

Intervention in the Former Yugoslavia. The International Framework.

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Much has already been written about the process that led to the break-up of Yugoslavia and about the armed conflict within its borders. This article, however, is concerned with neither. Rather, it aims at clarifying the dynamics of foreign intervention in a situation that combines civil war with ethnic warfare. In this analysis a central place is reserved not for the Serbs, the Croats or the Bosnians, but for the external players, such as the European Community (later: Union), the United Nations, NATO, the United States and others. What goals did they pursue and what instruments were brought into play to reach them? In an even more general sense this chapter is concerned with intervention by external parties. This phenomenon must give us pause, as it cannot be ruled out, that Western countries will have to confront this challenge rather frequently in the future. It is not the contention of this author that lessons can straightforwardly be learned from recent history. Still, it is useful to be alerted to the many complications that accompany interventions. This can be especially important when armed forces are adapting their military doctrines to the conditions that prevail in the post-Cold-War world. A misdirected doctrine can be the source of endless trouble. If only for this reason, an analysis of the intervention by so many actors in the former Yugoslavia is worth its while.

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Peace Plans and Instruments

Many factors - political, social and economic - have contributed to the disintegration of the former Yugoslavia. The search for a single cause is futile, nor is it appropriate to see the demise of that federal republic as the inevitable fate of an artificial political construction. It suffices here to say that the process was accelerated by the Serbian communists' attempts to preserve their power base and keep Serbia the dominant republic in the Yugoslav federation. To reach these goals they drastically restricted the autonomy of the other units. The Voivodina and Kosovo were forced into submission by these tactics. With regard, however, to Slovenia and Croatia, both instruments were blunted. The leadership of these federal units felt strong enough to reject the Serbian demands. Even in Bosnia-Herzegovina the Muslims and Croats stirred themselves to resist the Serbian claims. At this point the European Community became sufficiently alarmed to take an active interest in Yugoslavia's future. Its political instincts were all in favour of keeping the federation together. It accordingly persuaded the Slovenes and Croats to reconsider their separation. Serbian troops,

already fighting in Slovenia were withdrawn, and the European Community hoped that a political solution might still be found.

Soon these hopes proved illusory. The proposal the European Community put forward aimed at preserving a close cooperation between the several federal parts. The Serbs rejected this proposal and fighting again flared up, directed this time against the Croats. Working now in close cooperation, the European Community and the United Nations succeeded in establishing a cease-fire and in introducing UNPROFOR in a classical peacekeeping role. These developments were duly accompanied by the recognition by the Community of the independence of Slovenia and Croatia. Bosnia proclaimed its independence a few months later, a political act that started a war that was to last almost three and a half years. During this period diplomats were both busy and inventive, but their many peace proposals were all to no avail. As long as no external power was willing to back these proposals with force, every cease-fire and every truce was violated. Lord Carrington, Cyrus Vance, Lord Owen, Stoltenberg, the Contact Group - all laboured in vain. All were handicapped by the reluctance of the organizations they represented to commit themselves more fully. Impasse ensued, as none of the warring parties was strong enough to force a decision. The Bosnian Serbs, energetically assisted by the regular Serbian artillery and air force as well as by irregular Serbian units, proved too weak to win. The Bosnian Muslims proved too strong to lose. In the meantime, the Croats were biding their time, always on the look-out for an opportune time to recoup their losses.

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When the crisis broke, the international community set out to rescue Bosnian unity, but had to concede that the forces frustrating this ideal were too strong to be ignored. Even the Dayton agreement did only rescue some remnants of this ideal. Still, the diplomats negotiating on behalf of the international community did not lack ingenuity. Their problem was not flexibility, but their restricted political mandate, that forbade them to credibly threaten with the use of force. One can even put forward the proposition that, denied the option of the use of force, the international community showed an over-abundance of flexibility. Its instruments to put pressure on the local parties and to help civilians, caught up in the combat zones, were varied indeed. UNPROFOR's tasks in the disputed areas of Croatia were of simple peacekeeping kind. Its personnel was strictly neutral, while the local parties agreed to its presence in a buffer zone. In Bosnia, however, both the tasks of UNPROFOR and the prevailing situation were different. First of all, there was no peace to keep. Second, UNPROFOR's presence was not welcomed by all parties. Even its neutral role was questioned as, according to the logic of ethnic war, bringing humanitarian aid to the civilians of an other ethnic community, was equated to augmenting the stamina of the enemy. Consequently, in Bosnia, UNPROFOR was hard-

ly tolerated by the stronger party. In the end, it was simply brushed aside when this party decided to eliminate the civilians UNPROFOR was supposed to help.

In Bosnia UNPROFOR was certainly not keeping a peace, and it was not enforcing one either. The international community, however, was too divided to redress this unfortunate situation. Another instrument it used to impose its will on the warring parties was the embargo. Several resolutions of the Security Council of the United Nations were relevant in this respect. Resolution 713 of September 1991 prescribed a weapon embargo for the whole of former Yugoslavia, number 757 of May 1992 imposed economic sanctions against Serbia and Montenegro, and number 820 of April 1993 forced a complete embargo on these two political entities. Unlike UNPROFOR, the forces to be used for applying these measures remained at the disposal of NATO and the West European Union. Gradually, the strings of these measures were tightened, while NATO and WEU agreed to pool their resources. A similar gradual escalation characterized the international community's activities in the air. Since October 1992 Operation 'Sky Monitor' kept an eye on military flights over Bosnia (using, for example, Awacs stationed on Hungarian airfields), but it was not until March 1993 that the Security Council agreed to the use of force. Operation 'Deny Flight' resulted from this resolution. It brought moreover the close cooperation between NATO and UNPROFOR, that was missing at sea. However, precisely because of this cooperation - and the resulting dual key mechanism - it was only at the end of February 1993 that aircraft reacted forcefully to Serbian provocations.

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In April 1993 the Security Council reacted to the isolation of several Muslim enclaves in Bosnia by designating them 'safe areas'. By refusing to apply the term 'safe haven', the United Nations and the European Union tried to avoid any resemblance to operation 'Provide Comfort' (in Northern Iraq, on behalf of the Kurds). The Serbs were not slow to see the difference and were not fooled by the introduction in Bosnia of the Rapid Reaction Force (RRF). This formation, consisting of French, British and Dutch troops, was meant to remain part of UNPROFOR. As such it operated under the same rules of engagement, while its mission was kept within the confines of the peacekeeping mandate. On the other hand, the RRF was meant to remind the Serbs of the teeth and claws the international community still had at its disposal. This ambivalence diluted the message. It was, for instance, not clear whether the RRF was meant to stiffen up UNPROFOR, or to look after its evacuation once its position had become untenable. In any case, the Serbs were not impressed. Within a few weeks after the arrival of the RRF in Bosnia, they overran the safe areas of Srebrenica and Zepa. It was only after this embarrassment that the notorious dual key arrangement was changed. Henceforward, it only required coordi-

nation between the military of NATO and UNPROFOR to set the machine of direct action into motion. The special, civilian representative of the Secretary General of the UN was in effect cut out of this arrangement.

This overview shows, first of all, the ambivalence displayed by the international community. The Security Council needed over one hundred resolutions to express its fluctuating opinion. This number bespeaks a tendency to improvise. It leaves the observer with the impression, that the international community was continuously surprised by events. It almost seemed that the international community was confronted in the former Yugoslavia by a crisis for the very first time. Its handling of crisis management techniques certainly did not positively reflect on its learning capacity. Since the Vietnam war, for instance, the problems associated with the gradual escalation of violence are well documented. Yet, the international community reacted to the intransigence of the local parties as if no experience with this technique had ever been collected. Besides, it was not for the first time that democratic countries had to negotiate with rogue states and dictators. Again, they conducted themselves as if catchwords like "Munich" or "Abyssinia" meant nothing to them. Not only was it easy for the Serbs to play one Western country off against another. The speed with which the international community lost cohesion must give us pause.

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The United Nations

From the beginning one of the principal players in the Yugoslav drama has been the United Nations. When the crisis broke in 1991 this organization was still basking in the rosy afterglow of the Gulf War, in which it had played a rather creditable role. Moreover, now that the Cold War had come completely to its end, it looked forward to a period in which the members of the Security Council would work together harmoniously. They were even expected to react resolutely to any future disturbance of the international peace and security. Unfortunately the UN had left one crucial factor out of this scenario. The Gulf War had been the outgrow of a classical international crisis. One state had played the role of aggressor, another one clearly was the victim. The UN had in fact been designed to cope with precisely this situation. The crisis it had to solve in the former Yugoslavia was of a fundamentally different kind. Here the initial situation was one of a state falling apart in several parts, that subsequently started to fight each other.

One of these parts pretended to fight for the preservation of the federal state. To the UN this purpose was endowed with a fundamental legitimacy, even if the methods used were objectionable. The sovereignty of the state was one of the foundations of the UN. It has always been extremely reluctant to break with this principle. No wonder then that it

reacted ambivalently towards the Yugoslav crisis. On the one hand, the UN was quite willing to try a repetition of the active role it had played during the Gulf crisis and war. On the other hand, it realized in its more sober moments that its experiences with disintegrating states (like the Congo in the 1960s) were rather mixed. It is difficult to escape the impression that the UN tried to solve this dilemma by trusting its luck and its talents for improvisation. Improvise it certainly did, but it must be evident from the above that it had seriously underestimated the problems of civil strife and intra-state war. The concepts it used - peacekeeping, peace enforcement, humanitarian aid, safe areas - lacked precision, while their interrelations were not systematically analyzed. Worst of all, while the UN knew that it could only make its influence felt by way of 'subcontractors' (NATO and WEU), it failed to make arrangements for an efficient cooperation. The result of this lapse was the dual key system, that paralysed both the UN and the subcontractors.

The European Union

Hybris also bedeviled the European Community (after the treaty of Maastricht - Union) when it first confronted the Yugoslav crisis. Its contribution to the liberation of Kuwait had not been spectacular. It very much intended to not let another opportunity pass to settle an international crisis. It was determined to let the world know that it was a political factor to be reckoned with. No wonder then that the member states did not regret the restraint of the United States to interfere with the crisis. Soon, however, the EU found out that hybris brings ruin to those who indulge in it. If anything, it learned from the Yugoslav crisis, that it still has a long way to go before it can perform on the international stage. Its members turned out to be divided and unable to agree on a common course. Besides, such a course is not enough in a crisis. Member states will also have to agree on the means with which to implement decisions, and on how these instruments will have to be handled. On all these issues the EU had overestimated its powers. The result was confusion and hesitation, with growing signs of internal irritation. Worse still, these developments jeopardized transatlantic relations. In the end, the United States had to intervene not only to stop the fighting in Bosnia, but also to rescue NATO. For all participants in this drama, there are lessons to be learned. Not the least among these is that one cannot delegate power to a hegemon for more than forty years and not suffer the consequences. The constant exercise of (military) power breeds reflexes that are dulled among powerless and less powerful states. It will take time and practice before the EU can place itself beside the United States in this respect.

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Another problem was the inability of the EU to reconcile two wishes. First, its desire to stabilize the Balkans, put an end to the flow of refu-

gees from this part of Europe, and insure themselves against the backlash of separatism in some of their own backyards. Second, its democratic impulse to assist small powers to exercise their right of self-determination. Inconsistencies also troubled the policies of individual members of the EU. France, for instance, clearly showed a pro-Serbian political bias. Yet in Bosnia it opposed, in the end, the schemes of Belgrade and Pale. An interpretation of these inconsistencies should keep the following in mind. First, West European countries were struck by the Yugoslav crisis at a time when their attention was already occupied by many other pressing concerns. The end of the Cold War had brought in its wake the reunion of the two Germanies. How to cope with this process stood high on their agendas. The same applied to the preparation of the Maastricht meeting and the implementation of the many, often delicate compromises, resulting from this treaty. Besides, for all the attention they paid to the Balkans, West European countries were in no position to ignore developments simultaneously taking place in the Commonwealth of Independent States and the Russian Federation.

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Another problem plaguing West European politicians was their failing grip on their own constituencies. Voters showed a worrisome tendency to behave unpredictably. Foreign policy problems attracted an ever growing public attention, to which not all government leaders knew how to respond gracefully. In their defence it must be said that public opinion did not always excel in consistency. Demanding from their governments to put an end to the fighting was one thing. To accept that the implementation of this policy might result in casualties among West European soldiers was another. The willingness, moreover, to see the Yugoslav crisis as a joint challenge was lacking to a considerable degree. For a common response this crisis simply was not threatening enough. This meant that West European countries were touched by it separately and all had room to react to it in their own way. To Britain, France, Germany, Greece, Italy, etc. the Balkans meant different things. Each country has had its own experiences with this region. Each has its own memories, sentiments, myths and wishes. For Britain and France, for instance, the Serbs eventually came to play the role of 'bad guys'. On the other hand, they considered a strong Serbia an indispensable factor to Balkan stability. Both moreover cherished fond memories of working together with Serbia in two World Wars.

Military Myths

In reacting to the Yugoslav crisis, each West European country was constrained by its past, its constitution, its vulnerability to separatism, even its geographical distance to the region. In the end this lack of cohesion even showed in their attitude towards the UN and the United States. Unable to intervene decisively in the crisis, the EU showed a

tendency to hide behind the UN, complaining at the same time about its many shortcomings. Another way of rejecting responsibility was by stressing the impossibility of military intervention. This was accomplished by telling an uninformed public audience a superficially convincing story. West European countries, all of them busily lowering their defence budgets, could not possibly accomplish what the redoubtable German army had failed to do during the Second World War against the Yugoslav partisans. This message, of course, was hardly relevant. First, it exaggerated the number and quality of the German troops, while belittling their successes. Second, it failed to point out the difference between the highly motivated partisans of World War Two, and the Serbian *soldateska* of the 1990s. This rabble, after all, was unable to defeat in Bosnia the heavily outgunned Muslims. Even with the substantial assistance this *soldateska* received from Belgrade, it failed to win the war. Only a public that, because of its own ambivalence, wanted to be deceived, could swallow stories about Serbian military prowess.

More serious is that some of the professional military took the *soldateska* for the linear heirs of Tito's partisans. From this belief sprung the myth that an intervention by ground troops would inevitably result in a second "Vietnam". It was not only the Somalia example of mission creep that worried the military. On top of this came their fear of an endless war against an elusive enemy, seemingly a master in insurgency warfare. It is hard to tell whether this Vietnam-idea captured the military to the same degree as it did Western public opinion. Still, it is proper to point out that not every internal war necessarily leads to Vietnam-like situations. For this to happen, the internal war must show the characteristics of an ideological or religious struggle between factions of a population belonging, first, to an homogeneous ethnic/cultural entity and, secondly, not challenging the idea of belonging to a single state.

If an outside party intervenes in such a conflict, its military power will not be decisive. What it will have to do is win "the hearts and minds" of the local people. As its military power is formidable, it will, moreover, seldom be challenged by its adversary. Two reasons underlie this decision. First, the adversary knows that, being the weaker party, it is futile to confront directly this external power. Second, he knows that in the end this power will be irrelevant to the outcome of the struggle. This situation makes for the classical guerilla. In such a conflict controlling ground means very little, while control of the local people determines which side loses or wins. This means that, whoever uses force, will have to be careful not to alienate the civilian population. Military violence, to be successfully employed, must discriminate, in other words, between civilians and guerilla fighters. And for this an enormous amount of intelligence is needed. As this is for an outsider

often difficult to collect, a next best solution is to concentrate the civilians in separate areas. Two other bonuses spring from this approach. First, this concentration facilitates access to the hearts and minds of the civilians (at least of their children). Secondly, it isolates the guerilla fighters from the material and personnel assistance, the civilians might otherwise perhaps grant them.

Military Intervention

In this kind of war the party wins that does not kill the most people, but convinces the majority of the population of the legitimacy of its rule, and the correctness of its ideology or religion. This is why making prisoners and treating them relatively well, makes sense in such a conflict. After all, prisoners may be converted, and with them, their families. In a second type of internal war, however, this policy serves no useful purpose. A war between ethnic groups is a pure example of a zero-sum game. In such a conflict killing the enemy is a rational policy, as it is futile to try to convert him. Now the battle is not fought for the hearts and minds of the local people. What is at stake is territory, real estate and other economic resources. Legitimacy is determined by ethnicity. Ideology and religion are irrelevant, and the enemy is only concentrated now to facilitate expulsion or genocide.

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Guerilla tactics are rather inappropriate in this kind of war. A guerilla style of war presupposes, that yielding ground is less important than preserving fighting power and political (ideological/religious) control over the people. In an ethnic war, however, ground is of decisive importance, while leaving people behind, in order to evade a battle, means condemning them to death. In such a conflict even a military weaker party has no choice but to stand up and fight, whatever its chances of success in battle. This means too that such battles will occur regularly and that their outcome will decide the war. In contrast to a guerilla, the military balance consequently is of the utmost importance in ethnic wars. An outside power might decisively influence the outcome of such a war, simply by altering this balance. Whether he does so by sending troops or only weapons, is immaterial to the logic of ethnic war. It also means that in a situation in which one ethnic group enjoys a marked military lead, a decision by outsiders to stay neutral, means helping the stronger party to a probable decisive advantage. Such a decision can only be labelled neutral in a strictly legalistic sense.

Still another kind of internal war occurs when in an ethnically, religiously or ideologically homogeneous country the central state collapses. Provincial strongmen promptly try to fill the void, each one striving to subdue the others. Generally speaking, the armed clashes between the gangs these people command, have more in common with ethnic conflicts than with the first type of internal war. What is at

stake in these clashes is simply power, territory, wealth and women. The local population is bullied into submission and into paying for "protection". Ethnic allegiance, ideology and religion play a minor role in these gang wars.

The legitimacy of warlords is irrelevant in deciding these struggles. This means that outside military intervention can lead to quick and decisive results. Provided such an intervention is followed by substantial economic and humanitarian aid, the outsider will easily earn the gratitude of the population. The chance that such an intervention will degenerate into a Vietnam-like quagmire is small indeed. The inability (or unwillingness) to distinguish between these three types of internal war has led Europe as well as the United States to the mistaken perception of seeing the prospect of another Vietnam behind every intervention with combat troops. Cleverly, the Serbs played upon these fears, with political paralysis in the West as a result. Under these circumstances, the mostly ineffectual activities of UNPROFOR acted as a kind of substitute for military intervention. They were not only meant to bring relief and protection to the civilian population, but also, and perhaps even mainly, to pacify the conscience of Western public opinion.

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The conclusion must be that the Western military, when confronted with internal wars automatically tend to think in terms of counter-insurgency. This reaction condemns them to passivity or ineffectual actions, in which progress is measured by counting the number of cease-fires to which the local parties pledge themselves. Measuring those has the same significance as the body count, practised by American soldiers in Vietnam or the tallying of captured drugs transports by the police. All these devices tell very little about the real state of affairs. This is the more to be regretted, as a military intervention in an ethnic war or in a contest between warlords has little to do with counter-insurgency. Such an intervention is a straightforward conventional undertaking, in which Western military organizations excel and have at present no equals in the world. This conclusion is particularly relevant for the United States, that kept initially aloof from the Yugoslav crisis. This aloofness, however, also sprung from considerations of internal politics. The Clinton administration looked upon the end of the Soviet threat as an opportunity to give priority to economic and social affairs. It turned its attention to the agenda of American society and was, with regard to the Balkans, more than willing to give the European Union a chance to prove itself.

The United States

As long as the Cold War lasted, the United States had kept, for strategic reasons, an eye on Yugoslavia. With the power of the Soviet Union

gone, there were no longer pressing needs for the Americans to take particular notice of this part of the world. Only gradually this aloofness ebbed away. The manifest inability of the UN and the EU to end the crisis contributed to this turn of affairs. Other factors were the anti-Serbian inclination of American public opinion, and the criticism, voiced in Congress, of Clinton's inability to let the United States play a dominant role in world affairs. Worrisome too for Clinton was the threatening disarray of NATO. The relevance of the alliance could be seriously questioned, now that the Cold War had ended. A possibility to stay in business was by finding a new role as a stabilizing force, particularly in Central and Eastern Europe. The allies and the outside world, however, had to be convinced of the viability of this role. To accomplish this the Clinton administration could not ignore the possibilities of the Yugoslav crisis.

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Yet, America's relation to its NATO-allies remained strained. These partners after all, also had their UNPROFOR-commitments to worry about. These commitments made them vulnerable on the ground and sensitive to Serbian provocations or hostage taking. These circumstances meant that the sacred principle of NATO-solidarity was broken. The alliance had always strictly kept to the rule of shared vulnerability. With no American ground forces, however, in the field, it was impossible to live up to this principle. For the first time in the history of NATO, the European members were in a position to blame the United States of taking a free ride. After all, warships and military aircraft do not match in symbolic commitment value the employment of ground forces.

For this reason, talking about escalation sounded a different note for the European allies than it did for the Americans. As long as this difference lasted, it was difficult for the Atlantic partners to coordinate their policies. Another difference that troubled their cooperation was the American tendency to consider the Serbs to be the source of all trouble. The West Europeans (with the exception of the Germans) were inclined to spread the guilt for the crisis and the ensuing miseries more evenly. This difference unavoidably led to recriminations. Paradoxically the very lack of evenhandedness allowed the Americans to bring the war to an end. By blaming the Serbs for all the troubles, the United States were free to stimulate the Croat offensives in the Krajina and Slavonia in the summer of 1995. This approach is perhaps typical for the American style of foreign policy. It combined (not very elegantly in this particular case) elements of "realpolitik" with idealism, and with the rejection of a solution that did not in some way punish the aggressor. This last ingredient was tempered, however, by the indispensability of the Serbs in any peace conference. This factor made itself felt in a double way, as the Belgrade-Serbs were also needed to restrain and represent in Dayton their brethren from Pale.

The Russian Federation

Moscow's policy towards the Yugoslav crisis was mainly influenced by internal considerations, and by its changing expectations about Western economic aid. When the crisis started, the Russian leadership hoped soon to be the receiver of substantial financial assistance. In exchange, it was prepared to steer a pro-Western course, as exemplified by its willingness to stick to the CFE-agreements. As to former Yugoslavia, it followed the lead of Western countries, and supported the votes of the United States, France and Great Britain in the Security Council. As the many threats to use force against the Serbs were not executed, this policy had no negative consequences for Russo-Serbian relations. Still, nationalist and communist circles in Russia interpreted this course as a capitulation to Western interests. As the assistance from Western quarters remained at a disappointingly low level, it was difficult for president Jeltsin to counter these accusations.

Partly to stop this criticism, and partly to put pressure on the West, Jeltsin showed himself henceforth a less docile follower of Western initiatives. Simultaneously, Jeltsin sought to strengthen Russia's relations to the Commonwealth of Independent States. These endeavours were rather successful, while the Chechen troubles did little to warm Russia to the force of separatism in the former Yugoslavia. For their part, Western countries were alarmed by the indiscriminate violence Russia unleashed in the Caucasus. Jeltsin reciprocated by criticising NATO's plan for its eastward expansion. Against this background, the cooperation between Western countries and the Russian federation continued, but in a different key. NATO-countries began to realize that they had overestimated the pressure Jeltsin could exert on the Serbs. On the one hand, they accepted Russia's participation in the Contact Group, as it gave a sop to Jeltsin's need to show his opponents at home that Russia still carried some weight in the international arena. On the other hand, this participation could not stop NATO from finally directing military force against the Serbs in Bosnia. Russia's participation in the peace conference at Dayton and in IFOR must be seen in the same light. The United States welcomed Russia's presence. Moscow was too weak to do much harm, while excluding it might give Jeltsin an excuse to cross NATO, for instance with regard to the implementation of CFE.

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Dayton and After

As the Dayton process shows the UN and EU are still too weak and divided to impose their will on a complex international situation. Of course, this outcome has nothing to do with the capacities of the individual negotiators. These mediators were competent enough. What was troubling them was the fact that they could only speak for a divided council. This experience reminds the West of the lesson that suc-

successful crisis management asks for a centralisation of decision making. On the national level, it may be necessary to analyze critically civil-military relations under conditions of modern crisis management. The cooperation between politicians and the civilian and military bureaucracies was not always what it should have been. It is cold comfort to realize that in Russia too civil-military relations left much to be desired during the "peacekeeping" operation in Chechnia. A more optimistic note can be struck as regards the future contacts between Russia and the West. During the crisis these relations turned rather cool, but never led to serious trouble. The cooperation between Russian troops, UNPROFOR and IFOR on the whole went rather smoothly. It may form the model for the bridge with which to span the gap that undoubtedly will open when NATO expands eastward. The idea of a NATO-Russian brigade, as proposed by the American Secretary of State Mrs Madeleine Albright in February 1997, no doubt was inspired by the experiences with IFOR.

The Dayton agreement was founded on the military realities that were compelled by Croats and, to a lesser degree, Muslim arms. American diplomacy was thus inspired by "realpolitik" and the idea of a balance of power. Dayton and IFOR cannot, on the other hand, obscure the fact that this diplomacy has made itself captive to presidents Tudjman and Milosevic, both of them not the most democratic of statesmen. According to the dictates of "realpolitik", this lack of democracy is of minor importance. Still, it does not fit easily in the mainstream of American foreign policy, with its roots in international idealism. In this respect, it is a significant development that the second Clinton administration has made itself less dependent on Serbia's dictatorial leader. It now supports the democratic opposition in little Yugoslavia, expecting more support for Dayton from a liberal democratic government in Belgrade than from the group around Milosevic.

This change in America's policy is the more important as Serbia potentially still is the dominant state in the region. To invest in its stability and democratic institutions seems to reflect sound judgement. A parallel track towards Croatia seems appropriate. With or without democracy it is doubtful, however, whether Bosnia can be developed into a viable multi-ethnic state. The signs that it can stand on its own feet are not hopeful. Wars between communities, characterized by a high degree of ethnic violence, are not new to central and eastern Europe. In the past, some of these conflicts have been settled by forcing on the participants (in a controlled and disciplined way) a separation along ethnic lines. What worked out well in the past, is not necessarily a recipe for success in the future. Still, such a separation scheme is an alternative worthy of consideration to the present policy of keeping Muslims, Croats and Serbs within the confines of Bosnia. The artificiality of this state is underlined by allowing the Bosnian Serbs and Bosnian Croats to maintain close political ties to their ethnic brethren across the borders.

The Future

The future of Bosnia-Herzegovina once SFOR has left the area is anybody's guess. Another problem that will arise when that time has come is the ability of the EU to take care of the Balkans singlehandedly. Its past record is not very reassuring and it is not at all evident that the Treaty of Amsterdam will be helpful in this respect. Treaties sometimes do make a difference. What is needed most of all, however, is for the EU to learn how to handle military power. Individual European countries with memories of empire, like France and Great Britain, may still have a feel for it. The majority, however, has lost track of this commodity, though the reasons for this may differ from country to country. Anyway, the EU has much to learn in the field of military action. Perhaps, the economic dimension of security is gaining in importance. Still, in Europe's backyard and beyond its frontiers, military force has lost little of its relevance. War here is often a rational choice, and the destruction of civilian lives and property a rationally applied instrument for reaching political goals.

As long as these characteristics of ethnic war are not understood, West European countries will fail to respond effectively to international crises. And even an intellectual grasp of what they are up to may not be enough. France and Great Britain understood the dynamics of ethnic war well enough. In their case, however, cynicism and a short-term perspective led to a refusal to intervene decisively. In order to bring stability to its backyard, the EU will have to avoid both ignorance (growing out of ethnocentrism) and a short sighted time perspective. If it fails to steer clear from these cliffs, it condemns itself to partial irrelevance. In that case, it will no doubt be respected as an economic power. It will also learn that there are limits to what this power can accomplish. In that case, the EU will by choice remain a one-dimensional entity. There is nothing wrong with this, except that it will not be in a position to influence affairs that call for a military response. In those situations it will remain vulnerable, while dependent on outside powers. It is appropriate to remember that power corrupts, but that to be without power when it counts, also leads to corruption.

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