

## Naval War College Review

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Volume 61  
Number 4 *Autumn*

Article 4

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2008

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### Recommended Citation

Schindler, John R. (2008) "Europe's Unstable Southeast," *Naval War College Review*: Vol. 61 : No. 4 , Article 4.  
Available at: <https://digital-commons.usnwc.edu/nwc-review/vol61/iss4/4>

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## EUROPE'S UNSTABLE SOUTHEAST

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*John R. Schindler*

From the perspective of the U.S. Department of Defense, Europe has been the world's "safe" region for several years. After the tumult and disorder that plagued the Balkans in the 1990s, resulting in two major NATO-led military operations—in Bosnia and Kosovo, in 1995 and 1999, respectively—Europe has been viewed as a peaceful, stable environment for American forces and interests. When European Command is compared with Central Command, with its ongoing wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, Europe unquestionably and justifiably appears safe and happy; even the least-developed corners of Europe lack the endemic human security issues that plague portions of Africa, Asia, and South America.

Even the Balkans, the countries of southeastern Europe that until the early 1990s were part of Yugoslavia and whose integration into European and Atlantic economic and security relationships is incomplete, appear far more tranquil and promising than just a few years ago. Political, economic, and social progress, particularly in countries like Slovenia and Croatia, has been palpable and genuine. Also, the keeping of the peace in Bosnia and Kosovo by NATO and European Union (EU) forces, with hardly a shot fired during the stability phase, is no small accomplishment, considering how hot the fires of interethnic hatred so recently burned in those states. The early 2008 recognition of an independent Kosovo and the announcement that Croatia and Albania will be admitted to NATO have served as visible signs of progress in this troubled region.

However, beyond high-profile diplomacy, it remains unclear how much political and economic progress has actually been accomplished in the Balkans under Western guidance since the mid-1990s. It is far from certain that trouble spots like Bosnia and Kosovo have achieved much in terms of interethnic

reconciliation or the rebuilding of civil society—to say nothing of securing Western-oriented economic and political institutions—while Serbia, the region’s key country, remains distressingly outside Western political, economic, and security institutions. The Albanian question—a vexing political, social, and demographic issue that increasingly affects the neighboring states of Macedonia, Serbia, and Montenegro as well as Kosovo and Albania—remains out of bounds yet is increasingly important to regional security.

Western, and U.S., accomplishments in the Balkans since the 1990s are genuine and important, but has the mission been accomplished? While Americans can be forgiven for paying less attention to the Balkans since 9/11, as the Long War has caused U.S. military deployments in the region to dry up along with economic aid and political focus, the costs of recent inattention are mounting and may yet again lead to crisis in the region—something NATO and the United States will be unable to ignore.

#### SUCCESS STORIES

The passing of communist Yugoslavia in mid-1991 was met with anticipation by many of its peoples, glee by some and dread by others, but with a lack of interest by most Europeans and Americans. While Marshal Josip Broz Tito’s Yugoslavia got good press in the West, its heretic communist regime serving as a strategic asset to NATO in the Cold War, it was less popular with many of its citizens. Tito’s unique brand of communism, with its relatively liberal attitudes on social matters, allowances for multiethnic expression, and quasi-market economy, was popular with Western scholars as much as with governments. Yet Yugoslavia’s secret police was as active as that in any Soviet-bloc state, its prisons filled with dissidents. By the late 1980s, as the economy contracted and nationalism arose again after decades of official restrictions, the federation created by Tito from the ashes of Axis occupation in 1945 was no longer viewed as a happy home by many Western-oriented Yugoslavs. It was therefore no surprise that Slovenia and Croatia, the most westward-looking Yugoslav republics—geographically, politically, economically, and socially—were the first to depart Tito’s doomed state. Both abandoned Yugoslavia by force in mid-1991, resulting in two wars: one short and easy, and one long and painful.

Slovenia’s departure from Yugoslavia in the so-called Ten Day War beginning in late June 1991 with hindsight seems to have ended before it really started. There were barely sixty killed on both sides, and the conflict unfolded almost anticlimactically before CNN cameras. Yet the ease with which tiny Slovenia’s militia forces, equipped with little more than small arms, local knowledge, and sheer grit, beat back the once-mighty Yugoslav People’s Army (JNA) was no accident; it was the result of months of careful preparation by Slovenia’s clever and

thorough defense leadership.<sup>1</sup> No less important was the fact that the JNA General Staff was deeply divided over how to react to Slovenia's declaration of independence and produced no coordinated military response to the crisis. Although the JNA vastly outnumbered Slovene forces, especially in firepower and mobility, paralysis at the top coupled with low morale among Yugoslav conscripts, who were unenthusiastic about fighting fellow Yugoslavs, unraveled JNA efforts from the outset.<sup>2</sup>

If Slovenia won its independence from Yugoslav cheaply, however, Croatia's road out of Titoism would prove arduous and costly. The JNA, the servant of a disappearing state, was willing to let Slovenia go, but Croatia was another matter; the officer corps, which was disproportionately Serbian, wanted to keep Croatia in Yugoslavia by force, not least to protect the large Serbian minority in Croatia.<sup>3</sup> The result was a bitter conflict that cost thousands of lives and raged into early 1992. The JNA's grand offensive to subdue Croatia was an utter failure, yet it did succeed in carving away a third of Croatia's territory, mostly where ethnic Serbs were.<sup>4</sup> This Belgrade-backed pseudostate, known officially as the Republic of Serbian Krajina, would last not four years. After the fighting died down in early 1992, with the stalemated front patrolled by UN peacekeepers, the Croatian government in Zagreb devoted serious effort and resources to creating new, Western-style military forces. Croatia's maneuver-oriented New Model Army saw its debut in mid-1995, after long and effective preparation, in two offensives, known as FLASH (May) and STORM (August). These operations together destroyed nearly all the Serbian-controlled regions of Croatia, at a minimal cost in military casualties (though at a high cost in refugees, principally the two hundred thousand Krajina Serbs who fled rather than live in independent Croatia).<sup>5</sup> The struggle for independence, called the Homeland War by Croats, ended in an unambiguous victory for the government of Franjo Tudjman in Zagreb.

Given this recent history, as well as Slovenia's more advanced economy and closer ties to Austria and Italy, it is unsurprising that Slovenia has integrated into Western institutions faster than Croatia or any other former Yugoslav republic. It joined NATO and the European Union in the spring of 2004, and it became the first postcommunist state to hold the presidency of the Council of the EU, for the first half of 2008. Such political progress is perhaps remarkable, given that Slovenia became an independent entity for the first time in 1991, but can be attributed to its stolid, serious politics and avoidance of radicalism of any kind. It certainly helps that Slovenia is essentially devoid of minorities (nearly all citizens are ethnic Slovenes), and that there is no religious conflict either, since Slovenes are nearly all Roman Catholics, at least nominally. Because there is no real Slovene irredenta—the small Slovene minorities in Austria and Italy live

peacefully—relations with Western neighbors are very good, and Austria and Italy have been strong supporters of Slovenia's political and economic Westernization since the collapse of Yugoslavia.

In economic terms, Slovenia's progress has been real and impressive. Its per capita gross domestic product (GDP) is very near the EU average, and Slovenia is far and away the most economically vibrant and productive of the "new" (i.e., postcommunist) EU member accessions. In 2007, Slovenia was the first new EU state to adopt the euro. While the economy has some structural challenges, principally a high tax rate and low foreign direct investment, problems such as the loss of manufacturing jobs to China and India demonstrate that Slovenia has rapidly become a "normal" European country. It is important to note, however, that Slovenia's impressive economy is nothing new; under communism, it possessed by far the strongest economy in Yugoslavia, with a robust and diverse manufacturing sector and a standard of living approaching Western levels. The end of communism has merely enabled Slovenia to grow and integrate better a functioning economy that was already impressive and decently integrated with those of Austria, Italy, and Germany.

Recent changes to the Slovene military have been substantial. Since independence, successive governments in Ljubljana have overseen the creation of a wholly new defense system, centering on the transition from a territorial militia to a mobile, professional force. Conscription has been abolished, and the Slovene military is today a small (nine-thousand-strong) army, with modest air and naval support, capable of battalion-sized deployments out of the NATO area. Peacekeeping missions have included Bosnia and Kosovo, with small contingents elsewhere, including Afghanistan.<sup>6</sup> Despite resource constraints, Slovenia's military has integrated successfully into NATO and is the most Westernized of all militaries in the former Yugoslavia.

Considering the undoubted success of Slovenia since 1991, in political, economic, and social terms, it is paradoxical that there remains considerable affection, even nostalgia, for Tito and his multinational state. Such views, derided as "Yugonostalgia" by critics, have a hold in all parts of the former socialist federation but are particularly pronounced among the Slovenes, many of whom miss belonging to a larger, more diverse state, one in which average citizens were protected from the free market by pensions, limited working hours, and free health care.<sup>7</sup>

There is less nostalgia for Tito (who was half Slovene and half Croat) in neighboring Croatia, where bitter memories of communism are commonplace. Croatia, with some justice, considered itself the most nationally oppressed of all Yugoslav republics, and many Croats still denounce "Serbocommunist" with passion. That said, Croatia's hard-won independence from Titoism has proved

less successful than Slovenia's in political and economic terms, and its recently announced admission into NATO and candidacy for EU membership mark not the end of Croatia's transition but a midway point.

In economic terms, Croatia is doing well for its region but not by EU standards. Its per capita GDP is only 60 percent of Slovenia's, and inflation and unemployment remain perennial concerns. Niche exports, especially shipbuilding, are strong points—another holdover from the communist era—while tourism has rebounded vibrantly from its virtual disappearance in the 1990s. Corruption is perhaps the biggest drag on the economy, infecting the contracting and judiciary realms, and public-sector reform is stagnant, as it is across much of the Balkans. The fall of communism brought little in the way of “good govern-

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ment”; indeed, corruption in the 1990s, during the presidency of Franjo Tudjman, was possibly worse than under Tito. Much remains to be done.<sup>8</sup>

Croatia is a functioning democracy, and it has shed the outward vestiges of the Tito era, but its political culture maintains holdovers in mentality and personnel from the communist era. The lack of lustration (i.e., decommunization) remains a sore point, including for the police and security services, while public cynicism about the political process is widespread and voter turnout generally low. Although President Stipe Mesić, in office since 2000, has spurred little of the controversy or enmity that were associated with his predecessor Franjo Tudjman, the “father” of independent Croatia and head of state until his death in 1999, neither has Mesić accomplished as much as many had hoped by way of political reform. In stark contrast with Tudjman, who was a hard-line nationalist, Mesić has sought better relations with Croatia's neighbors and has attempted to heal the regional wounds of the last decade, with some success; Zagreb since 2000 has taken a much more conciliatory and productive line vis-à-vis Bosnia, for instance.<sup>9</sup>

Many pitfalls of the Tudjman era remain, however, not least the vexing problem of war criminals. With great difficulty, the Mesić government has handed over several high-ranking Croatian military officials to face charges before the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY) in The Hague. The greatest controversy surrounded the capture in Spain in late 2005 of General Ante Gotovina, considered by many Croats one of the leading heroes of the Homeland War. Gotovina had been on the run for several years, facing secret indictments by the ICTY relating to Operation STORM in 1995, and apparently had enjoyed quiet assistance from Croatian military and security services. Yet it was understood that the

Mesić government had acquiesced in—and likely assisted—Gotovina’s capture, causing a firestorm of controversy in Croatia and widespread hard feelings among veterans.<sup>10</sup>

Nevertheless, defense reform has been a significant accomplishment of the Mesić government. While Croatia’s military has some distance to go before it is fully interoperable with NATO, since 2000 officers with controversial pasts have been pensioned off and professionalism has replaced political cronyism as the prime mover of careers. Through the 1990s, the Ministry of Defense, run by Gojko Šušak, the most corrupt of all Tudjman’s ministers, was a hotbed of graft, kickbacks, and outright theft; rooting this dysfunctional culture out of the Ministry of Defense has taken years, but progress is significant. All efforts have been focused on NATO accession, and in 2008 Croatia suspended conscription. Under plans known as “Force 2010,” total active personnel will fall to twenty thousand. The ground forces, built around three maneuver brigades (one reserve), will receive several new types of vehicles (armored and unarmored), tank modernization, and new artillery; the air force will procure a small squadron of modern, multirole fighters; and the navy, essentially a coastal defense force, will receive several new corvettes and fast patrol craft.<sup>11</sup>

Croatia’s contribution to international peacekeeping has been modest to date, the only noteworthy mission being Croatia’s 320-strong contribution to the International Security Assistance Force in Afghanistan. Zagreb’s unwillingness to commit troops abroad has as much to do with the domestic political mood, which is suspicious of foreign adventures *en principe*, as with the unreadiness of the armed forces to operate alongside NATO before Force 2010 is fully implemented.

The Mesić government likewise deserves praise for its regional and cooperative approach to security affairs. Zagreb since 2000 has consistently viewed its national security as an international matter, and both the Defense Ministry and the Interior Ministry (responsible for the police and counterterrorism) consider close partnerships with other former Yugoslav republics indispensable in confronting transnational threats. While few Croats pine for the lost Yugoslavia, most understand that good relations are a *sine qua non* for regional security and prosperity. Lacking any major conventional foes or significant internal security threats—Croatia’s Serbs, more than a quarter of the population in 1991 and considered a fifth column by many Croats, are less than 5 percent today, after Operation STORM—Zagreb in recent years has emphasized unconventional threats like terrorism, migration, and crime as its primary security concerns. For several centuries Croatia, as part of the Habsburg empire, stood as the bulwark of Christendom against the Ottoman Turks to the south and east, an image that has not been forgotten, particularly in the post-9/11 world.

### BOSNIA: UNFINISHED BUSINESS

Croatia's security concerns are disproportionately focused on Bosnia, its troubled neighbor to the south. Formally the Republic of Bosnia and Hercegovina, the country received its independence from Yugoslavia in April 1992 and was immediately plunged into a bloody civil war that lasted until the fall of 1995. The country has been under foreign—first NATO, now EU—occupation ever since.

The Bosnian disaster was the leading foreign-policy story of the last decade, grabbing the attention of the world's media and helping drive direct NATO military intervention against the Bosnian Serbs in the summer of 1995, in Operation DELIBERATE FORCE. Claims of "genocide" and "ethnic cleansing" in the summer of 1992 caused a firestorm of controversy that never abated. With hindsight and dispassion, it is evident that the international media, encouraged by the Bosnian Muslim government in Sarajevo, significantly overstated war deaths and the extent of wanton crimes against civilians. In particular, the number of war dead, estimated at 200,000 or even 250,000, allegedly mostly Muslim and civilian—a significant number from a total Bosnian population of 4.3 million at the war's outbreak—was grossly overstated. Detailed analysis by Bosnian authorities and the ICTY independently determined that the total figure for war dead was about one hundred thousand on all sides: roughly 54 percent military and 46 percent civilian, with 62 percent being Muslim, 23 percent Serb, and 5 percent Croat.<sup>12</sup>

That said, it cannot be disputed that prewar Bosnia, a relatively thriving multicultural society, was destroyed by the 1992–95 conflict. Before the war Bosnia was almost 44 percent Muslim, 31 percent Serbian (Orthodox Christian), 17 percent Croat (Roman Catholic), and 5 percent Yugoslav (those, often of mixed background, who refused to identify with a particular ethno-religious group). All Bosnians are Slavs, divided by religion and history but speaking a common language, once known as Serbo-Croatian and today as Serbian, Croatian, or Bosnian, depending on one's preference (despite differences in orthography and vocabulary, these are linguistically nearly identical).<sup>13</sup> Although postwar analysis reveals few changes in population mix (though Muslims, who now prefer the term "Bosniaks," constitute 40 percent of the population), the country has just under four million citizens; many left as refugees in the mid-1990s and have not returned. More significantly, regional demographics within Bosnia are notably changed.

The American-backed Dayton Peace Accords of late 1995, which formally ended the civil war, enshrined two substate entities, the Muslim-Croat Federation and the Serbian Republic, each comprising about half the country. These entities, which represented the warring factions—the Muslims and Croats had been allied against the Serbs since early 1994, under pressure from Washington—were given substantial powers, which were supposed to be distinctly temporary.



This division recognized the population shifts that occurred during the war, and despite Dayton's pledges to resettle refugees in their prewar homes and communities, more than a decade after the guns fell silent the strong majority of refugees have not returned. As a result, most Muslims and Croats remain in the Federation, while Serbs are largely confined to their Republika Srpska. For instance, Sarajevo, the country's capital and largest urban area, was a multicultural city before 1992 but today has few Serbs, who are just 5 percent of Sarajevo's population, fallen from 38 percent prewar.<sup>14</sup>

In purely military terms, enforcing the Dayton Accords has been a resounding success. While under foreign occupation, which has coincided with a drastic drawdown in Bosnia's military capacity, the country has seen no return to open conflict, despite high levels of hostility among Serbs, Muslims, and Croats. Beginning in late 1995 as the U.S.-led, corps-strong Intervention Force (IFOR),

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which was renamed the Stabilization Force (SFOR) a year later, NATO peacekeeping was robust and properly resourced, relative to the size of the local population; just as important, the warring fac-

tions were exhausted and uninterested in more combat. Over the next several years, the force's strength fell from three divisions (one U.S.) to two brigades. By the time SFOR was closed out at the end of 2005, to be replaced by the smaller, European-led EU Force (EUFOR, at a current strength of only 2,200), it was clear that the military dimension of NATO-led nation (re)building was worthy of praise. Hence the claim of the last SFOR commander, Major General James Darden, U.S. Army: "If we could do it all over again, I don't know how we could do better."<sup>15</sup>

However true such claims may be in strictly military terms, it is clear that the political side of Dayton has been markedly less successful. In the first place, the political reintegration of Bosnia is far from complete. The two entities still exist, and the Republika Srpska, in particular, remains jealous of its prerogatives and unwilling to relinquish power to the ostensible national government in Sarajevo. Dayton has not changed the basic political fact, which to a considerable extent lay behind the civil war, that Bosnia's Serbs do not wish to live in a unitary Bosnian state politically dominated by Muslims, the largest group in the country. For their part, most Muslims cannot envision a Bosnia that is not in some way a unitary state, while Croats are increasingly resentful of their perceived second-class status vis-à-vis the Muslims in the Federation. Bosnian Croat support for enhanced status under Dayton, the so-called Third Entity movement, continues to exist, even though this is a taboo subject as far as Bosnia's Western

masters are concerned. Many sore points remain, above all the issue of war criminals. While many Bosnians, heavily but not exclusively Serbs, have been extradited to stand trial in The Hague on war crimes charges, some of the biggest fish remain at large. The July 2008 move by the new Serbian government to capture and extradite Radovan Karadžić, the civil leader of the wartime Republika Srpska, appears to be a positive development, yet there is no guarantee that his upcoming trial will not devolve into a disappointing spectacle like many high-profile trials at the ICTY. Moreover, General Ratko Mladić, the Republika Srpska's wartime warrior-in-chief, a revered figure to many Serbs, remains at large as of this writing, his whereabouts officially unknown. It is far from clear whether the ICTY model has worked well for Bosnia—some have suggested that a South African-style “truth and reconciliation” model might be more politically healing and empowering for Bosnians—and it is incomprehensible to many Bosnians that after more than a dozen years NATO has been unable to track the most-wanted men down.

Since Dayton, Bosnia's de facto ruler has been the high representative, selected from EU member states. The high representative enjoys essentially colonial powers, including the right to fire ministers and dissolve governments. Despite, or perhaps because of, this situation, political reform in Bosnia has lagged far behind where even pessimists expected it to be well over a decade after Dayton. While recent years have seen belated progress in transferring authority from the entities to the national government—including, significantly, the unification of entity militaries in 2005 (since 2006 Bosnia has had modest armed forces recruited from Muslim, Serb, and Croat volunteers)—much work remains to be done, and Bosnia today cannot plausibly be described as possessing an effective unitary government.

Whatever the shortcomings of Bosnia's political reconstruction since 1995, its economic rebuilding has been even less impressive. The prewar economy, which included a strong industrial sector, has not reemerged, despite ample Western aid and direct investment. Much of Tito-era production was military, which was neither needed nor wanted under Dayton. Just as serious, corruption in all entities and at all levels of society is entrenched and so grave as to undermine any meaningful economic reform. How bad this institutionalized theft actually is became evident in 2000, when extensive investigation revealed that of the five billion dollars in aid lavished on the country over the five years since Dayton, one-fifth—a billion dollars—had simply disappeared. Worse, the corruption infects all the entities and political parties, and in real terms such back-room deals have outpaced the country's notional economy.<sup>16</sup> While many Western firms attempted to open plants in Bosnia after 1995, few remain, daunted by the culture of theft and corruption that confronts all commercial

activities. Even major international corporations have been unable to make headway. After Dayton, the German auto giant Volkswagen AG attempted to rebuild at Vogošća, a Sarajevo suburb, a car plant that had been damaged during the war. But the project was a bust, and after several years of trying VW pulled out in frustration, having lined the pockets of local politicians but never getting a functioning car factory going. Western investment was no solution to Bosnia's ills, concluded the VW director for the country: "No chance. You would lose your money completely."<sup>17</sup>

As a result, the unofficial unemployment rate is around 50 percent, and no one seems to know the size of the grey economy or even how to determine where it begins and the legitimate economy ends. The country has become, in the eyes of leading human rights activists, "the last black hole in Europe." Despite widespread poverty, there is a wealthy class of Bosnians, usually connected to both the political and criminal elites (who are not infrequently the same group), but average citizens continue to be underemployed, to the detriment of societal happiness and stability.

The painful truth is that since Dayton Western powers have done an inadequate job of forcing political and economic reform. Eschewing a fully colonial approach as politically (and perhaps fiscally) unacceptable, NATO and the EU have attempted to impose a pseudocolonial superstructure over Bosnian life, with negative results. Corruption remains endemic, and Bosnians themselves seem unwilling, or perhaps unable, to remedy the situation. The 2003 verdict of David Harland, the former head of UN civil affairs in Bosnia, is just as true and devastating five years on:

Eight years after a devastating war, Bosnia and Herzegovina is a remarkable success story. Reconstruction is complete. Economic output has passed prewar levels and the republic's economy is now among the fastest-growing in Europe. Refugees have returned to their homes, war-time nationalist leaders are dead or in jail. Measured by the rate of marriage between young people of different ethnic groups, the hostility that recently led to so much blood-letting between Croats, Muslims and Serbs is receding. There is palpable optimism in the air. What was recently one of the most backward areas of Europe is moving forward.

The year is 1953.<sup>18</sup>

The Yugoslav communists did a far superior job rebuilding Bosnia politically, economically, and socially than the West has managed fifty years later. Bosnia recovered faster under Tito's leadership from the much more brutal and devastating Second World War than it has under Western tutelage from the 1992–95 civil war.

Another major issue confronting post-Dayton Bosnia is Islamic radicalism. Although Bosnia's Muslims are hardly radical as a group, there exists among them a small percentage of very radical sorts, many of them war veterans who fought in al-Qa'ida-linked mujahidin units. Such radicals hardly existed before the war but can be easily encountered today, thanks to lavish Saudi funding of radical mosques and Islamic "charities" and to quiet support from the wartime government in Sarajevo for extremist causes. While the number of foreign mujahidin who fought on behalf of Sarajevo was not large, probably four or five thousand in all, their political importance was of a high order, both for Bosnia and for the international jihadist movement. While few Westerners have paid sufficient attention, it is clear that in the 1990s Bosnia played a role in the growth of al-Qa'ida much as Afghanistan did in the 1980s; simply put, the Bin Laden organization metastasized from a South Asian regional problem into a global insurgency in the mid-1990s thanks in no small part to its successes in Bosnia.<sup>19</sup>

While NATO and the EU have persistently attempted to downplay the extent of the radicalism problem in Bosnia post-Dayton, some Bosnian Muslims have been less sanguine and more willing to point out that Saudi-style radical Islam, which was essentially unknown before the war, now has a visible foothold in the country.<sup>20</sup> With the death in 2003 of Alija Izetbegović, the Bosnian president from 1990 to 2000, radical Islam lost its most important benefactor; contrary to the secular and modern image granted him by the Western media, Izetbegović was in fact a lifelong advocate of extremist Islam. He was an early member of the Young Muslims, a subversive group linked to Egypt's Muslim Brotherhood, which was banned by Yugoslav authorities for its links to terrorism (during communist rule, Izetbegović was imprisoned twice for his illegal Islamic activism).<sup>21</sup> Of greater concern today is the younger generation, hardened by war and swayed by radical messages (and Saudi money). The classic case is Nezim Halilović, a young preacher in Sarajevo with a considerable following on Bosnia's radical fringe. An avowed propagandist for al-Qa'ida and extremist Islam, Halilović boasts of his ties to mujahidin in many countries, and his Friday sermons from Sarajevo's King Fahd Islamic Center—built after Dayton with funds from Riyadh, in the "Saudi shopping mall style" loathed by most Bosnian Muslims—are disseminated across the country and beyond on the Internet.<sup>22</sup>

Another continuing controversy has been the issue of Bosnian passports issued to foreign mujahidin during and after the civil war. It is clear that the Izetbegović government distributed several thousand Bosnian passports to foreign fighters and "aid workers" who fought on behalf of Islam; Osama Bin Laden is reportedly one of the many holy warriors who received a Bosnian passport under other-than-normal circumstances. (Subsequent investigation revealed that within two months of the Dayton Peace Accords signing, 741 foreign mujahidin

received Bosnian passports with assistance from the secret police, and 103 passports were granted on one day alone in late December 1995.) Sarajevo finally moved to revoke several hundred passports obtained under questionable circumstances in early 2007, after years of Western pressure to get serious about the problem. By that time, more than a decade had elapsed since the issue first arose in international intelligence and law enforcement circles, and no one knew where most of the mystery men were living. Some had already turned up dead in Chechnya, Afghanistan, and Iraq.<sup>23</sup>

The extremist problem in Bosnia resembles the country's bigger, broader challenges. Poorly understood by outsiders, some of whom actively deny the existence of a problem in the face of ample evidence, it is as much the product of foreign meddling and Western neglect as of anything done by Bosnians. It is inseparable from broader problems of corruption and criminality—and it shows no signs of going away or fixing itself.

#### KOSOVO AND THE ALBANIAN QUESTION

The political, economic, and social problems confronting Kosovo today are as grave as those plaguing Bosnia, perhaps more so. There can be no question that Kosovo remains the most volatile region in the Balkans, and the possibility of violent confrontation remains real. The emergence of an independent Kosovo in early 2008 represents not the end of the conflict over this contested land but possibly only the next round in a struggle that has plagued the Balkans for years, indeed generations.

The road to NATO intervention in Kosovo nearly a decade ago was long and difficult. Rising tension between Serbs and Albanians constituted one of the major causes of the collapse of Yugoslavia after Tito's death in 1980; as communism waned, nationalism reemerged with a vengeance in Kosovo among both Serbs and Albanians, and the Communist Party was incapable of keeping a lid on the problem as it had for decades.<sup>24</sup> The Yugoslav military had to be called in to restore order with bayonets in Prishtina, the region's capital, after serious riots in 1981, and by 1987 the JNA leadership was talking openly of a "rebellion" emerging in Kosovo that aimed at creating an Albanian republic free of Yugoslavia.<sup>25</sup> The Serbian crackdown that followed, and would last over a decade, permanently embittered Kosovo's Albanian majority and convinced even moderate and nonviolent Albanians that cooperation with the Serbian leadership in Belgrade was fruitless.

Serious armed resistance to Serbian rule emerged in Kosovo only in 1996, with the appearance of a shadowy group calling itself the Kosovo Liberation Army; for the first time since the Second World War Albanians were taking up arms against Serbian rule over Kosovo. This radical organization sought to

provoke a wider war by attacking Serbian police and, especially, Albanian “collaborators.” Such attacks mounted through 1998, and by the end of that year large parts of Kosovo were plagued with a bona fide insurgency.

Belgrade’s reaction was harsh, as expected, and in late March 1999 Serbian excesses against Albanian civilians provoked NATO military intervention, in the shape of Operation ALLIED FORCE, a seventy-eight-day bombing campaign that succeeded in forcing Serbian forces out of Kosovo. While it is now known that the extent of Serbian crimes against Albanians was seriously overstated for propaganda effect—contrary to claims of tens of thousands of noncombatant deaths in Kosovo, the ICTY was never able to verify more than three thousand Albanian civilians killed by Serbian security forces—the Serbs lost the propaganda war, as in Bosnia, in the opening round and never recovered.<sup>26</sup>

NATO then inherited Kosovo, as it had Bosnia less than four years before. In ethnic terms Kosovo is less complicated; the population postwar is over 90 percent Albanian, with small minorities of Serbs, Gypsies, and Slavic Muslims. Nevertheless, nation building in Kosovo is by any standard even less successful than in Bosnia. The NATO-led Kosovo Force (KFOR) has done a respectable job of keeping the peace at modest cost; its total strength has dropped from over fifty thousand in 1999 to sixteen thousand in recent years, with a U.S. Army brigade as a standing contingent (supplied by the National Guard since before 9/11). Unlike in Bosnia, KFOR’s commanding general has always been a European.

Yet KFOR’s record has blemishes, and its mandate has been filled with irony. Within months of KFOR’s arrival in the summer of 1999, on the heels of bombing and refugee displacement, it was obvious that NATO’s job had become the protection of the remaining Serbs and other minorities from the victorious Albanians. Attacks on Serb civilians and religious buildings had been commonplace, culminating in orchestrated riots in March 2004 that were pronounced a “failure” for KFOR by leading nongovernmental organizations. The most detailed report of the Albanian uprising is damning: “On March 17, at least 33 riots broke out in Kosovo over a 48-hour period, involving an estimated 51,000 protesters. Nineteen people died during the violence. At least 550 homes and 27 Orthodox churches and monasteries were burned, and approximately 4,100 persons from minority communities were displaced from their homes.”<sup>27</sup>

The political progress delivered by the United Nations Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK) since 1999 has been even less impressive than the military-security dimension. As UN veterans have elaborated in detail, UNMIK has singularly failed to bring about any sort of Western-style “civil society” in Kosovo. Allegiances remain anything but civic, rather ethnic, even tribal; few Albanians have any interest in living alongside Serbs or Gypsies, whom they consider enemies and traitors. Also, Western concepts of good governance and measures against

corruption fly in the face of local norms so completely that they are simply untranslatable without serious coercion, which NATO and the UN have never been willing to apply.<sup>28</sup>

The result is a functionally mono-ethnic society that is run by the leaders of the Kosovo Liberation Army, many of whom are deeply corrupt, boasting ties to organized crime and little interested in reforming anything. Thanks in no small part to this disturbing reality, Kosovo's economy is very troubled. The legitimate economy provides few jobs, and at least half the workforce is without employment. Kosovo was the poorest, least developed, and most fecund region of Yugoslavia, and these trends have continued after 1999. Per capita income is about two thousand dollars a year, among the lowest in Europe and far below that of Slovenia and Croatia, or even Bosnia. Demonstrating how deep corruption and criminality run in Kosovo, Carla DelPonte, the longtime chief prosecutor for the ICTY and no friend of the Serbs, has recently asserted that Albanian fighters in 1999 murdered three hundred Serb prisoners, harvested their organs, and sold them on the international black market.<sup>29</sup>

In February 2008 Kosovo ended its strange legal status—for nearly a decade it had been nominally a province of Serbia, while under NATO/UN occupation and quasi-self-governing—by formally declaring independence. This was predictably met with howls from Serbia and its ally Russia, but the United States and most EU members quickly recognized the republic's new status, as did most of Serbia's neighbors. NATO and the UN abandoned their former policy of "standards before status" (by which Kosovo would have been held to Western norms on human rights protection before independence was permitted); confronted with something of a mission impossible, NATO and the UN now considered an independent Kosovo unstoppable. To date, there is no indication that independence will ameliorate Kosovo's grave political, economic, and social problems.

Ominously, the emergence of a new state in Europe has reopened the touchy issue of border revisions in the Balkans, as well as the perennially vexing Albanian question. While few in Albania proper seem to pine for reunion with conationals in Kosovo (officially now "Kosova," per Albanian usage) and the government in Prishtina is careful never to utter anything about Greater Albania, the Slavs who live adjacent to ethnic Albanian territory are undoubtedly worried. Memories are long in the Balkans, and no Slavs have forgotten that a Greater Albania briefly existed, consisting of Albania plus Kosovo and a good chunk of present-day Macedonia, as a satellite of fascist Italy during World War II.

Serbia has its own Albanian problem, even after the loss of Kosovo. In the months after ALLIED FORCE, Albanian militias operating in the Preševo Valley, adjacent to Kosovo, staged dozens of attacks on Serbian police and military outposts. Styling itself as a local offshoot of Kosovo's successful

Liberation Army and reportedly recruiting among the Albanian population concentrated in the valley, the Preševo guerrillas were a shadowy, small force that nevertheless succeeded in scaring Belgrade badly before disappearing.<sup>30</sup>

The situation in Macedonia was, and remains, much more serious. Although this small, landlocked country of two million was fortunate enough to leave Yugoslavia in 1992 without bloodshed, the years since independence have been roiled by the ethnic question, to the detriment of peace and prosperity. Conceived by most citizens as a state by and for Slavic Macedonians (who are culturally and linguistically close to both the Serbs and Bulgarians), they are a young nation, despite having lived in the region for more than a millennium and a half; Slavic Macedonians were formally recognized as a distinct nation for the first time only in 1945, by Tito's regime.<sup>31</sup> Yet Macedonia has a substantial Albanian minority of about 25 percent—in best Balkan fashion, the Albanians assert they are a third of the population, while Slavs counter that the real number is only one-fifth—heavily concentrated in the country's west and north, adjacent to Kosovo.

The desire of ardent Albanian nationalists for union with Kosovo is hardly secret, and it took tangible and violent form in late 2000 with the emergence in Macedonia of an Albanian insurgent force, the National Liberation Army, which promptly launched attacks on Macedonian security forces.<sup>32</sup> Over the next several months, the insurgents staged assaults in or near several towns, and in mid-2001 fighting came close to the capital of Skopje. NATO intervention, including the deployment of over four thousand peacekeepers on the border with Kosovo, helped prevent the conflict from boiling over, but not before several dozen deaths had occurred; few outside the region realize how close the Balkans came to another war in 2001. Hard feelings remain on both sides, as do suspicions in Skopje that Albanian extremists are plotting more violence. Given that the Albanian question remains unresolved, at least in the minds of nationalist activists, there can be no assurances that such a conflict cannot reoccur, nor can anyone be certain that a wider war could be averted again.<sup>33</sup>

#### “SERBIA IS RISING”: TWENTY YEARS AFTER

Given the benefit of hindsight, it is clear that the biggest loser of the Balkans wars of the 1990s was Serbia, the largest Yugoslav republic and the one most responsible for the tumult of the previous decade. When Tito's federation went over the cliff in 1991, the Serbian government in Belgrade, led by Slobodan Milošević, enjoyed de facto control over Serbia, its once-autonomous regions of Kosovo and Vojvodina, and the neighboring republic of Montenegro. Today the country has lost nearly everything; Serbs have been expelled from Croatia and



live under foreign occupation in Bosnia, while Serbia's borders are reduced to nearly what they were before the Balkan wars of 1912–13. Most painfully, the Serbian heartland of Kosovo is now irredeemably gone. In a real sense, the Greater Serbia project espoused by nationalists has resulted not in glory but ruin; Serbia has cartographically regressed a century.

It has long been easy to place blame for all this at the feet of the late Slobodan Milošević, Serbia's failed leader, who was extradited to The Hague in 2001 and died in ICTY custody in 2006. Much demonized by the West, Milošević has more recently been a figure for unhappy Serbs to blame for their current predicament. Milošević remains an enigmatic character, and he has never inspired balanced judgments, yet his passing offers Serbia an opportunity to reassess the recent past. Although Serbs managed to depose Milošević bloodlessly in October 2000, they have yet to come to terms with the damage wrought on Serbia during his years in power.<sup>34</sup>

Milošević rose to prominence and power in the late 1980s by harnessing Serbian national feelings, which were emerging from under the ice of decades-long official proscription. Yet Milošević was never a nationalist himself; indeed, he seemed a colorless communist functionary from central casting, and he had little feeling for Serbian views (or for Serbs, for that matter). Cashing in on the patriotic slogan "Serbia is rising," he assured average Serbs they would be able to preserve their prerogatives as the largest nation in Yugoslavia. When Tito's Yugoslavia fell apart in 1991, Milošević helped fashion a new, downsized one, consisting of Serbia and Montenegro; under various names, this union would last until 2006, when Montenegro too wanted out.

Serbia under Milošević suffered from chronic ills, including profound economic collapse, the sinister blending of organized crime and state authority, demographic crisis, and losing wars in Croatia, Bosnia, and Kosovo.<sup>35</sup> While Milošević was culpable for some of these disasters, he created few of them alone, and some of the most serious defects in Serbia's economy and political culture were holdovers from Titoism. Yet it can be judged that Milošević did nothing to improve such ailments. Certainly his cynical brand of *divide et impera* politics, particularly his employment of the nationalist bacillus as needed, contributed to Serbia's problems long after he left the scene.

Serbia's current challenge is to form a new, postwar political identity suited to present-day realities, and there is no indication that this will happen quickly or easily. This should not be surprising, given the nature of the shocks to the system—political, economic, military, and social—that Serbia has absorbed in the last two decades, yet is not encouraging either. Fundamentally, Serbia's body politic is divided between modernists who envision a European future, based on a market economy, rule of law, and integration into such Western institutions as

NATO and the EU, versus traditionalists who favor isolation from “Europe,” perhaps in collaboration with a resurgent Russia and in explicit resistance to NATO, the EU, and almost everything else perceived as Western.<sup>36</sup> While the modernists have an appealing product, at least to younger Serbs, the traditionalists are able to fall back on ancient national themes, buttressed by hard feelings caused by recent mishandling by NATO and the West. How near run a struggle this remains has been laid bare by the spring 2008 parliamentary elections, which resulted in over three months of wrangling and horse-trading to produce a weak coalition government; in the winter of 2008, the modernist Boris Tadić required two rounds of voting barely to defeat the hard-line nationalist Tomislav Nikolić for the presidency (Tadić actually lost to Nikolić in round one, requiring a runoff election). While time may be on the side of the modernists, as younger voters increasingly desire a European future, it may take decades for pro-Western attitudes to achieve political dominance over the bitter-enders, and it promises to be a bumpy road.

Real reform in Serbia will require root-and-branch transformation of large aspects of public life, especially the breaking up of mafia alliances with parties, police, and politicians of all stripes. The assassination of Zoran Djindjić, the pro-Western and more or less reformist prime minister, in March 2003 by a team of mafia-linked secret policemen resulted in a short-term direct assault on the covert cadres that control much of Serbia's economy and politics, but much more effort is required to defeat the perverse system that originated under Tito and thrived under Milošević.<sup>37</sup>

While Serbia presently lacks the military power to harm its neighbors, it is beyond question that many Serbs, including numerous prominent politicians, consider Serbia's setbacks of recent years to be temporary and reversible; many assess Kosovo's “final status” as anything but final. While such views may not be reality based, given Serbia's staggering economic and demographic problems, to say nothing of its inability to confront NATO in military terms, they are held rather widely and have their origins in Serbs' deepest-held myths about themselves. Softening them will take decades and much patience. To be fair to Serbs who feel wronged by NATO and the West, it is far from self-evident why some Balkan borders are considered sacrosanct while others are not. Efforts by the Republika Srpska to renegotiate Dayton and perhaps leave Bosnia in the aftermath of Kosovo independence were rudely dismissed by the Western powers, but if Serbia's borders can be redrawn by international fiat, why cannot the same be done with Bosnian frontiers? In Kosovo and elsewhere, redrawing state boundaries to align with ethnic realities on the ground, while temporarily painful, will undoubtedly solve problems in the long run.

Bringing meaningful and enduring stability to Europe's troubled southeast will require Serbia's involvement and participation politically, economically, and militarily. There can be no lasting tranquility in the Balkans without the involvement—not just acquiescence—of the region's largest and most populous state. While Slovenia, Croatia, Bosnia, Kosovo, Macedonia, and Montenegro cannot be held hostage to Serbia's weakened political culture, neither can Serbia's neighbors proceed very far down the road to peace and prosperity without Belgrade's active participation. Serbia's twentieth century, which began triumphantly with the Balkan wars and the creation of Yugoslavia on Serbia's terms after World War I, ended catastrophically, in defeat and despair. It can only be hoped that for Serbia, and for all the states of the former Yugoslavia, the current century, while beginning in difficulties, will end more happily.

## NOTES

1. See the account by Slovenia's then-defense minister, Janez Janša, *Premiki: nastajanje in obramba slovenske države, 1988–1992* (Ljubljana: Mladina, 1992).
2. This confusion is conveyed vividly in the memoir of the then-Yugoslav defense minister: Veljko Kadijević, *Moje vidjenje raspada: vojska bez države* (Belgrade: Politika, 1993).
3. On the politics of the JNA leadership see Mile Bjelajac, *Die jugoslawische Erfahrung mit multiethnischen Armee 1918–1991* (Belgrade: Institute for Modern History, 2002).
4. Martin Špegelj, "The First Phase, 1990–1992: The JNA Prepares for Aggression and Croatia for Defense," in *The War in Croatia and Bosnia-Herzegovina 1991–1995*, ed. B. Magaš and I. Žanić (London: Frank Cass, 2001).
5. This is covered well in Ozren Žunec, "Operations Flash and Storm," in *The War in Croatia and Bosnia-Herzegovina 1991–1995*, ed. Magaš and Žanić. The destruction of the Krajina forces is detailed in an unclassified CIA account, *Balkan Battlegrounds: A Military History of the Yugoslav Conflict, 1990–1995: Volume I* (Washington, D.C.: CIA, 2002), pp. 367–77. Why the Krajina Serb "republic" folded without much of a fight is elaborated in Milisav Sekulić, *Knin je pao u Beogradu* (Bad Vilbel: 2001), pp. 97–120.
6. "Vod 74. MOTB na preverjanju na ISAF," *Slovenska vojska* (Ljubljana), 7 February 2008.
7. On Slovene Yugo-nostalgia: "Oh, Yugoslavia! How They Long for Your Firm Embrace," *New York Times*, 30 January 2008.
8. Jelena Budak, "Corruption in Croatia: Perceptions Rise, Problems Remain," *Privredna kretanja i ekonomska politika* (Zagreb), no. 106 (2006).
9. See the interview with Mesić in *Central Europe Review*, 15 May 2000, which lays out his goals for greater regional cooperation and integration.
10. "War Crimes Case Revives Passions in a Divided Croatia," *New York Times*, 12 December 2005.
11. The details of Croatian defense reform are elaborated in *Dugoročni plan razvoja Oružanih snaga Republike Hrvatska 2006–2015* (Zagreb: n.p., 2006), available at [www.morh.hr](http://www.morh.hr), the Croatian defense ministry website.
12. *Dani* (Sarajevo), 23 December 2005; "102.000 drept i Bosnia," NRK [Norwegian Broadcasting Corp.], 14 November 2004.
13. On the complex politics behind this, see Robert D. Greenberg, *Language and Identity in the Balkans: Serbo-Croatian and Its Disintegration* (Oxford, U.K.: Oxford Univ. Press, 2004).
14. Louis Sell, "The Serb Flight from Sarajevo: Dayton's First Failure," *East European Politics and Societies* 14, no. 1 (Winter 2000).

15. *International Herald Tribune* (Paris), 14 September 2004.
16. *New York Times*, 17 August 2000.
17. See John Schindler, "Bosnia Prepares for Life after Izetbegovic," *Jane's Intelligence Review* (January 2001).
18. *International Herald Tribune* (Paris), 27 January 2004.
19. For a discussion of this problem, see this author's *Unholy Terror: Bosnia, Al-Qa'ida, and the Rise of Global Jihad* (St. Paul, Minn.: Zenith, 2007).
20. For instance, Esad Hecimović, *Garibi: Mudžahedini u BiH 1992–1999* (Zenica: Sina, 2006).
21. On Izetbegović's radical background see Sead Trhulj, *Mladi Muslimani* (Zagreb: Globus, 1992).
22. *Globus* (Zagreb), 28 June 2002; *Slobodna Bosna* (Sarajevo), 13 September 2001.
23. On Bosnia's post-9/11 efforts to confront the mujahidin problem, see Schindler, *Unholy Terror*, pp. 273–324.
24. The best backgrounder is Julie Mertus, *Kosovo: How Myths and Truths Started a War* (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1999).
25. See the comments of Fleet Admiral Branko Mamula, the Yugoslav defense minister, in *New York Times*, 1 November 1987.
26. Note the statements by ICTY investigators in *The Guardian* (London), 18 August 2000.
27. From the sixty-six-page report *Failure to Protect: Anti-Minority Violence in Kosovo, March 2004* (Brussels: Human Rights Watch, July 2004).
28. These are the conclusions of Iain King and Whit Mason in *Peace at Any Price: How the World Failed Kosovo* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell Univ. Press, 2006). The authors, both UNMIK veterans, provide a rich, scathing account of the dysfunction of nation building in Kosovo.
29. *The Guardian* (London), 12 April 2008.
30. Zoran Kusovac, "KFOR Contains Conflict in Presevo," *Jane's Intelligence Review* (January 2001).
31. It is important to note that in the Balkans, the terms "nation" and "state" are markedly distinct, unlike in common American usage. Some Serbs, citing linguistic, religious, and historical commonalities, consider the Macedonian nationality to be a communist invention rather than an organic reality—a deeply offensive view to Macedonians, who are likewise skeptical of the motives of their Bulgarian and, especially, Greek neighbors.
32. See John Schindler, "The AKSh: Europe's Next Insurgency?" *Jane's Intelligence Review* (November 2000).
33. Violeta Petroska-Beska and Mirjana Najcevska, *Macedonia: Understanding History, Preventing Future Conflict*, Special Report 115 (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Institute for Peace, February 2004).
34. The most serviceable biography is Louis Sell's *Slobodan Milosevic and the Destruction of Yugoslavia* (Durham, N.C.: Duke Univ. Press, 2003).
35. The period is covered well in Robert Thomas's *The Politics of Serbia in the 1990s* (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 1999). How Belgrade got saddled with the evil alliance of mafia and state is clarified in Aleksandar Knezević and Vojislav Tufegđić, *Kriminal koji je izmenio Srbiju* (Belgrade: B92, 1995).
36. This schism is explained lucidly in the Helsinki Committee for Human Rights in Serbia's 2007 annual report, *Self-Isolation: The Reality and the Goal* (Belgrade: Helsinki Committee, 2008).
37. Djindjić was not lacking mafia ties himself—Christopher Corpora, "The Untouchables: Former Yugoslavia's Clandestine Political Economy," *Problems of Post-Communism* 51, no. 3 (2004).

