News/opinion feature

Solutions to Bosnian War are military

An analysis of the United Nations' role in the Bosnian War

by Tony Fabijancic

nder the auspices of a resolution authorizing military force to dis tribute aid to Bosnia-Hercegovina, the latest of numerous peace summits, and most recently the expulsion of Yugoslavia from the General Assembly, the U.N. has attempted a response to the war in Bosnia-Hercegovina. Since Croatia's declaration of independence more than a year ago, the Yugoslav (i.e. Serb) military has captured a quarter of Croatia's territory and two thirds of Bosnia-Hercegovina's, enacted the genocidal policies it accused the Croat government of planning for the Serb minority in that former republic, caused the largest movement of refugees in Europe since the Second World War, and systematically destroyed the cultural heritage of both Croats and Muslims. In effect, the lack of political will on the part of the international community to stop Serb aggression condones a year of savagery unparalleled in Europe since Ante Pavelic's fascist Croat regime (the Ustasha) terrorized Serbs during the Second World War.

There are arguments in favour of this inaction. Atrocities in this war, some say, are neither entirely onesided, nor easy to untangle. It is probable, they point out, that Croat irregulars fighting in Bosnia are armed by a nationalist Franjo Tudiman presidency intent on appropriating as much territory as possible. Rumors of an under the table agreement between Tudjman and his Serb Counterpart, Slobodan Milosevic, to drive out Bosnia's Muslims and split the newly declared country between them, have genocidal policies of Serbs, it is war are hardly innocent. Ultra rightwing militias modelling themselves on the Ustasha have been operating on their own since fighting began a year ago, without the official support of the Tudiman government. The new Ustasha not only fight the Serb enemy, but also the Muslims, with whom they are supposedly allied. But oddities abound in this war, not least of which is the presence in Ustasha camps of Muslim "armija" posts, doctors with identi-

tifying them as Croation, and the war in terms of ethnicity - in other assassination of members of the words, to see it as an ethnic conflict Ustasha by the official Croatian whose sides have similarly valid (or Bosnian army.

now in Bosnia) not because, appar- the relentless and premeditated exently, the Balkans are without strategic interest (something no federal leader will acknowledge publicly) but because no clear distinction between aggressors and victims seemed possible in what was conselves? Moreover, U.N. peace keeping forces have always operated on the basis of neutrality. To change this principle would mean to fundamentally change the parameters of U.N. peace keeping. It would mean empowering peacekeepers and transforming them into potential peacemakers instead. The cost of establishing such a precedence, particularly for an oil-free country somewhere on the fringes of Europe is undoubtedly high, financially and otherwise. There are half circulated for months. And while a dozen other flash points world eye-witness reports and assessments wide that could soon require U.N. by independent organizations like intervention - and for months, per- century. One relatively safe, con-Helsinki Watch have verified the haps years to come. Furthermore, any commitment on the part of naclear that the other parties in this tions with their own internal disputes (Britain and Spain particularly, where the Irish and Basque questions remain open) is too clear a signal for future international meddling.

> But it has become clear, if it was not always, that this war is not one between equals or one of equal responsibility. Despite signs of paranoia, hate, and aggression on all sides, the Serbs have generated the greater part of the violence and whipped things up to their present

fication cards marked "HV", iden- level of intensity. To perceive the invalid) claims - and therefore to The fact that Bosnia has become summarily dismiss it as typical of the Lebanon of the Balkans, a law- ethnic warfare in which hatred is less embroilment of militias trying acted out in equal measures, is to to flush out the Serbs (and some- misread it. Yet, this characterizes times each other), is undeniable and the U.N. response to the conflict. has made it that much more difficult Despite all its diplomatic initiatives for the international community to against Serbia (which have had no assess the conflict and determine a real effect on the fighting itself) the suitable plan of faction. For almost U.N. has soughtreal solutions based a year it refused to embark on a on the principle of neutrality - and mission of mercy (first in Croatia, neutrality means an obfuscation of pansionism of the Serbs.

This is not to deny the tone the war has taken all over Bosnia, but to distinguish between aggression and aggressive reaction, between carefully calculated plans to carve out sidered a civil war, an "internal new territory and attempts to curb matter", to be sorted out by the those plans. The essential nature of warring factions themselves, not by this war has either been misunderan international police force liable stood or, ominously, ignored at the to flounder in a Viet Nam-type quag- crucial level of international inmire. If all parties were equally volvement, namely on the ground responsible for creating this hellish during the operations of U.N. peace maelstrom, how could the world keepers. What limited functions they take sides to end the fighting, par- have been granted (the opening of ticularly when the warring factions the Sarajevo airport, the distribuseemed unwilling to do it them- tion of aid) for people who are shelled daily, massacred while they stand in bread lines, and terrorized every evening as they try to sleep is like saving the wounded long enough so they can witness their own execution. Sanctions, ceasefires, condemnations, and commiserations are poor answers to problems that require immediate action on the ground, in the devastated areas themselves. In other words, some indisputable sign must be given to the Serbs, beyond mere rhetoric and decorative outrage, that barbarism is an unacceptable vehicle of change this late in the 20th structive first step would take the form of air strikes on links between Serbia and Bosnia, roads, bridges, rail lines, thereby preventing troope movements into the attacked areas and cutting off Bosnian-Serb fuel supplies (Serbia produces about one fifth of its own oil, the only source now that sanctions have taken ef-

Warnings before the first rumblings of war that the Serbs envisioned a greater Serbia were discounted as the ravings of Croat nationalists who were equally likely to suppress their own minorities as the Serbs suppressed theirs. These warnings have proven prophetic. There are others. The Albanians in Kosovo will not suffer Serb martial law forever, nor will the Serbs tolerate the slightest provocation. Such a conflict could ultimately dwarf the present one because it would draw in Albania itself, thereby igniting a larger Balkan war that would awaken on all sides a mythologized history of violence deep with religious and cultural overtones, and ultimately trigger a larger conflict, if only ideological, between Mus-

lim states and the west. The war in Bosnia has shifted irrevocably in favour of the Serbs. The end to the fighting depends on The war in Bosnia has shifted irrevocably in favour of the Serbs.

the lengths they are still willing to go in expanding Serbia proper. Having lost the PR war has, if anything, sped up rather than slowed their operations because it has simply reinforced a very old paranoia: that the genocidal barbarians are hammering away at the gates of Serb civility and every possible measure must be taken to stop them. The seriousness of Ustasha threats in southern Croatia to take back territory lost in the Croat war a year ago may also prolong the fighting. In any case, the solutions to this war are military, and any assumptions about the value and success of peace negotiations are naive and damag-

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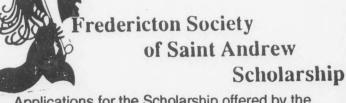
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