

## **Avoiding another Cyprus or Israel**

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### **Abstract:**

Americans remain undecided whether to abide by the Dayton peace process which requires integration of all the ethnic factions in Bosnia into a single country or implement partition of the region into three distinct states. Both choices mandate that US troops stay longer than June 1998 to oversee that either process goes on smoothly. Otherwise, border disputes would again arise with improper management.

### **Full Text:**

A favorite observation of commentators on Bosnia these days is that Bosnians, have been able to live together in peace only under an external power--an empire, a dictator--that could prevent their ethnic hatreds and passions from exploding into internecine violence. But having a of overlords is not the same as needing one.

Fought over by Hungary, Rome, and Constantinople in the 10th to 13th centuries, Bosnia was conquered by the Ottomans in 1463. It was handed by the Great Powers to Austrian occupation in 1878 to keep a peasant uprising against landlord abuses from leading to union with Serbia, and then, in 1908, annexed by Austria. In 1939 Bosnia was conceded in large part by the royal Yugoslav government to a newly autonomous Croatian province, an occupation legalized in 1941 when Nazi Germany recognized an Independent State of Croatia. Bosnia gained its territorial integrity and independence within a federal Yugoslavia in 1945 because a buffer was needed to balance the power and finesse border disputes between the two largest republics--Croatia and Serbia. When that role was no longer necessary and Germany again recognized Croatian independence in December 1991, Bosnians had less than three months to create an independent state. Now politicians in Washington debate whether Bosnia should be reintegrated as a single, multiethnic country as called for in the Dayton accords or be partitioned into three states.

Imperial powers seem to have needed Bosnia far more than Bosnians needed them. Although the American-negotiated Dayton peace agreement and the NATO-led assistance in its implementation are indisputably welcome, they do not appear to alter the real facts of Bosnians' history. The future of Bosnia has become an American project because the Clinton administration decided in 1995 that it was, after all, in the American interest--to preserve the NATO alliance, demonstrate U.S. commitment to European security, and reaffirm American leadership on moral principles. The interests of major powers--and their timetable--still hold sway.

### **A Washington Debate**

The current debate about Bosnia, between those who believe the Dayton implementation process is working, but needs more time, and those who say that Bosnia has been partitioned and that the sooner we face the facts, the sooner we can leave, is a debate about

one thing only: whether the United States should renew its military commitment to peace in Bosnia after next June. As even the partitionists are beginning to realize, however, either choice requires a longer stay in Bosnia. Although the partition option seems to some to provide a quicker exit than does the Dayton process, partition also leads to war unless it is carefully managed, with border skirmishes and irredentists policed for many years to come. Even if war can be avoided, partition will produce a new wave of refugees even before the earlier refugees have returned in any substantial numbers and European interests in that regard are met. American leadership elsewhere and its reputation with its allies--particularly during a debate about NATO enlargement--cannot suffer a resumption of war in Bosnia if the United States pulls troops out prematurely.

Indeed, the partition argument looks less complicated than the Dayton process only because the partitionists have not yet proposed a plan for how they would partition. Bosnia is now divided into segregated communities of Bosniacs, Croats, and Serbs, but it is not partitioned. The interentity boundary line between the Bosniac-Croat Federation and Republika Srpska (the two constitutional entities of Dayton Bosnia) is not a stable sovereign border. The border between Croat and Bosniac communities, which Dayton negotiators refused to draw officially, divides towns, municipalities, and counties, includes numerous enclaves, and would require large movements of people if the two are also to separate into fully independent political units. None of the three communities controls the major strategic lines of communication necessary to independence.

Negotiating this new "map" and its security guarantees will only return us to 1992 and restart the bickering, positioning, population transfers--and possibly war. Michael O'Hanlon's plan in the preceding pages requires the United States and its allies to do as much or more to stabilize and pacify three separate states than we are now committed to doing under the Dayton process for one Bosnia. Why then partition?

The fact is, it is too late for partition. What the major powers now need is a whole Bosnia and defense of the principle that no borders will be changed by force. Therefore, that is what will happen. As NATO Secretary General Javier Solana, President Clinton, Secretary of State Albright, and National Security Adviser Sandy Berger all made clear during October, there is no debate. The troops must remain for some while longer.

### The Absent Debate

Meanwhile the real issue is not being debated. What are those troops to do? What is their mandate? What kind of troops should they be? That wise men and women can differ so fundamentally in their proposals for Bosnia is a measure of how unclear American objectives are. The "full-speed-ahead" Daytonists have simply found a mechanism to prevent debate, particularly debate with NATO allies and other interested states. The lesson of the international response to the Yugoslav crisis (without which there would have been no Bosnian war) is that disunity guarantees failure, coalition unity is the precondition of success. The Dayton accords have become the primary instrument of that unity.

But what American diplomats at the head of this united front are trying to do remains unclear. Since late last spring Secretary Albright's new foreign policy team for Bosnia has been increasingly assertive, including the use of force by SFOR (the NATO-led stabilization force) to get compliance with certain Dayton provisions: arresting indicted war criminals, helping create an alternative Bosnian-Serb power center to that of Radovan Karadzic in

Pale, imposing rules on official media in Serb and Croat areas, taking over TV transmitters by force and jamming broadcasts from the air, protecting refugees and displaced persons trying to return to homes in strategic areas such as Brcko and its surrounding villages, now under direct American administration. The caution and impartiality of the military leadership in the first year of Dayton implementation have been thrown overboard.

In abandoning impartiality, however, they have also disturbed the delicate balance of the Dayton accords, leading Serbs and Croats to view American action as even more pro-Bosniac than they had thought and to think even more in terms of protecting their own national interests. For observers and allies currently standing behind the United States, these actions have raised new questions about the real goal of American policy. Is it to build a sovereign and viable Bosnia for all three communities or to fulfill prior commitments to some Bosniac leaders and their Islamic supporters by providing the bases for Muslim economic survival and self-defense, whatever the political outcome?

### A Disappearing Exit Horizon

The shift in Bosnia policy has had results. A dozen-odd indicted war criminals now await trial at The Hague Tribunal, and the political fight in Republika Srpska appears to be weakening the Pale leadership. But in aiming at an early exit, it has in fact delayed that exit.

For example, the program to "train and equip" a Federation army of Bosnian Muslims and Bosnian Croats against a Bosnian Serb army was designed by American diplomats, over the loud and continuing opposition of its European allies, to facilitate an early exit of U.S. troops. Because the beneficiaries of this program are the one party with an interest in resuming the war--Bosniacs who would choose territorial conquest and population expulsion to expand their current 27 percent--if international forces leave now, the train and equip program has now become the primary reason that American troops must stay longer.

Equally, the shift from process in the first 18 months of Dayton's implementation to compelling cooperation has rejected the key lesson drawn by those working for peace on the ground in Bosnia in those first 18 months: that a "bottom-up," "civil society," locally oriented, and reconciliatory approach is the only way to reintegrate the country. A "top-down" approach strengthens the role of national leaders and their ability to compel local compliance. While loudly criticizing "extreme nationalists" as the obstacle to Dayton, the new administrators are relying on them more. And punishing those who do not cooperate with the war crimes tribunal and the right of return to pre-war homes by withholding economic assistance runs counter to the broad consensus that an end to war in Bosnia requires economic revival--in all of its areas.

Whatever one's judgment about the responsibility of particular politicians in the war, it is generally recognized that Yugoslavia disintegrated because its political system overemphasized the national question, institutionalized rights of national self-determination, and lacked democracy--all characteristics shared by the constitution written for Bosnia at Dayton and the current methods of its implementation. The pro-Dayton team may actually be furthering the partition of Bosnia more than their pro-partition critics.

In fact, the one clear goal of this new assertiveness is to score successes before next June and prove to the US. Congress that its investment is paying returns and deserves support awhile longer. But the more assertive the implementation becomes, the more integral to the

political process in Bosnia the international community becomes. As the more the future of Bosnia depends on the actions of outsiders. Policy planners are also undermining the goal of American military planners, to shift the burden gradually back to Europe after June. The more Bosnia becomes an American project, the less able Washington is to hand it over to its European allies and NATO's new instrument for this purpose, the Combined Joint Task Force (CJTF).

The more pro-Bosniac American actions become and the fewer the assurances to Serbs and Croats that they will be secure in Bosnia, furthermore, the greater the risk that Serbs and Croats will secede and that allied unity will collapse over the creation of an independent Muslim state in Europe. These actions in turn make American policy dependent on what future the Bosniac leadership want to build--a subject now of heated internal debate within President Izetbegovic's ruling party.

### The Goal

If the troops are going to stay anyway, and they must, then why not use the time and money well? The separate project of NATO enlargement now requires that troops stay until stability is restored. But what does stability mean? The partition version falters when supporters have to admit the likely costs, that no one is prepared to support a rump Bosnia in the way that the United States supports Israel. A containment school has thus reemerged, arguing for a milder Cyprus-like version of stability: a loose division within the country and a small, semi-permanent international presence to prevent violence. But Bosnia is not and cannot be Cyprus. It is not an island; it is three communities, not two; and the stability of the rest of the region depends in part on a resolution of Bosnia's political issues.

The demands of Bosnia's current leaders notwithstanding, the stability of Bosnia does not depend as much on nationalist political control over territory and government ministries as it does on the elements that make any country viable and legitimate. The disastrous state of its economy, the fact that war interrupted even the first stages of its transition from a socialist to a market economy, single-party rule in most of the country, the lack of independent police and judiciaries, and growing segregation of schools and religious control over curricula are far greater threats to Bosnian stability than borders. A Bosnia partitioned into three mini-states will be no closer to resolving these issues than one Bosnia. A preoccupation with border disputes and national security enables leaders to avoid these issues longer still.

It has been only two years since the guns fell silent after a brutal civil war of neighbor against neighbor. All groups remain so fearful for their physical safety that forcing reintegration now only offers myriad opportunities for violence and revenge. This explains in part why US. Information Agency opinion surveys show that Bosnian Croats and Bosnian Serbs do not want to live in a unitary state. But what if we interpreted these opinions not as evidence of hatred and desire for separation, but as a reflection of vulnerability and fear, of a belief that protection currently can come only from their own national group, and the conviction that a unitary state means a monoethnic state where Muslims will rule and where they, as numerical minorities, will have no protection and meager prospects?

If there is peace, time is on the side of the Bosniacs--in terms of demographic growth, international support, levels of education, and experience with urban living and foreign trade. But the core groups of their professional class, who have the skills to bring Bosnia into the post-communist world, are those who held out throughout the war for a whole Bosnia,

including many non-Muslims, and those refugees who have recently returned out of commitment to Bosnia. Neither will stay if there are no opportunities soon for work commensurate with their education, for travel, for occupational and status mobility.

As differently as the three Bosnian communities may view Bosnia's political fate, however, all share a more important commonality. In all the USIA opinion surveys, the first concern and priority of members of all three communities is employment. If the diplomats now working so tirelessly for one Bosnia could respect the current reasons for separation and redirect their efforts to the issues all three share, they might find an increasing number of allies for a common life in Bosnia. The beauty of the Dayton accords is that their numerous internal compromises and contradictions allow a whole host of interpretations and adjustments without abandoning the document. But there will be no Bosnia if the cooperation diplomats seek is with Dayton, rather than among Bosnians over their common interests and goals.

Finally, whether Bosnia remains whole or is partitioned, it cannot be stable if it has poor relations with its neighbors and if its neighbors too make little progress on democratization and economic reform. Opinion polls in Serbia and Croatia do not support partition, and both countries' struggle toward democratization would be even more difficult were they to incorporate parts of Bosnia. The international community insisted on the current Bosnian borders in 1992-94 to send the strongest possible signal to other groups in the area that borders are not up for change. Creating a smaller, Bosniac Bosnia will expand what is now a small conflict over the status of Muslims who are a majority in the Sandzak region of Serbia and Montenegro (who now call themselves Bosniacs, too) into a major irredentist explosion. The most immediate instance--the unresolved Albanian question crossing the borders of Serbia, Montenegro, Macedonia, and Albania, especially Kosovo nationalism--can easily destabilize the whole region, drowning all Bosnian successes with it, if it is not also resolved soon.

It may be too much to ask that the international operation now reverse a thousand years of Bosnian history and seek to structure an environment in which Bosnians can work out their fate or fates on their own. How we structure that environment, however, will decide how long we have to stay.

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