

## *The NATO Powers and the Balkan Tragedy*

Western powers usually legitimize military interventions in terms of a proclaimed commitment to some universalist norm or to some goal embodying such a norm. These declared goals can oscillate, but they are important because a central element of their foreign policy, particularly when it involves starting a war, is maintaining the support of their domestic population. In the Anglo-Saxon countries, people like to think of themselves as the guardians and promoters, through their states, of the most civilized, humane, liberal and democratic values in the world. It is true that they have short attention spans and are generally far more ignorant of the world outside their borders than the populations of many other countries, but at least the elected leaders of their states can run into domestic trouble if the declared norms and goals are not implemented or if implementation is carried through with such barbarity that they contradict other, more basic, norms and goals.

The attack on Yugoslavia is justified as aiming to end the oppression of the Kosovo Albanians and guaranteeing their human rights. The result may be a NATO protectorate, it may be autonomy within Serbia, it may involve a partition of Kosovo, it may even lead to an independent Kosovo, it may be built under Rugova's leadership or that of the KLA. We simply do not know. These aims are only the latest of a whole series enunciated by the NATO powers since the start of the Yugoslav crisis in the late 1980s. It would tire the reader's patience if we were to list all the norms and goals proclaimed by these powers since 1989. A recitation, in any case, would tell us little of the real operational goals of the NATO powers in Yugoslavia over the last decade. Their operations have not been governed by any universalist norms geared to improving the conditions of the peoples of the area, but by their own *state political interests and state political goals*. These real objectives of the Western states have usually had little to do with the human rights of the citizenry. Yugoslavia has, for a long time, been the cockpit of Europe. At the same time, the operations of the Western powers in the Yugoslav theatre have been a major—some would say, *the* major—cause of many of the barbarities that have

confronted Yugoslav men and women in the past. A balanced judgement on the March 1999 NATO assault on Yugoslavia necessitates a study of the whole tragedy.

### The Western Powers and the Collapse of Yugoslavia

The post-Second World War Yugoslav state was, in many respects, a model of how to build a multinational state, though, from the beginning, the incorporation of Kosovo into Serbia was an anomaly.<sup>1</sup> The Federation was constructed against a double background: an inter-war Yugoslavia which had been dominated by an oppressive Serbian ruling class; and a war-time slaughter in which the occupying Italian and German forces enlisted Croatian fascism for ferocious massacres and also exploited anti-Serb sentiments amongst the Kosovo Albanian—and some elements in the Bosnian Muslim—population, to bolster their rule.

The new Yugoslav state pursued economic redistribution and development in the constituent republics. It evolved a self-management model to show its defiance of Stalin. Anti-Stalinist, internationalist socialists from the whole of Western Europe rallied to Tito and special brigades helped to rebuild the railways. The new republican borders ensured that the previously dominant Serb nation—the largest nation in Yugoslavia—would never again dominate the other Yugoslav nations. Both constituent nations and republics were furnished with rights of equal constitutional status; and, finally, the state was anchored in a transnational League of Communists rooted in all the Yugoslav nations (though most weakly in Kosovo). The Communists exercised a monopoly of political power but, despite the oligarchic character of the new state, they enjoyed wide support within the population as the guarantors of all the positive elements in the system and as the people who had led a successful resistance against fascism.

Partly to ease Serb sensitivities over the fact that very large parts of the Serbian population were left outside the Serbian Republic, the Communist leadership allocated Kosovo to the Serb republic as an autonomous province. They viewed this as a temporary measure until their goal, shared by the Bulgarian and Albanian Communists, of a Balkan Federation in which the borders dividing Albanian communities could wither away. The Stalin-Tito split blocked this.

There was one further important structural element in the stability of the post-war Yugoslav state. Both the USSR and the USA were committed to maintaining the integrity and neutrality of Yugoslavia as a state on the borders of super-power confrontation in Europe.

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<sup>1</sup> On the historical background of Kosovo's place in post-war Yugoslav history, see Branka Magas's prescient article under the name of Michelle Lee, 'Kosovo Between Yugoslavia and Albania', *NLR* 140, July–August 1983, pp. 62–91.

The collapse of this state was a result of both internal and external factors. Assigning comparative weight to the external as against the internal in the generalized crisis that shook Yugoslavia in 1990–1991 is a complex matter. However, without understanding the role of the Western powers in helping to produce and channel the crisis, it is difficult to comprehend the disintegration of Yugoslavia. Yet this Western role has largely been overlooked in Western literature.<sup>2</sup>

### From Debt to Crisis

The fundamental cause of the Yugoslav collapse was an economic crisis. This was then used by social groups in Yugoslavia and in the West to undermine the collectivist core of the economy and push Yugoslavia towards a full capitalist restoration. The economic crisis was the product of disastrous errors by Yugoslav governments in the 1970s. They borrowed vast amounts of Western capital in order to fund growth through exports. The Western economies entered a recession, blocked Yugoslav exports and created a huge debt problem. The Yugoslav government accepted an IMF plan that shifted the burden of the crisis onto the Yugoslav working class. Simultaneously, strong social groups emerged within the Yugoslav League of Communists, allied to Western business, banking and state interests and began the push towards neoliberalism, to the delight of the US. It was the Reagan administration which, in 1984, had adopted an NSC proposal to push Yugoslavia towards a capitalist restoration.<sup>3</sup>

This, naturally, undermined a central pillar of the old state: the collectivist link between the party and the working class. The effects were varied. In Kosovo, where the links between Yugoslav Communism and the population had always been weak, and where the economic crisis was at its most intense, there was an uprising in 1981 demanding full republican status. The mass mobilizations included separatist tendencies, wanting to unite Kosovo with Albania. Since 1974, Kosovo had been an autonomous province of the Serbian republic, a status that gave it far more extensive rights and power within Yugoslavia than enjoyed by national minorities in any West European state. However, in response to the separatist agitation, the central state began to reassert its power and harshly to repress those deemed to be unreliable.

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<sup>2</sup> The striking exception have been two outstanding and courageous works of scholarship: Susan Woodward's *The Balkan Tragedy: Chaos and Dissolution after the Cold War*, Washington, DC 1995, remains unsurpassed to this day, but see also Catherine Samary, *Yugoslavia Dismembered*, New York 1995.

<sup>3</sup> Uniquely, in Yugoslavia, the World Bank imposed a savage bankruptcy mechanism on the industrial sector. In 1989–90, the decisive years, this produced, out of a total industrial workforce of 2.7 million, 600,000 redundancies without compensation, along with a further half a million workers not receiving pay in the early months of 1990. This social shock hit mainly Serbia, Bosnia, Macedonia and Kosovo. See World Bank, *Industrial Restructuring Study, Overview*, Washington, DC June 1991; see also, Michel Chussodovsky, 'Dismantling the Former Yugoslavia', Research Paper, University of Ottawa, April 1996.

In Serbia, there was an attempt by the intelligentsia to reorganize the link between the party and the people on a Serbian nationalist and anti-Kosovar basis. This movement was ultimately joined and led by the Serbian Communist leader, Milosevic. It mobilized populist Serbian anti-Albanian chauvinism as a new basis for maintaining popular support for the party while actually implementing the Reagan administration's 'structural adjustment' programme processed through the World Bank.<sup>4</sup>

In Slovenia, the Communist leadership resisted Milosevic and sought new legitimacy by agitating for greater autonomy, with the obvious ultimate goal of splitting away from Yugoslavia altogether: thus capitalist restoration would be seen as a means towards Slovenia 'joining Europe'. Similar nationalist trends emerged in Croatia, though largely outside the Communist Party. All these attempts to replace the collectivist link between leaders and peoples with new ideologies embraced the symbols and discourses of pre-1945 Yugoslav bourgeois nationalisms. This shift towards pre-war values on the part of former Communist leaders and others building new pro-capitalist parties was not a peculiarly Yugoslav phenomenon: it occurred right across the Soviet Bloc and the rise of such trends was generally welcomed in Western capitals, where attempts by former ruling parties to maintain social links with the working class were seen as the main enemy to be combated.<sup>5</sup>

### Preparing the Carve-Up

This was the situation in 1989, when the Soviet Bloc started to crumble. As it did so, the US withdrew its earlier commitment to the maintenance of the integrity of the Yugoslav state. This shift by the US signalled the general view in the main Western powers: none of them had a significant stake in Yugoslav unity and all of them were pushing for a rapid switch to capitalism in the region, a switch to be brought about through induced economic slumps destroying the social gains of populations under the previous order. The populations were expected to put up with their loss of social rights and economic security because they had the prospect of later 'entering Europe'—a phrase which meant joining the EC club of the rich. This package of policies and conditionalities worked, initially, in much of East Central Europe, uniting the populations around governments taking the shock therapy road to capitalism. But, in two states, it produced splits and political fragmentation: Czechoslovakia was one and Yugoslavia was the other.

In the Yugoslav case, the tactic's destructive role took a particularly virulent form both because of the zeal of Western policy makers in

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<sup>4</sup> This involved traumatic social shocks inflicted on the working class.

<sup>5</sup> Milosevic, though presented as a unique phenomenon, was part of a regional political genus, which included figures like Iliescu and Meciar, and should be analyzed as such.

introducing their new paradigm in their first two cases—Yugoslavia and Poland where the shocks were launched simultaneously on 1 January 1990—and because some European governments actually wanted the break-up of Yugoslavia. Their pressure thus combined with the general Western drive for capitalism to speed the break-up during 1990. On one side were a number of European states eager to gain independence for Slovenia and Croatia; on the other side was the United States, keen to ensure that Yugoslavia paid its debts to Western banks and ‘globalized’ its political economy through shock therapy in order to guarantee a régime in the country that would be open for Western multinationals.

The forces enthusiastic to see the break-up of Yugoslavia through independence for Slovenia and Croatia consisted of Germany, Austria, Hungary, the Vatican and, more ambivalently, Italy. Since the mid-1980s, the Vatican and Austria had started an active campaign in East Central and Eastern Europe to rebuild their influence there and, by 1989–90, the Vatican was openly championing independence for Slovenia and Croatia. By 1990, Austria’s government was equally explicit. In the words of a study by the International Institute of Strategic Studies (IISS), Austria had ‘a remarkably open and sometimes brazen policy aimed at helping Slovenia and Croatia in their efforts to leave the [Yugoslav] Federation’.<sup>6</sup>

The real goal of Austrian policy was to expand Austria’s regional influence, since it ‘saw the Yugoslav crisis as an auspicious moment for self-assertion’.<sup>7</sup> In the summer of 1991, the EC was finally prompted to warn Austria that, if it continued its energetic efforts to break up Yugoslavia, it would be excluded from eventual EC membership but even that threat did not stop Austrian efforts. The Hungarian government of the late Jozef Antall, elected in the Spring of 1990, adopted a policy very much in line with that of Austria, but with additional Hungarian goals vis-à-vis Serbia’s Vojvodina Province. Thus Hungary secretly supplied automatic assault rifles to Croatia in late 1990. And, in July 1991, at the very height of the crisis between Serbia and Croatia, the Hungarian Prime Minister declared that the international treaties designating Hungary’s southern borders with Serbia and, in particular, with Vojvodina were treaties made only with Yugoslavia. This, he said, was a ‘historical fact’ which ‘must be kept in view’.<sup>8</sup> Referring to the 1920 Treaty of Trianon, Antal spelt out just why Hungary was so vigorously supporting Croatia’s secession: ‘We gave Vojvodina to Yugoslavia. If there is no more Yugoslavia, then we should get it back.’<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> John Zametica, *The Yugoslav Conflict*, Adelphi Papers, no. 270, The International Institute for Strategic Studies, London, Summer 1992, p. 49.

<sup>7</sup> Zametica, *The Yugoslav Conflict*, p. 50. Austria seemed to have hopes for rebuilding a kind of ‘Hapsburg’ sphere in Slovenia, Croatia and Hungary.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid. Zametica cites the Hungarian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *Newsletter* 398, 9 July 1991.

<sup>9</sup> Woodward, *The Balkan Tragedy*, p. 219.

These manoeuvres by Austria and Hungary to break up Yugoslavia were, of course, then overshadowed by the German government's decision to grant recognition to Slovenia and Croatia. The German government's open championing of Yugoslavia's break-up did not occur until the early summer of 1991, but, long before that, both Slovenia and Croatia were getting encouragement from Bonn for their efforts.

## The US Agenda

This campaign was not, of course, supported by the United States. It championed Yugoslav unity, as did Britain and France. But, for the US, unity was not the main goal: its policy was principally governed by its concern to ensure the imposition of shock therapy on the country as a whole via the IMF. In 1989, Jeffrey Sachs was in Yugoslavia helping the federal government under Ante Markovic prepare the IMF package, which was then introduced in 1990, just at the time when the crucial parliamentary elections were being held in the various republics. While Markovic bears responsibility for giving in to Western pressure, the practical consequences of implementation of the package were to deprive his government of most of its substance. By 1991, it was incapable of paying its soldiers, thus weakening the guarantors of the old state.

This was a critical turning point in the tragedy. Markovic, in the spring of 1990, was by far the most popular politician not only in Yugoslavia as a whole but in each of its constituent republics. He should have been able to rally the population for Yugoslavism against the particularist nationalisms of Milosevic in Serbia or Tudjman in Croatia and he should have been able to count on the obedience of the armed forces. He was supported by 83 per cent of the population in Croatia, by 81 per cent in Serbia, by 59 per cent in Slovenia and by 79 per cent in Yugoslavia as a whole. This level of support showed how much of the Yugoslav population remained strongly committed to the state's preservation. But Markovic had agreed to couple his Yugoslavism with the IMF shock therapy programme and EC conditionality and it was this which gave the separatists their opening. Their appeal to their electorates involved offering to repudiate the Markovic-IMF austerity measures and, by doing so, help their republics prepare to leave Yugoslavia altogether and 'join Europe'. The appeals of the nationalists in Slovenia and Croatia worked. As Susan Woodward explains: 'In every republic, beginning with Slovenia and Croatia in the Spring, governments ignored the monetary restrictions of Markovic's stabilization programme in order to win votes . . .'<sup>10</sup> After winning elections, they worked hard to break up the country. If Western policy for Yugoslavia had been a Marshall Plan, which the federal authorities could have used to rebuild the country's economic and cohesion, the whole story would have been different.

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

This is not a case of being wise after the event. Western policy makers were very well aware of the issue at the time. In 1989–90, the US government faced an acute trade-off in its Yugoslav policy. The State Department was concerned in 1990 about Yugoslav political stability. In 1990, the CIA was warning the Bush administration that Yugoslavia was heading for civil war within eighteen months.<sup>11</sup> The dilemma was well brought out by a journalist at a press conference given by Secretary of State Baker on 5 July 1990 in Washington. The journalist asked:

I noticed in the remarks that you made today that were distributed to us, you expressed some concerns about the situation in Yugoslavia. Now, how does conditionality apply to the kind of problem that you have described in Yugoslavia, which is less to do with the central government and more to do with the different republics. It is not clear whether Belgrade could deliver some of the things that you want. How will that be judged?

Baker, normally laconic, replied with some feeling but more evasion:

The question you raised is a very, very good question. There will have to be some serious thought given to the degree to which you look at the republic level as opposed to looking at the central government level. And you are quite right. There are some things in some countries with respect to which the central government can deliver on; and in other countries that cannot be done.<sup>12</sup>

But the US government as a whole opted for the priority of the shock therapy programme. Thus was the internal dynamic towards the Yugoslav collapse into civil war decisively accelerated. The only European states which did have a strategic interest in the region wanted to break Yugoslavia up.

Specifically Yugoslav structural flaws did, of course, push towards collapse. Many would argue that the decentralized 'market socialism' was a disastrous experiment for a state in Yugoslavia's geopolitical situation. The 1974 Constitution, though better for the Kosovars, gave too much to the republics, crippling the institutional and material power of the federal government. Tito's authority substituted for this weakness until his death in 1980, after which it could not be avoided and the state was plunged into crisis. But if the Western powers had been interested in putting the interests of the Yugoslav people first, they had adequate levers to play a decisive role, alongside Yugoslavia's federal government, in maintaining the

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<sup>11</sup> The CIA report was later leaked. Its contents were explained in the *International Herald Tribune*, 29 November 1990, cited in Zametica, *The Yugoslav Conflict*, p. 58.

<sup>12</sup> 'Baker Says East Europe Aid for Reform, Not Status Quo'. Secretary of State Baker's press briefing following a meeting of the Group of 24, Tracking Number: 145648 Text: TXT404, 3Fm Re (Background for the Houston Economic Summit, US Information Agency, 07/05/90).

country's integrity. Instead, the Western powers most interested in Yugoslav developments actually assisted, politically and materially, in bringing about the collapse.

### The Western Powers and the Atrocities

In 1990–91, Yugoslavia was heading towards dissolution, despite the fact that the overwhelming majority of its population did not favour such a course. The break-up violated a cardinal principle of the new post-cold-war state system, enshrined in the CSCE and the Treaty of Paris of 1990: that inter-state borders in Europe should not be changed. Instead, internal arrangements within states should be put in place to ensure adequate rights for all groups. But the Western powers were not prepared to enforce such principles in the Yugoslav case because Germany did not want to and the other states did not have any strategic interest in doing so. Norms not relevant to Western state interests were ditched. In the early summer of 1991, German and Austrian efforts to advance the dissolution achieved a triumph by getting the EC to mediate between Slovenia and Croatia and the central Yugoslav authorities. The EC states were eager to enhance their foreign policy role and standing through such mediation. They therefore accepted a function that implied Yugoslavia's destruction: mediation between forces within a state over and above that state's unity implies a repudiation of the state's sovereign authority.

The break-up might have been possible without great bloodshed *if clear criteria could have been established for providing security for all the main groups of people within the Yugoslav space*. That was the issue that confronted the Western powers once they got involved in 'mediation'. And the Western role in establishing rights and norms for the protection of Yugoslavia's peoples was crucial, for only the triumphant Western powers could give post-Yugoslav entities the rights of states in the inter-state system.

The problem here was that Yugoslavia's constitutional arrangements, furnishing rights to Yugoslavia's republican territories and its nations and peoples, were premised upon it remaining an integrated state. There were two cardinal structural issues here. The first was a division of the country into republics in such a way that the non-Serb nations would not fear that Yugoslavia would become a Serb-dominated state. To achieve this, as Branka Magas explains, required 'winning Serbian acceptance of the new constitutional order which was to divide—more in form than in fact—the Serb nation inside post-revolutionary Yugoslavia'.<sup>13</sup> Thus, large parts of the Serb population were placed within other republican territories or within autonomous provinces which enjoyed greater autonomy than, say, the Basque country in today's Spain. The Serbs were thus split up between Serbia proper,

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<sup>13</sup> Branka Magas, *The Destruction of Yugoslavia*, Verso, London 1993, p. 34.



Croatia, Bosnia, Vojvodina and Kosovo. This was, indeed, a question 'more in form than in fact' within an integrated Yugoslavia, but it became, of course, a division more of fact than of form in the context of Yugoslavia's break-up. But Yugoslavia's constitutional principles did provide a key to its resolution, for the constitution gave rights to nations of equal force to the rights of republics. Thus, under these criteria, the Serb nationals in, say, Croatia, were the subjects of national rights which could not be overridden by the will of the Croatian republic. But how was this issue to be dealt with in a context where the Yugoslav constitution was collapsing?

The second major issue concerned the major non-Slav nation *within* Yugoslavia, the Kosovo Albanians. While post-war Yugoslavia divided the Serbs within the state, it divided the Albanians both within the state and between Yugoslavia and Albania. As a result, there were always understandable tendencies within the Albanian communities of Kosovo and Macedonia that would have preferred to unite all Albanians in a single Albanian state. With the break-up of Yugoslavia, for many Yugoslav Albanians that became a realistic possibility. How was—and is—that problem to be dealt with?

### The Croatian Question

The answers which the Western powers gave to these two cardinal questions contributed directly to the bloody cycles of butchery in the Yugoslav theatre during the 1990s. In 1991, the Western powers, led by Germany, gave their answer on the question of the Serb population in Croatia. They declared that Croatia should be entitled to independence on grounds of self-determination and this should be within the boundaries of republican Croatia established within post-Second World War Yugoslavia. Self-determination was established by the fact that a referendum of the Croatian nation had voted for independence. This was a formula for war between the Croatian nationalist government and Croatia's Serb population because it violated the principles for handling the national question established in the post-war Yugoslav constitution: it denied the Serbs in Croatia their sovereign national rights.

Under that constitution, the will of a republican majority could not override the equally valid will of a constituent nation. Thus, the vote of the Croatian majority for independence could not override the rights of the Serb population, which had to be equally respected. The political leaders of the Serbian population in Croatia accordingly organized a referendum on whether to remain within an independent Croatia and the result was an overwhelming rejection. According to the Yugoslav principles, Croatian independence should have been dependent upon a prior resolution of that conflict of rights and democratic wills.

But the EC states during 1991 ignored this, rejecting the Yugoslav idea that the Serb nation had rights equal to the Croatian republican

will. Instead, the majority of EC states adopted the view that the Serb population of Croatia should accept their status as a national minority within an independent Croatia. This approach should, of course, have implied that CSCE principles for protecting minority rights should be guaranteed before Croatian independence was recognized. But the Croatian government rejected the guarantee of such CSCE standards.

The German government decided to brush this CSCE principle aside and recognized Croatia without any prior commitment by the Croatian government to adequate minority rights for Croatia's Serbian population. The German position thus involved a double betrayal of Croatia's Serbs: a betrayal of the Yugoslav principles concerning their rights; and a parallel betrayal of the CSCE principles concerning their rights. It was bound to drive the Croatian Serb population towards war under the leadership of Serb nationalism. And it led the American mediator Cyrus Vance to call the resulting war 'Genscher's war', referring to the German Foreign Minister. This may be an exaggeration: it was also Tudjman's and Milosevic's. But it was Genscher who made it clear to the Croatian Serbs that they had nobody to depend on for their rights but the force of their own arms and those of Serbia.

The reason why the German government took this stand remains obscure. Equally important is why the other EC powers accepted the German line. The bargaining on this issue reached a climax at an all-night meeting of European Political Co-operation on 15–16 December 1991 in Brussels. At that meeting, Chancellor Kohl got the British to support him by offering John Major two big inducements over the Maastricht Treaty: the British opt-out on Monetary Union and a British opt-out on the Social Charter (rights for workers within the EC). And, at the same time, Kohl promised that he would not recognize Croatia and Slovenia until they had implemented minority rights—essentially for Croatia's Serbs. But, having made that big concession, Kohl then proceeded to renege on it, unilaterally recognizing Croatia and Slovenia on 23 December without any such guarantees.<sup>14</sup>

The question then is, why did the other main Western powers accept this German unilateralism? And the answer is twofold: first, the US did not accept this German *démarche*—it finally decided to move on the Yugoslav crisis. As far as the other EC powers were concerned, Yugoslavia was simply not an important strategic issue for them: far more important was the Maastricht Treaty (and, for the British, being able to opt out of central parts of it).

The CSCE principles could also have been invoked at this time to draw attention to the oppression of the majority population of Kosovo within the new Yugoslavia. But no Western power had a stake in that issue.

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<sup>14</sup> For a full account, see Woodward, *The Balkan Tragedy*, p. 184.

Within the EC, one body, the Badinter Commission, did warn that the unconstitutional break-up of the Yugoslav Federation would lead to appalling inter-communal strife. The Badinter Commission took a view close to earlier Yugoslav jurisprudence: it declared that Bosnian independence should not be accepted unless substantial approval was given to such independence by all three peoples within Bosnia—the Bosnian Serbs, the Bosnian Muslims and the Bosnian Croats. Thus, while the EC took a ‘historic rights’ approach to recognizing borders in the Croatian case (and in the Kosovo case) it took the approach of recognizing the democratic rights of all national groupings in the Bosnian case. Since the Bosnian Serbs were bitterly against a Bosnian independence which would cut them off from the Serbs of Serbia, Badinter’s line implied no acceptance of Bosnian independence. This was also the German line in January 1992 and it was largely accepted by the European Community. But, at this critical juncture, the United States intervened vigorously in the Yugoslav crisis for the first time.

### US Intervention: Playing the Bosnian Card Against an Emerging German Sphere of Influence

During 1991, the United States’ declared policy was one of supporting Yugoslav unity. But, in reality, the US stood back from the Yugoslav crisis, simply watching the chaotic manoeuvrings of the European powers on the issue.<sup>15</sup> The Bush administration was pre-occupied by one overriding European policy issue: ensuring that Western Europe remained firmly subordinated to the Atlantic Alliance under US leadership. And it viewed this as a serious problem as a result of fundamental features of the Soviet collapse. First, NATO—the military cornerstone of the Alliance—had lost its rationale and there were moves in Western Europe (and Russia) to build a new security order in Europe that would tend to undermine US leadership. Secondly, newly united Germany seemed to be building a new political bloc with France through the Maastricht Treaty, with its stress on a Common Foreign and Security Policy leading towards ‘a common defence’. This seemed to be more than mere words, since Germany and France were in the process of building a joint military corps, the so-called ‘Euro-Corps’ outside the NATO framework—a move that profoundly disturbed Washington and London. Thirdly, Germany’s drive in relation to Yugoslavia seemed to be geared not simply to domestic German constituencies, but *to the construction of a German sphere of influence* in Central Europe, involving Austria, Hungary, Croatia and Slovenia and, perhaps

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<sup>15</sup> As it happened, the Bush administration was staffed at the top by long-time Yugoslav experts: Eagleburger, in charge of European policy, was a former Ambassador and Scowcroft, head of the National Security Council had been in the Belgrade Embassy and had written his Ph.D. on Yugoslavia. Woodward claims that one of the reasons for US passivity during 1990–91 was that both men had had business interests in Yugoslavia and questions were already been raised in the US about the possible influence of these interests on US policy towards the country. See *ibid.*, p. 155.

later, drawing in Czechoslovakia and, eventually and most crucially, Poland. This seemed to be the only explanation for the extraordinary assertive unilateralism of Genscher and Kohl, riding roughshod over their EC partners in December 1991 and sending a signal to the whole of Europe that Bonn had become the place where the shape of the new Europe was being decided.

This was not acceptable to the Bush administration. As Eagleburger explained, Germany 'was getting out ahead of the US' with its Croatian drive. In other words, the US interpretation of Genscher's drive to break up Yugoslavia was far from being that it was just a sop to Catholic domestic constituencies and the editor of the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*. In response to this challenge, the US administration decided to take over the political leadership in the Yugoslav crisis.

But, just as Germany's various declared universalist norms and goals were in the service not of the Yugoslav people but of German political influence, so the United States was not, of course, entering the Yugoslav theatre to calm the storms of war and provide new security for Yugoslavia's terrified peoples. Quite the reverse: it was entering the scene to push Germany and the European Union aside, but it was going to do so, as it turned out, *by laying the basis for a new and much more savage Yugoslav war.*

Washington's chosen instrument for taking the lead was that of encouraging the Bosnian government to press for independence and, therefore, for a Bosnian war. Bosnian independence was opposed by the German government and the EC. They aimed to try to hold the rest of Yugoslavia together. The US administration decided to put a stop to that by launching a drive for Bosnian independence which got underway in January 1992, just as the EC was following Germany's lead in recognizing Croatia and Slovenia.

Germany had redefined the problem: Europe must defend independent Croatia against Serbian/Yugoslav aggression. Now Washington would provide a new problem definition: Europe and the world must defend an independent Bosnia against Serbian/Yugoslav aggression and, perhaps, if tactically useful, against Croatian aggression as well. Thus did the US enunciate the great norm that would provide it with European leadership: self-determination for the Bosnian nation and defence of its independence against aggression.

### **Bosnia: A State Without a Nation**

There was a factual problem with the American line: there was no Bosnian nation in a political sense or in a Yugoslav constitutional sense. There were, instead, three nations in Bosnia, none of which had a majority of the population. As of the 1981 census, Bosnia contained the following main national groups: 1,629,000 Muslims; 1,320,000 Serbs; 758,000 Croats; 326,000 Yugoslavs. It was evident from

voting results that the majority of Bosnia's own population was not going to respect the authority of an independent Bosnian state. And it was equally obvious that large parts of that population would go to war rather than accept the state. The American government knew this perfectly well. So, by pushing the Izetbegovic government to launch a drive for independence, the Bush administration was, in fact, pushing for war.

As far as the Izetbegovic government itself was concerned, it had been bitterly opposed to the German drive to grant Croatia independence because it had been sure that this would increase pressures within Bosnia for independence and thus for civil war. Izetbegovic had made an emotional plea to Genscher in December to draw back in order to save Bosnia, but to no avail. In March 1992 when the US Bosnian independence campaign was in full swing, Izetbegovic reached an EC brokered agreement with Bosnian Croats and Serbs on a three-canton confederal settlement. But, a week later, he repudiated his earlier agreement because, according to the *New York Times*, the US government urged him to go all-out for a unitary, sovereign, independent state.<sup>16</sup> This set a course that was certain to produce an atrocious civil war in which both Bosnian Croats and Bosnian Serbs would be sure to gain support from their respective states.

If, at this time, the United States had decided to back the EC and German positions to keep Bosnia within rump Yugoslavia and to shore up its security in that context, the US would have conceded to Germany game, set and match in the European politics of Yugoslavia's crisis. It was this policy of *the use of Yugoslav developments for wider US European goals* which led the US down a road which trampled underfoot post-war Yugoslav jurisprudence on national rights: a government representing a minority of Bosnia's population was to be encouraged to ignore the expressed democratic will of other large Bosnian communities and attempt to establish a Bosnian state without a Bosnian nation. Quite predictably, Serbian paramilitary groups, some of them *en route* to the Krajina, were beginning to wipe out Bosnian Muslim villages. An appalling and vicious war was unfolding.

The war was a policy success for the US, which took control of events in the Yugoslav theatre and very successfully polarized European politics around those who supported the 'Bosnian nation' versus those who supported a drive for 'Greater Serbia'—a state uniting all Serbs—and the consequent drive for ethnic cleansing and barbaric massacres. Decisive in the success of the US operation were precisely the barbaric methods employed by one wing of the 'Bosnian nation'—the Bosnian Serbs—against the Bosnian Muslims. But also important were the covert supply of weapons to the Bosnian Muslims by the US and the reconciliation between Germany and the US over wider European policy.

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<sup>16</sup> See *The New York Times*, 17 June 1993.

Of course, there were other consequences of the US's playing of the Bosnian card, two in particular: first, the biggest nation in the Yugoslav arena, the Serbs, had their national rights trampled underfoot by the Western powers. This meant that they would rally to Milosevic's Serbian government as their protector—and it also meant that Western liberal-democratic politics could scarcely triumph in a Serbia whose people were being victimized by Western liberal-democratic states. The second consequence was that Yugoslavia's fourth biggest nation, the Kosovo and Macedonia Albanians, with their own national aspirations to freedom and unity, were also to be ignored by the Western powers: or, rather, left in the hands of a Serb nation enraged by Western disregard for their rights, in a Serb state with over 600,000 Serb refugees, ethnically cleansed by action under NATO leadership in the last stages of the Bosnian war.

### **The New German-American Partnership and the Road to Dayton**

As the Bosnian war continued through 1993 and 1994, the rivalry and mutual suspicions between Germany and the United States over various broad European issues gave way to a new unity around a new political programme for Europe and the Atlantic Alliance. One vital step to this was the Uruguay Round Agreement—embracing a common vision not just for 'trade' in the usual sense of that word, but actually for the expansion of Atlantic capitalism across the world through the strategy of 'globalizing' national political economies. Another absolutely crucial step was the agreement at the Brussels North Atlantic Council meeting of January 1994 to expand NATO eastwards into Poland—the key country for both the US and Germany. This decision, taken essentially by the US and Germany, was actually about how to reorganize European international politics after the end of the Cold War. To understand the significance of this Brussels summit decision, we must look at the broader debates and political battles between the Western powers over the shape of the post-cold-war European order. This debate can be bisected analytically into its political side and its military side.

### **The Political Concept for Europe**

The collapse of the Soviet Bloc had re-opened the question of how to structure and channel power-politics across Europe. There were three 'big ideas' in the early 1990s and two of them were absolutely unacceptable to the USA:

Option 1: A pan-European collective security system, embracing Russia and the US as well as all the other states of Europe, in an institutionalized framework—a much strengthened and streamlined OSCE—that would be norm-based: clear rules which all should enforce and which would lead all to coerce any state that breached them.

Option II: A two-pillar power structure involving the EU and Western European Union (WEU) in Western Europe and Russia and the CIS in the East. NATO would fade into the background as an ultimate guarantor of its members security, while the WEU/EU would expand into East Central Europe—something Russia could have lived with.

Option III: NATO under American leadership would take command of European politics. The OSCE would be marginalized, the WEU/EU would not be allowed to have a policy-making authority and a command structure autonomous from US supervision—exercised through NATO—and NATO would expand eastwards but would exclude Russia. So Europe would be re-polarized further East between a US-dominated Western Europe and a weakened Russia. Germany would be expected to discuss Eastern issues first with the US and its Western partners, rather than having the option of discussing with Russia before bargaining with its Western partners.

Options I and II would have undermined the American power position in Europe. But, during the early 1990s, there was resistance to Option III, not only from the Russians but also from many European states. It became a vital issue for the US to translate this option into reality.

Yugoslavia may, at first sight, seem to have little to do with these security debates among the Western powers. But what was going on was not just a 'debate': it was a political battle over the future political shape of Europe. And such battles between the Western powers are fought not only in words but also by deeds and by creating facts. In this context, Yugoslavia was a central arena for winning arguments by these methods.

Thus, if the EU had successfully handled the Yugoslav crisis in 1990–91, that would have given a great boost to Option II. The fact that, during the Bosnian war, the United States found that it could not do without political help from the Russians meant the formation of the Contact Group and implied an inclusive collective security approach to European affairs—Option I.

But, with an agreement between Germany and the United States on making NATO the central pillar of the new European system and on expanding NATO eastwards, the way was open for putting that German-American approach into practice in the Yugoslav theatre. Success there would then feed back onto the wider European political field with the actual expansion of NATO into Poland.

### **The Military Concept for a New NATO**

NATO as a military structure geared to fighting a war with the Soviet Union became redundant with the collapse of the Soviet Bloc. But American leadership of Western Europe depended upon the US being able to supply vital military services to its West European allies. The

Yugoslav wars gave the US and the French and British states an argument as to a new role for their military capabilities: the argument that chaos in East Central Europe would require the Western powers to 'project power' eastwards. In other words, to take aggressive military action to defeat forces in the East which were undermining stability or threatening the new political economy of Europe.

This concept greatly favoured the US in its battle to rebuild its political leadership of Europe, because the West Europeans lacked key military resources for handling such aggressive 'power projection' on their own: they lacked military transport infrastructures and planes, they lacked battlefield satellite intelligence-gathering equipment, and they lacked key new technologies such as Cruise missiles and other such 'smart' weapons. The US could supply all these. For the West Europeans to supply them would involve big increases in military budgets at a time of fiscal strain—first the EMS, then the Maastricht criteria, against a general background of economic stagnation.

Thus, with this new military concept for eastward power projection outside the NATO area, the US could hope to gain the support not only of the UK—which was already on-side—but also of France, which was eager to use its military capacity abroad to gain political clout in Western Europe. The vital issue though, for the US, was to win over the Germans. In the early 1990s, the German government seemed genuinely interested in a more autonomous European military instrument, built around a Franco-German axis and the Euro-corps. This was also something that President Mitterrand had favoured. But, by 1994, Germany was coming round to the idea that the notion of an autonomous West European instrument was impossible: it had to be a US-led NATO instrument.

### The Yugoslav Road to the New NATO

During 1994 and 1995, these shifts on the new political and military role of NATO in the New Europe fed back into the Bosnian conflict. There were, at first, acute tensions between the US and the British and French, because the US wanted to demonstrate its enormous air power with strikes against the Bosnian Serbs, but that threatened the safety of the British and French troops on the ground. The tensions reached the point where some thought NATO might even split on the issue. But, during 1995, an effective set of tactics emerged.

First, the US adopted the German approach to wrapping up the Bosnian war by building an alliance between the Bosnian government and the Croatian government against the Bosnian Serbs. This was a great success against the Serbs, effectively ethnically cleansing them from both Croatian territory and parts of Bosnian territory. Secondly, NATO could swing into action vigorously 'out of area', with British and French forces as well as US air power and the Croatian and Bosnian Muslim forces driving the Bosnian Serbs back into defeat. The whole



operation under US leadership was crowned with a European political triumph for the US in the form of the Dayton Agreement—no one at this time spared any thought for the people of Kosovo. The US tried to argue that the key to victory had been their air strikes, showing how central the US was to ‘European security’ as a result.

The fact that Dayton did not produce the original US-stated goal of a sovereign, unitary Bosnia was a mere detail, largely ignored by Western European electorates. The US had taken command of Yugoslav affairs and of the high politics of Europe through the reorganization of NATO and the new German-American partnership, both of which could be blooded in the Bosnian war.

### The US Approach to the New Balkan Backlash

To understand the US decision to launch war against Yugoslavia on 24 March 1999, we must understand how events have ‘progressed’ in both the Balkan theatre and in the broader regional European context since Dayton.

The big change in the Balkan region was the Albanian explosion leading to the collapse of an effective Albanian state and the destabilization of both Serbia and Macedonia by the arrival of the KLA—itself assisted by the Albanian collapse.

The real politics of Dayton did not produce a viable independent state: it has been a two ‘entity’ NATO protectorate unable to collect 80 per cent of its tax entitlements and devoting a staggering quarter of its GDP to military procurement two years after Dayton.<sup>17</sup> Its future survival will depend on keeping the two main states in the area, Croatia and Serbia, in line. The Croatian government has not actually stayed in line, since it has integrated the Bosnian Croat population into Croatia. But the Milosevic regime did keep in line, though it could not keep the Bosnian Serbs themselves under control since a majority of them viewed him as a traitor to the Serb nation by agreeing to Dayton in the first place. What US policy did not wish to contemplate, however, was an Albanian mass irredentist movement, since this would menace the fragile but pivotal republic of Macedonia, as well as Albania. But decades of lack of concern to produce a solution in Kosovo, coupled with the collapse of the Albanian state in 1996–97, opened the door precisely to the such an irredentist movement for a Greater Albania.

The Sali Berisha government of Albania, which lasted until 1996, was a corrupt dictatorship which rigged the elections and imprisoned the leader of the opposition, but he served American policy well because he sealed off the border between Albanian and Yugoslavia

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<sup>17</sup> See Carlos Westendorp’s testimony to the European Parliament in December 1998, reported in *Agence Europe*, no. 7355, 3 December 1998, p. 5.

and gave no encouragement to the national aspirations of the Albanians in Kosovo and Macedonia. (Berisha seems actually to have been a find of British intelligence and, as a result, the British were very reluctant to see him overthrown.)

With the popular uprising that overthrew Berisha, the Albanian state was completely shattered, its security forces dissolved and their arms were seized by the population—some 750,000 Kalashnikovs were privatized. Despite Italian military intervention, the new Socialist government of Nano, just out of Berisha's jail, could not impose order on Albania's territory and could not seal the borders with Macedonia and Kosovo. This gave an opening to the Kosovo Liberation Army, an organization whose leaders had once admired Enver Hoxha but now opened itself to all those who rejected the reformist and pacifist stance of Ibrahim Rugova. The KLA offensive gained a very receptive response both in Kosovo and in Macedonia, where the national aspirations of the Albanians had long been repressed. The KLA offensive in Kosovo got under way in February 1998 and was very effective, targeting Serbian officials and security personnel across the province.

### Dealing With the KLA

This presented the Clinton administration with an acute dilemma. It had to do something, since a Greater Albania was out of the question. There was, of course, an obvious solution: for the US and NATO to take a firmer grip over developments in Macedonia and Albania while at the same time leaving the KLA in Kosovo to the operations of the Milosevic régime. This could be accomplished through a combination of Milosevic offering Kosovan autonomy within Serbia, backed by the moderate Kosovan leader Rugova, along with a Turkish or Colombian-style counter-insurgency operation against the KLA, clearing out villages along the frontier with Albania and crushing the KLA militarily.

It would, in effect, involve an alliance between the US and the person whom the Americans had built up as the Saddam Hussein of the Balkans: Slobodan Milosevic. From March to September 1998, the Clinton Administration nevertheless pursued this strategy, combining rhetoric and cosmetic actions against Milosevic with effective acquiescence in the autonomy plus counter-insurgency approach. This was the line supported by the two Yugoslav experts of the Clinton team: Richard Holbrooke and Christopher Hill. It was also the line supported by many West European governments and by the Russian government.

The signal for this tactic was given when the US Ambassador in Yugoslavia publicly branded the KLA a terrorist organisation. According to the BBC, this was the specific go-ahead for Milosevic to launch his counter-insurgency in March, along with his offer of

provincial autonomy.<sup>18</sup> This tactic continued through UN Security Council resolution 1199 in September and it was embodied in the 13 October Holbrooke-Milosevic agreement introducing American-led OSCE monitors into Kosovo. As far as the EU side of the operation was concerned, it continued right through into January 1999.

But, sometime in October, Madeleine Albright changed tack. The change involved instructing Hill to produce a new document that would form the basis for peace negotiations between the parties in Kosovo. And this new document contained the key change: Milosevic was to have to accept a de facto NATO protectorate over Kosovo. The document did not, of course, use these words: it spoke only of a NATO-led military compliance force to supervise the transformation of Kosovo while it remained, *juridically*, a province of Serbia. But *politically* that meant a NATO protectorate. Albright would have known that no Serbian politician could dare to accept such a diktat from NATO. This new line was supplied to the Yugoslav government in December and was met with outrage from the Serbian side. Why was the new line adopted?

Supporters of the subsequent attack on Yugoslavia tend to assume that the change of American line must have had something to do with a desire to relieve the sufferings of the Kosovo people, perhaps, according to Robin Cook, for example, because between October and Christmas 1998 Milosevic started to behave in a new and brutal way in Kosovo. Yet this was not the view of Cook and the other EU foreign ministers at their EU General Affairs Council meeting on 8 December when Albright had already changed strategy. The report of the meeting in the *Agence Europe Bulletin* the following day stated the following: 'At the close of its debate on the situation in the Western Balkans, the General Affairs Council mainly expressed its concern for the recent "intensification of military action" in Kosovo, noting that "increased activity by the KLA has prompted an increased presence of Serbian security forces in the region."<sup>19</sup> This makes it very clear that the EU's analysis did not suggest any qualitative shift in the basic approach of Milosevic: on the contrary, it saw the KLA as the driving force behind the lack of a ceasefire.

### Albright's Gamble

This unchanging local Yugoslav context in which the Albright strategy shift took place, suggests that the reasons for the shift did not lie within the Yugoslav theatre itself at all. As in the case of the US *démarche* of January 1992 leading to the Bosnian war, the source of the shift must therefore be sought in wider US European political goals.

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<sup>18</sup> BBC Nened Sebak, 'The KLA: Terrorists or Freedom Fighters?', 28 June 1998, BBC News World UK International Foreign British Online Service, <http://www.bbc.co.uk>.

<sup>19</sup> *Agence Europe*, no. 7359, 9 December 1998, p. 4.

A military attack on Yugoslavia by the whole NATO alliance would, of course, have enormous pan-European political consequences, far more important for the state interests of all the great powers than the fate of the Kosovo Albanians. Success would decisively consolidate US leadership in Europe. Success outside the framework of UN Security Council permission would ensure no collective security in Europe by the UN back door of a Russian veto. And it would seal the unity of the alliance against a background where the launch of the Euro—an event potentially of global *political* significance—could pull it apart.

On a narrower front, successful military operation against Milosevic before the Washington summit to agree NATO's new role would have been a stunning political triumph for Madeleine Albright, whose term of office had, hitherto, been marked by a long catalogue of failure, most notably in the Middle East.

There were obvious political problems for Albright in gaining her triumph. First, the Russian problem, but, following the rouble collapse in Autumn 1998, the Russian state was hopelessly weak. No less difficult was the resistance of the West Europeans. Albright overcame that with three tactics. First her tactic of pre-empting meetings of the Contact Group by holding press conferences in advance, staking out her position publicly with extremely bellicose and militarist language against Milosevic—she had been pursuing this tactic for many months. Second, these incessant threats from Albright created the conditions in which she could argue that NATO's very credibility was at stake: after all the threats she had made, NATO could not back down 'now'. And, third, the Clinton administration spread two pieces of supposedly insider intelligence information: one was that Milosevic actually wanted a NATO attack so that he could sell the NATO compliance force domestically; and second, that the Yugoslav military would in any case soon overthrow Milosevic. Such stories could lull the West Europeans into thinking the NATO attack would swiftly be over. In fact, as we now know, the relevant US agencies, notably the Pentagon and the CIA were actually providing quite other information: it would be a very long and difficult air campaign; and there could be a huge refugee crisis.<sup>20</sup> But, the only specifically Balkan issue that mattered to the administration was the avoidance of any commitment to a Greater Albania through self-determination for the Albanians of Kosovo and Macedonia.

Albright had allies in France and, of course, Britain by early January and they were the co-chairs at Rambouillet. With them on board, the option of Germany standing aside was unthinkable—Germany cannot act without France, for fear of being branded with hegemonist

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<sup>20</sup> See the *Washington Post* coverage for 1 April through to 7 April 1999 for information on these issues, especially 5 April 1999.

ambitions. As for the rest of the EU states, they could not remotely afford to exclude themselves.

## Conclusion

There is a powerful impulse within the electorates of the NATO states for their governments to give a lead to the world and really help the less fortunate overwhelming majority of humanity to improve their lives and strengthen their security and welfare. But we must bear in mind two unfortunate facts: first, that the NATO states have been and are hell-bent on exacerbating the inequalities of power and wealth in the world, on destroying all challenges to their overwhelming military and economic power and on subordinating almost all other considerations to these goals; and second, the NATO states are finding it extraordinarily easy to manipulate their domestic electorates into believing that these states are indeed leading the world's population towards a more just and humane future when, in reality, they are doing no such thing.

The fate of Yugoslavia in the 1990s has been a classic case of this general story. NATO electorates thought their states were trying to help in Yugoslavia, even if they were not 'doing enough'. In reality, Western policies promoted the descent into barbaric wars. There are occasions when advanced capitalist countries will help the populations of other states. But these occasions are rare, namely when the welfare of the populations of these other states is a vital weapon in a struggle against another powerful enemy. This applied to US policy towards Western Europe when it was threatened by Communist triumph in the early post-war years. The welfare of the people of Yugoslavia has been irrelevant to the NATO powers in the 1990s because these powers have faced no effective enemies whatever.

The Bosnian war produced terrible atrocities, reminiscent of those perpetrated in the Spanish Civil War, in Ireland in the 1920s by the Black and Tans, by the Wehrmacht and Einsatzgruppen on the Eastern front in the Second World War, by the Americans in Vietnam or by the Turkish security forces in Eastern Turkey today. These atrocities were not perpetrated only by the Bosnian Serbs, but theirs were the most visible cases. No doubt, more such massacres have been perpetrated in Kosovo by the Serbian security forces who are, at the time of writing, being targeted for annihilation by the NATO powers.

It is surely right that institutions should be built that can put a stop to such acts of political violence and can punish their perpetrators. But we face an acute dilemma when we confront this task because we know enough about the dynamics of politics to be able to identify not only the perpetrators of atrocities, but the international actors who helped and continue to help create *the conditions in which such perpetrators arise*. And, in the Yugoslav case, the Western powers, by their deliberate acts of commission and omission, played a central role in creating the conditions in which barbaric acts were bound to flourish.

There is something deeply disturbing about a system of Western power-politics which can casually and costlessly make a major contribution to plunging Yugoslavia into turmoil and wars, can then use these wars to further their geopolitical ends and then seek to make political capital out of War Crimes Court judgements of perpetrators of atrocities, while themselves refusing all responsibility.

A Western policy which put the *human security* of the people of East Central, Eastern and South Eastern Europe first would involve a new Marshall Plan for the entire region entailing a development-oriented framework for the region. But that would involve scrapping the whole mercantilist and imperial economic programme of the EU and the IMF/World Bank towards the region. There is not the slightest sign of a preparedness of the Western powers to change course on these issues. Instead, the successful extermination of the Yugoslav conscripts in Kosovo will, no doubt be followed by 'aid' for gangster mafias of the kind which flourish in the aftermath of any devastating war, as is evident in NATO's Bosnian protectorate today.

### A Real Solution

A solution to the plight of the various Albanian and Slav communities in the region also requires an entirely new political framework of a regional kind which breaks with the Western powers' drive in the region in the 1990s which has, in effect, fragmented the populations into small, and often largely non-viable statelets. Bosnia survives only as a paper-state which is, in reality, a NATO protectorate. Macedonia survives through US determination to prevent the Albanian minority there from either separating or gaining a federal state structure. A separate Kosovo would have to be a NATO protectorate, not least to prevent a KLA government from achieving the goal of a Greater Albania. The Serbian population is divided into the Srbska Republika 'entity' and in what will be a defeated and embattled Serbia. Montenegro's future is at risk. And every one of these statelets must devote desperately meagre resources to large military budgets while most of their populations cling to nationalist leaderships in the hope of some minimal safety. The only genuine winner among the states in the Yugoslav theatre—apart from Slovenia, which has escaped the scene—is Croatia, thanks to its great power support. Yet Tudjman's triumphs have only increased his appetite for new conquests, in particular a slice of Bosnia which he has already, *de facto*, swallowed.<sup>21</sup>

The search for a new regional political framework which can provide all the Albanian and the Slav communities with a new unity and security must involve a new programme for Balkan confederation or federation. Such a new project can come only from social and political movements

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<sup>21</sup> Brooke Unger has made this point forcefully in *The Economist*. See his 'The Balkans: The Two Culprits', *The Economist*, 24 January 1998.

among the peoples of the region. Before the current NATO aggression against the region's largest nation, it was still perhaps conceivable that the Western powers could have gained sufficient trust to have had a semblance of being a 'pouvoir neutre' that might encourage such an endogenous popular movement for reconciliation and partial reunification. Now that is impossible in the short- or even medium-term. Any such endogenous movement of reconciliation will now have to repudiate this NATO aggression to have any credibility.

Some may imagine that the NATO powers may actually take responsibility for the lives of the people of the region and may itself engineer a new politics and a new start. But this is to completely misunderstand the basic premise of the whole operation of the Western powers in the Yugoslav theatre since the late 1980s. That premise is that not a single one of the NATO powers had a vital state interest in ex-Yugoslavia. For the European Union, their only vital interest is containment of conflict, above all containment of refugee movements. The US does not even have that stake in the region's future.

A NATO 'victory' in this war could promote the Clinton administration's central objective in waging the war: the winning over of Western Europe's political systems to US leadership of the new, aggressive NATO. After all, the political élites of all the main parties of Western Europe now find themselves justifying, day-in and day-out the vital necessity and enormous human value of the new NATO: Western Europe is being won to the idea that attacking damaged sovereign states is legitimate; shattering their military forces, infrastructures and economies is permissible; ignoring the UN Charter and the checks built into the UN Security Council structure is unavoidable; marginalizing and excluding a currently weak Russia is necessary; humiliating and ignoring the interests of the largest nation in former Yugoslavia, the Serbs, is vital. And we Europeans could never have achieved all these things without the generous leadership of the United States.

The story of Western involvement in the region is obscured by a poisonous Western imperial propaganda which turns reality on its head. It says that the Balkans cause the West no end of trouble because of the appalling characters who live there. The reality is that the Western powers have caused the Balkan peoples no end of suffering because they continue to use the region as a theatre for their power-politics.