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U.S. Army War College

AD-A261 664



Special Report

Insights  
Into The Balkan Enigma

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MAR 03 1993  
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Lieutenant Colonel William T. Johnsen

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## REPORT DOCUMENTATION PAGE

Form Approved  
OMB No. 0704-0188

1a. REPORT SECURITY CLASSIFICATION Unclassified		1b. RESTRICTIVE MARKINGS	
2a. SECURITY CLASSIFICATION AUTHORITY		3. DISTRIBUTION / AVAILABILITY OF REPORT	
2b. DECLASSIFICATION / DOWNGRADING SCHEDULE		Approved for public release; distribution unlimited	
4. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION REPORT NUMBER(S)  ACN 93008		5. MONITORING ORGANIZATION REPORT NUMBER(S)	
6a. NAME OF PERFORMING ORGANIZATION Strategic Studies Institute	6b. OFFICE SYMBOL (if applicable)  AWCI	7a. NAME OF MONITORING ORGANIZATION	
6c. ADDRESS (City, State, and ZIP Code)  U.S. Army War College, Carlisle Bks Carlisle, PA 17013-5050		7b. ADDRESS (City, State, and ZIP Code)	
8a. NAME OF FUNDING / SPONSORING ORGANIZATION	8b. OFFICE SYMBOL (if applicable)	9. PROCUREMENT INSTRUMENT IDENTIFICATION NUMBER	
8c. ADDRESS (City, State, and ZIP Code)		10. SOURCE OF FUNDING NUMBERS	
		PROGRAM ELEMENT NO.	PROJECT NO.
		TASK NO.	WORK UNIT ACCESSION NO.
11. TITLE (Include Security Classification)  Insights into the Balkan Enigma (U)			
12. PERSONAL AUTHOR(S) Johnsen, William T.			
13a. TYPE OF REPORT Final	13b. TIME COVERED FROM _____ TO _____	14. DATE OF REPORT (Year, Month, Day) 93/01/27	15. PAGE COUNT 28
16. SUPPLEMENTARY NOTATION			
17. COSATI CODES		18. SUBJECT TERMS (Continue on reverse if necessary and identify by block number)	
FIELD	GROUP	SUB-GROUP	
		former Yugoslavia; Balkans; international community; Bosnia-Hercegovina; civil war	
19. ABSTRACT (Continue on reverse if necessary and identify by block number) The author notes the ethnic and religious conflicts that abound in the ongoing civil war in the former Yugoslavia that have riveted international attention on the Balkans. He then provides insights into decision-making processes in this area that will assist policymakers in their examination of the region's varied and complex issues. Because of increasing pressure for the international community to halt the senseless killing and suffering that currently afflict Bosnia-Hercegovina, key questions are identified that must be addressed before any decision is made to commit U.S. military forces to this ongoing conflict. Finally, a brief assessment is offered of potential policy options that might be applied to the current civil war. The author concludes that each potential option is flawed; each has considerable drawbacks, risks, and costs. Despite these flaws, U.S. political leaders may feel compelled to exercise one of these alternatives. It is imperative,			
20. DISTRIBUTION / AVAILABILITY OF ABSTRACT <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> UNCLASSIFIED/UNLIMITED <input type="checkbox"/> SAME AS RPT. <input type="checkbox"/> DTIC USERS		21. ABSTRACT SECURITY CLASSIFICATION Unclassified	
22a. NAME OF RESPONSIBLE INDIVIDUAL Marianne P. Cowling		22b. TELEPHONE (Include Area Code) (717) 245-4133	22c. OFFICE SYMBOL AWCI

UNCLASSIFIED

19. ABSTRACT (Continued)

therefore, that policymakers understand the limits and potential consequences of such an option.

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# INSIGHTS INTO THE BALKAN ENIGMA

Lieutenant Colonel William T. Johnsen

January 27, 1993

Accession For	
NTIS	CRA&I <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
DTIC	TAB <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Unannounced	<input type="checkbox"/>
Justification _____	
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Distribution /	
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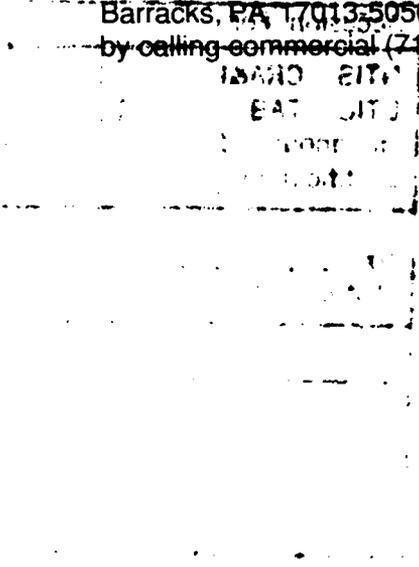
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The author expresses his gratitude to Dr. Thomas-Durell Young and Colonel William Barry for their insightful comments on previous drafts of this paper. Any contribution this paper may make is a result of their efforts. The author, alone, remains responsible for the opinions expressed.

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Comments pertaining to this report are invited and should be forwarded to: Director, Strategic Studies Institute, U.S. Army War College, Carlisle Barracks, PA 17013-5050. Comments may also be conveyed to the author by calling commercial (717) 245-3911 or DSN 242-3911.



## FOREWORD

The ethnic and religious conflicts that constitute the ongoing civil war in the former Yugoslavia have riveted international attention on the Balkans. Pressure is building for the international community, but especially the United States, to halt the senseless killing and suffering that currently afflict Bosnia-Herzegovina.

But glib appraisals and calls to action are not enough. A deeper understanding of the impediments to peace in the region is required. Viable alternatives must be formulated, assessed, and implemented. While many alternatives are currently being touted in the media, few of these options have been assessed for their feasibility, suitability, or efficacy. Arriving at solutions that meet these criteria will prove to be no easy task, for peace has largely eluded this region for over two millennia and cannot be wished into being.

This essay has a threefold purpose: to provide insights into decision-making thought processes in the Balkans that will assist analysts in their examination of the issues; to raise key questions that must be answered before a U.S. decision is made to commit forces; and to offer a brief assessment of potential policy options that might be applied to the ongoing civil war in Yugoslavia.

This essay has been extracted from a much longer study of the historical roots of conflict in the Balkans (*Deciphering the Balkan Enigma: Using History to Inform Policy*, Strategic Studies Institute, forthcoming). The supporting rationale for many of the conclusions, assessments, and judgements contained in this essay may be found in that study. Because of the importance of the topic and the time sensitivity of options under consideration, this essay has been published as an SSI Special Report. Those readers desiring a copy of the more detailed study should contact the Editor, Strategic Studies Institute, or the author.



JOHN W. MOUNTCASTLE  
Colonel, U.S. Army  
Director, Strategic Studies Institute

## BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH OF THE AUTHOR

WILLIAM T. JOHNSEN is a Strategic Research Analyst at the Strategic Studies Institute. Commissioned in the Infantry, Lieutenant Colonel Johnsen has served in a variety of troop leading, command and staff assignments in the 25th Infantry Division and 7th Infantry Division (Light). He has also served as Assistant Professor of History at the U.S. Military Academy, and most recently as Arms Control Analyst in the Supreme Headquarters Allied Powers Europe (SHAPE). LTC Johnsen holds a B.S. degree from the U. S. Military Academy and a M.A. and Ph.D. in history from Duke University.

# KEY JUDGEMENTS

## Insights to Assist Decision-Making.

- The past is the *basis* for present thoughts and deeds in Balkan and *defines* the future.
- Cultural cleavage within the Balkans and between Balkan and U.S. leaders is wider than many understand.
  - Occidental vs. Oriental thought processes.
  - Importance of religious and ethnic identity and attendant animosities.
  - Violence is an accepted agent of change.
- Existing political institutions in the Balkans are not likely to contribute to long-term solutions.
- The United States will not be able to take half measures. Regardless of the level of commitment, policymakers must understand that in the eyes of the participants, at least, the United States will be committed. The United States should not, therefore, start down the path of commitment unless it is willing to complete the journey.

## Key Questions to be Resolved Prior to Commitment of U.S. Forces.

- What are U.S. political objectives ("stopping the killing is insufficient")? What is the desired end state?
- What are the appropriate military ends, ways, and means to achieve the political objectives?
- How long and to what extent is the United States willing to commit forces to the region?

- If air power is not sufficient, what are the next logical steps? Is the United States willing to take them?

### **Long-Term Solutions.**

- If nations in the Balkans are to resolve their many conflicts, they will have to make a fundamental break from their past in order of magnitude comparable to those of post-World War II Germany and Japan.
- Must create stable political institutions that reduce ethnic tensions.
- Will require considerable expenditure of political, economic, and military capital—can or will the United States spend it?
- Commitment in terms of decades, perhaps generations.

### **Short-Term Options.**

- There are no easy options. All are flawed; each has drawbacks, risks, and costs.
- The United States cannot abstain from participation in resolving the crisis.
- The conflict in Bosnia-Herzegovina is a human tragedy. But an expansion of the conflict could be a strategic disaster. A primary objective must be to prevent the conflict from spilling over into Macedonia, Kosovo, or beyond the borders of the former Yugoslavia.
- Partition and mass exchange of populations are not acceptable solutions.
- Lifting the arms embargo is not likely to produce an acceptable solution.
- Physical containment of the conflict in Yugoslavia is not likely, except at unacceptable costs.

- Participation in peacekeeping operations is possible, but problematic.
  - Enforcing U.N. resolutions means choosing sides in the conflict.
  - To exercise leadership within the U.N. coalition, the United States may have to contribute substantially.
- Participation in peace-enforcement operations:
  - The United States must realize that a decision to participate requires an *a priori* choice of sides.
  - Enforcement of a “no-fly” zone has little practical value and will likely stiffen Serb resolve.
  - U.S. forces might have to undertake operations against not only Serbs, but also Croats and Bosnians if they refuse to comply with U.N. directives.
  - Peace-enforcement holds the potential to expand the ongoing conflict.
  - Establishment and maintenance of safe havens present the United States with indeterminate commitments and, therefore, are unacceptable.

# INSIGHTS INTO THE BALKAN ENIGMA

All that is required for evil to flourish is that good men do nothing.

—Edmund Burke

The intent of this essay is not to argue for, or against, military intervention in the Balkans. Rather, the purpose is threefold: to provide insights into decision-making thought processes in the Balkans that will assist analysts in their examination of issues in the region; to raise key questions that must be answered before a U.S. decision is made to commit forces to the region; and, to offer a brief assessment of potential policy options that might be applied to the ongoing civil war in Yugoslavia.

## INSIGHTS TO ASSIST INFORMED DECISION-MAKING

In assessing conditions in the Balkans, analysts must think in a broad context that weaves the variegated strands of the Balkans into a coherent tapestry. They must identify, examine, and connect an array of disparate and incredibly complex individual issues (e.g., language, religion, ethnic origin, and culture) in a manner that produces an accurate and coherent articulation of the problems. Without such an understanding, policymakers may not fully comprehend the consequences of their decisions.

*In the Balkans, the past—no matter how distant it may appear to Americans—is inextricably entwined with the present and extends into the future. Analysts must understand this history, and the local perceptions that enshroud it. The past is not the collective record of the region, but the fragmented history of competing religious groups, ethnic tribes, and political factions, each of which bears an historical grudge or claim against one or more groups. To deny such rancor as anachronistic or as irrational demands simply because it does not fit our cultural thought process is to underestimate seriously the depths of Balkan conflicts.*

*One should not minimize the depths of religious animosity in the Balkans.* This statement is more than a truism. Westerners must comprehend the importance of "identity" to the inhabitants of the Balkans and how religion contributes to ethnic and national identity. Croats and Slovenes are Roman Catholic and Serbs are Orthodox; they have been in conflict since the "Great Schism" of 1054 and show no sign of compromising. Equally important, both groups consider Bosnian and ethnic Albanian Muslims as apostate Serbs (or Croats) who expediently converted to Islam to improve their economic lot under the Ottoman Empire and should be returned to the fold—by force, if necessary.<sup>1</sup> The religious overtones of the ongoing civil war in the former Yugoslavia have brought Europe to the brink of its first religious-defined war since the Thirty Years War ended in 1648 and should underscore the importance of this issue.

*The patchwork quilt of ethnic groups in the Balkans complicates conflict resolution more than many understand.* (See Figure 1.) Ethnic animosities have developed over centuries and are deeply ingrained as evidenced by the modern Croatian fighter in Mostar, Bosnia-Herzegovina who declared, "Don't forget, this was all part of Croatia in 1101...Muslims and Serbs took it away from us."<sup>2</sup> Or, the Serb irregular fresh from "cleansing" who, when asked, "What happened here yesterday?" replies "Well, in 1389 ...," or "Under the Ottomans," or "Because in 1921 they ...." to justify his actions.<sup>3</sup>

The more recent experience of World War II only added fuel to these historical ethnic fires. Estimates indicate that upwards of 300,000 Serbs may have been forcibly converted to Catholicism, and Jozo Tomasevich notes that 350,000 Serbs may have perished in Croatian cleansing campaigns.<sup>4</sup> Precise numbers of Croatian casualties at Serbian hands are difficult to determine, but they would have been considerable. One example is illuminating. At the end of the war, approximately 100,000 supporters of the *Ustaši* regime surrendered to British authorities. Per established procedures, the British returned the Croats to Yugoslav control, and over

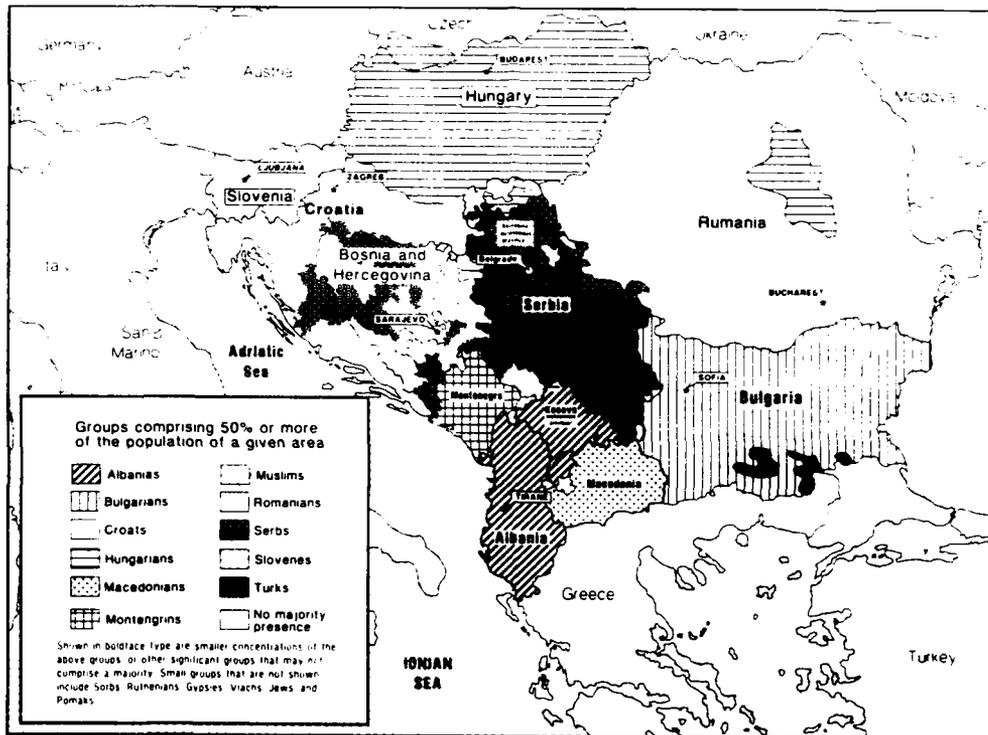


Figure 1.

the course of roughly six weeks, between 40,000-100,000 (depending upon the estimate) perished.<sup>5</sup>

To the people of the Balkans who lived through this era or to the current generation who heard, in vivid detail, grim horror stories from parents or grandparents, these activities are not history, but life as it exists in the Hobbesian sense—solitary, poor, nasty, brutish, and short.<sup>6</sup> Moreover, many of these people have a face to put on this misery. A face that belongs to the Croat, Serb, Muslim, Albanian, or Macedonian who participated in or who is perceived as responsible for the crimes of World War II.<sup>7</sup>

Short-term expedients may only worsen conditions, and an “us versus them” situation offers little room for compromise.<sup>8</sup> One must understand that any policy will leave one or more parties dissatisfied, and they will likely blame the United States—no matter how well-intended U.S. policies are.

*Cultural cleavages—whether within the Balkans or between Balkan and U.S. leaders—are wider than many analysts comprehend.* Although impolitic to say, substantial dissimilarities exist between Occidental and Oriental cultures and mind sets. These markedly different civilizations come into contact in the Balkans, particularly in the former Yugoslavia, where religious and ethnic frictions exacerbate the clash of cultures. In addition, American decision makers must understand that in the Balkans—whether at the individual, national, or international level—violence has been, and undoubtedly will continue to be, an accepted, perhaps preferred, vehicle of change for over two millennia.

*Analysts and policymakers should not assume that Balkan politicians follow Western European or American logic.* This is not to imply that Balkan leaders are irrational, but to point out that they may follow an entirely different thought process. What may look irrational to a Western interlocutor, may be absolutely credible in the eyes of a Balkan leader. American decision makers must understand that such dichotomies will occur and, rather than dismissing them out of hand, learn to bridge the gap between Balkan and Western logic.

Occidental analysts must also be careful not to mirror image their own values onto Balkan political leaders. Such an assumption could lead to a fundamental misunderstanding of an interlocutor's negotiating position or room for political maneuver. For example, many Balkan politicians (e.g., Milosevic of Serbia, Mitsotakis of Greece) have painted themselves into a corner because their rhetoric has stirred up a whirlwind of passion from which they are now unable to disengage, let alone control.

*Existing political institutions in the Balkans are not likely to contribute to the peaceful resolution of tensions,* as the political development of the region is but a long history of instability and violence. From the Byzantine Empire through the 1980s, corrupt and repressive governments have been the norm. The region largely lacks the precedent of the peaceful transfer of power. Large segments of the population see democracy as an institution of chaos. Additionally, Balkan politics historically have exerted divergent rather than unifying forces which

endure today as evidenced by the centrifugal forces that shattered Yugoslavia.

*Compromise represents weakness*, particularly to politicians who think only in zero-sum game terms, and where in the past, defeat has frequently meant death. Negotiators must be prepared for difficult and protracted dialogue. Progress will occur only in an incremental and discontinuous manner. Considerable backsliding may occur. Diplomats and leaders, therefore, must display considerable patience and be prepared for a painfully slow process.

### **POTENTIAL LONG-TERM SOLUTIONS**

As George Schultz has pointed out, the basic problem to be overcome in the Balkans "... is learning how to govern over diversity: Ethnic, cultural, religious, linguistic diversity."<sup>9</sup> Under the best of conditions, diversity alone poses significant challenges to finding tolerable solutions. But the history of the region exponentially complicates the ability of leaders to devise acceptable ones.

*Only a fundamental break from the past offers the possibility of a viable solution.* Forging a new path will be difficult, however, for the people of the Balkans hold their history close to their hearts. If long-term solutions are to succeed, a thorough reform of political systems and institutions must occur. Long-term progress will be possible only if governments can instill sufficient confidence in their populations to overcome the profound mistrust and deep animosity that have developed over the centuries. Ethnic and religious minorities will have to be convinced that governments will safeguard their interests. Nationalist and irredentist demands, particularly the long drive for a "Greater Serbia," will have to be contained.

To effect this break from the past, *the United States and Europe will have to invest considerable economic, political, intellectual, and military capital to support the development of democratic institutions within the region.* Given the past history of the Balkans and the current ethnic, religious, and cultural divisions, this course will prove daunting. The level of political.

economic, and intellectual commitment needed cannot be forecast with accuracy.

The degree of military commitment required could vary considerably. In the best case, if current peacemaking/peace-keeping initiatives succeed, no substantial deployment of U.S. forces would be necessary. In the worst case, that of peace-enforcement operations against recalcitrant Serbian and Croatian forces, significant forces likely would be required. The level of forces and the duration of employment of those units could vary considerably, depending on the degree of force applied and resistance encountered. That said, even if peace-enforcement operations succeeded quickly, a large contingent of U.S. military forces likely would be required to sustain the peace. And, as other peacekeeping examples (Northern Ireland and Cyprus) indicate, such an obligation could be open-ended.

*Substantial time—perhaps decades or generations—will be necessary to build and sustain the political ethos needed for a lasting solution in the Balkans. Problems that developed over centuries cannot be transformed over night. This is not to argue that long-term solutions are not possible or that U.S. forces would be required for the entire period, but only to point out the difficulties involved. The post-World War II Franco-German<sup>10</sup> model offers hope, but even that example indicates the time, effort, and leadership dedicated to good will that will be required.*

Should American political leaders decide to intervene, *they will have to convince the American public that it is in U.S. national interests to make the amount of investments—intellectual, political, economic, and military—that will be necessary to achieve an acceptable solution in the Balkans. This effort will prove to be no easy task if the United States becomes increasingly preoccupied with its own difficulties. Without such a level and duration of commitment, however, acceptable solutions may not be found.*

## ASSESSING SHORT-TERM POLICY OPTIONS

In the near term, pressures will build for the United States to do something to stop the suffering and killing in the former Yugoslavia. An array of options are available for policymakers to consider.

### Option 1: U.S. Abstention.

Leaving matters solely in European and U.N. hands is not in U.S. interests. Ignoring the situation will not make it go away. Should the conflict continue, even if only in Bosnia-Herzegovina, public opinion (as in the case of Somalia) may eventually pressure the United States to take action. Better to be involved earlier in the process when a variety of alternatives are available, than later when many options might be foreclosed. Furthermore, if an explosion of violence eventually forces the United States to intervene, conditions will likely be far worse than at present.

While credit must be given to European and U.N. attempts to resolve the crisis, those efforts have failed thus far and show little likelihood for success. If the crisis is not resolved quickly, considerable potential exists for fighting to spread beyond Bosnia-Herzegovina to Macedonia or Kosovo. Should either of those possibilities come to pass, the war is likely to expand beyond the former Yugoslavia. *Particularly disturbing is the possibility that Greece and Turkey could enter the conflict on opposing sides, with the potential for unravelling the NATO Alliance.* Nor should one rule out the possibility of a resurgent, nationalist, and Pan-Slavic Russia renewing old ties with Serbia,<sup>11</sup> a specter that would send shivers throughout Europe and North America.

U.S. refusal to participate in the resolution of the Yugoslav crisis sends the wrong signal to the rest of the world. What would such a move say of U.S. support of European integration, a European Defense Pillar, or the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe? Could the United States expect allies, particularly Muslim allies, to support the "no-fly" regimes in Iraq when the United States is unwilling to underwrite similar action in the Balkans? Allowing the violence

to continue also sets a poor precedent for other ongoing (e.g., Armenia-Azerbaijan, Georgia-South Ossetia, or Moldova) or potential (e.g., Ukraine-Russia) ethnic conflicts in Europe. If the United States wishes to prevent future occurrences of ethnic violence, now may be the time to send an appropriate message.

### **Option 2: Partition and Mass Exchange of Populations.**

A second option might be to partition the territory of the former Yugoslavia and conduct a mass exchange of populations. Indeed, the current U.N. peace plan for establishing ethnic enclaves in Bosnia could be considered a variation of such a plan.<sup>12</sup> *Such a proposition is a chimera fraught with difficulties.* Given that ethnic identity is based, in part, on territorial aspirations, boundary lines that satisfy all parties will be nearly impossible to draw, are likely to be drawn arbitrarily, and may simply hone animosities.

*The human costs of a population exchange would be staggering,* as the historical examples of the massive Greco-Turkish exchanges in the post-World War I era, the population shifts that accompanied the division of India and Pakistan, and the 45 years of war that have followed the partition of Palestine clearly indicate. And should one or more groups refuse to move into the new zones, would populations be forcibly exchanged?

Such an option once again sets a very bad precedent that could be viewed as little more than aiding and abetting the Serbian "ethnic cleansing" campaign. Other ethnic groups in Europe could use such a solution as a pretext to initiate conflict in hopes of obtaining a similar solution.

### **Option 3: Lift the Arms Embargo.**

Some pundits argue that the best option available would be to lift the arms embargo and allow the Bosnians to equip themselves for a "fair" fight.<sup>13</sup> *While understandable, perhaps, such an option may be wrongheaded,* and will neither solve the underlying political conflict nor bring the civil war to military resolution for several reasons. First, unless the Bosnians

receive arms to match their opponents' (e.g., tanks, artillery, and helicopters), the fight would hardly be fair. Second, an even match might only increase casualties and lead to a stalemate that would prolong the conflict and its attendant suffering. Third, the West would have to assume at least partial responsibility for any atrocities that would likely occur as a result of the influx of arms. Fourth, should the Bosnians be successful, the Serbs might turn on Kosovo or Macedonia, with all of the consequences previously described.

#### **Option 4: Containment.**

To preclude the conflict from spreading beyond the borders of the former Yugoslavia might require some form of physical containment that would free the combatants to carry the war to its conclusion without the threat of spill over. But as argued below, *whether from a practical or humanitarian perspective, containment cannot work except at an unacceptable level of death and suffering.* This option would require the physical presence of forces around the perimeter of the former Yugoslavia: Italy, Austria, Hungary, Romania, Bulgaria, Greece, and Albania. As current evasions of the U.N. sanctions indicate, it is highly unlikely that all of these nations would tightly enforce the containment perimeter.

Even if all nations agreed to enforce containment, some nations might not have sufficient forces to seal the perimeter. A danger would exist, therefore, that the war could spill beyond the borders of the former Yugoslavia. At the very least, nations along the perimeter could suffer considerable fighting in their borderlands and might bear numerous casualties. Such potential outcomes would undoubtedly influence their decision whether to participate in such an operation.

*Such an option may only escalate the conflict.* Who in Europe or the United States could stand idly by and watch the "ethnic cleansing" of hundreds of thousands or the deaths of countless civilians? How long could the world community remain passive and watch atrocity after atrocity or genocide take place? Such scenes would not contain the conflict, but would undoubtedly widen the war as fellow Muslims or fellow

Slavs or fellow Catholics felt compelled to take action to save their brethren from massacre.

### **Option 5: Join Ongoing Peacemaking and Peacekeeping Efforts.**

The United States could boost its efforts in support of the ongoing peacemaking efforts of Lord Owen and Cyrus Vance. Existing sanctions could be tightened or new provisions with increased teeth could be added. As the strength of current rhetoric indicates, however, such constraints may continue to have little or no effect on Serbian or Croatian operations in Bosnia. On the other hand, given the historical precedents of the region, *these actions might spur Serbs to exact further retribution against Bosnia or expand the conflict into Kosovo or Macedonia.* Policymakers must be prepared for such an eventuality.

The United States could also exert considerable economic and diplomatic pressure to ensure more complete compliance with U.N. resolutions by nations within the region which may *not be fully supporting the sanctions regime.* This might require the United States to bring pressure on some of its Balkan allies, as well as some of our newly found friends in the region whom we are trying to influence. Such efforts might conflict with other ongoing initiatives in the region, but the importance of ending the conflict in Yugoslavia, before it has a chance to spread, should be the overwhelming priority.

*American participation in the peacekeeping effort is problematic.* First, this option presupposes that all sides in the ongoing conflict will allow the peacekeeping process to continue. Second, it assumes that fighting will not escalate to the point where peacekeeping forces would have to be withdrawn for their own safety. Neither of these assumptions should be taken for granted.

More important, perhaps, is the question of what form the U.S. contribution to peacekeeping operations should take. *American leaders must understand that this may require more than the politically palatable limited use of air power and lead to the commitment of substantial levels of air and ground*

forces. In assessing the level of contribution that the United States is willing to make, several points need to be considered. First, the level of influence within most decision-making bodies is proportional to the amount of participation and the degree of risk assumed. In short, the United States will have to pay the piper if it wants to call the tune, and a substantial U.S. force may be required.

Second, conditions in Yugoslavia will not be resolved quickly and *a long-term commitment of forces will likely be required*. Given existing U.S. commitments, anticipated reductions of military forces and resources, and potential trouble spots around the world (especially Iraq and the Middle East), the United States must carefully balance the levels of forces and the duration of commitment required in the Balkans against anticipated worldwide requirements to ensure that U.S. capabilities are not overstretched.

Third, *once U.S. forces commence peacekeeping duties, principal parties in the conflict will no longer consider the United States an unbiased observer*. Regardless of how evenhanded Americans try to be, the perception (Bosnian or Serb) will be that the United States has chosen sides—against the Serbs.<sup>14</sup> Remembering that perception is reality in the mind of the beholder, the United States must recognize that participation in peacekeeping operations will, therefore, forfeit the U.S. role as an honest broker, and undermine U.S. influence in mediating a peace settlement.

### **Option 6: Peace-Enforcement Operations.**

If peacekeeping fails to halt the killing and suffering in Yugoslavia, the issue immediately arises whether the United States will be willing to participate in peace-enforcement operations. Before reaching a decision to commit U.S. forces to peace-enforcement, one key question must be answered: *What are the U.S. political objectives to be achieved?* Only with clearly articulated answers to this critical question can supporting military objectives be determined and appropriate operational plans developed. Without clear responses to this query, U.S. forces should not be committed.

Because peace-enforcement normally requires action against an identified aggressor, any U.S. participation in peace-enforcement means that the United States will be forced to choose sides in the ongoing conflict (another good reason to have clear political objectives before operations commence). Initially, at least, operations would have to be undertaken against Serb forces (both regular and irregular)<sup>15</sup> who are fighting in Bosnia-Herzegovina. Should Croatian forces currently occupying Bosnian territory refuse to withdraw, operations might have to be carried out against them as well. Thus, *peace-enforcement holds the potential to expand the conflict from a Yugoslavian civil war to a major regional conflict*. This may represent a larger commitment than the United States or its allies are willing to make at this stage.

A number of ways are available to enforce the peace in Yugoslavia. An exhaustive assessment of all options is not possible given the constraints of this essay. The analysis will highlight, therefore, three possible alternatives that fall across the spectrum of options.

**Use of Air Power.** When considering the use of air power as the initial step in peace-enforcement operations, a key question should immediately arise: *What if air power is insufficient to enforce the peace?* Once the United States or a coalition commits air forces to peace-enforcement operations, the Rubicon may have been crossed. If air power fails to yield a satisfactory response quickly enough, or results in escalation of the conflict (i.e., increased killing in Bosnia-Herzegovina or spill over to Kosovo or Macedonia), pressures will build to commit ground forces to enforce the peace. What further steps would the United States and its allies be willing to take? These steps should be assessed before U.S. air forces are committed.

The use of air power for peace-enforcement also raises a host of additional questions. What level of force should be applied? What should be targeted: Serbian irregular or regular forces; tanks, artillery, or units; supply lines, depots, and airfields; government centers (if appropriate ones can be identified<sup>16</sup>) and command and control facilities; or power

grids, fuel supplies, and other dual civil-military use resources? What should be the priority? Should dual use facilities be struck? Answers to these questions, as well as potential second and third order consequences, must be considered before the commitment of U.S. aircraft.

*Use of air power appears to offer the safest, most effective means to enforce the peace. But appearances may belie reality.* For example, many observers, to include then President-elect Clinton, have called for strict enforcement of the U.N. "no-fly" zone over Bosnia.<sup>17</sup> Enforcement of the "no-fly" zone does not appear to present significant challenges, especially since the Serbs do not appear to be significantly violating the zone.<sup>18</sup> But one must ask what such enforcement would accomplish beyond labelling peace-enforcement operations as "anti-Serb." Additionally, tanks and artillery pieces make fine targets only if they can be detected and attacked before they disperse. The mountainous terrain, considerable foliage, and weather conditions in Yugoslavia, combined with the difficulties in locating and destroying SCUD missile launchers during the Gulf War, should provide some pause for the vocal advocates of such an option.

*Air interdiction of supply lines may also work, but may not be as effective as many believe.* Certainly, air power may be able to deal a crushing blow to the mechanized forces of the Serbian Army, but irregular forces will be much more difficult to target and pursue. While the danger of abusing historical analogy is always present, one should not forget that air power has rarely been effective in dealing with lightly armed, highly mobile forces operating in either mountainous terrain or an urban environment. The U.S. experience in Vietnam and the British ordeal in Northern Ireland should prove instructive in this regard.

**Establish and Maintain Safe Havens.** One proposal to enforce the peace is the establishment of safe havens within Bosnia-Herzegovina. These enclaves would be formed around territory where one ethnic group predominates. Because safe havens might temporarily halt or reduce the violence, this option has considerable emotional appeal, but holds little

potential for a long-term solution, and may only aggravate the situation.

*Such a plan simply would reward Serbian aggression and tacitly condone the Serbian policy of "ethnic cleansing."* This option also suffers from all of the problems outlined in Option 2 (Partition and Population Exchange). Furthermore, while safe havens might temporarily halt the violence, they may only sow the seeds of future conflict as one side or another seeks to squeeze an opponent or expand its zone of control. Under foreseeable circumstances, the less numerous and poorly armed Muslims would undoubtedly be the ones squeezed. Such outcomes would do little to relieve the long-term pressures that have been building in the region for intervention on behalf of the Muslims, and run the risk of expanding the conflict.

*The establishment of safe havens would require commitment of ground forces to protect the various zones.* To allow the ethnic groups to defend themselves makes little sense, as violence would likely occur along the line of contact as various parties probed the edges of their zones. Outside, "neutral" forces would have to be physically interposed between the warring parties. Given the size and the number of safe havens under discussion at the peace talks in Geneva, a substantial number of forces would be required.<sup>19</sup>

Because of the size of the forces required to cordon off the safe havens, U.S. ground forces would undoubtedly be required to participate in the peace-enforcement operations. It is unlikely that such a plan could be initiated without the commitment of U.S. ground forces to serve as the critical impetus to motivate others to participate. U.S. involvement also may be required to convince the Serbs and others that the U.N. coalition is intent on enforcing the peace.

*A key question that must be answered before U.S. forces are committed is how long the United States might be willing to sustain the military effort to protect the safe havens?* This option could very well result in a large and open-ended commitment to the region. If long-term resolution of the conflict cannot be reached between the warring parties (and one

seriously doubts that safe havens will provide such a solution), then defenders cannot withdraw without endangering inhabitants of the safe haven. Thus, *American ground forces could become hostages to events and the United States would surrender the initiative to others in the region.*<sup>20</sup>

The potential exists that even the "protected" could come to resent the presence of those sheltering the safe havens. American forces, therefore, run the risk of being caught in the middle, unable to satisfy either side. Nor should one forget that the various parties in the former Yugoslavia are formidably armed.

**Restore the Borders of Bosnia-Hercegovina.** *This option would be a significant undertaking that would undoubtedly require commitment of U.S. forces to air, sea, and ground combat operations.* It is inconceivable that U.N. coalition forces would be committed without substantial participation of U.S. ground troops.

Initial operations would likely be carried out against Serbian forces, either irregulars in Bosnia-Hercegovina or with main elements of the Serbian Army that might come to their aid. Concurrent operations might also have to be conducted against Croatian forces that might refuse to leave Bosnian territory. On the one hand, the Serbs might swiftly fold, the Croats might quickly withdraw, and restoration of Bosnian borders might proceed apace. Conversely, this rosy scenario might not play out.

While U.N. and U.S. forces would likely prevail, the price could be considerable. Given the terrain and the Serbian and Croatian regular and irregular forces available, ground operations would not resemble the U.S. experience in Panama or Somalia. Nor would operations be similar to Operation DESERT STORM, where a clearly delineated battlefield and open terrain allowed the allied coalition to bring overwhelming force to bear to rapidly defeat the enemy.

Neither potential casualties nor resource costs that might be associated with U.S. participation in peace-enforcement operations can be forecast with any accuracy, largely because the extent of a possible U.S. commitment is not known. But.

none of the options outlined above comes without cost. *The key question is how much the United States is willing to pay in terms of political capital, national treasure, and, most importantly, lives of its young men and women?*

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Even if casualties are low, and they might not be, expenditures would be considerable. The current official estimate for the cost of Operation RESTORE HOPE in Somalia, for example, is \$583 million, and this for an operation of less than four months duration.<sup>21</sup> Certainly, peace-enforcement operations in Yugoslavia would be on a much larger scale, against a well-armed and organized opponent, would last much longer, and could prove a considerable drain on a reduced defense budget. In fact, such operations could exert significant influence over the entire budget process.

*An equally important, but rarely asked, question is what are the potential returns for the considerable investments that might be made?* This is not to argue that the United States should not exercise one or another option for humanitarian reasons. However, leaders must make a reasoned policy choice that addresses both solutions to the problem and the resultant effects on U.S. national security and domestic interests. While policymakers should not engage in absolute worst case planning, neither should they indulge in best case scenarios. The gods of fortune may smile upon efforts to halt the killing, but such an assumption should not guide U.S. leaders.

Even should operations initially succeed, allied forces could remain within a sea of hostile populations and irregular fighters. Given the distant and recent history of the region, irregular operations, guerrilla warfare, and terrorism should not be ruled out. This is not an attempt to conjure up ghosts of the past (either the U.S. experience in Vietnam or the Yugoslav Partisan experience during World War II), but merely to point out that conditions may not be as simple and clear-cut as some pundits would lead us to believe.

Finally, even if operations are an overwhelming success, *how long will the United States and its allies be willing to maintain forces in Bosnia to keep the peace?* As the aftermath

of the Gulf War indicates, the U.S.-led coalition is still ensnared by events in the region, and no end of a substantial commitment is in sight. Given the past history of the Balkans, how much time might elapse between the departure of peace-enforcement forces and a resumption of hostilities? One would guess: not much.

## CONCLUSIONS

Should current levels of violence continue or escalate in the former Yugoslavia, pressure will undoubtedly build for the United States to intervene militarily in the crisis. Before deciding whether the United States should become engaged, there are several general points that must be understood. *First*, whether we admit it or not, the United States is already involved. *Second*, there are no easy answers and solutions could be painful. *Third, all short-term options are flawed*: each has drawbacks, costs, and risks that must be weighed against the potential gains. Indeed, short-term options may only exacerbate conditions, delay long-term settlement, and draw the United States further into Balkan conflicts than national leaders originally intended. *Fourth*, there is no agreed script on how these options will play out. One, therefore, must understand the second and third order consequences of their decisions and be prepared to implement alternatives.

Before policymakers appraise likelihood of success for the various alternatives available, they need to consider the following key questions:

- What are the political objectives to be achieved? What is the desired end state of the conflict?
- What are the appropriate military ends, ways, and means to achieve political objectives?
- How long and to what extent is the United States willing to commit forces to the region?
- If air power proves to be insufficient, what are the next logical steps? Is the United States willing to take them?

The reasons for asking these questions are well known, but deserve repeating. If policymakers do not clearly understand their goals and the possible directions their decisions may take them, the United States runs the risk of its policy being controlled by, rather than controlling, events. If not careful, the United States could be incrementally drawn into the miasma of the Balkans with no clear idea of how it got there or how it can get out.

As leaders assess the various options, they must keep in mind that the ongoing human tragedy in Bosnia-Herzegovina is exactly that. Spoken coldly, the magnitude of the human suffering is heart rending, but *the current state of the civil war in the former Yugoslavia is an indirect threat to the vital interests of the United States.*

*Conversely, an expansion of the war into Kosovo, Macedonia, or outside the boundaries of the former Yugoslavia would be a strategic disaster.* The war could engulf the entire Balkan Peninsula or expand, perhaps, into Central Europe via Hungarian minorities in Vojvodina. NATO allies might find themselves drawn into opposing sides of the conflict which could lead to at least the unravelling of NATO's Southern Flank and, perhaps, the collapse of the Alliance. Pan-Slavism could once again stalk the European stage. First priority for policymakers, therefore, must be to ensure that the war does not spread beyond its current confines. While arguably a harsh choice, it is also represents strategic reality.

But U.S. leaders may not, and perhaps should not, be able to look at the options outlined above from the cold detachment of harsh strategic realities. The leadership role of the United States has been built not only on its political, economic, and military power, but on American moral values. As internal and external pressures build for the United States to exercise its leadership role, American policymakers will have to factor this critical moral imperative into their strategic decision-making calculus.

## ENDNOTES

1. See Roger Thurow and Tony Horwitz. "History's Lessons." *The Wall Street Journal*. October 7, 1992. p. A1ff.

2. *Ibid.* Nor is this an isolated incident. As Anna Husarska has noted, journalists in Yugoslavia cannot get a direct answer to any question without some form of historical background being interjected into the answer. "Everything has a historical dimension, explanation, or excuse, and it is a very complicated history indeed." Anna Husarska. "No End of Trouble in the Balkans," *The Washington Post*, Book World, November 1, 1992, p. A5.

3. Husarska. "No End to Trouble in the Balkans."

4. Tomasevich notes that some Serbs claim between 500-700,000 Serbs perished at Croatian hands. His estimates are more dispassionate. Jozo Tomasevich, "Yugoslavia During the Second World War," in Wayne S. Vucinich, ed., *Contemporary Yugoslavia*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1969, pp. 78-79.

5. Under the terms of the post-war agreements, all prisoners were to be returned to their home nation or the nation they had fought against. Information taken from *ibid.*, pp. 112-113 and Barbara Jelavich, *History of the Balkans*, Volume II: *Twentieth Century*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983, p. 272.

6. Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan*, Gateway ed., Los Angeles: Henry Regnery, 1956, p. 113.

7. As Vojo Kupresanin, a Serb leader in Banja Luka noted. "World War II was bitter here. ... Serbs were butchered, and many families were left with only one male member. Now these people are the soldiers and carrying guns. Now the chance has arisen for people to take revenge." Chuck Sudetic. "Serbs' Gains in Bosnia Create Chaotic Patchwork." *The New York Times*. August 21, 1992. p. A1.

8. A detailed discussion of the background to and depths of ethnic animosities can be found in William T. Johnsen, *Deciphering the Balkan Enigma: Using History to Inform Policy*. Strategic Studies Institute, forthcoming, chapter 3.

9. George Schultz. "Why Bosnia needs NATO and U.S. forces." *The Washington Times*. January 11, 1993. p. E4.

10. Some might argue that the Franco-German example is *sui generis*. brought about due to the unique conditions of the time: a thoroughly defeated and bankrupt Germany, unparalleled leadership on both sides, and the massive Soviet threat.

11. See, for example, recent rumblings from Russian ultra-nationalists in Russell Watson with Margaret Garrard Warner and John Barry, "Where the World Can Draw the Line," *Newsweek*, January 4, 1993, p. 35, and Gerald Nadler, "Russian Die-Hards Create Mounting Troubles for Yeltsin," *The Washington Times*, January 19, 1993, p. A7. For Yeltsin's recent comments concerning Russian ties to Serbia, see Serge Schemann, "Yeltsin Critical of U.S. Role in Balkans and Iraq," *The New York Times*, January 26, 1993, p. A6, or Fred Hiatt, "Yeltsin: U.S. Likes to 'Dictate,'" *The Washington Post*, January 26, 1993, p. A12.

12. "Bosnia Waits for Clinton," *Newsweek*, January 18, 1993, p. 32.

13. Zalmay Khalilzad, "Arm the Bosnians," *The Washington Post*, December 28, 1992, p. A15.

14. The Bosnians would perceive the United States had intervened to save them and the Serbs would, at least, view such interventions as opposing their interests in the area.

15. The question immediately arises: Which Serbs? The answer is convoluted: Serb irregulars from Serbia, Serb Army forces, ethnic Serbs living in Bosnia-Herzegovina, all of the above? How does one determine which forces to strike? Can the United States or its allies attack targets in Serbia if ethnic Serbs in Bosnia-Herzegovina are the only ones engaged in fighting? The complications are endless.

16. For example, if Serb irregular forces in Bosnia are fighting and the Serbian Army is not, could the United States legitimately bomb government centers in Serbia?

17. Dan Oberdorfer, "U.S. Toughening Policy on Balkans. To Urge 'No Fly Zone' Enforcement," *The Washington Post*, December 13, 1992, p. A1.

18. Richard Cohen, "In Behalf of Bosnia," *The Washington Post*, December 17, 1992, p. A23, and Bruce George, Presentation to the Atlantic Council of the United States, January 19, 1993, p. 8.

19. "Bosnia Waits for Clinton," *Newsweek*, January 18, 1993, p. 32.

20. The British experience in Northern Ireland may prove instructive in this regard.

21. Eric Schmitt, "U.S. Job in Somalia is Growing in Cost," *The New York Times*, January 17, 1993, p. A7 and Elizabeth A. Palmer, "Cost of Kindness Unbudgeted," *The Washington Times*, January 25, 1993, p. A1.

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**Author  
Lieutenant Colonel William T. Johnsen**

**Editor  
Marianne P. Cowling**

\*\*\*\*\*

**Composition  
Daniel B. Barnett**