

---

**Bogdan Denitch**

---

## LESSONS FROM THE BOSNIAN WAR

**T**

he European Community (EC), the United States, and the United Nations have all contributed mightily to the death of Yugoslavia and the murder of Bosnia. German and Austrian overeagerness to recognize unilateral declarations of secession by Slovenia and Croatia assured that there would not be a peaceful parting of the ways.

The federation that was Yugoslavia was a much lesser evil than the horror that followed. Yes, it was a one-party regime with as many as five hundred political prisoners during most of the last decade of its existence, but with the exception of the Albanians in Kosovo, it was not dominated by its largest national group. Since the purge of the head of political police, Alexander Rankovic, no Serb had been a major figure in the Yugoslav Federation for the last twenty years of the country's existence. Tito was a Croat, the major party ideologue Kardelj, a Slovenian. In office at the time the country broke up in 1991 were Prime Minister Markovic, a Croat; Foreign Minister Loncar, a Croat; President of the Party Presidium Suvar, a Croat; and Chief of Staff Kadijevic, the product of a mixed Serb-Croat marriage. The ambassadors in Moscow, Paris, Vienna, Rome, and at the UN were Croats. The ambassador to Washington was a Bosnian.

The reason to insist upon these facts is that legions of half-informed commentators are now busy rewriting history to portray the breakup of Yugoslavia as inevitable and justified. The breakup was caused by policies that saw all of Eastern Europe through the prism of the cold war. Breaking up and fatally weakening any state ruled by any Communist party was axiomatically a good thing. Secessionist ethnic nationalism was automatically a good thing for Yugoslavia (or the Soviet Union for that

matter), unlike South Africa, India, Pakistan, Nigeria, or Indonesia.

Pressures to democratize and decentralize the country without breaking it apart would have been welcomed by substantial forces in Yugoslavia. But these pressures were absent. In 1991, the European Community's arbitrator, Lord Carrington, counseled against recognizing any of the former Yugoslav states without a settlement that would guarantee the rights of all minorities. The EC's failure to accept his recommendation led to the violent assault on the seceding states by the Yugoslav army and large Serbian minorities in Croatia and Bosnia.

Having made the first fatal mistake of welcoming unilateral secession, the UN, the EC, and the sole remaining superpower then failed to move to stop the violence at the very outset. They might have succeeded by providing for guarantees of equal rights to ethnic communities that were now violently thrust into an insecure existence as minorities in the lands in which their ancestors have lived since at least the early sixteenth century. After they failed to do this, two million Serbs in Croatia and Bosnia were unsurprisingly unwilling to trust their security to the new nationalist regimes in which they had become minorities overnight. Instead, they successfully launched a combined civil war and war of aggression, much like the war in Lebanon, exposing the inadequacy of the UN security system, the weakness of the EC, and the hopeless drift in U.S. foreign and security policy.

The lesson is: without a world community or superpower that can assure minimal security, military force becomes an attractive way of solving one's problems, and to hell with world opinion. World opinion will not save victims of ethnic genocides and massacres. This lesson

will not be missed by hawks in Israel as well as those, like the Russian leadership, who have a genuine problem with neighboring nationalist regimes that want to make their Russian minorities pay for the past crimes of Stalinist and Russian imperialism.

To be sure, the breakup of Yugoslavia and the wars that followed had probably become likely even earlier—in 1986-1989, when the Serbian strongman Milosevic attempted to bully his way into power over all of Yugoslavia by mobilizing nationalist mobs, destroying the autonomy of Kosovo and Vojvodina, and signaling his intention to tear up the existing Yugoslav federal Constitution. Milosevic thus provoked the secession of Slovenia and Croatia and helped thrust the Croat right-wing nationalists into power in Croatia in 1991.

But in 1991 the world community still could have put its weight behind the numerous anti-Milosevic forces in Yugoslavia and pushed for decentralization and democratization. However, there was and still is great reluctance to “intervene in internal affairs of sovereign states,” since more than one UN member, even among members of the Security Council, would have to worry about precedents if forces for democracy, human rights, and local autonomy were to start receiving international support.

Intimidation of the substantial Serbian minority by the Croat nationalists and systematic manipulation by Belgrade of all-too-vivid memories of massacres perpetrated by Croat fascists during the Second World War produced a revolt in the mainly Serbian Croat borderlands known as the Kraina. In the war that followed, the Yugoslav army took the side of the Kraina Serbs. After much wanton destruction by the invading army, including the razing of Vukovar and the shelling of Dubrovnik, a UN-policed truce line was established that has left more than a quarter of Croatia under rebel Serbian rule, cutting off the land links to Dalmatia and Slavonia. Any normalization and democratization of politics in Croatia requires the peaceful reintegration of the Kraina into Croatia. This can happen only if national rights and local autonomy are internationally guaranteed to the Kraina Serbs.

Croatia must become a state of all of its citizens rather than a de facto exclusive ethnic state of Croats. Without peace, democratic and civic rights are in constant jeopardy, and without those, Croatia will never get into the EC or obtain economic aid to rebuild the country. Croat nationalists and their liberal salon sympathizers, who have never met an ethnic nationalism they did not like, are the worst enemies of a decent democratic Croatia.

In Bosnia, war became inevitable when the Bosnian Serbian nationalist leader Karadjic set up a secessionist government in Banja Luka months before the March 1992 referendum in which the majority of Moslem and Croat Bosnian citizens voted for independence. The referendum was opposed by most Bosnian Serbs, a third of the population of Bosnia. The more chauvinist Bosnian Croats, supported by the Croatian government, set up an ethnically “cleansed,” purely Croat pseudo-state of Herceg-Bosnia, being no more willing to accept an independent Bosnia dominated by its most numerous group, the Moslem Slavs, than were the Serb nationalists.

The people who *genuinely* favored a multi-ethnic secular Bosnian state were the urban cosmopolitans, who had generally declared themselves to be Yugoslavs in the censuses; the substantial urban population that was intermarried; and of course the democratic left, which holds power in the second largest Bosnian city, Tuzla, and represents the main parliamentary opposition to the increasingly Islamic Izetbegovic government in Sarajevo. These groups are systematically ignored in all proposed settlements for the Bosnian War, as well as by the UN, the United States, and the EC. Their very existence is an embarrassment, since it argues against the creation of ethnic ghettos as the only viable solution.

The prospects for Bosnia today are much worse than they were two years ago. Partition was by no means inevitable then. Now it may be too late to reverse the ethnic cleansing in Bosnia, too late to reverse the Serbian territorial conquests, too late to punish the Serbian and Croatian chauvinist thugs. Instead, they will be rewarded. They have labored mightily and bloodily for two years to split a

working Bosnian multi-ethnic society into ethnically exclusive bantustans, something that even the whites in South Africa gave up on.

After the failure of international institutions it is naive to have much confidence in any international guarantees in the Balkans. Therefore, settlements acceptable to the warring parties and that include at least a majority of the Croatian and Bosnian Serbs are now the only possibility for peace. It is too late to lift the unjust arms embargo, which makes it more difficult for the Bosnian government to get heavy weapons. Lifting the embargo would only prolong the war unless the same world community that had cravenly refused to defend safety zones in Bosnia intervened massively to

defeat the Bosnian and Croatian Serbs. Lifting the arms embargo is a demand of the U.S. hawks, who will fight to the last Bosnian but not risk a single U.S. professional soldier. It is cheap demagoguery.

Serbian and Croatian nationalists claimed that it was impossible for the different national communities to live together in one state. Through atrocities, organized mass rape, and destruction of cities, mainly by the Serbian forces, this became a self-fulfilling prophecy. Because of endless delays and failures to exercise any leadership by the United States and its allies, it is now probably too late to restore a nonsectarian civic Bosnian state. But we must at least try to save the Bosnians. □

---

**Daniel Bell**

---

## **WILL THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY BE THE PACIFIC CENTURY?**

**A**s we approach the millennial year 2000, there seems to be a general expectation that the twenty-first century will be the Pacific Century. After about two thousand years of European-centered civilization as we know it (in philosophy, religion, and science) and five hundred years of European and then American economic and political dominance, will the center of gravity and the new tidal forces move to the Pacific, as once they had been concentrated in the Mediterranean and then shifted to the Atlantic rim? Much of this expectation arises from the fact that in 1960, 4 percent of the world's GNP was generated by the East Asian economies, that in 1990 this rose to 25 percent, and by the year 2000 this may well be 33 1/3 percent.

Yet given this fact, the question may be

raised whether economic might translates itself into political and military and cultural leadership, or despite China's still growing so rapidly (though inflation prone), whether the curve of Asian economic activity may not be reaching an asymptote, a ceiling that suggests a slowdown in the future.

The Pacific community suggests the fifteen nations that make up the Asian Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) organization that began in 1989, centering primarily around Japan, South Korea, Indonesia, Thailand, Singapore, and China, as well as the United States and Canada. But in thinking in historical terms, we are dealing here primarily with Asian nations. We leave aside India and the former Soviet Union. India is not involved in the trading blocs of the Pacific region, and there