1990s NATO

Topic B: The Balkans

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The Balkans

With the reordering of power structures following the collapse of the communist bloc in Eastern Europe, a power vacuum was unleashed in the Balkans. During the Cold War period, the majority of Eastern European countries had been dominated by puppet socialist regimes under the influence of the Soviet Union. However, Yugoslavia, a pan-Slavic state encompassing a large portion of the Balkans, maintained a significant degree of autonomy under the leadership of dictator Josep Broz Tito. When Tito died in 1980, new leaders emerged in Yugoslavia like the Serbian Slobodan Milosevic seeking to advance their own nationalist interests.¹ As the Soviet Union collapsed and perestroika ended Eastern European communism, the new nationalist movements influenced Serbian nationalists within the Yugoslav government to pursue their own interests. Therefore, NATO faced an increasingly deteriorating situation in the Balkans.

In the early 1990s, the Balkan issues presented new problems for NATO. The rising nationalist sentiments resulted in the breakup of Yugoslavia with the declarations of independence by Croatia and Slovenia. This encouraged Bosnia to proclaim its own independence in 1992, when it became Bosnia-Herzegovina.² The potential for a Serbian War against Croatia and Bosnia was high at this point, and NATO considered acting as a mediator between the two sides and a peacekeeper in the region. Soon, war erupted when ethnic Serbs living in Eastern Bosnia launched attacks against the capital Sarajevo with the backing of Slobodan Milosevic and the Serbian dominated Yugoslav army. The Serbs in Bosnia wish to establish a “Greater Serbia” by ethnically cleansing supposed Serb lands of Bosnian Muslims. The ethnic cleansing typically involved murder, rape, torture, and the forced removal of peoples so as to ensure the ethnic homogeneity of a particular

¹ [http://www.cof.edu/earthinfo/balkans/BKhis.html](http://www.cof.edu/earthinfo/balkans/BKhis.html)
region. January 1993 saw the breakdown in the alliance between Bosnian Croats and Muslims, allowing the Serbians to dominate up to two-thirds of the nations territory. Then in April 1993, the United Nations deployed its Protection Force (UNPROFOR) to halt Bosnian Serb attacks. The following year in 1994, the United States and NATO brokered a deal to create a Muslim-Croat Federation. The scene would shift to the eastern enclave of Srebrenica in March 1995 as the Bosnian Serb President Radovan Karadzic issued orders for Serbians to cut off this refugee town.

With the outbreak of war in the Balkans, NATO should re-evaluate its role in the region and decide if a military intervention is in order. With signs of an ethnic cleansing program beginning to take effect in the region, the committee should debate and discuss these signs and see if they warrant an intervention. While debating this topic, NATO delegates should consider the larger questions at hand about NATO’s post-Cold War policy. With ethnic and religious tensions building due to the dissolution of Soviet States, should NATO work to discourage nationalist movements, which work to impose an inferiority complex on other national, ethnic, and religious groups? Should NATO be responsible for resolving clashes between different nationalist entities and maintaining peace in Europe? Keep these questions in mind, as the committee’s actions will set policy precedence for many years to come.

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3 http://www.history.com/topics/bosnian-genocide
4 http://www.reuters.com/article/2008/07/21/idUSL21644464
Background and Current Situation:

The Balkans Conflict: 1990-1993

At the onset of the 1990s, the non-aligned Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia “was one of the largest, most developed and diverse countries in the Balkans,” a federation made up of six republics: Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Macedonia, Montenegro, Serbia and Slovenia. Additionally, Kosovo and Vojvodina were autonomous provinces within the Republic of Serbia. The main religions in Yugoslavia were Orthodox Christianity, Catholicism and Islam. Bosnia and Herzegovina’s diverse ethnic population, with “43 per cent Bosnian Muslims, 33 per cent Bosnian Serbs, 17 per cent Bosnian Croats and some seven percent of other nationalities” was reflected in the shared government. With a political history of “tenuous compromise” between the Bosnians, Croats and Serbs, the unity they had achieved “was only in the context of a federal Yugoslavia and an independent Bosnia-Herzegovina government was not a strong enough institution to keep the lid on the tensions just under the surface.”

The central republic had a strategic position that Serbia and Croatia competed to assert their dominance over territory after the leaders of Croatia and Serbia met in 1991, agreeing to divide up the republic and leave a small enclave for Muslims. Over 60 percent of Bosnian citizens voted for independence in a referendum in March of 1992, a referendum the Bosnian Serbs boycotted and followed with a rebellion in April of that year, declaring a Serb republic within Bosnia and Herzegovina to be under their control. The Yugoslav People’s Army and Serbia supported the Bosnian Serbs. They were able to quickly grow to control over 60 percent of the country “through

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6 ibid
7 ibid
8 ibid
9 ibid
overwhelming military superiority and a systematic campaign of persecution of non-Serbs. At this time in Sarajevo, violence escalated between Serbs and Muslims and clashes began in other areas between Croats and Serbs.

After the rebellion of the Bosnian Serbs, the Bosnian Croats declared their own republic, backed by Croatia. Outside leaders complicated the conflict because of their own interests. The Bosnian government attempted to maintain the republic, but “the conflict turned into a bloody three-sided fight for territories, with civilians of all ethnicities becoming victims of horrendous crimes.”

In late 1994, President Jimmy Carter traveled to the former Yugoslavia to conduct peace talks and work on a solution to the conflict. Once there, he held discussions with the presidents of Bosnia, Croatia, and Serbia, as well as a multitude of multinational representatives and officials. After two days of talks, “the leaders of Bosnia’s Muslim-led government and the Bosnian Serbs reached agreement on a cease-fire and on the resumption of peace talks.” Tensions in the area continued to rise, though. In March of 1995, President Radovan Karadzic of the Bosnian Serbs ordered that U.N.-designated safe areas Srebrenica and Zepa be cut off from convoys of aid. While this cease-fire provided a temporary relief from the fighting, the conflict continues to rage on.

Background on Crimes Against Humanity

The legal definition of genocide was defined by the United Nations in the 1948 Convention

12 ibid
13 http://www.cartercenter.org/countries/bosnia-peace.html
14 http://www.reuters.com/article/2008/07/21/idUSL21644464
on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide. The actual definition of genocide is mentioned in Article 2 which states, “In the present Convention, genocide means any of the following acts committed with intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial or religious group, as such

(a) Killing members of the group;
(b) Causing serious bodily or mental harm to members of the group;
(c) Deliberately inflicting on the group conditions of life calculated to bring about its physical destruction in whole or in part;
(d) Imposing measures intended to prevent births within the group;
(e) Forcibly transferring children of the group to another group.”

This definition opens up the definition of genocide to something beyond mere physical acts such as torture or murder. Genocide is instead viewed as a framework that is designed to separate a particular group of people with the intent of eradicating that group of people’s identity. This framework can be depicted in numerous ways including human rights violations and discriminatory legislation.

The United Nations created this legal definition of genocide during the Nuremberg Trials when it became necessary to develop an international definition of standards of human rights. “Genocide as defined in Articles II and III practically cover all those measures taken by the Nazis during their persecution and brutal extermination of certain social, religious and cultural groups.”

As such, the atrocities committed by the Nazis served to establish, for the first time, a set of international doctrines on human rights that applied both during war and peace times. Such an aspect is crucial to how genocide is defined today because, unlike the situation in World War II, a country does not have to be in the midst of a war to be accused of genocide by international law.

16 http://worldwithoutgenocide.org/genocides-and-conflicts/bosnian-genocide
These past discussions on the topic of genocide are important to NATO’s present-day debate. Although a consensus on what exactly is going on in Bosnia has yet to be reached, Bosnian Muslims seem to be accounting for a disproportionate amount of civilian casualties in the conflict. There have also been signs of systematic raping occurring throughout the region. By 1993, the death toll rose into tens of thousands with close to two million homeless in all of the former Yugoslavia, with over 500,000 having completely fled the region.17

Current Situation

It is currently July 9th of 1995, and fighting has raged since the expiration of the ceasefire in May. Muslim and Croatian forces have taken the offensive, and Bosnian Serb forces have “[retaken] U.N.- secured weapons, brushing aside UNPROFOR guards” in the process.18 NATO recently responded to these Bosnian Serb advancements with airstrikes, and deployed a combat-ready Rapid Reaction Force to the area. Just days earlier, the Bosnian Serb commanders “launched an offensive against the eastern enclaves of Srebrenica and Zepa.”19 Bosnian Serbs have overtaken two UN observation posts in Srebrenica, and have detained 30 Dutch peacekeepers. Artillery fire is spilling into the city, and Bosnian Serb tanks have pushed to within 1,500 yards of the edge of the town.

American Enterprise Institute scholar Patrick Glynn in 1995 characterizes the situation in Bosnia as a moral failure for the West as they “stood by essentially passively as rampaging Serbs pursued a brutal war of aggression against their Muslim neighbors.”20 There are multiple possible plans of action to consider. Air power, for example, could possibly be used to attack Serbian

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17 http://publications.gc.ca/Collection-R/LoPBdP/TP/bp374-e.htm#(34)txt
18 https://history.state.gov/milestones/1993-2000/bosnia
19 https://history.state.gov/milestones/1993-2000/bosnia
weapons provisions and supply lines. Glynn points out, however, that it would be difficult to destroy all of the Serbs weapons, and the associated logistical risks of action by air would be high. An air strike, however, would not have a precedent in NATO history.

Glynn argues the time for “relatively low-risk actions” has long past, such as “a well-targeted use of NATO air power” to end the ethnic cleansing, suggesting a larger scale intervention will be necessary. An additional factor to consider is the safety of UN peacekeepers and the civilian populations they protect as certain population centers are inadequately defended by the Bosnian government forces. UN Peacekeeping troops have been under fire, and the UN and NATO’s “inability to protect civilians in the safe-haven has been met with mounting anger and contempt from Bosnian government officials.”

On May 30th, 1995, in remarks to the North Atlantic Council, Secretary General Claes said NATO is ready “to support efforts towards the reinforcement of UN Peace Forces in former Yugoslavia, with the aim of reducing their vulnerability and strengthening their ability to perform their essential mission.” Claes reaffirmed NATO will commit to protecting the Bosnian Safe Areas set by the UN and “continue to support the efforts of the international community to achieve a negotiated solution to the conflict.”

United Nations Security Council resolution 836 authorizes member states “acting nationally or through regional organizations or arrangements” to work under the Security Council’s authority

21 ibid
25 ibid
and in coordination with the Secretary-General and the UN Protection Force (UNPROFOR) to support the UNPROFOR “in the performance of its mandate.”

The Balkans War from a socio-morally perspective was utterly incomprehensible given the aftermath of World War II and the Holocaust just half a century prior. NATO and Western society vowed to never again tolerate acts of genocide, but countless Bosnians were brutally murdered. The conflict saw the large scale use of one sided violence and cases of “ethnic cleansing where entire villages or areas of minorities were persecuted,” making it important for NATO to pay close attention to the violence and consider humanitarian responsibilities.

In his May remarks, Claes condemned Bosnian Serbs’ “outrageous behaviour,” the “killing and detention of the UN peacekeepers and the unacceptable threats against the lives of those held hostage,” as well as “barbaric shelling” of the UN safe areas, causing the large-scale slaughter of innocent civilians.

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27 http://www.ucdp.uu.se/gpdatabase/gpcountry.php?id=20#
28 http://www.veterans.gc.ca/eng/remembrance/history/canadian-armed-forces/balkans
Bloc Positions:

A five-nation Contact Group was formed in the spring of 1994 between United States, Russia, Britain, France, and Germany with the goal of brokering a settlement between the Federation and Bosnian Serbs.

France and Britain

France and Britain, the main contributors to the 35,000-member U.N. peacekeeping force, have a more vested interest in the safety of the peacekeepers and a NATO strategy that will protect the efforts made by the UN as well. France deploys the largest national contingent to UNPROFOR, with Britain following and the two countries working together closely in UNPROFOR, playing a vital role in the UN peacekeeping effort.

In April of this year, France threatened to withdraw its 4,530 peacekeeping troops from Bosnia unless its diplomatic partners and the United Nations could insure their safety. Previously, France proposed with the US to enable UN peacekeeping forces to be able to fight back harassment by Serbian nationalists. Additionally, they proposed “a humanitarian aid corridor from the Adriatic coast to the Bosnian capital of Sarajevo, and backing it up with heightened use of NATO warplanes to protect aid convoys and other U.N. missions.” Once hostilities resumed in the spring of 1995, French foreign minister Alain Juppé predicted fighting would intensify. Juppé was correct, and the violence resulted in the death of two French peacekeepers in April, prompting a French Security Council resolution “stressing the unacceptability of all attempts to resolve the conflict [...]”

34 Watson, Fiona M. and Dodd, Tom. “Bosnia and Croatia: the conflict continues.”
military means,” calling to extend the cease-fire and resume peace talks.

British forces have remained essentially unchanged in structure and command since 1994, with around 6,500 military personnel serving in Italy, in the Adriatic and Mediterranean and in Croatia and Bosnia and a Royal Naval task group supporting UNPROFOR and helping police the UN No Fly Zone over Bosnia.36

In Operation Determined Effort, a contingency plan for a NATO operation withdrawing UN forces, “France is reported to be resisting NATO control of withdrawal in every circumstance, favouring a UN-run mission in the event of only a limited pull-out.37”

United States

An important consideration is the actions and statements from political leaders in the US as the conflict became so violent that, although not a security issue for the US, interventions and possible solutions were discussed. However, the US has a difficult position; while they wish to appear as a leader in NATO, they are limited by transatlantic separation and domestic pressure against intervention. Before the air strikes in 1994, President Bill Clinton, outlining US interests said: "We have an interest in showing that NATO, history's greatest military alliance, remains a credible force for peace in post-cold-war Europe. We have an interest in stemming the destabilizing flows of refugees that this horrible conflict is creating. And we clearly have a humanitarian interest in helping to prevent the strangulation of Sarajevo and the continuing slaughter of innocents in Bosnia.38"

Additionally former President Jimmy Carter helped orchestrate a four-month cessation of hostilities in January of 1994 after meeting extensively with representatives and leaders for all parties

36 Watson, Fiona M. and Dodd, Tom. “Bosnia and Croatia: the conflict continues.”
37 ibid
involved, including the UN.\(^{39}\)

**Germany**

A statement by the government said the German force would “support both the newly established United Nations rapid reaction force in Bosnia and any NATO plan to extricate United Nations peacekeepers,” adding that “German transport planes would fly supplies for United Nations troops outside Bosnia, and German military personnel would help run a field hospital in Croatia.\(^{40}\)” Germany was also taking in over half of Yugoslavian refugees as of 1994.\(^{41}\)

**Canada**

“The value of NATO to Canada rests with the political and stability functions of the Alliance\(^{42}\)” and thus Canada will generally work to promote stability and work with its main allies. Canada is a major contributor to UN peacekeeping operations and as of early 1994 had 2,000 troops in the Balkans and had spent an estimated $210 million on Bosnian peacekeeping.\(^{43}\)

**Nordic Countries - Norway, Denmark, Iceland**

Iceland has no armed forces. Otherwise, the Nordic bloc generally cooperates with the Anglo-Saxon countries of the US, Canada and Britain.

**Greece**

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39 [http://www.theguardian.com/world/2003/jan/05/balkans.warcrimes](http://www.theguardian.com/world/2003/jan/05/balkans.warcrimes)
41 [http://publications.gc.ca/Collection-R/LoPBdP/BJ/bp374-e.htm#(34)txt](http://publications.gc.ca/Collection-R/LoPBdP/BJ/bp374-e.htm#(34)txt)
“In May 1992, the United Nations Security Council imposed broad trade, financial and political sanctions against Serbia and Montenegro for their role in provoking and supporting aggression, ethnic cleansing and other atrocities in Bosnia.”  

Greece compromised these sanctions by smuggling weapons and oil into Serbia that helped to fund Milosovic’s regime. Such an action proves the strong understanding between such countries at this time. It is important to consider such a relationship and how that relationship will determine Greece’s position in any future conflicts between Serbia and the United Nations.

**Spain, Portugal, Italy, Turkey, Belgium, Luxembourg and the Netherlands:**

Spain, Portugal, Turkey, Luxembourg, Belgium and the Netherlands have not maintained a strong stance on the situation in the former Yugoslavia territory up until this point. However, all of these countries have contributed to the aforementioned United Nations Protection Force (UNPROFOR) by supplying troops, military observers, and civilian police to provide protection for the population during the frequent outbreaks. Italy has not offered support for Determined case but would provide logistical and other support at home, and “small contributions from Greece and Portugal are likely to take the form of naval and logistical units.”

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44 Watson, Fiona M. and Dodd, Tom. “Bosnia and Croatia: the conflict continues.”
Questions to Consider:

1. How will NATO work with the United Nations to protect peacekeeping troops?

2. What is the precedent for working with the UN Security Council?

3. What other multinational bodies in Europe have stakes in intervention?

4. What would an international response be like to an air strike?

5. What are the options being considered by different governments?
Recommended Sources:

1. Chronology – What happened during the war in Bosnia?
   http://www.reuters.com/article/2008/07/21/idUSL21644464

2. Balkan Wars Article & The Economist in general
   http://www.economist.com/node/379026

3. North Atlantic Treaty Organization Homepage: use search function for relevant articles

4. UN Security Council Resolutions

5. Bosnia-Hercegovina: The International Response
   http://publications.gc.ca/Collection-R/LoPBdP/BP/bp374-e.htm

6. International Relations Journal
   http://ire.sagepub.com/

7. Journal of the United Nations
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