

## The Predicament of Peacekeeping in Bosnia

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### Recommended Citation

Varady, Tibor (1995) "The Predicament of Peacekeeping in Bosnia," *Cornell International Law Journal*: Vol. 28: Iss. 3, Article 9.  
Available at: <http://scholarship.law.cornell.edu/cilj/vol28/iss3/9>

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## The Predicament of Peacekeeping in Bosnia

### I. Keeping Peace—and Authority

Thank you for giving me this opportunity to speak. As some earlier speakers did, I would also like to start with semantics about peacekeeping, peacemaking, and peacebuilding. I do not subscribe to the idea of an overarching notion of peacekeeping that would extend even to operations such as the Gulf War. Furthermore, I am fairly certain that peacekeeping units would not be happy with this perception either, because they often have explained their action or inaction in terms of limitations inherent in the concept of peacekeeping. I think that their explanations are entitled to some respect.

I was somewhat puzzled with the sequence of this conference's topics. It began with peacekeeping and then moved towards peacemaking. While logic cannot offer much support to this sequence, it is precisely the order that was attempted in Bosnia-Herzegovina. The international community began to address the conflict first with peacekeeping, hoping that this would later yield peacemaking. It may seem rather easy to demonstrate the logical inconsistency of this progression, but a closer examination of the concepts of peacekeeping and peacemaking reveals that things are not so simple. These concepts are interlocking notions which involve different levels of reality.

The role of peacekeeping, like many other roles in the former Yugoslavia, was a transfunctional one. Peacekeeping forces in Bosnia, and in the former Yugoslavia in general, were always called "peacekeeping," but they were clearly awaited as peacemaking forces. This was not merely wishful thinking on the part of Bosnians or other aggrieved residents of the former Yugoslavia. The problem was how to make peace, and the mission was heralded as a solution to the problem. There was a tremendous pressure to do something to stop the war, the atrocities, and ethnic cleansing, and the United Nations Protection Force (UNPROFOR) was a response to this pressure. Political leaders in various countries explained to their voters that UNPROFOR was the means by which something would finally be

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done, and it was clearly understood that making peace was what UNPROFOR would attempt to do.

When the peacekeepers arrived, it became obvious that their mandate, their equipment, and their logistic support seriously restricted them. Still, they had one asset which seemed to proffer them some chance of success. This asset was their *prestige*, their *authority*. It was the first time in Eastern Europe that such a move was made. The "international community" stepped in, and I think that it was not a completely foolish expectation to believe that the arrival of U.N. troops would keep some ambitions at bay and possibly check aggression.

Bringing into play authority in Bosnia was not a completely new gambit. This has been the general approach towards events in Yugoslavia. When the various Carrington plans were offered, the authority of the European Community (E.C.) stood behind them. This authority lent credibility to the E.C. position taken in the August 27, 1991 Brussels Declaration stating that its members would never accept the politics of *fait accompli*. All of the E.C. plans were accepted by Slovenia, Macedonia, Bosnia-Herzegovina, and Croatia. These plans were all rejected by Serbia and Montenegro with the exception of one which Montenegro accepted and only Serbia rejected.

At that time, the authority behind both the threats and incentives was very sparingly used. Involvement was growing, yet the avoidance of involvement remained a cherished political value. At that time, no economic or other sanction had been mentioned; there were only suggestions that those who accepted the plan would fare better economically. These suggestions had some credibility given the economic stature of the European Community.

In 1991, it was still unthinkable to mention military threat or protection. The E.C.'s very cautious and gradual use of authority actually resulted in a corruption of authority of some magnitude. Prestige was spent just up to the level where it was neither sufficient nor workable. After the first and succeeding plans were rejected, more powerful components of authority were brought into play. Time and again, the European Community, the United Nations, and the United States were ready to pay yesterday's price for a solution, but never the actual cost.

When military threats were finally used, they were followed up very sparingly. First, there were rumors that the Sixth Fleet would come to the Adriatic. Then, there were no-fly zones (which actually functioned as fly-watch zones), the threat of airstrikes, and finally, NATO. While it cannot be proven, I am quite convinced that a threat of economic sanctions in 1991 would have been effective. A clear promise of considerable economic aid might also have yielded a solution. At that time, however, such a solution appeared too radical. Later, sanctions were announced and introduced, but always at a time when they were no match for the stampede of new developments. The international community's and its key institutions' authority was devalued step by step as stronger and stronger

promises and threats were made but were never strong enough to do the job.

NATO was the last fragment of authority brought into play. According to a Bosnian Serb paper of July 1995, NATO was defeated by the Bosnian Serb Army. No matter how absurd this sounds, I think that there is some truth to this assertion. It was, of course, a limited showdown, but this is no excuse. If you compare the results in terms of casualties, NATO lost more people in the confrontation than the Bosnian Serbs lost. As far as material losses are concerned, NATO lost, among other things, several planes (Harriers around Gorazde, another plane in the area of Banja Luka, and two Predator spy-planes), while Bosnian Serbs suffered no equivalent losses from the NATO attacks.

One can hardly contest that NATO has been a clear loser in terms of moral loss and damage to credibility. Not only were none of NATO's aims achieved, but NATO failed to even frustrate or forestall the aims of Karadzic and Mladic. Thus, the Bosnian Serbs' claim that they handed NATO a military defeat is not completely nonsensical. It is well known that NATO committed only a limited force and that it was hindered by a complicated chain of command. But the chain of command, chain of motivation, and deployment of adequate forces are decisive elements in each confrontation. Thus, the question has arisen whether, within the given political environment, NATO is capable of committing adequate forces and whether it is capable of persisting in its efforts with an adequate chain of command.

The erosion of the authority of the international community's principal agents has continued. The irrationality of Milosevic's and Karadzic's actions have often been mentioned, although it can be argued that they behaved quite rationally in pursuing their own obsessions and interests, and in not bowing to the unrealized threats of NATO. After the fall of Srebrenica and Zepa, two safe havens designated by the Security Council, a new term was established in the international media: Srebrenica, Zepa, Gorazde, Sarajevo and Bihac became "so-called safe havens." The next step in this direction may be the conversion of the Security Council into the "so-called Security Council."

Many are questioning whether peacekeeping efforts have actually accomplished anything. There are, of course, comprehensive reports, some of which were mentioned and cited during this conference, but I would like to relate to you some of my personal impressions. From talking to many people from the region, including friends and former students from Sarajevo, I can only say that the signals are contradictory. It has been said that the peacekeepers failed to keep peace because there was no peace to keep and the authority invested was never sufficient to create peace. I agree. Nevertheless, the United Nations did try to mitigate the tragedy and did achieve some positive results, an accomplishment which must not be underestimated.

How much of the success was attributable to UNPROFOR, the United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR), or the International

Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) is difficult to determine and probably not too important to establish. In spite of this limited success, practically all warring factions have a negative picture of U.N. involvement. Recurring accusations emerge in stories about bribery and black-marketeering in which U.N. personnel play the main role. While I cannot confirm these reports, I can confirm that I heard them from many people and from all sides of the conflict.

It is not easy to find neutral observers among the residents of Bosnia. However, some evidence which can be said to come from neutral sources may be cited. During the last several months, I had a chance to speak with some leaders of two very small groups who are in a truly impartial position. In July of last year, I attended a meeting in Geneva of intellectuals from all over the former Yugoslavia, organized by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO). One of the participants was a man who represented the Jewish community from Sarajevo. Some months later, in Budapest, I met the lady president of the Hungarian community of Sarajevo. Jews and Hungarians are both completely outside the ethnic dividing lines and ethnic strife in Bosnia. Sarajevo used to have a sizable Jewish community, originating mostly from Spain. It also had a small Hungarian community from the time of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy, but most Hungarians came to Sarajevo from the ranks of the Hungarian minority in Yugoslavia. Some came to study, while others found jobs or established families. Both communities had several thousand members each, but both have dwindled down to only several hundred members.

Their two stories were quite similar. A central point of agreement was that Sarajevo's inhabitants have been facing severe restrictions imposed by three actors: the Serbian blockade (the cruellest actor), the Bosnian government itself, and UNPROFOR. One question I asked these representatives was whether they wanted to leave Sarajevo (They actually had a choice, since I met one of them in Geneva and the other in Budapest). Both stated that they had no desire to leave.

The president of Sarajevo's Hungarian community, whom I met in December 1994, is a professor of veterinary medicine. Her husband is Moslem and a professor of biochemistry. She said that many things had improved. For example, unlike the year before, her eight-year-old son now attends school without being exposed to a great danger of sniper attacks. At the same time, however, she explained that her son's school, had no windows, even in December. There was no glass to replace them. Wooden or tin windows would not suffice, since they would not let in daylight, and there was no electricity. So they had no windows. She also told me that sitting was very difficult since the chairs only had their metal frames (the wooden part was used for heating). She described these conditions as some sort of improvement, and she attributed it partially to the fact that UNPROFOR made getting to school somewhat safer.

The final point made by both my Jewish and my Hungarian acquaintances was quite striking. They stated that the strongest reason for the

peacekeepers' continued presence was the fact that when there are U.N. peacekeepers present, the press is also there. This presence of the press imposes some restraint on the perpetrators of atrocities.

## II. What Peace To Keep?

The ethnic landscape of the former Yugoslavia is improbably complex. A Serbian political leader (Vuk Draskovic) compared Yugoslavia's ethnic distribution to the design of a leopard skin. Throughout the course of history this ethnic diversity has often been a source of richness, but no less often a source of conflict. In my opinion, the present confrontation is not between Serbs, Croats, Moslem-Slavs, Albanians, Hungarians, and others, but between those who believe in the possibility and the sense of living together and those whose beliefs are built on the assumption that separation is the only solution.

The fact that these two ideas are expressed openly and explicitly is new. In Tito's Yugoslavia, the only legitimate concept was that of "Brotherhood and Unity," and all other alternative concepts were suppressed (and oppressed). This clearly less-than-democratic imposition of "Brotherhood and Unity" did not mean that below the layers of official politics the opposing concept of "unquenchable historic hatred" remained the only reality. As a matter of fact, life in common had become a reality, and the relevance of history had faded. Tragic events of the past gradually lost their significance, and the prospect of living together was very much enhanced by multiculturalism and acceptance of distinct ethnic, religious, and linguistic identities. Having lived there, my impression is that the bulk of the present conglomerate of hatred is new hatred generated by escalation within the last ten years.

This escalation became possible because of a power vacuum in a space which was suddenly left without authority. Disintegrating communist power opened the gates for the disintegration (or at best reorganization). In federal multiethnic states this power vacuum created a heightened level of societal danger. Constraints, those of the communist party and those of civilization as well, were significantly loosened. Political power, economic power, sovereignty, and national identities lost their bases so that everything was up for grabs. At the same time, the end of state-socialism triggered the end of a long-established international order, and the new situation resulted in confusing responses from international institutions. This is the climate in which ethnic separation established itself as an option within Europe and in which ethnic separation is gaining a resigned but growing international recognition.

I would like to object to the option of ethnic separation, not only on moral grounds or on the basis of norms of civilization (which would be too easy), but on practical grounds as well. I am convinced that both ethical and practical considerations lead to the conclusion that the best way to keep peace in Bosnia and in the former Yugoslavia is through the establishment of a multiethnic and multicultural society.

Even though events are moving towards ethnic separation, they have not even reached a half-way point. Recognizing the concept of ethnic separation is not just acquiescence in a status quo, it is an instigation of a continued cruel march towards the gruesome objective. Also, one must not forget that inter-ethnic marriages in Bosnia-Herzegovina constitute more than twenty percent of all marriages.

In reviewing the practical considerations, one would also have to question whether all Serbs or all Croats could live harmoniously in one state, if such a state came into being. I submit that the cultural dissimilarities and differences in mentality between, for example, Krajina Serbs or Bosnian Serbs on the one hand and Vojvodina Serbs on the other hand, are much larger than the differences between the Vojvodina Serbs and the Vojvodina Hungarians, or the Vojvodina Slovaks. One should also ask what message will be sent to the former Soviet Union and to other areas experiencing ethnic tensions if the international community concludes that the only solution to ethnic differences is ethnic purity, ethnic partition and the changing of borders.

Of course, leaders of nationalistic factions base their legitimacy on the concept that living together is impossible, a concept which stems from the claimed existence of an "unquenchable historic hatred." This theory is questionable even in these nationalistic leaders' most immediate environment. General Mladic's wife is a Macedonian. Karadzic's vice president, Koljevic, has a brother who decided to stay in Bosnian-held Sarajevo and share its suffering. One can see from the phonebook of Sarajevo that, judging by their surnames, most telephone subscribers by the name of Karadzic are Moslems. Few people know that in those areas of Sarajevo which were bombarded by Karadzic and Mladic, there is still a sizeable Serbian population. Some of the Serbs hold important positions in the city administration and in the Bosnian Army as well. A delegation of Bosnian Serbs living in the territory held by the Bosnian government visited Belgrade during the Spring of 1995. They were received very warmly by the anti-war Serbian opposition.

This leads me to my next point, which is that there is an anti-war and anti-Milosevic Serbian opposition. There was and still is a peace movement. Several hundred thousand citizens of Serbia refused the draft, refused to join the civil war, and are still subject to criminal punishment. Nationalist leaders claim, of course, that all their ethnic brethren are with them, and this assumption is readily accepted by those international actors who feel that it would be too much trouble to oppose the *realpolitik* of ethnic partition. Note also that in December 1992, Milan Panic ran against Milosevic on a platform of multicultural coexistence. He argued for the recognition of Bosnia and Croatia and against the use of ethnicity as an organizing principle. As a consequence, Panic was labelled as a traitor by the Serbian government-controlled media, but he still received about thirty-five percent of the votes. Moreover, these were predominantly Serbian votes because the Albanians boycotted the election and the

Hungarian minority constitutes less than five percent of the Serbian population (other minorities are even smaller).

Of course, a lot of damage already has been done. Sometimes, reality moves towards negative stereotypes. In recent years, some members of ethnic factions have started acting in exactly the same way in which they were depicted earlier by the rival faction's propaganda. But this is not the whole reality of the former Yugoslavia. All ties have not been broken. There are many examples of bravery reaching beyond ethnic lines, and there are still many people who refuse to judge their neighbors by ethnic criteria. This remaining domain of multiculturalism is what has to be kept, and this is the only foundation on which peace may be built.

#### **A Postscript from September 1995**

After this essay was written in September 1995, the international community discharged a response which cannot be labelled as sparing, or just-less-than-adequate. Bosnian Serb positions were heavily bombarded by NATO. Realities and attitudes have changed since, and chances for a settlement appear to be genuine. I still believe, however, that the price for the creation of such a chance would have been much lower a year or two earlier. A timely investment of adequate authority would have spared thousands of lives and would have prevented immense devastations.

I still also believe that thrift and the desire for speed should not legitimate ethnic partition because peace cannot be reestablished within the former Yugoslavia without giving multiculturalism a chance.

