

"The Greatest Collective Failure ..."

(1991-93)

America, eternally protected by the Atlantic, desired to satisfy her self-righteousness while disengaging her responsibility.

—HAROLD NICOLSON, *Peacemaking 1919*

We do not interfere in American affairs; we trust America will not interfere in European affairs.

—JACQUES DELORS, President of the European Community, 1991

Europe took part in [the war] as a witness, but we must ask ourselves: was it always a fully responsible witness?

—POPE JOHN PAUL II, speaking in Sarajevo, April 13, 1997

IN EARLY 1995, IN AN ARTICLE PUBLISHED IN *Foreign Affairs*, I referred to the former Yugoslavia as "the greatest collective security failure of the West since the 1930s."¹ Although the article had been approved through the formal State Department clearance process, the phrase was not universally welcomed in the Administration. While it was intended to apply to events between 1990 and the end of 1992, there was concern that some people might also apply it to events as late as 1994, halfway into the Clinton Administration's first term.

Yugoslavia undeniably represented a failure of historic dimensions. Why and how had it happened—and just at the moment of the West's great triumph over communism?

There was, of course, no single, or simple, answer. But five major factors helped explain the tragedy: first, a misreading of Balkan history; second, the end of the Cold War; third, the behavior of the Yugoslav leaders themselves; fourth, the inadequate American response to the crisis; and, finally, the mis-

taken belief of the Europeans that they could handle their first post-Cold War challenge on their own.

I. Bad History, or The Rebecca West Factor. Many books and articles about Yugoslavia have left the impression that the war was inevitable. The most famous of all English-language books on the region was Rebecca West's monumental travel book *Black Lamb and Grey Falcon*, first published in 1941 and continuously in print since then. West's openly pro-Serb attitudes and her view that the Muslims were racially inferior had influenced two generations of readers and policy makers. Some of her other themes were revisited in modern dress in Robert Kaplan's widely acclaimed 1993 best-seller, *Balkan Ghosts: A Journey Through History*, which left most of its readers with the sense that nothing could be done by outsiders in a region so steeped in ancient hatreds. According to numerous press reports, the book had a profound impact on President Clinton and other members of the Administration shortly after they came into office.*

Thus arose an idea that "ancient hatreds," a vague but useful term for history too complicated (or trivial) for outsiders to master, made it impossible (or pointless) for anyone outside the region to try to prevent the conflict. This theory trivialized and oversimplified the forces that tore Yugoslavia apart in the early 1990s. It was expressed by many officials and politicians over the course of the war, and is still widely accepted today in parts of Washington and Europe. Those who invoked it were, for the most part, trying to excuse their own reluctance or inability to deal with the problems in the region. Some of the most surprising renderings of this view came from Lawrence Eagleburger, the former American Ambassador to Yugoslavia, who succeeded James Baker as Secretary of State near the end of 1992. Eagleburger regularly expressed his frustration with those Americans who called for action in stark terms. In September 1992, for example, almost two months after journalists had first filmed

* Kaplan wrote of West, whose work he called "this century's greatest travel book": "I would rather have lost my passport and money than my heavily thumbed and annotated copy of *Black Lamb and Grey Falcon*." For a perceptive analysis of the negative effects of West and her followers, see "Rebecca West's War," by Brian Hall, *The New Yorker*, April 15, 1996.

In his account of his years as editor of *Oslobodjenje*, the Sarajevo daily that published throughout the war, Kemal Kurspahic wrote: "At a time of crucial decisions [President Clinton] simply read the wrong book, or more precisely drew the wrong conclusions from *Balkan Ghosts* by Robert Kaplan, which led to the comforting thought that nothing much could be done in Bosnia 'until those folks got tired of killing each other'" (*As Long As Sarajevo Exists*).

Kaplan has repeatedly stated that he did not intend to have this effect. His book is primarily about Greece and Romania. It devotes less than four chapters out of seventeen to the former Yugoslavia, mentions Sarajevo only once and Mostar not at all, and has only twelve references to Bosnia. In his preface, Kaplan says that "nothing I write should be taken as a justification, however mild, for the war crimes committed by ethnic Serb troops in Bosnia, which I heartily condemn."

the atrocities being committed by Serbs against Muslims in prison camps in western Bosnia, he said:

I have said this 38,000 times, and I have to say this to the people of this country as well. This tragedy is not something that can be settled from outside and it's about damn well time that everybody understood that. Until the Bosnians, Serbs, and Croats decide to stop killing each other, there is nothing the outside world can do about it.

It was, of course, undeniable that the ethnic groups within Yugoslavia nursed deep-seated grievances against one another. But in and of itself, ethnic friction, no matter how serious, did not make the tragedy inevitable—or the three ethnic groups equally guilty.* Of course, there was friction between ethnic groups in Yugoslavia, but this was true in many other parts of the world where racial hatred had *not* turned into ethnic cleansing and civil war. There had been periods of intense ethnic conflict in Yugoslavia, most recently in World War II. But the fighting between 1941 and 1945 was part of the larger killing field, triggered by Hitler's ambitions, into which all of Europe had turned. Though some Serbs nursed ancient enmities that could be traced back to their defeat by the Turks on Kosovo Field in 1389, the three groups had lived together for centuries. Serbs, Croats, and Muslims worked together in every walk of life. There was no noticeable physical or ethnic difference between them, and, in fact, considerable intermarriage. Many people told me that until the collapse of their country they did not know which of their friends were Serb and which were Muslim. Throughout the war, I heard frequent accounts of old friends sending each other personal messages and gifts and helping each other escape across the battle lines. As Noel Malcolm wrote in his 1994 *Bosnia: A Short History*, "Having travelled widely in Bosnia over fifteen years, and having stayed in Muslim, Croat, and Serb villages, I cannot believe the claim that the country was forever seething with ethnic hatreds."[†]

Yugoslavia's tragedy was not foreordained. It was the product of bad, even criminal, political leaders who encouraged ethnic confrontation for personal, political, and financial gain. Rather than tackle the concrete problems of governance in the post-Tito era, they led their people into a war. Observing how racial hatred was deliberately inflamed, Warren Zimmermann wrote in his memoir of his ambassadorship:

* As journalists reported at the time, the American government had concluded by the early summer of 1992 that the Serbs had carried out close to 90 percent of all the atrocities in Bosnia and Croatia.

† Page 252. Malcolm's *Bosnia: A Short History* was the first serious English-language history of Bosnia, and argued convincingly that Bosnia had its own history and continuing identity. Malcolm undermined the conventional wisdom that the war was the inevitable result of ancient hatreds. It is unfortunate it did not appear earlier.

Those who argue that "ancient Balkan hostilities" account for the violence that overtook and destroyed Yugoslavia forget the power of television in the hands of officially provoked racism. While history, particularly the carnage of World War Two, provided plenty of tinder for ethnic hatred in Yugoslavia, it took the institutional nationalism of Milosevic and Tadjman to supply the torch. . . . Yugoslavia may have a violent history, but it isn't unique. What we witnessed was violence-provoking nationalism from the top down, inculcated primarily through the medium of television. . . . Many people in the Balkans may be weak or even bigoted, but in Yugoslavia it is their leaders who have been criminal. The virus of television spread ethnic hatred like an epidemic throughout Yugoslavia. . . . An entire generation of Serbs, Croats, and Muslims were aroused by television images to hate their neighbors.²

Malcolm similarly observed:

Having watched Radio Television Belgrade in the period 1991–2, I can understand why simple Bosnian Serbs came to believe that they were under threat, from Ustasa hordes, fundamentalist jihads, or whatever. . . . It was as if all television in the USA had been taken over by the Ku Klux Klan.³

II. The End of the Cold War. Yugoslavia was cobbled together at the Versailles Conference in 1919–20 from parts of decaying, dying, and defeated empires. In the name of Wilsonian self-determination, the victors of World War I established a country that violated that principle, creating a time bomb that would later explode. Revealingly, its original name was the "Kingdom of the Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes," which was later changed to Yugoslavia, or Land of the South Slavs.

World War II changed everything once again. Against the backdrop of ethnic violence, especially between Croats and Serbs, a legendary communist leader, Josip Broz Tito—half Croat, half Slovene—came out of the remote mountains of Yugoslavia, seized power by fighting the Nazis, and held it for an astonishing thirty-five years. In 1948 came the event that defined Yugoslavia, Tito's historic break with the Soviet Union. From then on, the West was ready to overlook or minimize all other problems within Yugoslavia because of the strategic importance of supporting an anti-Soviet state, albeit a communist and undemocratic one, in such a vital area of Europe. Yugoslavia would receive special treatment from the West for the next forty years.

By the time Yugoslavia started its final agony in 1991, momentous events elsewhere obscured what was happening in the Balkans. The Berlin Wall had been torn down and Germany was unified; communism was dead or dying in Central Europe; the Soviet Union was breaking up into fifteen independent nations; and, in August 1990, Iraq invaded Kuwait, setting in motion the U.S.-led coalition that liberated Kuwait early the following year. Yugoslavia, hav-

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ing lost its strategic importance in the eyes of most Western policy makers, fell to its death almost ignored by the West.

III. The Internal Yugoslav Drama. It was famously said during Tito's time that Yugoslavia had six republics, five nations, four languages, three religions, two alphabets, and one party. But after his death in 1980, the Communist Party weakened. Like many other autocratic leaders, Tito had not permitted the development of a strong successor. An increasingly ineffectual central presidency rotated annually among the six semi-autonomous Yugoslav republics, and, for a time, the Albanian-dominated region of Kosovo.

In the rest of Central and Eastern Europe, democracy and democratic ideals had been the strongest weapon in the struggle against communism. But in Yugoslavia, against a backdrop of mounting debt, spiraling inflation, and high unemployment, it proved to be extreme nationalism. Thus racists and demagogues—often communists or former communists—rallied people on the basis of ethnic consciousness. Those who wanted to retain a multiethnic state or work out a peaceful new arrangement giving more autonomy to the republics were either driven out of the country or silenced—sometimes brutally.

The crisis began in Catholic, Western-oriented Slovenia, the smallest and wealthiest of the six Yugoslav republics. In 1989, as the Berlin Wall came down, Slovenia began a series of direct challenges to the central government. Kosovo, an "autonomous" region in Serbia whose Albanian majority lived under harsh Serb rule, teetered on the edge of secession and open revolt.

In Serbia, Slobodan Milosevic, the most agile Yugoslav leader, saw his opportunity. Renaming the Serbian Communist Party the Serbian Socialist Party, Milosevic took up the cause of Serb nationalism. In 1989, on the six hundredth anniversary of the Serb defeat by the Turks at Kosovo, Milosevic went to the legendary battlefield and delivered an inflammatory speech before one million Serbs. (When I asked Milosevic in 1995 about this famous speech, he heatedly denied that it was racist, and charged Ambassador Zimmermann with organizing a Western diplomatic boycott of the speech and the Western press with distorting it. But his words and their consequences are indelibly on the record.)

IV. Post-Iraq American Fatigue. In the spring of 1991, the Yugoslav crisis became acute. The victory in the desert against Saddam Hussein had been the result of superb coalition leadership by the Bush Administration, but dealing simultaneously with both Desert Storm and the death throes of the Soviet Union had exhausted Washington. As Zimmermann noted dryly in his memoirs, "Even a great power has difficulty in dealing with more than one crisis at a time."⁴ In addition, the American presidential election was only a year away. American policy makers did not wish to get involved in Yugoslavia, and many considered the situation insoluble. In the words of David Gompert, a senior

National Security Council staff member at the time, the Bush Administration knew "a year before the fighting began that Yugoslavia was being led toward the abyss by a few demagogic politicians, [but] simply knew of no way to prevent this from occurring. . . . The Bush national security team that performed so well in other crises was divided and stumped."⁵

In June 1991, Secretary of State James Baker made his only visit to Belgrade, a day trip jammed between an important meeting with Soviet officials in Berlin and an emotional trip to Albania, where one million Albanians cheered him in the streets of the capital.

Baker's perception of the situation was reflected in his personal report from Belgrade to President Bush that night, which he quoted in his memoirs: "My gut feeling is that we won't produce a serious dialogue on the future of Yugoslavia until all parties have a greater sense of urgency and danger. We may not be able to impart that from the outside, but we and others should continue to push."⁶

This was a crucial misreading. The Yugoslavs knew exactly how urgent and dangerous the situation was. They had been waiting to see if the United States and its allies would intervene. Once they realized that the United States, at the height of its global influence, was disengaged, they proceeded rapidly on their descent into hell. Only four days after Baker left Belgrade, Croatia and Slovenia both declared their independence. Two days later, on June 27, the first (and shortest) of the Balkan wars—the Yugoslav invasion of Slovenia—began. Three more wars—between Croats and Serbs, Serbs and Bosnians, and Croats and Bosnians—were to follow, killing hundreds of thousands of people, displacing over two million more, and destroying not only the country of Yugoslavia, but hopes for what President Bush called a peaceful "new world order" in Europe. Long after he had left Belgrade, Ambassador Zimmermann reflected on the tragedy: "The refusal of the Bush Administration to commit American power early was our greatest mistake of the entire Yugoslav crisis. It made an unjust outcome inevitable and wasted the opportunity to save over a hundred thousand lives."⁷

The United States was now in the position of supporting something that no longer existed. Given their Yugoslav expertise, the key figures in shaping American policy should have been Eagleburger and National Security Advisor Brent Scowcroft, who had been a military attaché in Belgrade early in his Air Force career. Questioned about this in 1995, Scowcroft said, "Eagleburger and I were the most concerned here about Yugoslavia. The President and Baker were furthest on the other side. Baker would say 'We don't have a dog in this fight.' The President would say to me once a week 'Tell me again what this is all about.'"⁸

V. Atlantic Confusion and Euro-passivity. For the first time since World War II, Washington had turned a major security issue entirely over to

the Europeans. In his memoirs, Secretary Baker explains this decision: "It was time to make the Europeans step up to the plate and show that they could act as a unified power. Yugoslavia was as good a first test as any."⁹

In fact, Yugoslavia was the worst possible place for a "first test" of a new American policy to "make the Europeans step up to the plate." To be sure, with the Soviet threat gone and Germany united, Europe had to assume a larger role in the Atlantic partnership, as they themselves wanted. But for over a half century Europe had been unable to "act as a unified power" without American leadership. The Bush Administration's stellar performance in 1989-90 on one of the last great Cold War issues, German unification, had been one of the brightest chapters in American foreign policy in the entire century; without Washington's steadfast and visionary support, it would not have happened, given the opposition of Britain and France. Yet only a year later the same officials who had made it possible turned their backs on the first post-Cold War challenge in Europe.

The Yugoslav crisis should have been handled by NATO, the Atlantic institution that mattered most, the one in which the United States was the core member. The best chance to prevent war would have been to present Yugoslavia with a clear warning that NATO airpower would be used against any party that tried to deal with ethnic tensions by force. The United States and the Europeans could then have worked with the Yugoslav parties to mediate peaceful (although certainly contentious and complicated) divorce agreements between the republics. But Washington did not see it that way. As David Gompert candidly observed of his own colleagues:

The U.S. Government's handling of the Yugoslav crisis from 1990 to 1992 contradicted and undermined its declaratory policy regarding the centrality and purpose of NATO in post-Cold War Europe, [which] implied NATO responsibility to respond to precisely the sort of conflict by then raging in the Balkans. . . . Predictably, the attempt to hold the Yugoslav crisis at arm's length did not spare the United States the effects of, or responsibility for, the failure that followed.¹⁰

Europe's own miscalculation was equally grievous. It was encapsulated in a memorable statement by the Foreign Minister of Luxembourg, Jacques Poos, whose country then held the rotating presidency of the European Community (later renamed the European Union). "The hour of Europe," Poos declared, "has dawned."

The day after the war between "Yugoslavia" and Slovenia began, six days after Secretary Baker's June 1991 trip, Poos led a mission of the European Community "troika"—the Foreign Ministers of the previous, current, and next

presidencies of the E.C.—to Belgrade. Poos did no better than Baker. But the process revealed the disarray between the United States and the Europeans.

So determined was Baker to keep the United States uninvolved that he flatly rejected a proposal from Assistant Secretary of State Thomas Niles to send an observer to the talks between the Yugoslav parties sponsored by the Europeans, fearing that even such a minor action might imply a possible American role.

In this sorry sequence, Europe and the United States proved to be equally misguided. Europe believed it could solve Yugoslavia without the United States; Washington believed that, with the Cold War over, it could leave Yugoslavia to Europe. Europe's hour had *not* dawned in Yugoslavia; Washington *had* a dog in this particular fight. It would take four years to undo these mistakes—four years before Washington belatedly and reluctantly, but ultimately decisively, stepped in and asserted leadership, with European support. But this did not happen until after even more severe strain within the Atlantic Alliance, and historic disasters in Bosnia.

The Yugoslav-Slovene war started on June 27. It was short and, by the standards of what was to come next, almost a lark. Within ten days, after light casualties on both sides, Milosevic ordered the Yugoslav Army to withdraw. A few days later, at a meeting on the Adriatic island of Brioni, Dutch Foreign Minister Hans van den Broek, the senior European representative, negotiated an agreement that effectively gave Slovenia its independence, but left the situation more explosive than ever. As Laura Silber and Allan Little put it, "The Brioni Agreement was hailed as a triumph of European diplomacy. It was nothing of the sort. It left every important item of contention unresolved. . . . The diplomatic triumph belonged to Milosevic and [Slovenian President Milan] Kucan, who had, between them, agreed on Slovenia's departure from the federation . . . and, in effect, destroyed federal Yugoslavia."¹¹

The Kucan-Milosevic deal was a characteristic example of Milosevic's tactical flexibility and superb negotiating skills, and served his long-term purposes in ways not well understood at the time. Slovenia's departure from Yugoslavia made it easier for Milosevic to create a Yugoslavia dominated by the Serbs, since it removed from the country a republic with almost no Serbs.

Croatia, with hundreds of thousands of Serbs within its boundaries, was not ready to accept such an outcome. Croatian President Franjo Tudjman had long dreamed of establishing Croatia as an independent country. But the boundaries of his "country," drawn originally by Tito to define the republic within Yugoslavia, would contain areas in which Serbs had lived for centuries. In the brief war in Slovenia the Yugoslav Army seemed to be defending the territorial integrity of Yugoslavia; when that same army went to war only a few weeks

later against Croatia, it had become a *Serb* army fighting for the Serbs inside Croatia.

The Croatian-Serbian war began with irregulars and local incidents, and escalated rapidly to full-scale fighting. In August 1991, an obscure Yugoslav Army lieutenant colonel named Ratko Mladic joined his regular forces with the local irregulars—groups of young racists and thugs who enjoyed beating up Croats—and launched an attack on Kijevo, an isolated Croat village in the Serb-controlled Krajina. There had been fighting prior to Kijevo, but this action, backed fully by Belgrade, “set the pattern for the rest of the war in Croatia: JNA [Yugoslav] artillery supporting an infantry that was part conscript and part locally-recruited Serb volunteers.”¹² Within weeks, fighting had broken out across much of Croatia. The JNA began a vicious artillery assault on Vukovar, an important Croat mining town on the Serbian border. Vukovar and the region around it, known as eastern Slavonia, fell to the Serbs in mid-November, and Zagreb was threatened, sending Croatia into panic. (The peaceful return of eastern Slavonia to Croatia would become one of the central issues in our negotiations in 1995.)

After exhausting other options, the European Community asked the former British Foreign Secretary Lord Carrington to take on the task of bringing peace to Yugoslavia. Carrington, an urbane man of legendary integrity, told me later that he had never met such terrible liars in his life as the peoples of the Balkans. As the war in Croatia escalated and Vukovar crumbled under Serb shells, Carrington put forward a compromise plan to end the war.

Again the United States stayed away. No American negotiator entered the effort; Washington’s support for the Carrington plan was confined to tepid public statements and low-level diplomatic messages. In mid-November, United Nations Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali appointed Cyrus Vance as the United Nations negotiator, and asked him to work closely with Carrington. Because Vance was a former Secretary of State, many people believed the United States was now somehow involved—an impression the Bush Administration did not discourage. But it was not true.

In 1991, the United Nations Security Council voted to impose an arms embargo on all of Yugoslavia. The United States supported this, and subsequently, in practice, this seemingly neutral position was a gift to the Serbs, since almost all the armaments and weapons factories of Yugoslavia were located in Serbia. To the Croats and especially to the Muslims of Bosnia, this was a huge blow. Paul Wolfowitz, President Bush’s Undersecretary of Defense, argued against this, later calling it “totally and disastrously one-sided in its effect,”* but to no avail. As the war worsened, Senators Dole, Biden, and Liberman would make repeated efforts to “lift” the embargo unilaterally, lead-

* *The National Interest*, Number 53, p. 102.

ing to some of the most emotional and contentious struggles of the Clinton Administration.

The appointment of Cy Vance quickened my own interest in Yugoslavia. I had worked for Vance twice—first in 1968, during the Paris peace negotiations with North Vietnam, and again when I was Assistant Secretary of State for East Asian and Pacific Affairs during the Carter Administration. We had been close allies in the Carter years, and I had great respect and affection for him and his family. Vance was a born mediator. Even in his mid-seventies, he still brought intensity and meticulousness to his work, with enough focused energy to outlast people half his age. Furthermore, Vance brought to the table something Carrington could not offer—the possibility of a U.N. peacekeeping force in Croatia if there was an agreement to end the fighting.

The Germans Recognize Croatia. As the Vance-Carrington effort commenced, the European Community addressed one of the most controversial decisions of the war: whether or not to recognize Croatia as an independent nation. For months Germany had been pressing the E.C. and the United States to recognize Croatia. Vance and Carrington opposed the German position vigorously. They both told me later that they had warned their old friend and colleague German Foreign Minister Hans Dietrich Genscher, in the strongest possible terms, that recognizing Croatia would trigger a chain reaction culminating in a war in Bosnia. They reasoned, correctly, that Bosnia would have to follow Croatia's lead and declare independence next. Once Bosnia did this, Vance and Carrington predicted, the substantial Serb minority within Bosnia would then rebel against living in a state dominated by Muslims. As one Yugoslav later put it, each ethnic group would ask, "Why should I be a minority in *your* state when *you* can be a minority in mine?" War would be inevitable.

Genscher, the senior Foreign Minister in Europe, ignored the warning of his old friends. Uncharacteristically flexing Germany's muscles during a critical Foreign Ministers meeting in Brussels in mid-December 1991, he told his colleagues that if they did not support him Germany would simply recognize Croatia unilaterally. Faced with a threat of a public break in European "unity" just when the historic Maastricht Treaty was proclaiming the dawn of a new, unified Europe—a treaty whose prime mover had been German Chancellor Helmut Kohl—the other Europeans yielded to Genscher.

The United States opposed the E.C. decision, but without noticeable vigor: as Baker admitted in his memoirs, "our central focus for months to come would be on managing the peaceful dissolution of the USSR."¹³ Even the unfailingly polite and generous Warren Zimmermann was critical of his superiors on this point, later describing Washington's telegram of instructions on recognition "perfunctory, . . . enough to show we had done something, but not

enough to produce results." The State Department's statement, Zimmermann wrote, was "weak and nuanced, [designed] mainly to avoid ruffling the Croatian community in the United States."¹⁴ Washington itself would recognize Croatia a few months later.

In recent years, I have been asked repeatedly whether or not the German decision to recognize Croatia triggered the war in Bosnia. This question is complicated. On the one hand, I believe the German decision was a mistake. On the other, many other actions taken in 1991 by the outside powers proved to be more serious errors. In the end, while the German decision probably hastened the outbreak of war in Bosnia, the conflict would have occurred anyway once it was clear that the West would not intervene. To blame Bonn alone for causing the war in Bosnia evades the responsibility of many others. Germany was scapegoated for what happened in Bosnia by people seeking to deflect attention from their own failures.

Given Germany's history in the region—the Nazi associations with their puppet state in Croatia during World War II, and the death camps in Croatia, where both Jews and Serbs had died—Bonn's position also raised concern that Germany, united for the first time since 1945, was about to embark on a more activist, perhaps more aggressive, foreign policy in Central and Eastern Europe. But I see no evidence for the theory that German policy was derived from either its history in the region or a plan for new German assertiveness in Central Europe. During my ambassadorship in Germany, I came to know Genscher and many of his former Foreign Ministry associates well. They were among the most civilized and progressive people with whom I have ever worked. They understood the terrible history of their country under the Nazis, and were deeply committed to making a democratic Germany the key to a democratic and peaceful Europe. I felt—and so stated as Ambassador—that with the end of the Cold War it was desirable for Germany to develop a more active foreign policy, one that would be commensurate with its size and economic strength.

President Clinton, who had visited Germany several times as a student and had studied German, welcomed Germany's emergence as a major participant in shaping European policy. Better to work for the gradual re-emergence of Germany as a European power, this time prosperous and democratic, he felt, than to bottle it up and risk an abrupt reaction later.

Thus, while the German decision on Croatia was wrong, its importance should not be overstated. In fact, Alija Izetbegovic's remarkably bold statement to the Bosnian Parliament on February 27, 1991—almost ten months before Germany recognized Croatia—foreshadowed the problems to come: "I would sacrifice peace for a sovereign Bosnia-Herzegovina," he said "but for

that peace in Bosnia-Herzegovina I would not sacrifice sovereignty." As Silber and Little observe, "To the Serbs, this was a war cry."¹⁵

Vance got an agreement to stop the fighting in Croatia at the beginning of 1992. By February he had overcome resistance from the local Krajina Serbs, gained Milosevic's support, and formally recommended to the United Nations the deployment of 12,500 U.N. peacekeepers. Within days, the U.N. had voted to send to Croatia the second-largest international peacekeeping force ever deployed.

It was a substantial achievement, but there was a cost. Almost one third of Croatia now lay in areas supposedly protected by the United Nations but in fact controlled by the Serbs. Ethnic cleansing of the Croats from these "United Nations Safe Areas" by the Krajina Serbs—who contemptuously proclaimed an independent "republic" on the same terrain—proceeded under the passive eyes of a thirty-nation U.N. peacekeeping force. Vance and Carrington had stopped a war, but the feeble U.N. follow-up left a legacy of pent-up Croatian nationalism that would explode in the Krajina three years later, just as we were beginning our shuttle diplomacy.