Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina, apart from a small contingent in the (Former Yugoslav) Republic of Macedonia, which now had declared independence also<sup>104</sup>.

The enclaves in Eastern Bosnia and the Bihac pocket became extremely profitable for black marketeers besides, of course, Sarajevo. While the international press reported fighting in Bihac, parts of the front line were reserved for Muslim-Serb trade. However, if too many people came forward, the selected few had the army too shoot a little on the desperate individuals in order to keep the market closed and prices high<sup>105</sup>.

## 8. The Autonomous Province of Western Bosnia.

There was a final and open split in the Muslim government

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<sup>102</sup>UNHCR policy.

<sup>103</sup>UN Civil Affairs

<sup>104</sup>UNPROFOR fact sheets.

<sup>105</sup>UN Civil Affairs in Bihac, early 1995.

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in Sarajevo. A former semi-corrupt businessman, Mr. Fikret Abdic<sup>106</sup>, who was a member of the same political party as the Bosnian President, Mr. Alija Izetbegovic, and who in fact obtained more votes in the last pre-war elections than President Izetbegovic did, declared parts of the Muslim Bihac pocket as the Autonomous Province of Western Bosnia. Mr. Abdic was a Bosnian Muslim, but had rather little faith in Islam, contrary to Mr. Izetbegovic. For Mr. Abdic, money was everything. He made peace with the Serbs and started fighting against the Bosnian Muslim Army 5th Corps in the Bihac pocket, receiving much support from the Serbs who happily pointed out that Muslims were now fighting Muslims.<sup>107</sup> Ironically, Mr. Abdic's war was partially financed indirectly by the United Nations through enormous rent paid for facilities used for United Nations troops. These facilities used to belong to state factories in Former Yugoslavia and state property should have been provided free of charge under the Status of Forces Agreement (SOFA) between the United Nations and the Republic of Bosnia and Herzegovina. However, after the break up of Yugoslavia, factory directors claimed that they were not communists any more and demanded that rent should be paid to them as the caretakers of the former state owned businesses<sup>108</sup>. The result was that money changed hands, possibly sometimes also with a secret commission or bribe, with the United Nations personnel negotiating the higher than

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<sup>106</sup>Out of two evils, a corrupt economy was better than no economy at all. Abdic was involved in a huge debt scandal as director of Agrokommerc during socialist times.

<sup>107</sup>It is claimed that Mr. Abdic had to pay the Serbs for their military support, and when he ran out of money, so did the military support. It is also said that many of the Muslim soldiers suffered from "bad marksmanship" in order not to kill their fellow Muslims.

<sup>108</sup>UN Civil Affairs.



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market price rents<sup>109</sup>. In the case of Mr. Abdic, he also insisted on the money be paid in cash into his Austrian bank account<sup>110</sup>. In the end, Mr. Abdic's forces were overrun by the Bosnian Army 5th Corps and his men got stranded in a refugee camp in no-mans-land on the border between Croatia and Serbian Krajina, unwelcome everywhere.

But despite strange war-games and corrupt activities, the war was not finished.

The Croats argued that they would not live under Muslim majority and would only accept Serbs as neighbours, but not live with them.

The Serbs wanted their own state and to be a part of Serbia, not another or a new country where they would be a minority.

The Muslims wanted to control all of Bosnia and Herzegovina, including the minority populations, under an umbrella of a multiethnic and multi cultural state.

Consequently there was a stalemate. By the winter 1994-1995, it was clear that a "to be or not to be"<sup>111</sup> was coming closer, the summer normally being the shooting season.

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<sup>109</sup>The UN administration could never prove this, despite looking into the problem.

<sup>110</sup>It was not unusual for the United Nations to pay rent into foreign (and strange) bank accounts or to pay large amounts in cash. The reason being that the Bosnian banking system was not functioning and that people in the field needed cash.

<sup>111</sup>A Bosnian interlocutor's comments at the beginning of 1995 (name withheld).

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### **9. 1995: The war's fourth phase. The “de facto” dividing lines redrawn and the end of formal fighting in Croatia and Bosnia-Herzegovina.**

The Bosnian Muslim Army, having had some limited successes against the Serbian Army, especially in areas of little importance to the Serbs, and having gradually obtained more weapons despite the arms embargo, was increasing in confidence, boosted by a large amount of conscripts, perhaps numbering by then (1995) almost 200.000 men. At the same time the Bosnian Serbs perhaps only had about 50.000 men under arms, - many of the volunteers had gone back home to Serbia because the lucrative looting opportunities were all exhausted for the Serbs, - and most Yugoslav Army units, originally sent by Belgrade, had returned to Serbia for political reasons<sup>112</sup>.

In the spring of 1995 the Bosnian Muslim Army, for a small part also aided by Arabic speaking Mujahiddeen, had major preparations under way to break the siege of Sarajevo from the outside, by braking into the city through Serbian lines. Bosnian President, Mr. Alija Izetbegovic, announced that this operation would mean the loss of the three eastern enclaves of Zepa, Srebrenica and Gorazde<sup>113</sup>. The assessment was that the Serbs were getting too tired of the endless lack of peace and would give

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<sup>112</sup>General Morillon claimed the JNA units were in Bosnia until May 1995. This can be discussed, but at that time, this was partially also a question of definition: what was JNA and what were local Serb forces? The command structure may have been local, but the materiel was not. Milosevic was, at this stage, trying to distance Serbia from a possible fall of the Bosnian Serb Republic (Republika Srpska).

<sup>113</sup>At this time the Bosnian Muslim assessment was that more would be gained by force than by talking.

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in. Furthermore, there was a hope that the Serbs would be excluded in using their heavy weapons around Sarajevo since Sarajevo was a United Nations safe area, supported by the threat of United Nations sanctioned NATO air strikes. However, the Muslims failed to realize that they were also violating the principle of a safe area, resulting in very little response on behalf of the United Nations and NATO, besides the usual and meaningless condemnation for violating a safe area. After all, both sides had been violating these principles all through the war, Serbs attacking into the safe areas and the Muslims attacking out of them, both claiming legitimate self-defence purposes.

But Sarajevo was too important for the Serbs to be given up easily and the Serbs resisted fiercely<sup>114</sup>. Moreover, Croats did not attack the Serbs at the same time in order to diversify the Serb resources<sup>115</sup> and the Muslim attack was a complete failure. The Muslim army lost a lot of men, including in minefields, by staging hopeless and desperate World War One infantry style attacks against Serbian machine-guns and artillery. The Serbs also hailed Muslim parts of Sarajevo with artillery in order to let the Bosnian Muslim government understand who set the terms of the war. Following the attack, the Muslims paid the price for stirring up increased fighting. The Serbs eliminated the Muslim enclaves of Zepa and Srebrenica, but were stopped from taking Gorazde because of NATO involvement in protecting Gorazde the year before. It appears that NATO did not want to lose face the same

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<sup>114</sup>The Bosnian Serb Military Intelligence in Ilijas informed UN Civil Affairs a few months earlier that the Serbs would never give Sarajevo up, or alternatively, they would destroy it. When the Serbs left Sarajevo in the autumn of 1995, they burned and destroyed the Serbian areas, but were too late to level the Muslim parts because of the Rapid Reaction Force's presence.

<sup>115</sup>The Kiseljak Croats, being Federation partners with the Muslims, simulated support but did nothing. Ref. UN Civil Affairs in Kiseljak, 1995.

## The War in the Field

way as respect for the United Nations had gone down the drain.

It was clear that the Bosnian Muslim Army, consisting mainly of infantry but lacking battle decisive arms, was almost powerless. It was now also clear that the Muslims had lost the war militarily because of the international arms embargo, - neither Croats nor Serbs letting heavy arms and battle decisive material go secretly through their territory to the Muslims. The Muslims obtained small arms despite the arms embargo, by paying for the through transport, but that was not enough. Nevertheless, the Muslims had certainly not lost the war politically<sup>116</sup>.

But the story with the Croats was different. Even though the Serbian Republic<sup>117</sup> in Bosnia had occupied 70% of the territory, it was understood that in the settlement, the Serbs would have to give up territory. However, just by handing it over would mean popular revolt by those living there. More war-games were tried out in Kupres, when the Croatian Defence Council (HVO), or popularly said, the Army of the Croat Republic of Herceg Bosna, attacked the Serbs there. In fact there was almost no fighting and the Serbs just retreated and left Kupres for good<sup>118</sup>. However, officially, the Serbs lost a battle against the Croats in Kupres.

In the same way as the Croatian Serb and Bosnian Serb armies were only a small shadow next to the Yugoslav Peoples'

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<sup>116</sup>The failure of the breaking of the siege of Sarajevo was the only serious failure of this author's crystal ball, being a UN field officer on the Federation side at the time. Luckily for him, both the Bosnian Muslim government and their military leadership made the same error of judgement about their strength, (and possibly also the United States intelligence operating in the area at the same time unless, of course, if they had a different agenda for how to end the war, that is to let the Muslims understand that they would have to talk and accept a crippled state).

<sup>117</sup> Republika Srpska.

<sup>118</sup> UN Civil Affairs BH report.

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Army, the Herceg Bosna Army was only a small shadow and a puppet of the Army of the Republic of Croatia, whose might and power could no longer be concealed. After eliminating the self-proclaimed Republic of Serbian Krajina in August 1995, partially by creeping quietly up from Herzegovina, before launching a decisive attack all over Krajina, practically erasing Croatian Serbs in 2 - 3 days, - the next question was what to do in Bosnia and Herzegovina. At this stage, it appears that Croatia had a green light from the United States and from Germany to go ahead militarily in order to solve the Yugoslav crisis<sup>119</sup>. In the meantime the Bosnian Muslim Army 5th Corps broke out of the Bihac pocket, expecting the Croats to help them. But again, the Croats made the Muslims understand that they made the decisions, not the Muslims. The stockpile of arms the Muslims had in Zagreb in Croatia<sup>120</sup>, but could never reach the Bihac pocket because of previous Serbian isolation, was never delivered by the Croats. Consequently the Serbs rolled the Muslims back into their pocket, exactly like they had done a year and a half earlier in a similar break out from the same pocket. The Bosnian Government and Bosnian Muslims obviously had no friends outside the Islamic world<sup>121</sup>. The next step, executed in the autumn of 1995 was to decide on (execute) the division of Bosnia between Serbs and Croats. Herzegovina was divided since 1993, but Bosnia was an unsettled case. The Croatian Army took in a very quick operation all of Western Bosnia from the Bosnian Serbs, - President Milosevic of Serbia saying or doing nothing. Not surprisingly, the

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<sup>119</sup>United States support was necessary in order to block a possible United Nations Security Council attempt to condemn Croatia's actions.

<sup>120</sup>Bosnian Army source. Name withheld.

<sup>121</sup>Bosnian Muslims being European, claimed it is better to have Arabic fundamentalists as friends, rather than having no friends at all, neither option being good. Ref. UN interlocutors in Visoko, 1994.

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Croatian attack stopped when the Serbian Republic<sup>122</sup> in Bosnia had about 50% of Bosnia and Herzegovina under its control, just like had been proposed in the negotiations two years earlier. Not surprisingly either, there were no all out and decisive battles in this attack, the Bosnian Serbs just retreated, not being able to resist the Croatian Army without the support of Milosevic's Yugoslav Peoples' Army<sup>123</sup>. By now, Croats controlled approximately 30% of Bosnia and Herzegovina, Serbs around 50%, and the Muslims 20%. In fact the Muslim army made almost no advances and in one case when they wanted to take a part from the Serbs, their so-called Croat allies in the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina fired on them, later to excuse it as a mistake done in the confusion of a battle<sup>124</sup>.

The “de facto” division of Bosnia and Herzegovina between Serbs and Croats, or more properly between Franjo and Sloba<sup>125</sup>, had taken place, but there were still some disagreements to be settled at the negotiating table.

At this stage the Americans stepped officially in and proposed the proximity talks in Dayton in the United States, to be conducted between Serbia, representing also Serbs in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, representing also Croats in Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Bosnia and Herzegovina<sup>126</sup>. A peace agreement was signed. For the Muslims it was an unjust peace, but it was peace. The Serbs got half of Bosnia and Herzegovina, including disputed areas like Zepa, Srebrenica and Visegrad. Croats got a

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<sup>122</sup> Republika Srpska.

<sup>123</sup> This operation and the fact that the Muslims got nothing, supports the theory on the Tudjman-Milosevic agreement on dividing Bosnia.

<sup>124</sup> In the area not far from Jajce.

<sup>125</sup> President Franjo Tudjman of Croatia and President Slobodan Milosevic of Serbia.

<sup>126</sup> Bosnia and Herzegovina meaning the Muslim parts.

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“de facto” Greater Croatia, having the Muslims as a buffer between them and the Serbs in large areas. Some people claim the Dayton Agreement is nothing but a glorified cease-fire, nailing down on paper the realities on the ground. This is only partly true.

Some territories were exchanged and front lines were moved as a result of the talks and the agreement included the Serbs giving up Sarajevo. The Dayton talks and their preparation were certainly not easy<sup>127</sup>. Not every Croat, Serb and Muslim was happy with this arrangement. Croatia's President, Franjo Tudjman, signed, but the Croat President of the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina, Mr. Kresimir Zubak, who was also the President of the self-proclaimed Croat Republic of Herceg Bosna, was unhappy to give up some important Croat territories because his supporters and interests were in Bosnia and Herzegovina. On the other hand, Croatian President Tudjman was thinking about the welfare of all Croats, including the need to keep the Americans happy, something Croatia depended on.

The President of the Serbian Republic<sup>128</sup>, Dr. Radovan Karadzic, was not the man pulling the strings there any more either. In fact it is questionable if he ever was a president making independent policy, more than just an administrator with some decision powers in Milosevic's hierarchy<sup>129</sup>.

Despite this, in political attitudes, nothing new happened. Bosnia and Herzegovina remains a divided country, despite being still “de jure” one state. When the Dayton Agreement was signed, the war was over anyway. Bosnia and Herzegovina was

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<sup>127</sup>The US envoy, Mr. Richard Holbrooke, had a lot of preliminary meetings and travelling in Former Yugoslavia before the three presidents were willing to meet officially.

<sup>128</sup> Republika Srpska.

<sup>129</sup>Dr. Karadzic sometimes opposed Milosevic but it was always Milosevic who had the last word.

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effectively partitioned, and everybody seemed to have had enough of the war anyhow.

### **10. 1996: The aftermath of the Croatian and Bosnian wars.**

In the years immediately following the war Bosnia and Herzegovina continued in reality to be three states. The Republic of Bosnia and Herzegovina (the Muslim parts), were internationally recognized, but effectively controlled less than one quarter of the republic's original territory, most of it in Central Bosnia, but also an area around Bihac in the North Western part of Bosnia, bordering Croatia. Bosnia and Herzegovina is effectively a bankrupt country, basically living off the billions of dollars spent by the international community there every year, but with little or no production of its own<sup>130</sup>. The Croat Republic of Herceg Bosna, a "de facto" part of a Greater Croatia with all the benefits of a modern and functioning semi-western country, was forced to accept the name "Croat Community in Bosnia and Herzegovina", in order to keep a proforma life in the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina. The Croats still control around 30% of the territory of the pre-war Socialist Republic of Bosnia and Herzegovina. The Croat territories were the only parts where facilities like post, banks, telephone, water, electricity and entrepreneurship thrives reasonably. The Serbian Republic<sup>131</sup>, received recognition as a state within the state. They are subject to some restrictions, including not being able to unite with Serbia. Bosnian Serbs are very unhappy with the treatment they received, having their

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<sup>130</sup>Source UNMIBH

<sup>131</sup>Republika Srpska.



## The War in the Field

republic established through force, but not having the right of self-determination and to unite with Serbia and, not surprisingly, they are very unwilling to co-operate in projects of an integration into a multi-ethnic Bosnia and Herzegovina, which led to that the bulk of the international aid went to the other two ethnic groups<sup>132</sup>, further increasing Serb dissatisfaction with the peace arrangement. The Serb Republic remained an authoritarian and orthodox police state, inherited from communist Yugoslavia. There was basic food in the Serbian Republic<sup>133</sup>, but no money or luxury whatsoever. Like in other parts of Bosnia and Herzegovina, most capable people want to or have left the country for a better life somewhere else.

Using the war as an excuse to be political refugees does not work any more. After all, the only genuine refugees were those of mixed marriages and in a very few cases some individuals from the political opposition. Muslim refugees had little interest in going to Islamic countries because the standard of living there was often even worse than in Muslim Bosnia. The bulk of the refugees were living on social security in Europe, many in Germany because of German guilty conscious in closing the door on war refugees. Those were in fact economic refugees, or for males of military age, fleeing the conscription into the armies. However, some persons have left as immigrants, not refugees, to third countries, which is benefiting both them as well as their new home country. However, those with the initiative and persistence to be immigrants are few compared to the rest of the herd.

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<sup>132</sup>Just like during the war years, most foreign aid went to the Croats and the Muslims.

<sup>133</sup> Republika Srpska.

## 11. Looking for scapegoats.

From an early stage in the war, especially during the Serbian advance and large-scale atrocities, suggestions appeared about making those responsible for bad treatment of people responsible in court. An International Tribunal for the Prosecution of Persons Responsible for Serious Violations of International Humanitarian Law Committed on the Territory of the Former Yugoslavia since 1991, in short International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia, ICTY, was established in The Hague under United Nations authority. This tribunal has popularly been referred to as the War Crimes Tribunal<sup>134</sup>.

In this context it is important to point out that following most wars revenge has usually been taken out on the losing party. In medieval times it often consisted of executing prisoners of war, including the losing king and his men. Following the Napoleonic Wars, imprisonments and exile was invented. However, after the Second World War, political show trials were set up in Tokyo and Nuremberg, sentencing the political leadership of the countries which had lost the war, Japan and Germany<sup>135</sup>. On the other hand, in the case of the 1992-95 war in Bosnia and Herzegovina there are no formal losers or winners<sup>136</sup>.

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<sup>134</sup>United Nations publication on ICTY basic documents from 1995, regularly updated on the Internet.

<sup>135</sup>In Japan's case the Emperor was saved for political reasons in the then United States occupied Japan. Here again, politics were more important than justice.

It is beyond the scope of this study to discuss the role of Britain's Bomber-Harry in killing hundred of thousands of civilians in Germany or numerous American and Soviet breaches of the laws of war committed during the Second World War, but since they won the war, in true historical tradition, the victors were not on trial.

<sup>136</sup>Facts on the ground, based on living standard and territory, clearly show (footnote continued on next page)

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With the ICTY in The Hague, the investigations, prosecution and the judges are under the same roof. Some of the judges are from countries with a dubious human rights record. The accused are not always allowed to face the witnesses, questioning the reliability of the evidence. Some of the Bosnian Serb leadership was indicted for war crimes almost immediately after the ICTY was established. Attempts have been made to bar people indicted for war crimes from Bosnian politics, basically perverting justice by claiming guilt until proven innocent, rather than vice versa. From the perspective of a fair trial, the whole set-up of the ICTY can be questioned, even though it is difficult to see an alternative solution. Needless to repeat, it is often popularly looked upon as political show trials<sup>137</sup>.

Despite its shortcomings, ICTY has tried small individual criminals for killings and bad treatment of people, which is a very important undertaking since their home country would otherwise have protected them. For psychopaths and common criminals to use the war to kill numerous innocent civilians for no purpose other than for their own pleasure is inexcusable. As such, this is a very important undertaking in the fight against impunity.<sup>138</sup>

On the other hand, when a person like President Slobodan Milosevic of Serbia, often seen as the father of the war, was not for many years asked to explain himself in front of the ICTY about his actions in starting the Croatian and Bosnian wars, possibly because he had managed to make himself important to the ongoing

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that Croats won and the other two lost, but that is not relevant in this context.

<sup>137</sup> Geoffrey Robertson, article in *The Australian*, 5 July 1996.

Six months earlier, UN Civil Affairs in Mostar in a restricted paper also had raised some unanswered questions on the ICTY process.

<sup>138</sup> In line with international covenants against cruel and inhumane punishment, ICTY cannot impose the death penalty.

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Bosnian peace process which was of highest priority to the West, it was not surprising to hear some Bosnians claim that the ICTY was not doing its job. The problem here was twofold. Indicting Milosevic would have led to calls to indict President Tudjman of Croatia also. That was politically unacceptable for the West, since the newly independent Croatia was still an infant needing its “father”. Now, when President Tudjman is dead, Milosevic can be sacrificed. The other part of the problem was that it took a long time to prepare the case against Milosevic. It was not until the 1999 Kosovo War that the prosecutor at ICTY gave in and they officially charged Milosevic.

If an institution like ICTY had been responsible for the Nuremberg and Tokyo trials following the Second World War, it cannot be excluded that they would still be ongoing. The problem is that once international institutions have been created, they are very difficult to close down. They will continue to search for new jobs in order to justify their existence. This may eventually end in a long witch-hunt, unless a time-cap is put on ICTY’s existence.

The accusations on the breeches of the laws of the war are twisted by those who have never experienced war and how it changes rational human behaviour. Hunger, extreme tiredness and extreme fear, added to by deaths of friends and relatives killed by the enemy, calls on soldiers to do what soldiers job is, - kill the enemy by all available means. Trying soldiers who served under these conditions is irrelevant, especially since disobeying orders is punishable. Furthermore, every general in every war has ordered destruction and killings.<sup>139</sup> It is easy to sit in a safe and comfortable armchair and tell others afterwards what they should or should not have done.

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<sup>139</sup>Recall that the United States had reservations concerning an International Criminal Court in order not to put an unnecessary legal burden on their soldiers.

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Concrete examples of strange accusations are those against Mr. Milan Martić, who was a police officer but became president of the Republic of Serbian Krajina, partially through election fraud. Nevertheless, he was relatively popular amongst Serbs and his political life consisted of Krajina and nothing but Krajina. He is accused of violating the customs of war when Serbs fired a missile into central Zagreb, the capital of Croatia, as a revenge for a Croatian attack on Serbian territory. On the contrary, the President of Croatia, Mr. Tudjman, was not indicted for war crimes despite the shelling of Knin, the capital of Serbian Krajina. All through the war in Croatia, it was understood that if Croatia would threaten the existence of Serbian Krajina, Zagreb would be shelled, even laid in ruins like Vukovar. The Serbs even demonstrated this in 1993 by firing a missile towards the same range, but gently avoiding too much damage by appropriate targeting outside the city<sup>140</sup>. The Croats attacked West-Slavonia, as discussed earlier, and paid the price. In retaliation, civilians got wounded on the streets of Zagreb and the international media showed it all over the world, making people wonder if it is the media or the governments that rule the world<sup>141</sup>. However, the Serbian missile was also aimed at a government building related to the war effort, located downtown Zagreb. All sides in the Yugoslav civil war have often had military units, barracks, administration or military headquarters in built up areas.

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<sup>140</sup>During the collapse of Krajina in August 1995, there were other reasons why the missiles never went off on Zagreb, notably that Sloba objected to it. If that was a part of the “deal” or if Croat retaliation on Belgrade was a factor is guesswork, but in 1999 Sloba didn’t mind air raids on Belgrade. We believe it was a deal that Sloba would give Krajina to the Croats in order to partition Bosnia and Herzegovina.

<sup>141</sup>ICTY claims that the missile was loaded with a cluster bomb and therefore hurt more civilians than necessary. We wonder, however, how it is possible to fire such a large missile into a city center and hurt so few.

## The War in the Field

Consequently they got shelled and civilians got hurt. The obvious question then is which side is violating the laws of the war by killing civilians? Those firing or those using them as a shield? The answer to this question is decided by the victors of the war. The American term for killing civilians, invented in the 1991 Gulf War, is "some collateral damage". Revenge, in order to teach a military adversary a lesson is also very common in today's low conflict areas. Examples are American attack on Libya, Israel's actions in the Middle East, Serbs erasing Muslim Zepa and Srebrenica<sup>142</sup>, Serbs shelling Zagreb, and the United States launching several cruise missiles into the Serbian Republic<sup>143</sup> for shooting down an American fighter plane over Serbian territory. Concerning the ICTY, Serbs are accused of shelling Sarajevo and thereby killing civilians. However, the Muslim government, who held Sarajevo's citizens closed in the city, denying them the possibility of fleeing, walks free from any responsibility.

In this context it is interesting to note that there has been a distinct difference in the behaviour between the Serbs and the Croats concerning sending their accused war heroes to The Hague to be tried. Croats in the beginning were defiant, but eventually gave in to American pressure, using the carrot and the stick, and some of the Croat war heroes from Central Bosnia went to The Hague for trials. Some of them believed, possibly naively, that they would be found not guilty<sup>144</sup>. Again, the trials are conducted under conditions totally different from those on the killing fields.

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<sup>142</sup>When executing the men in Srebrenica, the Serbs made the mistake not to try them for atrocities on Serb villagers earlier in the war and for armed rebellion against the state. They just killed them like it were the Eastern Front in the Second World War. We can recommend "Srebrenica, Record of a War Crime" to those interested in researching those events further.

<sup>143</sup> Republika Srpska.

<sup>144</sup>UN interlocutors in Mostar.

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The Serbs, on the other hand, have so far refused to send their war heroes to be tried. Serbians are proud people, not giving up principles for a short-term gain<sup>145</sup>. Co-operating with ICTY would help Serbs temporarily, but in the long run, that would give a bad example, putting the knife in the back of those Bosnian Serbs, notably General Mladic and Dr. Karadzic, who they owe the most for establishing their Republic and not being Islamised a second time<sup>146</sup>. The Bosnian Muslim government has promised full co-operation with ICTY. However, for the time being, it appears that ICTY is using selectivity in whom to accuse and whom not, at least publicly<sup>147</sup>.

### **12. The United Nations' Role as seen from inside the conflict area in Croatia and Bosnia. (Note also chapter 20)<sup>148</sup>.**

The United Nations, through a large number of Security Council resolutions, was supposed to ease the situation and assist in providing a negotiated solution. The International Conference on Former Yugoslavia (ICFY) unfortunately yielded little results. The United Nations, through their presence in the form of the United Nations Protection Force (UNPROFOR), had

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<sup>145</sup>President Kostunica of Yugoslavia (Milosevic's successor) has indicated on television in June 2001 that he may consider sending Milosevic to the ICTY for trials in order to receive Western aid in exchange.

Out of two evils, it would be better to sacrifice Milosevic against Yugoslav law and let him be tried outside Yugoslavia, rather than being without Western aid money. This certainly is "realpolitik" without higher ideals.

<sup>146</sup>This may be exaggerated but many Serbs see it this way.

<sup>147</sup>There are some closed indictments as well.

<sup>148</sup>The international aspect of the UN is discussed in chapter 20.

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responsibilities to protect minority populations in Croatia, including and most notably in Serbian Krajina, since the largest parts of the so-called protected areas were on Serbian territory, having a large amount of mixed population. This was not always very successful considering the lack of UN resources and sometimes either Pro-Serb sympathies of the UN personnel, or even fear of the fanatic Serbs.

On the other hand, the name "protection" in Protection Force, for Bosnia and Herzegovina was a little of a misnomer. In Bosnia and Herzegovina, besides monitoring the situation, UNPROFOR was only tasked to assist the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) aid convoys, but not directly to protect anybody from attacks, with the exception of the six safe areas<sup>149</sup>. However, for the six safe areas, Sarajevo, Tuzla, Bihac, Zepa, Srebrenica and Gorazde, there were no means available to either defend them nor to disarm them.

There was UN personnel with an excellent understanding of the problems, but without any possible solutions acceptable to everybody. But there was also personnel from parts of the world where the mentality and human behaviour is totally different from Slav Europe and who never grasped the deeper roots of the problems and consequently contributed less to the peace building, - some of them being with the UN just for the money, either for themselves, or for the troop contributing nation. Consequently, the United Nations became a powerless scapegoat, taking more than their fair share of the blame. After all, if the member states are not willing to enforce the carefully worded Security Council resolutions, the Secretary General and his staff are powerless. The war was finished on the battlefields, first through fighting and later through "manoeuvring", as well as by American pressure on the

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<sup>149</sup>As directed by the Security Council through its numerous resolutions.



## The War in the Field

parties to accept the realities on the ground. But despite limited success, the United Nations did a good job in keeping the conflict on a low level from 1993 onwards through their quiet diplomacy, not to mention all the persons who were kept alive through food aid received from UNHCR<sup>150</sup>.

### **13. NATO as seen from inside the conflict area in Croatia and Bosnia. (Note also chapter 19)<sup>151</sup>.**

There is much to be said about NATO, but only the highlights of those actions directly relating to the war as seen from inside the theatre will be mentioned here. First it should be pointed out that all through the war, NATO member states governments and their Ambassadors were influenced by the international media, particularly by CNN International, CNNI being the only TV station providing constant up to date cover of the war all over the world. The only problem was that CNNI was pro Muslim and basically anti-Serb.

NATO's patrolling of the skies over Bosnia all through the war, maintaining it as a no-fly zone, kept fixed wing jet fighters out of the war, thereby dampening the conflict which, in fact, only hampered Yugoslav Peoples' Army operations since the others had no proper air force<sup>152</sup>. However, when the war was going on,

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<sup>150</sup>Some claim that the food aid just prolonged the war.

<sup>151</sup>The international aspect of NATO is discussed in chapter 19.

<sup>152</sup>Helicopters were not allowed to fly either, according to the Security Council decisions, but that was never enforced. The reasons for that could be twofold, lack of US and NATO capability to enforce it, and the risk of shooting down Bosnian statesmen and dignitaries as well as unauthorized ambulance flights, eventually causing embarrassment.

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all the way until 1995, peace-keeping was the responsibility of the United Nations, but NATO only moved in when the war was in its finishing stages. First came the Rapid Reaction Force, still under United Nations command but being a battle force, not white and blue peace-keepers, consisting of British and French troops<sup>153</sup>. When the Rapid Reaction Force arrived in the summer and autumn of 1995, there were indications that there would be an imminent showdown between the United Nations forces, being directed by the Security Council, and the Bosnian Serbs. At this stage, the US Air Force, having been in the air all through the war, was also ready to bomb the Serbs, the excuse being to protect Sarajevo as a safe area not, at least not officially, to force the Bosnian Serbs to stop military activity and talk peace<sup>154</sup>. The Milosevic government of Serbia was starting to distance itself from the Bosnian Serbs in order to protect itself in a worst case situation and the last Yugoslav Peoples' Army units left Bosnia in May 1995<sup>155</sup>. But the Bosnian Serbs smartly backed off at last moment, Bosnian Serb President, Dr. Karadzic, saying that nobody would enter into a war with the United States, obviously knowing what happened in Iraq in 1991<sup>156</sup>. However, it now became clear that the Serbs would lose Sarajevo. Considering their interests in the Middle-East and the increasing pressure from media influenced domestic politicians, the United States government had only two options. Either arm the Muslims or fight the Serbs for them. The Serbs

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<sup>153</sup>Britain and France needed to be very active in order to justify their permanent seats on the Security Council under growing pressure from Germany and Japan who also would like permanent membership, despite not being nuclear powers.

<sup>154</sup>The US wanted to bomb the Serbs already in 1992. Ref Civil War in Bosnia, 1992-1994, Chapter on The Vance Owen Plan: November-December 1992.

<sup>155</sup>General Morillon accounts after he left Bosnia.

<sup>156</sup>Recall that this is before the 1999 Kosovo War.

### The War in the Field

were eventually bombed as a show of force. Damage was minimal but the message was clear. The Serbian obsession of Sarajevo became their Stalingrad. They would lose Sarajevo, keep the Serb Republic, - and there would be peace talks, whether they liked it or not.

Needless to say, the Muslim support for NATO grew stronger, whilst the Serb dislike increased. For the Croats it made little difference.

### III. THE WAR IN CROATIA AND BOSNIA-HERZEGOVINA AS AN OBJECT OF INTERNATIONAL HIGH POLITICS.<sup>157</sup>

#### 14. The United States' Policy.

The United States of America started off by having reservations about Yugoslavia's disintegration in a similar manner as the then European Communities, hoping for a united and democratic Yugoslavia. However, soon after it became inevitable that Yugoslavia was no longer a viable country in its form as a federation of six republics, the United States Government's support was all on the part of those successor states that could be seen as struggling to get away from the communist system imposed on them. Serbia, being the biggest communist supporter in Yugoslavia during its disintegration, being led by communists or former communists re-flagged under a nationalist name, was seen as the enemy of the emerging independent states and the new democracies<sup>158</sup>. But in the emerging independent republics, the

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<sup>157</sup>This book only discusses the world powers. For information on the views of the neighbouring states, Italy, Austria, Hungary, Romania, Bulgaria, Greece and Albania, See: The Yugoslav Conflict, by John Zametica, Adelphi paper 270 from 1992.

<sup>158</sup>The orthodox states of the European communist world had a much slower transition from communism in the early 1990s than the catholic states, possibly because of a mentality difference stemming from centuries of a different religious system. Immediately after the fall of communism, dissidents came to power in large parts of the catholic world, but in large (footnote continued on next page)

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leadership was heavily based on dissidents and former dissidents to the communist system<sup>159</sup>. Some of the dissidents were nationalists but of non-Serb origin. Some of them would not be overly democratic, but they opposed the communist system of Former Yugoslavia which, considering a lack of a better alternative, dictated United States support for Slovenia, Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina and eventually the (Former Yugoslav) Republic of Macedonia.<sup>160</sup> Everybody, including the United States, could see Serbia, through the use of the Yugoslav Peoples' Army, supporting Serbian armed struggle and atrocities in Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina against the lightly armed forces of Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina, which were considerably hampered by the United Nations arms embargo.<sup>161</sup> At the beginning of the Yugoslav War of Disintegration, the Yugoslav Peoples' Army was certainly a formidable fighting machine, even though there was little political will to use its full battle capacity within Yugoslavia itself. After the war in Bosnia started in 1992,

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parts of orthodox Europe, the communists remained in power for much longer, using new name, calling themselves democrats or nationalists.

<sup>159</sup>Macedonia elected a former communist as a president. However, Gligorov was not the same Stalinist as Milosevic.

<sup>160</sup>Undoubtedly, some ex-Yugoslavs saw a new political career opportunity they could not achieve without independence, having more interest in their career than the well-being of their citizens.

<sup>161</sup>The Yugoslav Peoples' Army was supposed to be strong enough to resist both a possible Western invasion as well as a possible Russian intervention. But their planning completely lacked the possibility of a civil war, Yugoslavia being based on socialist brotherhood and unity. According to the Army plans, defence was focused around Bosnia where most of the arms factories were, since Zagreb and Belgrade would be more difficult to defend against invasions from West and East. The military strategist may wish to note that when the Western attack finally came in 1999, the army was useless because it was only an air war and Yugoslavia had no ballistic missiles to strike back at the attackers heartland.

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the United States became increasingly adamant to attack the Serbs from the air<sup>162</sup> in order to make the war more fair play. This could have been done by reducing support for Croatian and Bosnian Serbs coming from Serbia, by bombing the bridges on the river Drina on the border between Bosnia and Serbia. All through the war, the United States was the advocate of a more robust policy towards the Serbs, the Serbs being seen as the aggressor attacking the states which had just got their independence through a free democratic referendum. The Serbian leadership was well aware of this tough stand of the United States government and already in 1993 was starting to pay attention to an eventual military confrontation with the United States<sup>163</sup>.

United States policy towards Bosnia and Herzegovina was a bit more complicated than just condemning the Serbs, which made the case of Croatia look simple in comparison. When the Muslim-Croat War started in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Herzegovinian Croats were strongly supported by their kin living in Croatia proper. But the Republic of Bosnia and Herzegovina was also supported by the United States. Despite Bosnia and Croatia having mutual recognition, there was a “de facto” war going on between these two states. The United States support for Croatia was unquestionable. However, possibly because of the increasing Islamisation in the Muslim parts of Bosnia and Herzegovina, United States’ support for Bosnia was more words than action<sup>164</sup>. The official policy consisted of stopping the bloodshed, hindering an escalation, and keeping US influence in Europe<sup>165</sup>. But the

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<sup>162</sup>Ref: Civil War in Bosnia, 1992-1994, chapter on The Vance Owen Plan: November-December 1992.

<sup>163</sup>As shown on Serbian television by their propaganda machine and largely state controlled media.

<sup>164</sup>This is a guesstimate based on talks with US personnel at the time.

<sup>165</sup>US Policy in the Balkans. US Army War College.

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United States government continued to support the Bosnian Muslim government, being the only internationally recognized government of a now partitioned state<sup>166</sup>. Upon the initiative of the United States, the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina was created. This is a federation between Croats and Muslims, but not including the Serbs. It never worked as a Federation but it certainly is a very good ceasefire, if not a peace agreement, between the Muslims and the Croats. Because of the rise of Islam in Bosnia<sup>167</sup>, the United States, having had bad experiences in its relations with countries turning fundamentalist and anti-United States, had to play the difficult balance of supporting Bosnia's independence from Yugoslavia but at the same time try to restrict the rise of Islam. A secular state like Turkey was not a problem, but another Iran was to be prevented.

Islamic countries in the world had substantially increased their political support of the Bosnian Muslim government. However, a lot of this support was in the form of religious indoctrination and most likely also money from the rich Gulf States, but not in what was most urgently needed, guns and food. The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees would provide the food anyhow and arms would be almost impossible to smuggle in because of the arms embargo, - at least without United States and NATO approval<sup>168</sup>. But there are indications that the United States used this lack-of-arms-supply opportunity and informally supplied a very limited amount of light arms to the Bosnian

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<sup>166</sup>The Bosnian government was often referred to as the "mainly Muslim" government since it had pro-forma Serbs and Croats in it.

<sup>167</sup>There is almost no Islam in Herzegovina because it is controlled by Serbs and Croats.

<sup>168</sup>An alternative was to pay heavily to the Croats or the Serbs for through transport, but this was never done on a scale large enough to be battle decisive.

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Muslims. The United States could now correctly claim that they were supporting the Bosnian government so there would be no need for the Islamic countries to do so. Considering the United States' political and economic interests in the Middle East, they had to show some support of the Bosnian Muslims. Despite the US involvement, there were always some Islamic fighters from the Middle East in Bosnia. These served no purpose militarily but they put an Islamic pressure on the Bosnian Muslims who were primarily Europeans and only Muslims by faith, but not by culture.

The United States wanted to stop Islamic fundamentalism from spreading at almost any cost. In order to show support and to prevent a human tragedy, the United States organized air drops with food aid for the Muslims when they were totally sandwiched between Serbian and Croat forces. But one of the biggest problems the Bosnian Muslims had in receiving aid from outside was that they had no airport that could be used because of the range of Serbian artillery. Nobody was willing to risk their transport airplanes as sitting ducks on the ground, not to mention the political problems at home if American servicemen would be killed.

In the United States there was always a certain amount of politicians who called for direct military action to help the Bosnian Muslims from being slaughtered by the much better armed Serbs. On the other hand, the U.S. government always had to consider the domestic problems U.S. casualties would cause, the experience from the Vietnam War on how to get involved in somebody else's war not being forgotten. Not surprisingly, after the Gulf War in 1991 against Iraq, which had been the first war in history that had been won by the use of air power only, with the casualties being not much more than in a military exercise of the same size, the United States advocated using air power to control the outcome of the Bosnian War. This, however, was strongly opposed by the United States allies who had troops on the ground in the form of



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United Nations peace-keepers, who then could become objects of Serbian retaliatory targeting<sup>169</sup>.

The United States eventually carried out some limited attacks on the Serbs, mainly as a part of NATO forces in order to enforce Sarajevo, Gorazde and Bihac as United Nations Safe Areas, but also as a revenge for shooting down an American fighter jet on patrol over Bosnia, which in turn was Serbian revenge for NATO effectively grounding their air force. The US administration's view was that the Yugoslav problem would be easier solved by force than lenience, contrary to their European allies<sup>170</sup>.

The United States has the credit for making the former-Yugoslavs sign the Dayton Peace Agreement, which basically documented the realities on the ground. They also have the credit (or the blame<sup>171</sup>) for creating the Muslim-Croat Federation.

Following the end of the war, the United States has armed the Bosnian army, even to the point that in the case of U.S. troops withdrawal, it could be de-stabilizing, tempting the Muslims to force the Bosnian Serbs into submission. However, without arming the Muslims, an eventual US troop withdrawal would be very difficult to justify without risking a return to the war division. In any case, the NATO occupation of the territory of Bosnia and Herzegovina will not be terminated any time soon. It also gives the United States an excellent opportunity to continue to be an European Power.

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<sup>169</sup>When air raids were conducted, the Serbs were forced to take UN personnel as hostages to stop them.

<sup>170</sup>In the end the US viewpoint turned out to be correct.

<sup>171</sup>Herzegovinian Croats want to annex to Croatia, not to bankrupt and Islamic Bosnia.

## **15. The European Union's (then the European Communities) Policy.**

The European Union (EU) common foreign policy is sometimes at the lowest common denominator<sup>172</sup> and this appears to have been the case on Former Yugoslavia. Consequently, the European Union had a very cautious policy towards the war. It dampened German support for Slovenia and Croatia, but also actively engaged in mediation during the war's first stages in 1991. The EU monitored the happenings very closely with observers on the ground since the beginning, even before the United Nations became involved. It brokered several ceasefires, which all were broken soon after. It co-chaired the International Conference on Former Yugoslavia (ICFY) along with the United Nations. The European Union furthermore accepted many refugees and delivered a lot of food aid.<sup>173</sup> Above all, the goal was to prevent any escalation of the war which now was going on in the backyard and in many ways was too close for comfort. An all out Balkan war would have entailed considerable political, economic and military problems, besides an even larger influx of refugees into the Union. The arms embargo was supported but within the EU there were mixed feelings. Germany, (Austria not being a member yet), had pushed for the European Union early recognition of Slovenia and Croatia, much to the Serbs' annoyance. On the other hand, Greece and Serbia have always been traditional allies and shared the hatred against Islam and the Turks<sup>174</sup>, the latter being seen as

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<sup>172</sup>The Yugoslav Crisis, Adelphi paper 270.

<sup>173</sup>Even though the European Union is well on its way to become a supranational alliance, rather than an alliance of independent states, it still is, and certainly was in 1991, not much more than what its member states want it to be and do in harmonizing policy.

<sup>174</sup>The Yugoslav Crisis, Adelphi paper 270.

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descendants of the Ottomans. France and Britain were also hesitant in upsetting Serbia too much. Amongst others, Serbia had been their World War ally. In the end the EU policy towards the Yugoslav Civil War was very dampened. It could very well have been different if Greece and / or Germany had not been a member of the EU. It was clear that the Catholic part of Yugoslavia certainly belonged to the EU sphere of influence while Serbia was looking more east than west at the time<sup>175</sup>. The EU is, at least officially, a supporter of an unified and multi-ethnic Bosnia and Herzegovina. But anti-Islamic feelings in Europe probably also fuelled the "laisser-faire" policy towards the Muslim government in Bosnia. Officially, though, no European politician would admit that. On the other hand, today it is all too evident to see the way Moroccan and Turkish EU applications are treated compared to non-Islamic states seeking membership, even if they are geographically in Asia, like Cyprus. It appears increasingly clear that for the time being the only thing the EU is interested in is how to repatriate all the refugees they accepted during the war and to prevent the arrival of new ones<sup>176</sup>. The economy in former Yugoslavia is in a bad shape so not surprisingly, the refugees are going to try to stay in the EU at all cost.<sup>177</sup> Support towards Bosnia is consequently much aimed at creating conditions to return the refugees<sup>178</sup> without being accused of "throwing them out the door". Croatia was in the bad books of the EU for a while, mainly

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<sup>175</sup>Milosevic's Serbia looked towards their Slav Communist Comrades in the East, but the Post-Milosevic government realizes that the money comes from the West and from eventual future EU membership.

<sup>176</sup> In this context we would like to point out that following NATO's occupation of Kosovo in 1999, Kosovo can now be claimed to be safe and 2 million Albanians will not get into the EU as refugees.

<sup>177</sup> As of this writing (June 2001), some EU countries have repatriated Bosnian refugees, others have been more lenient.

<sup>178</sup>Private comments of a member of the German representation to the EU.

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because of lack of democratic principles. This, however, has changed to the better taking into account the attitudes of young Croats and the death of President Tudjman, who was a rather undemocratic president. Slovenia, being different from the other ex-Yugoslavs, both economically and culturally, is well on its way to become an EU member. But no doubt, for the EU, Bosnia will just remain a peripheral territory or land mass more than a proper European state, for many years to come, - just like under Ottoman and later Austro-Hungarian administration. From the beginning, it was clear that the European Union did not share the American viewpoint that the use of force would solve more problems than it would create. Yugoslavia was too close to pour more oil on the fire in order for it to burn out. The EU, then EC, involvement in the Yugoslav crisis was also partially by default. The CSCE, now OSCE, had abdicated an active role, the US was content to leave the problem to the Europeans, the Soviet Union was busy with their own problems at home, and NATO had a very low profile at the outset of the war<sup>179</sup>. Furthermore, the EU was not a security organisation, the WEU being little more than the name. The European Union Administration in Mostar failed in uniting the city but that was not the fault of the EU. It was the Croats refusal to be a part of the ruins of the "Muslim Republic".

### **16. The Federal Republic of Germany's Policy.**

Because of its former wartime history, Germany was very reluctant to deploy any troops as United Nations peace-keepers in Former Yugoslavia. Nevertheless, because, - or despite - its

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<sup>179</sup>The Yugoslav Crisis, Adelphi paper 270.

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wartime history, Germany was the first country to recognize Slovenia and Croatia when they declared their independence from the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia. All German actions during the Yugoslav War of Disintegration strongly supported Slovenia and Croatia. Slovenia was quickly out of the war-game, but Croatia was not. Germany kept Croatia alive politically and economically, and supported their case within the EU (then EC). Being EU's largest country, their political and economic weight was substantial. Regarding Bosnia, Germany officially supported the Bosnian Government. However, some of that support could have been in order to speak with the same voice as the United States. Germany also had to consider other issues of interest vis-a-vis the United States, such as the NATO's Trans-Atlantic relationship and United States troops based in Germany. In fact the Bosnian Muslims had no real allies outside the Islamic world, despite all sorts of diplomatic statements.

Germany later deployed troops as part of NATO contingents enforcing the Dayton Peace Agreement, but that was not out of love for Bosnia, but primarily in order to show NATO coherence and to reinforce its international position. Secondly it was to try to participate in stabilizing Bosnia enough in order for Germany to get rid of the hundreds of thousands of Bosnian refugees they had accepted. Germany's support of the Catholic parts of former Yugoslavia led to a Serbian distrust of the EU, leading to Serbian propaganda campaigns on the "Forth Reich" and its "Drang nach Osten"<sup>180</sup>.

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<sup>180</sup>The Yugoslav Crisis, Adelphi paper 270.

## 17. Russia's Policy.

Russia, being a dying superpower, was desperate to have its voice heard in the Yugoslav power game and to continue to be recognized as a world power. The only leverage Russia had was that the Serbs, being orthodox, looked towards the Russians as their Orthodox brothers<sup>181</sup>. However, Russia's domestic problems by far overshadowed their interest in the Yugoslav Civil War, - a war at home being a far bigger concern than the Balkans. The Serbs always hoped that in the case of a serious confrontation with the West, the Russians would help them, just like in 1914 at the outbreak of the First World War. It appears that the feeling this time was not mutual, the Russians having limited interest in the Serbs, finding them both disobedient and dishonest, negotiating without good faith and even going behind the Russian's back<sup>182</sup>. However, Russia showed some sympathy towards the Serbs and indirectly helped somewhat with the war effort. But reports about the Serbs receiving lots of Russian arms and volunteers are exaggerated. The Serbs did not need much more arms or manpower, since they had inherited plenty from the Yugoslav Army. Fuel was the only thing they desperately needed and some of that may have come from Russia. But Russia never blocked any actions of the United Nations Security Council against the Serbs. The reason for this was that Russia was too busy showing the West that they no longer had the Cold War attitudes of "niet" against every Western suggestion. Russia wanted to demonstrate

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<sup>181</sup>There may not be much of a friendship or brotherhood in international relations, but there are certainly interests, whatever they might be called. Nevertheless, when Russian troops arrived under UN flag, the Serbs cheered their welcome.

<sup>182</sup>The (rephrased) contents of Russian envoy Vitaly Churkin's frustrated comments following his turn of failed negotiation efforts.

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its new image as a liberal country, and for the West the relations with Russia also by far outweighed anything in Former Yugoslavia all until the 1999 Kosovo War. The Russians, like everybody else, failed in negotiating a peace agreement between the Bosnian Serbs and the rest. They did not accept the air raids against the Serbs, but were powerless to do anything more than just observe and protest. Russia provided troops for the United Nations peace-keeping in Former Yugoslavia but these troops were always considered relatively pro-Serbian and were happy to sell the Serbs fuel on the black market, however for their own profit as well. Russia's support for the Serbs was best noticed when the United States mentioned the possibility of breaking the arms embargo on Former Yugoslavia and ship arms to the Muslims<sup>183</sup>. The Russians then made it clear that they would in that case also break the trade sanctions on Serbia. In the end neither was officially done until after the peace agreement in 1995, and then through proper channels, not unilateral action.

### **18. The Policy of The United Kingdom and France.**

The United Kingdom and France had such similar and perhaps also co-ordinated policies that they can be discussed together. Both countries were very large troop contributing nations for the United Nations. There have been some suggestions

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<sup>183</sup>Officially, the United States referred to "unilaterally breaking" the arms embargo as "unilaterally lifting" the arms embargo, since the word "breaking" UN Security Council resolutions would not go down easily in the world opinion, but "lifting" sounded better. The United States needed the Security Council approval to lift the arms embargo, which they did not have.

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that this was not because Yugoslavia was of strategic importance to them, but more because of the status these two nations have as permanent members of the UN Security Council<sup>184</sup>. The policy of France and of the United Kingdom was mainly to hinder an all out Balkan War. Actively containing the conflict through negotiations and by supplying peace-keeping troops was considered more viable than just taking sides and bombing the Serbs. At a certain time, the US government advocated lifting the arms embargo and at the same time striking the Serbs. But the UNPROFOR troop contributing nations, including these two largest, France and Britain, opposed this since more arms would just increase the violence and air strikes on the Serbs would mean retaliation on UN peace-keepers. However, towards the end of the war in 1995, these two countries were at a loss on how to tackle the situation<sup>185</sup>. Negotiations had no progress and the Bosnian Serbs were more defiant than ever. Eventually there would be a war with the Serbs or alternatively the United Nations would just withdraw, leaving Bosnia to its own fate. A withdrawal would be difficult because the Muslims would insist, through the threat of force, that the peace-keepers would either stay, or at least their arms would be left behind<sup>186</sup>. Obviously neither France nor the United Kingdom would accept that Bosnia dictated their troop movements.<sup>187</sup> In order to withdraw properly from Bosnia, more

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<sup>184</sup>The other two countries who would like permanent membership in the Security Council, Japan and Germany, are neither nuclear powers nor troop contributing nations for the UN. However, Germany and Japan along with the United States, pay a very large proportion of the United Nations peace-keeping expenses.

<sup>185</sup>One British UN officer answering a journalist's question by "what she thought herself", because he did not know what to do next, - and neither did anybody else.

<sup>186</sup>UN Civil Affairs Zepce assessment at the time.

<sup>187</sup>The Turkish United Nations Battalion had more arms than a peace-keeper (footnote continued on next page)



## International High Politics

troops would be needed, meaning possible American or NATO involvement to support and defend it in an orderly manner.

Eventually the decision was made not to leave Bosnia as a failed peace-keeping mission but to boost it in order to enforce a solution. The Rapid Reaction Force, composed of British and French units in full battle gear arrived. It was used, not to withdraw the lightly armed peace-keepers, but in order to stop the war in Sarajevo by attacking the Serbian artillery around the city. This was followed by selective air raids on the Serbs. The Bosnian Serbs finally got the message that it was time to talk peace. Continued resistance against NATO artillery and air power would mean much damage to military infrastructure which in turn would mean becoming an even easier prey for Croatia. The British and the French saved the face of the peace-keeping operation and the Bosnian Serbs avoided having to accept unconditional surrender, even though General Ratko Mladic, the Bosnian Serb Army Commander had to be reminded by the Western Allies that he did not set the terms of the talks any more. Needless to say, neither the Bosnian Croats, Bosnian Serbs, nor the Bosnian Muslims were asked about their viewpoint on the deployment of the Rapid Reaction Force, - they were just told what was going to happen. However, Croatia proper knew, co-operated and benefited, as discussed above, when after Operation Storm in Krajina, they took large parts of traditionally Serbian settled Western Bosnia too.

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would normally need. It appears that these were intended to be left behind intentionally in case of withdrawal to help the Bosnian Muslims.

**19. NATO as an International Player. (Note also chapter 13)<sup>188</sup>.**

The viewpoint of the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation, (NATO), was like all other NATO policy, based on a consensus, not majority voting or supranational powers. If one member nation objects, nothing happens. However, in order to achieve consensus between the member nations there is a lot of politics behind the scenes on providing support in return for other favours. The NATO military staff was mainly involved in drawing up plans for either rapid deployment or assistance in withdrawing the UN peace-keepers. The largest NATO nation is the United States and their viewpoint has much influence. In NATO, with the growing weight of the European pillar, the voice of the European allies is becoming stronger, provided they can agree amongst themselves. Since the beginning, NATO enforced the arms embargo in the Adriatic and the no-fly zone over Bosnia. The Americans advocated a robust policy towards the Serbs but the Europeans were more moderate. NATO as an alliance had no enemies in Former-Yugoslavia, even though in the beginning the Serbs were generally seen as the aggressor by some member states.<sup>189</sup> For NATO the relationship with Russia was far more important than the Balkans.<sup>190</sup> As usual in NATO, the Greeks and the Turks disagreed. The Greeks had sympathy for the Serbs and the Turks for the Bosnian Muslims. Nevertheless, this was never allowed to spoil NATO policy. NATO, at least officially, was

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<sup>188</sup> The local aspect of NATO is discussed in chapter 13.

<sup>189</sup> This drastically changed with the 1999 Kosovo War when NATO as an alliance fought a war against Serbia, which resulted in NATO's occupation of Kosovo.

<sup>190</sup> In 1995 Russia was a dying superpower, albeit still to be reckoned with. In 1999, apparently, their opinion no longer mattered.

## International High Politics

busy developing its program on Partnership for Peace with the former communist countries. An open dialogue with Russia was initiated and Former Yugoslavia was just one of the subjects discussed. During the deployment of the NATO led Implementation Force (IFOR) to follow up on the Dayton Peace Agreement, Russia participated with NATO in obtaining a so called common goal, "peace in Bosnia". Russian troops were eventually integrated into IFOR under a very unusual command arrangement, Russia not accepting direct NATO command over its troops. Some people claim that NATO's involvement in Bosnia saved NATO from being irrelevant and dying<sup>191</sup>. It is correct that peace-keeping outside the Washington Treaty area and outside the borders of the alliance member states, under a United Nations or Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) authority is certainly one of NATO's new tasks. However, what keeps the alliance alive is not the new tasks, but the threat from a change of policy in Russia towards a more totalitarian system and in that context IFOR / SFOR and Former Yugoslavia is of little importance. NATO continues to be a forum for its members' security consultations and security co-operation.

In order to force the Bosnian Serbs to comply with United Nations declarations on Sarajevo, Gorazde and Bihac being safe areas, NATO carried out air raids. The symbol of the air raids was, in contrast with the United Nations approach, a very robust policy. In reality this had less to do with putting pressure on the Serbs than to show the world that NATO is not afraid of using force if diplomatic means fail. This was and still is absolutely fundamental if NATO is to remain a viable defence alliance,

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<sup>191</sup>The obvious change was that the NATO communiqués from the early 1990s on "combating drugs" or "multi faceted threats" (non-defined or non-existent threats) was gone. Now it would be Peace Making, Peace-keeping and Peace Enforcement outside the Treaty area (amongst other).

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despite its new tasks in peace-keeping and peace enforcement<sup>192</sup>.

### **20. The United Nations Organisation as an International Player. (Note also chapter 12)<sup>193</sup>.**

The United Nations as an organisation is more than just its member states. It is an international actor on its own, and much more so than NATO which is more just a co-ordinated policy of its much fewer member states. But for the United Nations, the more members there are, the more different viewpoints there are to be considered. This primarily applies to the General Assembly, but the considerations the Security Council has are also more complicated with increased size. There are considerations to be taken on the principles of international law and difference on interpretations between cultures, resulting in very dampened and careful actions, sometimes to the point that the decisions are ineffective. The veto power of the five permanent members of the Security Council is also a hindrance to simple majority decisions. This is in favor of the five permanent members but the numerous voices from the ever growing members from the Third World and the former communist world are becoming increasingly stronger.

The United Nations Secretary General has a lot of political powers, but he is certainly dependant on the superpowers' support if he wishes to continue in his job<sup>194</sup>. It is not correct to

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<sup>192</sup> We would have preferred that the 1999 Kosovo War would not have been entered into without a clear prior UN Security Council approval.

<sup>193</sup> The local aspects of the UN are discussed in chapter 12.

<sup>194</sup> Dag Hammerskjold at the height of the Cold War, "I shall not resign", (footnote continued on next page)

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say that the United Nations, as an organisation, is powerless. However, the power it is allowed to exercise is usually limited by vaguely formulated recommendations and decisions of the Security Council, based on a compromise keeping all the members happy, where also one veto can block all actions. In the case of the war in Yugoslavia between 1991-95, the Secretary General's reports to the Security Council on the situation were both correct and accurate. But beyond that, world high politics took over.

The United States was the nation who took the initiative to found the United Nations. The US pays about 20% of the UN regular budget and around 30% of the peace-keeping budget. In addition, the UN Headquarters are in the United States. Not surprisingly, the United States wants to exercise considerable control over the organisation. The methods include lobbying, using the veto in the Security Council and by not paying their huge part of the expenses unless some conditions are met. The United Nations are often criticized in the United States. But the United States has also admitted that their dollars spent on the United Nations buys much more world political influence than the power they get per dollar spent on their much more expensive armed forces. Hence, there is continued support of the United Nations in the United States.

The other four official nuclear powers, Russia, Britain, France and China, certainly have much influence on United Nations policy through their permanent seats on the UN Security Council. But Britain seldom differs much from United States policy, sharing some of their cultural attitudes and remembering well who helped them out in two world wars. France, officially having an independent policy, is a member of NATO's political

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depending on US support against the USSR. Also more recently, Boutros Ghali failing to get US support and to be re-appointed.

## International High Politics

co-operation<sup>195</sup>, like the United States and Britain, and consequently does not have a fundamentally different viewpoint. China for a large part lives in its own world, applies policy of non-interference, and often abstains from voting<sup>196</sup>. But Russia, as a successor state to the Soviet Union, is the country, that during the Cold War blocked many Western proposals in the Security Council.<sup>197</sup>

The United Nations policy throughout the Bosnian War was much more moderate than the standpoint taken by NATO. Firstly, the United Nations' strength, not weakness, is that it incorporates most countries in the world. This huge political weight has to be used moderately. All viewpoints in any conflict have to be considered. The United Nations is not a war fighting organisation despite the provisions in chapter VII of the United Nations Charter<sup>198</sup>. There is a difference between peace-keeping and peace enforcement. When there was no peace to keep in Bosnia, the United Nations was the main agency dealing with the Yugoslav War of Disintegration. After the peace came, the operation became a NATO responsibility. In fact, the opposite would have been more appropriate.

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<sup>195</sup>France has not fully participated in NATO's military co-operation.

<sup>196</sup>This may change in the future, though.

<sup>197</sup>As of this writing, India being the world's second largest nation and an emerging nuclear power will probably soon like to be considered for permanent membership, just like Japan and Germany would like a permanent membership based on their relatively large Gross Domestic Products.

<sup>198</sup>The interpretations of chapter VII are becoming increasingly more militant and interfering into domestic policy, e.g. the operation in Haiti in order to enforce the change of government raised many questions. There are many arguments for and against UN military activity. We have many reservations about establishing supranational authorities because of possible abuse.

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In 1994 it was becoming clear that the war would end within 2 years, if not formally, at least “de facto”<sup>199</sup>, mainly because Bosnians of all nationalities had had enough and tiredness was setting in<sup>200</sup>. But in Bosnia the biggest stumbling stone was Sarajevo. The Serbs would not give it up and there is no doubt that the rough stand of NATO bombing, under United Nations authority, speeded up the end of the war. On the other hand, if the Serbs had been defeated militarily before by NATO bombs, the war might have ended earlier. However, doing this while the Bosnian Serbs still had full support from Milosevic's government in Serbia, could have developed a more hostile attitude from the Serbs and the Russians. The Russians had to participate in the game and the Serbs would possibly have used a military defeat as an excuse to renew hostilities in due time, just like losing the Battle of Kosovo in 1392, followed by Ottoman occupation, is one of their ridiculous but many excuses for killing Muslims today.

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<sup>199</sup>Unofficial estimate of a visiting ICTY delegation, supported by the estimates of the author, being a UN field officer at the time. In the end it turned out to be only one more year.

<sup>200</sup>Furthermore, the Croatian army was getting strong enough to finish Krajina off.

#### **IV. SOME THOUGHTS ON FUTURE PROBLEMS IN THE BALKANS.**

##### **21. “Realpolitik” or something else?**

There is no simple answer to what should be the next step, both locally and internationally. If it would be simple, a solution would have been found a long time ago. Our viewpoint is contrary to current political correctness in the Western world. We believe that a split of the territory of Bosnia and Herzegovina, along the current lines of division, is the only viable long-term solution. The war was not only fought over *if* to divide the country, but perhaps more over *how* to divide it. The Muslims wanted all of Bosnia and Herzegovina with or without its Serb and Croat minority populations. The Serbs wanted 2/3 of Bosnia and Herzegovina and Sarajevo; and the Croats wanted the Croat territories in Western-Herzegovina, including Mostar, and in Central Bosnia. The end result is, however, different. Muslims lost most of their territory but got Sarajevo. The Serbs lost Sarajevo but got 1/2 of Bosnia and Herzegovina. The Croats got more than their fair share when they took Bosnian Krajina following the fall of Croatian Krajina in 1995. But looking at the relative state of the economy between the three, it is very clear that the Croats won the war.

When civil wars break out it is usually either because of some ideological differences (e.g. the Vietnam and Korean Wars where everybody agreed to their nationality, but not on the political system), or because of ethnic differences, where the political system is the same on both sides (often equally undemocratic). In



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the ideological war it is easy to change sides, but in an ethnic war a relatively unpopular leader can keep his subjects because they have no alternative. Traditionally there are three ways to end a civil war:

- one of the sides wins the war,
- the country is split up,
- a foreign occupation is imposed.

In Croatia the Croats won the war. In Bosnia and Kosovo it ended with a foreign (NATO) occupation.<sup>201</sup>

Attempts to reunite Bosnia and Herzegovina have practically failed, which is not surprising following three and a half years of fighting for the opposite. Bosnia's borders are ancient but old borders are no reason to conduct politics. If every state wanted their medieval boundaries there would certainly quickly be a world war. Following the Cold War, the Soviet Union insisted on that the borders created after the Great Patriotic War<sup>202</sup> should not be changed. The Soviet Union said this at the time because of the post war expansion they had gained. But it is also clear that such changes will lead to endless discussions and possible wars. This stand was also the OSCE's viewpoint.

A map on the division of Bosnia and Herzegovina between Republika Srpska and the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina has been accepted in the Dayton Agreement. This map will not be easily changed without a fight. But the agreed map does not specify the unofficial but real border dividing the so-called Federation territory between the Croats and the Muslims. It appears that the "de facto" borders dividing Bosnia and Herzegovina into three parts are there to stay, whether officially

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<sup>201</sup> See "Yugoslavia's problems become NATO's problems. War in Kosovo." (title translated from original language). Magnus Bjarnason, Morgunbladid. 18 April 1999.

<sup>202</sup> Known in the West as the Second World War.

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agreed or just being a fact. On the other hand, constitutional arrangements can be changed without a new war and a border does not hinder travel or business, although free trade agreements have to be made.

Since status quo is unacceptable in the long term, considering the international expense of supporting Bosnia, there should be a simple answer to what to do next, - it being peoples right to self-determination. Just like Yugoslavia was split up, Bosnia and Herzegovina being a miniature copy of the same, is split up. It only remains a question of time when Republika Srpska will annex to Serbia and when Western Herzegovina will annex to Croatia. If that will be years, decades or even centuries is unknown. A part of the answer lies in when the current generation of international world politicians (EU) and their military machine (NATO), who advocated a union, are gone. The Croat and Muslim "enclaves" will slowly die because of lack of opportunities for schools and jobs in Central Bosnia. The sooner the international community accepts the realities and the will of over 50% of the population to split the country, the sooner this chapter of Bosnian history will be closed. However, a question to be asked is what will then happen to over a million Bosnian Muslims. They will have no friends on either side for at least a generation, and no access to the sea through own territory. But that is the situation anyhow. On the other hand, there are also many smaller countries in the world with no access to the sea and few raw materials either. The Bosnian Muslim state will never be rich, but it can survive and Islamic countries in the world will likely support it for political reasons, which is unacceptable to the Europeans, including many Bosnian Muslims who prefer money to religion. Obviously, there will be a continuous drain from the country of able people but that is happening anyhow, just like in so many Third World countries. The sooner a division of Bosnia and Herzegovina is executed "de jure" without any restrictions on the

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successor states to enter into alliances, the better it will be for Serbs and Croats living in the country. For the Muslims it will not make a big difference since there is already a “de facto” division. The biggest risk the Muslims face is that the international community will claim the problem is solved and cut the billions of dollars spent on Bosnia and Herzegovina every year in various forms.

From an outside perspective, a division of the country rewards Serbian and Croat aggression. However, from a Serb and a Croat perspective they have been living in Bosnia and Herzegovina for centuries and are just using their democratic rights to determine their own future. The Muslims will be worst off, having relatively little land, for which they can only thank the United Nations arms embargo, which deprived them of the means of self-defence, but no "World Policeman" would come around to help them until it was too late.<sup>203</sup> Notwithstanding, city dwellers like Sarajevans need less space than farmers and peasants. Land downtown Sarajevo is certainly more valuable than the equal size of Mount Bjelasnica. At the time of this writing, international efforts to reintegrate Bosnia and Herzegovina into three states within a state have not shown much success beyond scratching the surface. If the locals had a real will to reintegrate, they would not need any foreign assistance to do so, just like the East and West Germany did not need any foreign pressure in 1990.

If Bosnia and Herzegovina is split up, Bosnia in the future would refer to a geographical area, not a state. This can be compared to geographical Macedonia, which consists of Slav Macedonia with the name Republic of Macedonia, and Greek Macedonia, which is a part of Greece. Bosnia would then just be another example of minority populations seceding from a country.

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<sup>203</sup>As the reader can guess, it is the Muslims, not the Serbs, that should develop conspiracy theories.

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Croatia, politically wisely but humanly horribly, cleansed many Serbs out of the country<sup>204</sup>. In the short term, this hurt Croatia in the international arena, but in the long run, they will have much fewer problems with their new ethnic nation state. Serbia couldn't carry out this cleansing at home and their problems with minorities have escalated out of control in Kosovo. If Serbs in Bosnia can have their republic and eventually annex it to Serbia, Muslims in Sandzak in Serbia should be able to annex to Muslim Bosnia, Albanians in Kosovo and Macedonia to declare independence and annex to Albania, and Hungarians in Vojvodina to annex themselves to Hungary. The principles applied to others should also apply to oneself, even though that is not the general Serbian viewpoint (with or without Milosevic). The disintegration of Bosnia and Herzegovina is just a part of a much larger and more complex Balkan problem.

The imminent problem for the Europeans is the refugee problem. Can Europe integrate a couple of million refugees from former-Yugoslavia, many of whom are educated and usually willing to work?<sup>205</sup> Certainly the long-term impact is very small if the refugees wish to stay. For those wishing to return it is a different story. The economy is in ruins, first from communist mismanagement and after 1992 from corruption and war. It is not yet completely safe for refugees and internally displaced persons to return to places they have been expelled from. It is not fair to force people back if they are not or do not feel safe. Very few refugees outside the country will want to return if they are going to be internally displaced and not going to their home towns. It is easier said than done to create conditions ensuring return in safety and dignity. Currently, not many will be able to live happily in

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<sup>204</sup> Some came back later.

<sup>205</sup> As of this writing, some have in fact gotten citizenship in their host countries, but other have been repatriated.

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Bosnia and Herzegovina outside the territory of their ethnic kin for many years to come. Displaced persons and refugees should not be given illusions about returning. There may be only a limited fear for the life of those with a clear conscious, at least for the moment, but discrimination, general dislike, and an economy ruined beyond easy repair are no easy and lightly ignored problems.<sup>206</sup> As a “realpolitik” solution to the refugee problem, those wishing to go home could be given a sum of money with a no-return-as-a-refugee clause attached, and those wishing to stay have to be integrated into the societies they live in. Concerning the internally displaced persons, they better start to feel at home in their current locations if they are not already doing it, because the longer they stay in the new location, the less likely it is that they will ever return.

The conclusion on Bosnia and Herzegovina is that the Bosnians of all three nationalities have to start to stand on their own feet. This will be quickest achieved by a division since integration efforts have been in vain. Just pouring in foreign money is not a political solution, it just postpones the inevitable.

When the war started in Kosovo in 1999, the NATO occupation created conditions for the Kosovo Albanians which were safe enough to prevent them from automatically obtaining an

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<sup>206</sup>Bosnians, especially the Muslims both culturally, as well as because of the communist legacy, do not have the same entrepreneurship as the Japanese and Germans following the Second World War. It was not unusual in Bosnia during the war to see the Bosnians standing with their hands in the pockets, watching United Nations or other international aid personnel carrying out works or asking if the United Nations could not do this or that for them, rather than mobilizing forces themselves. Needless to say, the entrepreneurial individuals who are not able to become rich on aid money or / and corruption are already living abroad. It was noticeable during the war that the Croats quickly repaired war damaged things, but the Serbs and Muslims had neither the means nor the interest to do so.

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asylum visa to the European Union. On the eve of an expected civil war in Macedonia<sup>207</sup>, the Albanians there will only flee temporarily to Albania because there the economic conditions are worse than in Macedonia. Despite most of them being Muslims, the rest of the Islamic world is no golden land for refugees. It is not difficult to guess who will have to take the next wave of refugees from the Balkans, namely the European Union with its money and slack asylum laws.<sup>208</sup> The Macedonian Government will not be happy to accept a NATO occupation of parts of the country because that is the first step towards disintegration, just like Kosovo is a legal part of Serbia, but in reality it is a NATO “colony”. In Macedonia the official Albanian population is only 25%, in reality perhaps 40%, and in a few years time, with the current Albanian birth rate, they will be 50% or more. Slav Macedonians dislike Albanians just like the Serbs do. There is no way around that Macedonia will partition in due time, just like Kosovo and Bosnia, even though this could be delayed with a NATO occupation. However, it is clear that the Slav Macedonians would prefer the Croatian model to solve their problems.

It should be noted that there are no serious confrontations in Vojvodina between Serbs and Hungarians that indicate a greater Hungary would be discussed in the near future. Hungarians are Central Europeans, not Balkan people, and work their problems out peacefully, in the same way as the split of Czechoslovakia was

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<sup>207</sup>This book is written in June 2001.

<sup>208</sup>Despite accusations against Serbs, Serbia took in more Ex-Yugoslav refugees than anybody else did, - half a million in total. Unfortunately for the Serbs, Mr. Milosevic was more interested in his own power than the good future of Serbia, much in contrast to statesmen like Presidents Izetbegovic and Tudjman. Milosevic was going to cling on to the power at all cost, just like another fuhrer in another European country half a century earlier, - with equally bad consequences for his nation.

## Thoughts on the Future

conducted in a civilized manner.

We are of the viewpoint that Montenegro will sometime in the future peacefully leave the Yugoslav Federation.

For those Balkan people who still want to fight with arms for their civil and political rights, remember that armed struggle for independence may pay off, but the price is very high.

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<sup>209</sup> When we first did a research on Yugoslavia in 1993, there were only around 10 books to be found in a the nearest library. In 1998 it was easy to come up with 50-100 relevant books, and in 2001 the book titles numbered in the hundreds. Some books on this subject are of excellent quality, some are written just to write a book, and some just express viewpoints, anger or brag about personal achievements.



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