
A Unified and Multiethnic Bosnian State: Achievable Goal or Impossible Dream?

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In following with the Dayton Accords, the United States, other Western powers, and Russia have supported the goal of a unified Bosnia, established with multiethnic demographics. Yet, that goal, despite its heavy promotion as an important part of a lasting peace, has not been achieved, and some analysts doubt that it will ever be reached. Under the program of "Federation Building" humanitarian assistance organizations and development agencies promoted a similar goal in Bosnia before Dayton for the development of the Muslim and Croat entity. However, to date that program has also failed to achieve its goal of establishing multiethnic demographics throughout the Federation. Although the Federation now receives 85 percent of all humanitarian assistance to Bosnia—formerly 98 percent until late 1997—and military ties between the two ethnic groups continue to grow, Muslims and Croats in most of the entity live in separate societies. The way in which unity and multiethnic demographics will be achieved throughout Bosnia remains unclear. This lack of clarity is most likely due to the failure of policy analysts and policy makers, especially in the United States, to examine enough truly pertinent information concerning the Bosnian society, preventing them from making appropriate assessments of the situation and ultimately from developing appropriate strategies to achieve the overall goal.

Current analyses apparently seek to illustrate that the multiethnic demographic goals of Dayton can or cannot be achieved based upon estimates of the level of relations among the three groups. In order to support views on either side,

strength is given to or taken away from the idea that nationalist fervor and ethnic intolerance is high and ancient animosities have come to the surface. Although these factors have played a great role in the process, too much attention is given to them alone. In reality, the inability of the Bosnian people to hold their state together and move toward a more positive political future has been caused in a larger part by the lack of a strong national identity, the development of a social identity and self-image created through negative comparisons with the West, a respect and fear of government authority, and a high degree of political apathy. These factors find their root in a repressive period of Tito's regime and prevailed throughout the former Yugoslavia. They fostered an environment which nationalists exploited by promoting ethnic intolerance and old hatreds.

The examination of events and attitudes in the former Yugoslavia and Bosnia presented here demonstrates that national identity, social identity and self-image, concern for authority, and political apathy will have the strongest impact on the Bosnian peoples' move toward or away from the concept of a unified and multiethnic state. These factors hold more significance than nationalist fervor and old hatreds. Using a multidisciplinary approach, this essay exposes the situation from the inside and explains how these factors have moved events forward. The objective of this piece is not to draw conclusions on the feasibility of Dayton's goals but rather to ignite new policy assessments.

National Identity in the Former Yugoslavia: Tito's Negligence

After the First World War, the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes was established in Yugoslavia. Serbs saw the new kingdom as a Serbian Empire resulting from the wartime victories of the Serbian Army, and in 1928, the state instituted a centralized government, with a monarchy based upon the already accepted Serbian Karageorgevich dynasty. To some degree, this resulted in a Serbian hegemony in Yugoslavia. The demographics of the government were not multiethnic, and non-Serbs held few positions of power. The king was a Serb, all prime ministers Serb except once in 1928, all ministers of foreign affairs Serb except once in 1919, and all the ministers of the army and navy Serb. Indeed, when Yugoslavia entered the Second World War 161 of the 165 generals were Serbs.¹

When the Kingdom sought to join the Tripartite Pact in 1941, however, the Yugoslav Kingdom Army revolted. This provoked the German attack on Yugoslavia and resulted in the subsequent defeat of the army, which for the most part signaled the end of Serbian hegemony. The Kingdom was occupied and partitioned by Germany, Italy, Hungary, and Bulgaria, and the independent state of Croatia was created. Hitler determined that Bosnia and Herzegovina would be part of Croatia, thus redefining the identities of all inhabitants. At the end of the Second World War, Serbs, organized as Chetniks, and Croats, organized as Ustashe,

clashed in a struggle for power. In the end, Yugoslavia fell completely under the Communists, led by Josip Broz Tito, Secretary-General of the Yugoslav Communist Party, and the issue of ethnic identity was not revisited from 1945 to 1980. Communism was a new ideal in Yugoslavia and was seen as a recipe for solving inter-ethnic and social conflicts. Tito's movement, with its South Slav sympathies, sought to reduce the nationalism of rival Serb and Croat leaders who also disputed power with the Communists during the occupation years. Indeed, Tito was a staunch opponent of the nationalist movements that now hold power. Yet Yugoslavia under Tito was not a single, united nation, but a federation trying to heal the wounds of a terrible war. A breach with the Soviet Union for a short time united Serbs with Croats against an outside danger, but other events resulting from that breach had a devastating negative impact on the people's psyche. Except for the cult of personality Tito had created for himself, a true Yugoslav nationalism or patriotism never developed.

In Tito's Yugoslavia there was a technical or official definition of national identity. This concept of nationality, however, differed greatly from that within Western Europe. In western societies, both citizenship and nationality generally refer to the relation of a person to a particular state. In the multiethnic socialist state, national identity is different from and more than citizenship.² It is not necessarily a question of a person's state or place of residence, but an ethnic identity that a person can either inherit or adopt. Indeed, the category of *narod* ("nation") in Yugoslavia was heavily influenced by Stalin's definition of nation.³ Accordingly to Stalin, a nation is a historically formed and stable community of people which has emerged on the basis of a common language, territory, or economic life, and psychological makeup, the later being manifest in a common shared culture.⁴ These four criteria outlined by Stalin in his nationalities policy were the main guidelines for the Yugoslav federal state's attitude toward its various ethnic communities,⁵ but they were applied flexibly, erratically, and according to practical politics in Yugoslavia. In addition, there was the historical legacy of the Ottoman millet system, which created collective cultural identities based on membership of a religious community.⁶ This legacy was most apparent in Bosnia, where three ethno-religious communities spoke the same language and share the same economic life.

Many Yugoslavs by the 1960s and 1970s sincerely thought that they had put ethnic hatred behind them. Where ethnic difference was stressed, it was repressed. But multiethnic tolerance did not create a national identity. The very machinery used for the repression of ethnic difference served to eliminate any chance for a national identity to develop. That machinery engendered fear among the people of punishment issued by the central government. This fear, especially during the postwar years, greatly affected the people's impressions regarding allegiance to the state, government authority, and civic values.

Very few of the recent commentaries on the former Yugoslavia discuss the period of repression that existed when Tito broke with Stalin. During this period Tito questioned the loyalties of the members of the Communist Party, the Cominformists. The overwhelming majority of Cominformists were Serbs, with the highest proportion from Montenegro.⁷ Most Cominformists in Croatia came from Dalmatia or the Serb minority in the Military Frontier, the stronghold of the partisans during the war. Those suspected as Cominformists included many Yugoslavs who had worked in the Soviet Union and most former partisans. Many of these were probably guilty of little more than indiscretion or were victims of envious colleagues. From 1948 to 1950, about 12,000 men and some women were shipped to Goli Otok, ("Barren Island"), in the northern Adriatic.⁸ It was an uninhabitable marble quarry where prisoners gained release by breaking the will of those who had not yet made a confession and recantation.⁹

To make matters worse during that repressive period, the entire justice system was permeated with abuse and lawlessness. During the reform of the legal system and police in 1951 it was uncovered that different courts rendered completely different sentences for the same violations. Instances were cited of rash deprivation of civil rights by certain agencies. Incredible criminal charges, unjustly pursued, amounted to 40 percent in Serbia and 47 percent in Montenegro.¹⁰ In Bosnia, 110 of the 184 judges had no legal training, while three district court judges had only elementary level education.¹¹

National identity, manifested sometimes through patriotism, is a key factor in an individual's social identification. According to sociologists, an individual employs social identification not only to order and make sense of a complex world but to make sense of oneself. Self-concept is built upon both personal identity, the self as an individual, and on social identity, the self as a member of a group. Group allegiances assist in defining, to oneself and others, an individual's identity in terms of social connections. For the people of the United States and Western Europe, the post-war period was a time for them to gain a stronger sense of national identity. The Yugoslav people did not have that opportunity during that period. Tito's attacks against the Communist Party diminished the national pride stemming from the partisans great victory against the Nazis in the Second World War, and a national identity and sense of national pride had little chance of taking root. Any existing sense of accomplishment and unity among the people following the war was destroyed. It was made worse by the general decrepit state of the justice system. Without some sense of national identity as a Yugoslav, the people lacked a sense of belonging. This is critical, for the sense that citizens have of national identity helps to establish their own identity. A citizen's sense of national identity, sense for maintaining the well-being of the state, and sense of patriotism helps to hold a state together in the time of national emergency and protects the integrity of the state from foreign and domestic threats. Tito's de-

struction of the Cominformists instead left the Yugoslav people with a sense of fear for government authority long after the end of the purge and the period of reform. There was little willingness to challenge the activities of the police when they arrested the Cominformists and little desire to confront them on any other issues. A thorough respect and obedience of authority and a fear for the repercussions that a challenge to authority, real or perceived, might bring became the norm.

Tito's assault on the Cominformists also served to establish a sense of political apathy in the nation. The Cominformists were political activists, whom Tito viewed as a possible challenge to this authority. Few would desire to travel down a path which could lead to a similar response by Tito. The Yugoslav people were satisfied, from this point onward, to follow the authority of Tito and refrain from truly challenging his political concepts or offer viable alternative perspectives. The extent to which those frightful days can be remembered can now be found in the school books among each ethnic group in Bosnia. Croatian history texts say "he lived the easy life and imprisoned all his political opponents."¹² Serbian students are taught that he was "the prison warden of the Serbian people."¹³ The Muslims condemn him for his atheism and for thwarting the establishment of a Bosnian state.¹⁴

According to sociologists, if group affiliation is linked to self-concept, then protection of group identity can be positively correlated to self-esteem. An attack on one's group is an attack on oneself. Protection of the group identity positively reinforces one's self concept. This link precipitates broad social effects. Individuals strive to maintain or enhance their self-esteem; they strive for a positive self-concept. Following the post-war period of repression, there was little positive connotation to being a part of Yugoslavia. The people did not view threats to the country's stability as a threat to their self-esteem and did not feel obligated to protect or maintain anything or at least feel motivated to take strong action in the name of preserving the state.

On Being Yugoslav in Europe

The gravity of the political program to remove the political enemies of Tito was somewhat masked by the fact that Yugoslavia enjoyed one of the finest civil societies in Eastern Europe. The collectivization of land, which had begun in earnest in 1949, was put in reverse, so that the de-collectivization was almost complete in 1953.¹⁵ Peasants in the countryside were not allowed to own large farms or to employ labor outside their families, but they started to get reasonable prices for their goods.¹⁶ As a result, food became plentiful in the cities. The unraveling of plans for central economic control allowed for the introduction of small private businesses.¹⁷ As early as 1950, arguments were made for the creation of self-management in state run companies. At first, Tito opposed this, saying the workers

were imitative, but later he agreed to the concept saying: "But this is Marxist—factories to the workers."¹⁸ Having accepted it, Tito himself advanced the Worker's Council plan that same year.

Tito also allowed Yugoslavs to travel and work abroad. A certain degree of openness developed in the late 1950s allowed for the existence of some opposition journals and the formation of a few philosophical discussion groups such as the Belgrade Circle.¹⁹ A cultural elite also developed growing from a vivid cafe life, art, theater, and cinema. In some way, the people developed an additional level of respect for authority because it provided opportunities.

Social groups or categories belonging to them are associated with positive or negative value connotations. One's social identity may be negative according

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to the evaluations of those groups which contribute to an individual's social identity. The evaluation of one's own group is determined in reference to specific other groups through social comparisons in terms of characteristics and attributes pertaining heavily to values and

characteristics. Comparisons vary negatively between in-group and out-group result in low prestige. Individuals will strive either to improve low group prestige or to leave that group for one of higher prestige. Upon discovering what was available in the West through their travels, Yugoslavs found themselves feeling inferior to the people of the West during the period of Communist rule. Rather than comparing their society to those of other states in the East, against whom they had a much better existence, comparisons were made to the societies of Germany, Switzerland, France, Britain, Canada, and the United States. And, in comparison to the West, Yugoslavs had very little. Through their reasoning, great limitations were placed on the average Yugoslav by Tito's Communist regime. Over the past forty years, it would not be uncommon for a Yugoslav to hold the view that things from Yugoslavia were second-rate and not worthy of recognition when compared to things from the West. Yugoslavs would look to the East to enhance the image of their own society not by positive comparison, but by denigrating those of other Eastern states. This perspective of Yugoslav things persisted through the post-Communist period. There still existed an inferiority complex, which caused the Yugoslav to look West for validation.

These symptoms are often described as being common among many people of the Balkans.²⁰ Historically, the term Balkans includes those areas that were under some form of Turkish rule from during medieval and early modern times.²¹ Turkish domination was often mediated through imposed Greek ecclesiastic and

administrative control.²² These periods of Balkan history were also marked by bureaucratic corruption, clientelism, economic backwardness, and rampant ethnic nationalism and regionalism.²³ Five hundred years of such rule left a lasting legacy, particularly when added to the previous millennium of Byzantine rule or influence possessing many of the same characteristics.²⁴ Today the word Balkan has also been generally associated with the unpleasantness of Europe, especially tribalism and irrational nationalism, ethnic and territorial fragmentation, and a seeming incapacity for responsible self-rule.²⁵

These perceptions of their region have had an impact on the identity of the Yugoslav people. When such negative perceptions are projected upon a group, individuals will strive either to improve low group prestige or to leave that group for one of higher prestige. This attitude characterized the approach of the Yugoslavs to the post-Communist period.

Becoming More European: The Root of the Struggle

One of the most immediate consequences of the revolutions in Eastern Europe of 1989-1990 was the unleashing of aspirations of eighty million Eastern Europeans "to return to Europe."²⁶ Reflecting this popular will, the new Eastern European governments adopted policies that would allow their states join Western European political, economic, and military institutions; the European Union, and NATO.²⁷ The people of Yugoslavia had a natural desire to be part of the larger events sweeping through Eastern Europe. There was an opportunity to become something greater than Eastern European and Yugoslav and get beyond the stark existence perpetuated by the Communists. Here was the opportunity to have the many benefits of Western society, with opportunities for a new lifestyle and the realization of dreams for wealth and luxury for oneself and one's family.

Nationalist Manipulation of the Former Yugoslavia

The destruction of the roots of the post-war national identity, the inculcation of a fear for government authority, and the existence of political apathy all served as critical factors in the manner in which the people of Yugoslavia responded to the nationalist movements of the 1990s. According to the 1990 census, more than a quarter of the Yugoslav population identified themselves as Yugoslavs.²⁸ However, the civic opposition in each republic of the former Yugoslavia could not muster a common defense of civic values against the ethnic nationalism that was pulling the country apart.²⁹

Negative ethnic group prestige may well exacerbate inter-group competition, perhaps leading to conflict based more on the prevailing comparative prestige of the groups involved than on actual issues between the two groups. Negative group prestige may also increase distance between groups, as the group strives

to prove its own value within its uniqueness. Nationalists took advantage of the sociological conditions and the psychological state of the people of the former Yugoslavia to achieve power in the post-Communist state. Through nationalism, they established new identities for the people that would propel their agendas forward. Once divided by ethnicity by the nationalists, republics sought either to leave Yugoslavia through secession in order to connect with the Western Europeans, the group of higher prestige, or to improve their status in Yugoslavia. Greater ties to the West, with the prospect of future prosperity for the state and new wealth, could only be achieved by Croatia and Slovenia through the establishment of greater autonomy for themselves. Without a new agreement, they would, as Franjo Tudjman noted for Croatia, "take an independent path into Europe."³⁰ Under Slobodan Milosevic's plan, Serbia and the rest of Yugoslavia would take a path into Europe under a system in which Belgrade would have increased powers.

In 1990, there emerged two opposing schools of thought concerning provisions of the Constitution of 1974.³¹ Serbia, led by Milosevic, along with Montenegro, espoused the views of the "Eastern" school, calling for a more centralized Yugoslavia with more power in Belgrade and no autonomy for Kosovo and Vojvodina.³² Croatia, led by Tudjman, along with Slovenia, espoused the views of the "Western" school, calling for a loose confederation of independent states.³³ Alija Izetbegovic of Bosnia and Herzegovina, along with Macedonia, tried to bridge these two concepts.³⁴ The Fourteenth Congress of the League of Communists of Yugoslavia ended in chaos when the Croats and Slovenes walked out, causing the disintegration of the Communist Party.³⁵ Leaders of the republics met frequently to discuss the reorganization of Yugoslavia, but no bridge to Eastern and Western concepts could be found.

When the Croats and Slovenes came to view discussions as hopeless, they declared their independence. The death of the Communist Party and the secession of Croatia and Slovenia crushed Milosevic's dream of dominating Yugoslavia. He then fashioned a new objective for a "Greater Serbia" in which the Serb minorities in other republics would be incorporated with generous pieces of territory into a Serbia centered Yugoslavia.³⁶ Milosevic's concepts for Serbian nationalism and a Greater Serbia were passed on to Bosnian Serb nationalist and leader of the Serbian Democratic Party in Bosnia, Radovan Karadzic. As a result, crisis would hit Bosnia.

Crisis Hits the Bosnians

The Yugoslav Constitution of Bosnia and Herzegovina stated that it was the state of equal citizens and nations of Bosnia and Herzegovina: Muslims, Serbs, Croats, and members of other nations and nationalities living in it.³⁷ Bosnia consisted of ethnically mixed local communities where mutual acknowledgment and accep-

tance of differences constituted the dynamics of social life. Coping with cultural differences was part of people's most immediate experience of social life outside the confines of their home, and it was therefore an essential part of their identity.³⁸ Before the war, Bosnia's villages, though some internally homogeneous, co-existed harmoniously in ethnically mixed clusters.³⁹ Cities, such as Sarajevo, were traditionally more diverse.⁴⁰

Religious Identity in Bosnia: The Reality

Religious identity in Bosnia overlapped with ethnic identity or any nationalist identity for all three groups.⁴¹ Muslims adhered to Sunni Islam, Croats to Roman Catholicism, and Serbs to Orthodoxy. Religion is more than a set of beliefs. It is a part of one's cultural identity, whether or not one is a believer.⁴² To Western observers, the labels of Orthodox and Roman Catholic Bosnians refer not to their religion but to their ethnic and religious ties with peoples outside of Bosnia, Serbia and Croatia respectively.⁴³ In fact, the use of the term ethno-religious to describe the identity of all three nationalities has been said to be a more accurate reflection of local understanding of national identity as determined by religious adherence.⁴⁴ In rural areas, the terms for religious identity, Orthodox and Catholic, were used instead of the official terms Croat and Serb.⁴⁵ The notion that Orthodox and Catholic Bosnians belong to the Serb and Croat nation states was accentuated during the exchange of nationalist rhetoric between Serbia and Croatia before and during the war.⁴⁶ The official term Muslim to denote a cultural identity is thus in accordance with local parlance which reflects this overlap between religion and collective cultural identity.⁴⁷

Further, in rural areas of Bosnia, great importance was attached to custom and the way in which it defines a person and the community in which that person is a part.⁴⁸ Traditions and customs defined the village.⁴⁹ The village and its customs as a whole provided an individual with an identity.⁵⁰ There was a denial of the village as a community of separate ethnic groups with different customs and focus instead was on the higher level of a community of villagers sharing the same surroundings.⁵¹ Views and attitudes toward one's neighbors were dependent upon the kind of mixed surroundings and the experiences one had in that environment.⁵²

Nationalist Manipulation Starts in Bosnia

In agreement with Michael Ignatieff in *The Warrior's Honor: Ethnic War and the Modern Conscience*, nationalism is not what Samuel P. Huntington, in *The Clash of Civilizations*, would wish us to see: an eruption of ancient historical rivalries and antagonisms.⁵³ As Ignatieff explains, nationalism is a modern language game, invented to respond to the uprootings of modernity.⁵⁴ It simply meets those challenges to old identities by transforming identity into narcissism.⁵⁵ It is a rhetoric

that takes the facts of difference and turns them into a narrative justifying political self-determination.⁵⁶ Most appropriate for the situation in Bosnia, Ignatieff states, "In the process of providing legitimacy for a political project—the attainment of statehood—it [nationalism] glorifies identity. It turns neighbors into strangers and permeable boundaries of identity into impassable frontiers."⁵⁷

The Bosnians' perspectives about their place in the post-Cold War Europe were not simply transferred from Serbia and Croatia. There was no drive to engage the West. Problems in Bosnia began when both nationalist Serbs and Croats convinced the people that the Muslims would establish a state for themselves giving them little power and status. The nationalists promoted a new, stronger sense of identity without a strong, positive foundation. Self-image, among the members of ethnic groups, was built on negative concepts for the destruction of other ethnic groups. Essentially, nothing of real social value was offered to the people.

When the secessions began in the former Yugoslavia, the unified Bosnian leadership in reality only had two choices: remain part of a smaller Yugoslavia or declare independence themselves.⁵⁸ In the Bosnian Parliament, a vote was held on a "Resolution for Sovereignty" in October 1991. Most Serbs strongly insisted upon an immediate decision to remain in Yugoslavia. Indeed, before the final vote was cast on the Resolution, the president of the Serbian Democratic Party, Radovan Karadzic stood up in Parliament and stated that if the resolution were adopted, "Bosnian Muslims will disappear off the face of the earth."⁵⁹ A Referendum on Independence was held in March 1992, but the Serbian Democratic Party boycotted the vote. Karadzic had already held a "Plebiscite of the Serbian People" with 100 percent approval by the Serbs in 1991. Further, the Serbs had begun organizing themselves into Serbian municipalities. The Serbs under Karadzic, armed by the Yugoslav National Army and paramilitary groups, began their attacks.⁶⁰

Croatian nationalists espoused an agenda to pull part of Herzegovina from Bosnia and annex it to Croatia.⁶¹ The claim was that Croats in Bosnia felt threatened by Izetbegovic's policies which were allegedly directed toward establishing a fundamentalist Muslim state. Izetbegovic, the Bosnian President and a Muslim, sought to ensure that Bosnia remained a multiethnic community, a civil state based on the right of individual citizens with constitutional protections for minorities.⁶² He tried to make the system work. However, Tudjman, Milosevic, the JNA, and Karadzic made this impossible.

Unfortunately, the Bosnians, much as the people of other states of the former Yugoslavia, did not possess a real national identity or a strong "Bosnian identity" that would provide enough of them with a true support and empathy for their neighbors when trouble came. They did not have the experience, the organization, the knowledge, the tradition, or the will to challenge authority espousing views that may have been contrary to their own. The safe way was to remain

cautious and hope for the best. But this strategy failed. In Bosnia, the nationalists, as part of their manipulation in the post Communist period, would once again capitalize on the people's political apathy and fear of government authority. Even worse, they would capture the emotions of the people and drive the people of Bosnia in the wrong direction. Unable to recognize the false signals and the manipulation of fact, the process was made simple. History did

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play a role here, but not because of ancient ethnic struggles. Instead Tito's destruction of national identity and failure to develop civic values set the country on the path to destruction.

Misperceptions and Absence of National Identity

If, according to sociologists, group affiliation is linked to self-concept, it follows that protection of group identity could be positively correlated to self-esteem. An attack on a group is an attack on one's self; protection of the group identity positively reinforces one's self concept. This link precipitates broad social effects. Individuals strive to maintain or enhance their self-esteem; they strive for a positive self-concept. This would fully explain why the people of the former Yugoslavia would fight to defend their religious identities. However, once again in agreement with Ignatieff, religion itself did not trigger deep feelings and an exaggerated defense of it in Bosnia.⁶³ Religion was used to trigger inauthentic religious responses between groups.⁶⁴ Religion allowed for unleashing of a tumult of self-righteousness.⁶⁵ Such convictions on the part of the people proved to be inauthentic, shallow, and fraudulent.⁶⁶ This view differs greatly from that of scholars such as Samuel Huntington in *The Clash of Civilizations* who takes violence in the Balkans as proof that religious differences were "major" and fundamental.⁶⁷

At a certain point people of the various groups saw evidence of the nationalists' observations engendering real difficulties in Bosnia. Under the sociological theory of Attribution, when cause is attributed to behavior, the action is most likely to be seen as reflective of the actor and the actor's disposition; when cause is attributed to the situation, the action is seen to be mediated by contextual factors. Any behavior displayed would simply be explained by a negative cause. Actions or behaviors by opposing groups may well have been benign. However, nationalists would claim the cause for such behavior as something harmful to their respective groups' well-being. Nationalists would further feed this flawed pattern of analysis by attributing behavior to characteristics of the other ethnic groups. The natural tendency for attribution, coupled with the quality of information available on a situation, helped create an almost surreal environment. Many people could readily agree with what the nationalists were saying for "they could see the

truth with their own eyes.” This also explains why television was so important to the nationalists’ efforts. Warren Zimmerman notes in *Origins of a Catastrophe*, Milosevic and Tudjman, primarily through the medium of television, promoted violence provoking nationalism.⁶⁸ The media’s terror campaign established ethnic solidarity on the basis of an enemy to be both hated and feared.⁶⁹

Where Have Nationalist Identities Taken the Bosnians?

The war in Bosnia was an act of self-destruction committed by the Bosnian people. Now many Bosnians have turned inward against themselves. This is the understandable reaction of people placed in such a situation with little tradition or experience or concern for political or civic issues. The entire experience—the evaporation of the Communist regime and the disappearance of the status quo—created a smoke-covered vacuum which the nationalists quickly filled. Once the smoke cleared, the new identity and new values, which the nationalists promised, provided little for positive development among the respective ethnic groups. However, this also places the true hold of the nationalists into question. The situation for many youth and displaced persons provides some evidence and hope that the new nationalist identities did not take hold of all people in Bosnia.

The Lost Generation

For the youth of Bosnia, and elsewhere in the former Yugoslavia, current circumstances have given some the sense of being a lost generation. They lack a sense of direction, possess little power, are disoriented, and lack a real foundation for future plans or action. Their group identities are very weak and they have a low self-image and low prestige. Their evaluations of their respective groups’ status have been greatly impacted by negative statements emanating from the international community. Comparisons between themselves and the West following the war also result in negative perspectives and low self-esteem. In this period of peace, the youth have begun to speak with dark cynicism of the societies that sent them to war. They are no longer concerned with the nationalist message or movement. They are only concerned with the suffering which has befallen their friends.

Literature coming from the former Yugoslavia often tends to present a sense of anger and alienation. Vladimir Jakonovic, a Serbian novelist, explains the war was as much an internal conflict as an external one.⁷⁰ He notes, “It became every man for himself. It distorted and changed every aspect of life until the town you grew up in was no longer recognizable. If I have any fundamental point to make about the war, it is that it was a colossal waste of time.”⁷¹

Displaced People: What Happened to Nationalist Unity?

Displaced persons are those individuals who, as a result of ethnic cleansing or

fighting during the war, were forced to leave their land and property and settle in a town or city controlled by their respective ethnic group usually with very little means of support. The residents of towns or cities in which the displaced persons have arrived, generally have not welcomed them as comrades who have suffered greatly. Rather, from the perspective of the resident, the displaced person represents a threat.

In the Federation, it was recognized as early as 1995 that there was an enduring tension between displaced persons of rural origin residing in urban settings and the original urban dwellers themselves. In several locations, the urban-rural tension rivaled the inter-ethnic tension. East Mostar was seen as a good example of this. City residents, east and west, are perversely united against the perceived scourge of resident displaced persons. Many original inhabitants of the cities describe it as nothing short of reclaiming the cosmopolitan culture of Bosnia against the degradation brought on by villagers. The displaced persons are truly viewed as outsiders.⁷²

The plight of the displaced persons in Republika Srpska contradicts the political foundations of the entity. Displaced persons, Bosnian Serbs, report that efforts are made to discriminate against them in hiring. With an unemployment rate of about 95 percent in Republika Srpska, this been particularly harsh. Discrimination also extends to housing preference, and all other areas vital to the displaced persons' survival in the new town. Most long term residents of towns and cities harbor a bias against displaced persons by which they view all of them as simple country people, with very little to offer for the future well-being of the entity.⁷³

From the perspective of many displaced persons, the residents of their adopted towns and cities have betrayed them. They do not feel that they are outsiders, and they cannot accept that the long time residents do not want to accept them as true victims of the war. They resent the fact that although they were caught in some of the heaviest combat during the war and were victims of ethnic cleansing, residents in towns and cities, will not give them support. Perhaps for them, the nationalists message now means little.

Conclusion

The factors presented in this paper could possibly alter analyses on Bosnia in a variety of ways. For example, with regard to unification, current analyses have caused some to recommend a direct effort to develop a Bosnian national identity following a period of partition. However, as discussed, there is no strong impetus for it among the ethnic groups within the entities. The people of Bosnia were not disposed to develop a strong sense of national identity before the war, and they possess little or no sense of a singular Bosnian national identity now. The nation-

alist established the current national identities, social identities, or self-images. Moreover, for the moment, the people are still reeling from the impact of the nationalist movements that tore their society apart and the war that may have changed them forever. It may help if analysts could examine the Bosnians' sense of social identity and self-image and whether their perspectives can be modified with positive influences that might allow for the eventual acceptance of a new, positive national identity.

With regard to the nationalists, some still wield power out of office and are recognized as government authority. In the role of authority, many people hold a sense of respect and fear for them as they had for authority in the past. The nationalists led the people into war and have not ceased their efforts to promote their agendas. They recognize that they have made great gains and will not retreat now. To date, Dayton's call for the establishment of multiethnic demographics has not truly challenged the nationalists. However, analysts should not simply consider how to remove them. What should be considered is how the degree of respect and fear which the people hold for them can be reduced. The international community could support that process by serving as an alternate authority to the Bosnian people on the issue of establishing a united, multiethnic state. It could counter the nationalists' authority by implementing effective economic and infrastructure development programs and gaining the respect of the Bosnian people. Policy decisions on such efforts must continually be made in tandem with those to support moderate leadings. Yet a dependency on foreign aid should never be allowed to take hold, and strong oversight must exist.

Current democratization programs are not making any real headway. The situation in Bosnia will not eventually change as a result of the will of its people. Just as they could not be counted upon in the past, the people cannot be simply counted upon in the future, including those who may disapprove of the nationalists' agendas, to organize an effective opposition against them. As long as there is relative political apathy, the nationalists will continue to shape the environment and strengthen their relative positions. Analysts should assess whether the people of both entities can be assured that what exists now can be developed into a positive future, whether they can be given a sense that they have a stake in that future, and whether they will accept the ways and means to make a positive difference.

As a result of the overemphasis on the role of the nationalists in creating events in Bosnia, it becomes easy to see how some sense little hope for improvement while others adhere to an uneasy sense that Dayton's goals will be achieved. Yet it is even easier to recognize the significance of the factors and how consideration of them could greatly improve policy assessments on Bosnia. Few to date have provided any real answers on how to proceed. However, the period of relative inaction on this issue must end. New assessments, developed through consid-

eration of the factors presented, will allow policy makers to establish firm, appropriate approaches and commitments of resources for this issue. That will hopefully assist in resolving one of the more troublesome foreign policy issues of our time. 

Notes

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