

Former Yugoslavia's problems not easy to solve

There is serious doubt that the fragile tripartite presidency of the State of Bosnia-Herzegovina, that ostensibly represents all three ethnic groups, can withstand even a moderately stiff political breeze.

By Robert B. Adolph Jr.

SARAJEVO, Yugoslavia — The former Yugoslavia must be the most complex political-military conundrum on the planet. The cast of characters is large — Muslim Bosnians, Roman Catholic Croats, and Orthodox Christian Serbs who were until recently engaged in all-out war. Various nations outside the region supported internal factions materially and financially during the fighting. Intervention and monitoring by the United States, North Atlantic Treaty Organization, United Nations, Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe and others, for now, has put an end to the slaughter.

There is no genuine peace here. Many Serbs living in what is known as rump Yugoslavia still desire political union with their brethren in "Republika Srpska." Many ethnic Croats living in Bosnia-Herzegovina would prefer joining with the nation of Croatia. Many Bosnian Muslims feel that the establishment of an independent nation with well-defined and secure borders is their best hope for a peaceful future.

The problem is that for hundreds of years these three groups intermarried, lived together in relative harmony, shared the same language, and made new homes well outside traditional ethnic bounds. In other words, Bosnians, Croats and Serbs, before the war, could be found living throughout the greater region. In many ways this situation is still true. The hate-filled policy of ethnic cleansing was stopped before it could reach its logical conclusion.

As many as 250,000 men, women and children died in the late war. Many more were wounded. Hatred seethes barely beneath the surface of many of those who endured living four years of brutal siege in Sarajevo. The survivors of the well-planned massacre at Srebrenica are unlikely to forget that perhaps as many as 10,000 men, women and children died at the hands of monsters masquerading as human beings.

Some leading intellectuals and local politicians seem to favor the rational solution of moving toward the creation of a true multi-ethnic state from the remains of the war. This was essentially the hope that drove the Dayton Accords. The only difficulty is that many of the people in the region are not acting rationally. Lots of people living here remain angry. Moreover, the sirens song of nationalism has struck with full force in the Balkans.

The situation in Kosovo is an excellent example. The Kosovo Liberation Army is seeking full independence from rump Yugoslavia's central government in Belgrade. Because Kosovo is 92 percent ethnic Albanian, its citizens no doubt feel justified in attempting to break free of what they call "Serbian domination." As spring approaches, the potential for violence in Kosovo escalates. Slovenia and Macedonia are the only new nations that came out of the Balkan conflict relatively unscathed, but the violence could easily spread. "Contact Group" brokered peace deliberations recently held in France will ultimately find that the rump Yugoslav Serbs will be unmoved by any diplomatic induc-

sues. America has no economic or security interests in the former Yugoslavia. Our predominant object appears to be two-fold: to prevent further slaughter and to try and broker a peaceful settlement among the former warring parties. For the time being the killing is over. Settlement is more problematic.

Today, nationalist impulses seem

to rule the Balkans. The American-led Stabilization Force's presence keeps the war dogs at bay only for the moment. The most pressing question now is — how long will the United States and NATO continue placing their soldiers between potentially violent ethnic groups bent on nationalist ambitions? It is a question that has no easy answer. The il-

lusion of peace exists only so long as the stabilization force remains.

Hope is a scarce commodity in Sarajevo these days. I have spoken with dozens of young people here. Many are trying to find a way out of the country. Apparently, the young

have reason to feel this way. Although the U.S.-brokered War Accords were welcomed, there has been little progress toward finding a long-term solution to the problems confronting these people.

Belgrade hangs on like a bulldog to its position in Kosovo. Croats and Bosnians of the Federation smile politely at one another across conference tables that might as well be many miles wide. Ethnic Serbs in "Republika Srpska" dream of unification with Serbian dominated rump Yugoslavia. Croats fantasize about creating a greater Croatia, while Muslim Bosnians try and play catch-up in the race to create and solidify a national identity.

Many of these aspirations are mutually exclusive and potentially at odds with the aspirations of the others. There is only so much land. There are many disagreements. Hatred runs deep in the Balkans. Although a multi-ethnic state may seem a potential panacea for the elite, nationalist ambitions and the fear of ethnic domination will likely prove to be more powerful than reason in the end. In all probability, unless the impulse to nationalism is somehow addressed, war is again likely in the Balkans.

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