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## A Leader Despite Himself? An Analysis of the Statesmanship of Alija Izetbegovic, 1990-2000

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**“A Leader Despite Himself?”**  
**“An Analysis of the Statesmanship of Alija Izetbegović, 1990-2000”**  
**A Thesis Submitted to the Graduate School of the University of Missouri-St. Louis in**  
**partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree**  
**Master of Arts in History with an emphasis in European History**  
**An Institutional Review Board Approved Project (#071211C)**

**May 2009**

**Advisory Committee**

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## **Abstract**

Although much attention and scholarship have been devoted to the 1992-1995 Bosnian War, very little work has been done on one of the key figures of that conflict, Alija Izetbegović. No biography exists of Izetbegović in English, nor is there even a serious journal article which thoughtfully analyzes Izetbegović's statesmanship during the war. There is a great need then for a work which intelligently analyzes Izetbegović's actions during that turbulent time, something I have attempted to do in this thesis. I argue that Alija Izetbegović was a flawed political leader, who because of reasons of temperament and religious belief was unable to successfully confront the many challenges that were presented to him. Yet I also argue that Izetbegović must be judged in light of the remarkably difficult situation he was in, when his choices were often limited and when he faced circumstances which were often beyond his control.

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## Introduction

### An Elusive Figure

Of all the major actors of the Bosnian conflict, Alija Izetbegović was perhaps the one who was – and remains today - the most enigmatic and confusing. We basically know who individuals like Franjo Tuđman, Radovan Karadžić, or Slobodan Milošević were – unscrupulous nationalists whose unpleasant mugs appeared on countless television screens and newspaper front pages, visual incarnations of those Balkan demons who were responsible for the particular hell that Bosnia was during the early 1990s. Izetbegović however, in spite of his being one of the key players in the Bosnian drama because of his role as president of Bosnia, is to most people a totally unknown figure, a mystery.<sup>1</sup> Show a photograph of Milošević to someone, with his sharp crew cut and squat, rather ugly face, or of Karadžić with that wild, crazy mane of hair, and it is likely that instant recognition will occur, but show one of Izetbegović with his sad-faced visage and that quintessential beret on his head, and all you are likely to get is a blank expression. Yet even for those who know of him, it is quite possible that their opinions will be unformed or tentative, if for no other reason than because so much is not known about him.<sup>2</sup>

Not that there are not quite a few people who *do believe* we have a proper understanding of Izetbegović, and they have not hesitated over the years in making their views known. One such category of individuals is Izetbegović’s defenders, those who see him as having been a great Bosnian democrat who valiantly defended his people. Unsurprisingly, many Bosnian Muslims fall into this category, those who consider their fellow Muslim Izetbegović the “father of the

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<sup>1</sup> As the Bosnian Serb columnist Gojko Berić notes, some see Izetbegović as a “Bosnian Ghandi,” others as “an Islamic fundamentalist;” some say that he is “a living legend,” others “a mild form of dictator.” He also writes, “...it seems to me that it is easier to catch an eel with your bare hands at the mouth of the Neretva...than to deal with the political and intellectual profile of Alija Izetbegović.” Gojko Berić, *Letters to the Celestial Serbs*, trans. Saba Risaluddin (London: Saqi Books, 2002), 258, 266.

<sup>2</sup> Consider that although there are at least nine biographies on Milošević, not one exists on Izetbegović in English, and perhaps not even in Bosnian. Jasna Dragovic-Soso, “Why Did Yugoslavia Disintegrate?” in *State Collapse in South-Eastern Europe: New Perspectives on Yugoslavia’s Disintegration*, ed. Leonard J. Cohen and Jasna Dragovic-Soso (West Lafayette, IN: Purdue University Press, 2008), note 79, 35 and Gale Stokes, “From Nation to Minority: Serbs in Croatia and Bosnia at the Outbreak of the Yugoslav Wars,” *Problems of Post-Communism* 52, no. 6 (November/December 2005): note 13, 18.

nation” i.e. an independent Bosnia - an entity which before 1995 had never even existed.<sup>3</sup> Such Muslims, a few of whom this historian has met here in St. Louis, tend to be quite sensitive about his legacy, as though it has been sullied enough by others over the years and they wish for it not to be sullied further.<sup>4</sup> There are also a few Westerners who are admirers of his, perhaps the most prominent of whom is the French *philosophe* Bernard-Henry Levy, who as recently as at a 2006 conference declared that Izetbegović was “a friend” who “embodied... the definition of a warrior... a man who made war because he was obliged to, but without liking it, finding it at the same time disgusting and necessary.”<sup>5</sup>

On the other extreme there are Izetbegović’s critics, who make a number of claims against the man which run from the sensible to the rather extreme. Unlike fanatics who seek to do things like rehabilitate figures like Slobodan Milošević or deny the crimes of individuals like General Ratko Mladić, they are composed of a vocal minority of scholars as well as much of the Serbian (although also to an extent the Bosnian and Croatian) peoples who seek not so much as to totally ignore the responsibility of Serbs (and to a lesser extent the Croats) for all the bad things which happened during the Bosnian conflict as to put more of the onus on *Izetbegović* for what happened – a pox on all of their houses sort of approach which seeks to revise the oft-accepted narrative of the Bosnians simply being victims of Serbian and Croatian aggression. This sort of revisionism has taken different forms by different individuals – I will mention only three here, scholars whose works have a good deal of substance and whose views are fairly representative of

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<sup>3</sup> There were various independent Bosnian kingdoms during the Middle Ages, but none of these states were nations in the contemporary sense. And during the last five hundred years, Bosnia has always been simply one component part of greater states or kingdoms, namely the Ottoman Empire, Austria-Hungary, and Yugoslavia.

<sup>4</sup> “For most of the Bosniacs, Izetbegović is the father of the Bosniac nation. They refer to him in an affectionate way as *dedo*/grandpa, and for many he remains above criticism.” Ante Cuvalo, *Historical Dictionary of Bosnia and Herzegovina* (Lanham, Maryland, Toronto, and Plymouth, UK: The Scarecrow Press, Inc., Second Edition, 2007), 119.

<sup>5</sup> “Salmagundi Conference: War, Evil, the End of History, and America Now,” *Salmagundi*, nos. 158-159 (Spring-Summer 2008), 143. Levy also at some point described Izetbegović as a Bosnian Charles de Gaulle (i.e. the de Gaulle who led the French Resistance during World War II), something Berić says is “panegyric nonsense from a philosopher who had simply ‘fallen in love with Bosnia’ and made friends with Izetbegović.” Gojko Berić, *Letters to the Celestial Serbs*, 261.

some of the common indictments made of Izetbegović and his statesmanship. There is Bat Ye'or, a Jewish/Egyptian expert in the phenomenon of *dhimmitude*- the name for the inferior status which non-Muslims have had under Islamic rule over the centuries up to the present day - and who is much sought after in conservative and neoconservative political circles for her crusading efforts against modern *ihadism* around the world. She sees Izetbegović as a disingenuous Muslim who downplayed the history of ethnic hatreds within Bosnia and who nonchalantly dismissed what she sees as the very legitimate fears that Bosnian Christians had of some kind of reversion to Ottoman rule when he and his Muslim-majority SDA party came to power in 1990, thus setting the stage for violence within the nation. Or there is the political scientist Alan J. Kuperman at the University of Texas-Austin, who sees Izetbegović as an indecisive and weak-willed ruler who was beholden to the hard line Islamic interests within his political party, something that had terrible consequences - not the least of which in Kuperman's mind was Izetbegović's dragging Bosnia into a brutal war which his nation was totally unprepared for and which, even worse, was eminently avoidable. Third, there is the military scholar John Schindler at the naval academy in Portsmouth, Rhode Island who, contra-Kuperman, sees Izetbegović as a cunning Machiavellian who used in public his liberal, European persona as a kind of ruse to distract from his more honestly-held fundamentalist vision, which was to create a radical, Islamic state in Bosnia.

Finally, there is a third group which maintains a more moderate, in-between view of Izetbegović, made up mostly of scholars and some independent thinking Bosnians who unlike the first two groups tend to be more detached and objective in their evaluations of who Izetbegović was, seeing him neither as harmless or as horribly malignant. Again, I will just mention three individuals here. First there is the British scholar Sabrina Ramet, who uses the metaphor of a "pepper-pot" to describe the beliefs of Izetbegović, with her portraying him as a political opportunist who played the good secularist card to Europeans, Americans, and secular Bosnians on one hand but could also appeal to the radical, fundamentalist yearnings of more religious

Bosnian and foreign audiences when needed (although unlike somebody like Schindler she places in her work almost all the responsibility for the bad that happened during the Bosnian war on the Serbs', and to a lesser extent the Croats', shoulders).<sup>6</sup> Or there is the view of the thoughtful British historian of Bosnia, Marko Attila Hoare, who stresses the impact of the war and the lack of help from the West as key factors in radicalizing Izetbegović and in making him take actions that he might not have undertaken under more peaceful circumstances. Finally there is the French scholar of Islam and *jihad* Giles Kepel, who sees Izetbegović as a kind of Islamic dinosaur who tried to impose a limited version of an Islamic state on Bosnia but was largely unsuccessful, simply because most Bosnian Muslims were too modern and such a vision as Izetbegović's was behind the times.<sup>7</sup>

Different opinions, different conclusions then about this elusive figure, a jumble of theses and antitheses that never, to use a crude metaphor, seem to lead in my opinion to a really complete Hegelian synthesis. Indeed, in my reading of the literature about Izetbegović, I was impressed by how limited much of it seemed, how different works either failed to take into account in an eclectic way the interpretations of all of the three groups just mentioned, or appeared to neglect some important aspect of Izetbegović's thought or actions. Many authors, I felt, overlooked some negative aspects of Izetbegović's *Islamic Declaration*, an important essay he wrote in the late 1960s, while a few others over-emphasized these negative aspects; some authors did not give due credence to the limited but legitimate concerns the Bosnian Christians might have had about Izetbegović, while a few others blew up these fears out of proportion; a few authors wrongly in my mind simply saw Izetbegović as being just as bad as Karadžić or

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<sup>6</sup> "To this day there is disagreement as to the nature of Izetbegović's political program; this is, apparently, no coincidence. His incongruous "pepper pot" included appeals to secular values as well as to Islamic values ostensibly incompatible with those same secular values." Sabrina Ramet, *The Three Yugoslavias: State-Building and State-Legitimation, 1918-2005* (Bloomington, IN and Washington D.C.: Indiana University Press and Woodrow Wilson Center Press, 2006), 422-424.

<sup>7</sup> For an example of Kepel's argument (who uses the work of Xavier Bougarel's Ph.D thesis "Islam et politique en Bosnie-Herzégovine: Le parti de l'Action démocratique"), see Giles Kepel, *Jihad: The Trail of Political Islam*, trans. Anthony F. Roberts (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2002), 251-253, 406, note 5.



Milošević during the war, while others were not able to recognize that although Izetbegović did not commit near the crimes that other Yugoslav figures did, he certainly committed his fair share; and so on. In the main, then, I saw the basic problem in the literature as one of proportion, of not getting the right equilibrium that carefully calibrated Izetbegović's guilt and innocence in light of the terribly difficult situation that he and others were facing. Or, to use an anecdote which is again rather crude, there was once an old woman who was told about the lack of virtue of a certain younger neighbor. The old woman responded, "It is not true, but it is true enough." In thinking about what many of the writers said about Izetbegović, I found myself reversing this formulation and saying to myself, "It is true, but it is not true enough."<sup>8</sup>

What I hope to do in the next pages then is address much of what critics, defenders, and those in-between have said about Izetbegović and explain at times why I do not think what they say is true enough, while at the same time trying to recognize their often valid points. Although what follows is a history in the sense that it provides a brief narrative of a person's past life and some of his actions, it is a fairly limited history insofar as I focus only on those aspects of Izetbegović's career that are controversial or that have not received the understanding they deserve. Still, there exists no other study that I know of (in English, anyway) which tries to comprehensively evaluate Izetbegović's statesmanship from when he first began his political career soon after he left prison in 1988 to his resignation of the Bosnian presidency in 2000,<sup>9</sup> so in a sense at least I may be breaking new ground through this endeavor.

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<sup>8</sup> This anecdote comes from the historian John Lukacs, who also often feels compelled in his work to use this reverse formulation. John Lukacs, *The Last European War: September 1939-December 1941* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2001), 240.

<sup>9</sup> Well, there is *Unholy War: Bosnia, Al-Qa'ida, and the Rise of Global Jihad* (St. Paul, MN: Zenith Press, 2007) by John Schindler, a book on the development of Islamic fundamentalism in Bosnia that, while a not a study of Izetbegović's statesmanship *per se*, sees Izetbegović as an integral part of that phenomenon and devotes a good deal of attention to the career and actions of Izetbegović. The problem with this work is that while Schindler makes some original observations (e.g. concerning the Ottoman Empire, which he quite rightly in my mind sees as a very negative entity as far as Bosnian Christians were concerned), his portrayal of Izetbegović lacks perspective and is unduly negative. Izetbegović also features prominently in Steven Burg's and Paul Shoud's *The War in Bosnia-Herzegovina: Ethnic Conflict and International Intervention* (Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe, Inc., 1999), an excellent work, but one in which the phenomenon of Izetbegović is really not analyzed in an in-depth way. There is also a special issue of *Islamic Studies* –

As can be seen from the title “A Leader Despite Himself?”<sup>10</sup> I attempt to also explore one of the most fascinating aspects of the Izetbegović phenomenon, which is how before he decided to embark on his career as a politician in around 1989 at about the age of sixty-five he had literally never exercised any other political office before. Unlike an individual like Slobodan Milošević, who had spent many years climbing up the greasy pole of the Serbian Communist bureaucracy, all of Izetbegović’s political experience had been that of the political dissident - or more precisely that of the religious dissident – working secretly with other devout Muslims like himself in an effort to promote a more fervent Islam than the Yugoslav Communists were willing to allow. Writing religious manifestos and trying to make connections with foreign countries in order to spread his religious vision – that was his life in a nutshell for several decades, about as far away as can be imagined from the typical political life. Izetbegović was jailed twice for these religious activities, in 1946 for three years and in 1983 for just over five years, the second time being after a celebrated Communist show-trial which received much attention throughout Bosnia and made Izetbegović into a kind of martyr. When Izetbegović was released in 1988, he was able to ride on that martyr-status and appeal to those Muslims throughout Bosnia who were looking for a candidate who would represent them without apologies. Yet the difficulty Izetbegović faced at that time was that there was little more to his candidacy *besides* his martyr-status; nothing in this rather contemplative and shy man’s life had prepared him for the grueling demands of statesmanship in the heart of the Balkans, especially when rabid nationalisms were increasingly

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Volume 36, Numbers 2 and 3 (Summer/Autumn 1418/1997) - devoted to Islam in the Balkans, in which different authors write about separate aspects of Izetbegović’s career and thought. Finally, there is a Ph.D thesis by the French scholar Xavier Bougarel “Islam et politique en Bosnie-Herzégovine: Le parti de l’Action démocratique,” which as can be seen by the title is a study of the Party of Democratic Action, the political party Izetbegović helped to found. Unfortunately I do not speak French and so have been unable to take advantage of this study.

<sup>10</sup> This is the title of an excellent previously unpublished essay by Berić about Izetbegović, which we will come across throughout this thesis and analyze in more detail in the conclusion.

coming to the fore. In spite of this huge handicap though, was the office able to make a leader, a statesman, out of Izetbegović? Again, the next few pages attempt to provide an answer.<sup>11</sup>

One important note: I am just starting to learn Bosnian or Serbo-Croat, so there are many sources which I was not able to consult which would have provided for me a fuller understanding of Izetbegović and the actions he took. Inevitably then this makes my thesis at some level flawed or at least (that word again!) limited, and honesty dictates me to state that there might very well be arguments here that are at best incomplete or at worst simply wrong. Almost all my research has been based on my perusal of the relevant secondary works as well as contemporary newspaper and magazine articles which depicted important events connected to Izetbegović. Finally, I should give special mention to one other method of inquiry I used for this work, that of interviewing refugees from the former Yugoslavia who settled in St. Louis.<sup>12</sup> During the early 1990s a trickle of mostly Bosnian Muslim refugees started to come into St. Louis, a trickle which soon became a flood, with anywhere from 50,000 to 80,000 Bosnians now being residents in St. Louis. Although I was not able to interview as many Bosnians as I would have liked (I interviewed eleven subjects), thus making it impossible to provide any sort of sample group who might be considered representative of the general Bosnian population, I was able to get some interesting insights from those Bosnians I was able to talk to. A few of these insights I have

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<sup>11</sup> There is one more reason why this thesis could be of some importance. Especially after September 11<sup>th</sup>, there has been increased attention devoted to the phenomenon of Islamic radicalism and the dangers it poses. It will perhaps become increasingly tempting to see Izetbegović as simply another Islamic fundamentalist who, while not at the level of a bin Laden, still represented a similarly malignant phenomenon. Alongside this a kind of Serbian revisionism might occur which suggests that the Serbs were perhaps not so wrong in trying to resist somebody like Izetbegović, even though they did it in a disproportionate manner. It is important then to be able to see Izetbegović as he really was, and analyze carefully his religious beliefs and statesmanship so as to be able to determine how much of a legitimate threat he really was.

<sup>12</sup> All of the subjects I interviewed signed a consent form (#071211C) approved by the Institution Review Board of the University of Missouri St. Louis. This consent form had a description of the research I was engaged in (basically, learning about the lives of former Yugoslav refugees in St. Louis and their opinions of what happened in their homeland), how I would use the information gained from the interviews, and a description of my subjects' rights. One of the rights of my subjects was the right to be anonymous, an offer that some – although not all – of my subjects decided to exercise. In the cases in which subjects are anonymous, I simply refer to their ethnicity. In the case of the other subjects I give their names, something that they had given me permission to do when they signed their consent forms, as well as more biographical details about them since again they are willing to have their identity be known.

included here, insights which I believe help to illuminate and supplement what already exists in the more scholarly literature on Izetbegović.

Alija Izetbegović was born on 8 August 1925 in Bosanski Smač, near the Bosnian/Croatian border in northern, northeast Bosnia. It was certainly an auspicious time in the history of Bosnia. The Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes (later to be called Yugoslavia, or ‘Land of the South Slavs’) had been created just seven years before as a multi-national state which comprised Slovenia, Croatia, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Serbia, Macedonia, and Montenegro, and these various nations – as well as the different peoples within these nations - were just learning to live together in a common state after having been under Austro-Hungarian or Serbian rule (and more distantly for some of them, Ottoman rule) just a few years before. It was the beginning of a stressful process that would never really cease to be stressful, with individuals of one group of nations (or ethnicities) seemingly always being resentful about being – or believing that they were - under the thumb of other groups. These grievances would always be pervasive during the troubled history of Yugoslavia, lasting right up to Izetbegović’s assumption of the presidency of Bosnia nearly 60 years later. At the particular time of Izetbegović’s birth and childhood it was the Serbs who were ruling the roost and were seen by many as unfairly dominating the other Yugoslavs from Belgrade, something that Izetbegović would still remember many years later, the injustice of it all still prominent in his memory.<sup>13</sup>

After living for only two years in Bosanska Somač, Izetbegović moved with his family to Sarajevo, where he studied at the best *gymnasium* in the city. As an adolescent he showed a certain intellectual precocity, reading Bergson, Spengler, and Kant, an early indication of his future proclivity for philosophical and abstract thought (something that would not always be to

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<sup>13</sup> Izetbegović recalls in his memoir how between the wars almost all of his teachers were Serbs, and how the Yugoslav government was trying “to Serbianize the Muslims” in Bosnia. Alija Izetbegović, *Inescapable Questions: Autobiographical Notes*, trans. Saba Rissaluddin and Jasmina Izetbegović (Leicester, England: The Islamic Foundation, 2003), 15.

his benefit). It was also around this time that he felt resurgence, after a certain period of neglect, of his early childhood Muslim faith, something that would never leave him and would always be, as faith is for any truly devout person, the cornerstone and foundation of his life.<sup>14</sup>

Izetbegović's youth was interrupted by the Second European War, which after almost a year and a half finally found its way to Yugoslavia. Although Prince Paul of Yugoslavia had reluctantly submitted to his country becoming a part of the Axis pact on 25 March 1941, he was overthrown by Serbian army officers in a British-supported coup who in turn installed the 17 year-old anti-Nazi King Peter II.<sup>15</sup> Thousands of Yugoslavs famously marched down the streets of Belgrade yelling "Bolje rat, nego pat!" or "Better war than pact!" Infuriated by Yugoslavia's intransigence, Adolf Hitler decided to give the Serbs exactly that. On 6 April 1941<sup>16</sup> Germany brutally invaded Yugoslavia, conquered her (partly assisted in this process by Croatian and Serbian soldiers, who often did not cooperate against the Germans), occupied mainly the Serbian part of Yugoslavia and in most of the Croatian part allowed the Croat Ante Pavelić to set up his fascist *Ustaše* government. What followed during the next four years in Yugoslavia was awful, a cruel confirmation of the saying that the Balkans has more history than she truly deserves. In addition to the cruelty inflicted by the *Ustaše* and to a lesser – but still very real – extent by the Serbian-puppet government of Milan Nedić and the governments of other parts of occupied

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<sup>14</sup> At this time Izetbegović also joined the Young Muslims. He is fairly disingenuous in his description of this organization in his autobiography, noting simply that they wanted to return Islam to the purity and simplicity of the past. No mention is made, for instance, of the Young Muslims' connections to the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt at the time, a pan-Islamic organization which sought to install *sharia* law throughout the world and which was violently anti-Western. Nor does he mention the Young Muslims radical journal he helped edit after the war, *The Holy Warrior*, which was what caused him to be sent to prison for the first time. Alija Izetbegović, *Inescapable Questions*, 16-17 and John Schindler, *Unholy Terror*, 39. It is important to mention here Izetbegović's connection to the Muslim Brotherhood, for many of the ideas he would eventually express in his *Islamic Declaration* and to an extent also in his *Islam Between East and West* – the need for a pure society in which there will be no alcohol, prostitution, or gambling, the need for authoritative leadership within an Islamic state, the stress on Islamic internationalism, the importance of a strong anti-Zionism, and so forth - can clearly be linked to the basic ideas of the Brotherhood. For a thoughtful summary of the history of the Islamic Brotherhood, see the recent work by Juan Cole, *Engaging the Muslim World* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 51-57 as well as Kepel, *Jihad*, 27-30.

<sup>15</sup> Sabrina Ramet, *The Three Yugoslavias*, 109-110.

<sup>16</sup> Exactly fifty-one years later the members of the European Community (EC) were guilty, as history professors are wont to say, of not reading their textbooks. They decided to choose 6 April 1992 as the date to recognize an independent Bosnia, adding insult to injury as far as the Serbs were concerned.

Yugoslavia, there were also not one, but several, wars occurring simultaneously on Yugoslav soil at this time, involving mainly the Communist Partisans and the Serbian Četniks who fought both the Fascists and each other (although at different times during the war the Fascists, Četniks, and Partisans would also collaborate with one another, adding to the chaos and confusion).<sup>17</sup>

Although the numbers of casualties were later inflated to 1.7 million by Josip Tito's Communist regime in an effort to get more war reparations, the reality was terrible enough – approximately 1 million were murdered or killed, of whom about 530,000 were Serbs, 192,000 Croats, 103,000 Muslims, as well as Jews (28,000 were killed or murdered in the Pavelić's Croatia), Roma, and other ethnic groups.<sup>18</sup> Perhaps even worse, in some ways, than the quantity of the murders was the quality – thousands of Serbs simply getting their throats slit at the largest Croatian concentration camp Jasenovac, Yugoslavs burned alive inside their homes that had been torched by soldiers (Yugoslav ethnic cleansing did not begin during the 1991-1995 wars of Yugoslav succession), babies' heads being smashed against walls; there was no end to the cruelty. After the war Tito would ban any sort of discussion of the murders that went on between different ethnic groups because of the ghosts which might be unleashed,<sup>19</sup> but the memories would certainly burn in the minds of Yugoslavs over the years of the second half of the twentieth century, passed along to another generation through endless evening conversations and stories at home.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Sabrina Ramet, *The Three Yugoslavias*, 110-117, 133, 142-160.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 114, 116-117, 119, 161.

<sup>19</sup> Adam LeBor, *Milošević: A Biography* (New Haven, CT and London: Yale University Press, 2004), 10.

<sup>20</sup> As one Serb from Bosnia (how this individual chose to be identified) put it to me, "Those peasants from the villages, they had memories from the Second World War – they could not let go of the past." A Serb from Bosnia, interview by author, St. Louis, MO, 3 July 2008. Sead Begić, a 51 year old Bosnian Muslim from Bosanska Gradijica, also saw the war as having had a formative impact on the consciences of Bosnians. As he described the matter to me, his generation of Bosnian Serbs, Croats, and Muslims were constantly told stories of the atrocities which had occurred during World War II. "We [Serbs, Croats, and Muslims] played together on the playground," Begić said, "but later our parents at home would tell us: 'You can't forget about what happened during the war, be careful – Don't marry a Christian girl!' Although we weren't told this sort of thing every night, we certainly were told it." Sead Begić, interview with author, St. Louis, MO, 10 December 2008.

As he is about so many events and time periods in his life,<sup>21</sup> Izetbegović is fairly sparse when recounting what he actually did during wartime Bosnia (which was part of the Croatian *Ustaše* state at the time), saying basically that he was a draft-dodger and leaving it at that. The limited available evidence does suggest that he was fairly quiescent during this time, certainly showing none of the same opposition against the Fascists that he would later demonstrate against the Communists. Apparently his only protest against *Ustaše* rule occurred in 1943, when along with a few other Muslims (including veiled women) Izetbegović showed up at the screening of a film which they believed disrespected Islam and banged metal objects loudly during the showing of the feature.<sup>22</sup>

The war in Yugoslavia ended with Tito's communists on top, and very quickly Tito inflicted revenge on Četniks and other enemies, murdering thousands in the process. Although some promises had been made during the war about allowing for political pluralism, once in power Tito used his power to ban other political parties and to clamp down on all potential dissidents or opponents, especially those who were religious since they were seen as particularly threatening (Tito's disdain towards religion was manifested against Islam, for example, through the banning of the veil, madrassas, and other Islamic customs and institutions. He also allowed only one Islamic community to function, the Islamic Religious Community, which had to openly pledge support to Tito in order to receive financial backing).<sup>23</sup> Because of his involvement with the Young Muslims, Izetbegović naturally fell into the religious category and was arrested in 1946 and sent to prison for three years, a relatively lenient sentence in comparison with some other Young Muslims who received death sentences just a few years later. Fortunately

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<sup>21</sup> For instance, with the exception of mentioning the writing of his theological works and some other minor details, there is simply a blank spot from 1966 (when he finished working for an agricultural firm) to 1983 (the year of his famous Sarajevo trial), with Izetbegović providing no information *whatsoever* about what he was actually doing professionally or otherwise during these years in his memoir.

<sup>22</sup> It needs to be said though that for this and for many other incidents throughout his book, Schindler relies often on two Bosnian magazines - *Dani* and *Slobodna Bosna* – and fails to identify the authors or the names of the articles which are the sources of the information (although he does list the dates).

<sup>23</sup> Alma Imanovic, "Wahhabism in Bosnia and Herzegovina in the Context of Global Political Islam," (master's thesis, Webster University, June 2005), 48-49.

Izetbegović was able to resume his life fairly easily after his release, going to law school and graduating, marrying, and starting a family.<sup>24</sup>

During the 1960s and 1970s, in an effort to both promote his non-alignment movement with Muslim countries and to provide a buffer-people between the Serbs and Croats, Tito reversed his earlier persecution of Muslims and allowed for a more open atmosphere in Yugoslavia for Islamic development. Mosques were built and a more open display of Muslim piety was condoned.<sup>25</sup> Perhaps influenced by this slightly more liberal milieu, Izetbegović came out with his *Islamic Declaration*, a manifesto he wrote in 1969 and had published in 1970, and which more than anything else in his career has been misunderstood by scholars and commentators. This is rather strange, since the *Declaration* itself is fairly simple and straightforward, yet for some reason many people have either read into it things it does not really say, or have failed to note the things that it clearly does say.<sup>26</sup> A document of about 80 double-

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<sup>24</sup> Alija Izetbegović, *Inescapable Questions*, 21-22, 25.

<sup>25</sup> Ivo Banac, "Bosnian Muslims: From Religious Community to Socialist Nationhood and Postcommunist Statehood, 1918-1992," in *The Muslims of Bosnia-Herzegovina: Their Historic Development from the Middle Ages to the Dissolution of Yugoslavia*, edit. Mark Pinson (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993), 145. As the historian of Bosnia Noel Malcolm drolly puts it, "By the mid-1960s there were prominent Bosnian Muslim diplomats serving in several Arab states and Indonesia, including the son of a former Reis ul-ulema. That these officials were Communist Party members who had largely abandoned their religion seemed not to matter, so long as they had names such as Mehmed, Ahmed, and Mustafa." Noel Malcolm, *Bosnia: A Short History* (New York: New York University Press, 1996), 197.

<sup>26</sup> For instance the historian Marko Attila Hoare, who is thoughtfully critical about many aspects of Izetbegović's statesmanship, says about the *Declaration*, "This text was subsequently portrayed in Serb and Croat nationalist propaganda as a fundamentalist tract, but was in reality an expression of Muslim separatism inspired by a moderate interpretation of Islam." Marko Attila Hoare, *The History of Bosnia: From the Middle Ages to the Present Day* (London: Saqi, 2007), 375. Although Hoare is right to say that the *Declaration* is not a work of fundamentalism, to suggest that it is "moderate" is misleading. Certainly the kind of Islamic moderation Izetbegović demonstrates in his work is more radical than, say, a Christian moderation that a modern Christian would advocate. Instead, it is more accurate to see the *Declaration* as a work which contains both liberal and pan-Islamic, authoritarian elements; as Xavier Bougarel rightly puts it while examining the time period during which Izetbegović wrote this work: "One might pose the question: Is A. Izetbegović the Vaclav Havel or the Lenin of Islam?" Xavier Bougarel, "The Emergence of a Pan-Islamist Trend in Bosnia-Herzegovina," trans. Asma Rashid, *Islamic Studies* 36, no. 2, 3 (Summer/Autumn 1418/1997): 546. Indeed, the *Declaration* should be seen as a kind of intellectual work-in-progress in which Izetbegović was trying to work out disparate ideas in his mind and provide some kind of synthesis for his devout Islamic beliefs on the one hand – some of which could be construed as radical or fundamentalist – with his genuine admiration for many Western, liberal ideas on the other. Certainly Izetbegović was not alone during the 1960s in trying to understand what Islam meant in the modern world – other figures outside of Yugoslavia like Ruhollah Khomeini (whose *Towards an Islamic Government* came out the same year as Izetbegović's *Declaration*) or Sayyid Qutb were also grappling with such



spaced pages calling for the establishment of a reformed, more humane, and internationalist Islamic state, Izetbegović discusses the need for the Islamic world to unite and reject both the extremes of modernity *and* fundamentalism and to embrace a religion which both respects the ancient traditions of Islam and at the same time intelligently takes advantage of the modern sciences and modern thought to improve the lot of all Islamic peoples. In many ways the *Declaration* is an admirable and even liberal document, in which Izetbegović calls for all Muslims – especially women - to be better educated (he contrasts the illiteracy of the Islamic world today with the Muslims of 10<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> century Spain who were all able to read), exhorts wealthy Islamic nations like Kuwait to be more supportive of their poorer Muslim brethren, argues for the need to re-interpret many *sharia* laws in light of changed world circumstances, urges the Islamic peoples to avoid the use of violence and force to achieve objectives, and so forth. It is hard also not to be impressed by his religious devotion; sounding much like the Protestant theologian Karl Barth, for instance, Izetbegović criticizes how Islam has become for so many Muslims, both fundamentalists and secularists who have been too seduced by Western influences, simply a rigid form of religious observance rather than a transformative experience that enables one to be truly good and have love for others.<sup>27</sup> Indeed, to be most charitable, one could argue that Izetbegović is proposing here something similar to the approach to religion that the late Catholic theologian Richard John Neuhaus espoused as far as Christianity is concerned in America, which is that the religion of the majority in a society should strongly inform the culture and values of that society while at the same time not infringing upon the rights of those minorities who do not subscribe to the majority religion.

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matters. See Giles Kepel, *Jihad*, 239. Finally, one should mention that this process of trying to reconcile different ideas – for example liberalism versus the desire to create or at least maintain certain aspects of an Islamic society that might also have illiberal elements – would be an ongoing one for Izetbegović, lasting up to the day of his resignation as leader of the SDA in 2001.

<sup>27</sup> *Islamic Declaration: a Programme for the Islamization of Muslims and the Muslim Peoples*, 7-8,15-16. [http://www.balkanarchive.org.yu/politics/papers/Islamic\\_Declaration\\_reprint\\_English.pdf](http://www.balkanarchive.org.yu/politics/papers/Islamic_Declaration_reprint_English.pdf).

The problem is that unlike Neuhaus, who put a strong influence on such things as the Constitution to act as a safeguard for minority rights, Izetbegović mentions no mechanism in the *Declaration* which could act as a check on the potential tyranny of an Islamic society. This is troubling, for although the sort of order that Izetbegović envisions would seem to be more benign than, say, the sort of fearful totalitarianism which exists in states like Saudi Arabia, he is nonetheless quite clear about wanting to establish an Islamic order which could theoretically be - but need not be – democratic,<sup>28</sup> and which contains features which many (including Muslims) would find to be quite worrisome, not least because Izetbegović often describes such features in rather vague and equivocal language. He writes, for example, of the legitimacy of private property, but that it must also be used for the good of Islamic society. But one could ask - *Who* decides what kind of private property is good for society, and what if certain minorities within Islamic society object to the “correct” view of how private property should be exercised?<sup>29</sup>

Defenders of Izetbegović like Noel Malcolm or the great Croatian scholar Ivo Banac respond to such criticisms by pointing out that in the *Declaration*, Izetbegović specifically states that the sort of society he supports should only be established in places where there already exists a Muslim majority, which would exclude a country like Bosnia (which Izetbegović does not mention in the text). Yet the demographics of Bosnia would seem to call Malcolm’s and Banac’s argument into question, for after the 1990 election Muslims made up 44% of the population compared to 31% for the Serbs and 17% of Croats, not an absolute majority but pretty close to it.<sup>30</sup> Indeed, considering the high birth rate of the Muslims during the 20<sup>th</sup> century it would be reasonable to assume that within a generation, Bosnian Muslims *would* have an absolute majority,

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<sup>28</sup> Perhaps the influence of the ideas of the Muslim Brotherhood on Izetbegović can be seen here in his somewhat nonchalant attitude towards the need for a Muslim society to have a democratic government. The Muslim Brothers had a very non-national idea of Muslim governance, in which there was really no need to think about what kind of nation-state should exist (after all, their dream was of some kind of restored caliphate that would be supranational). One thinks of that moment during the 1920s when Egyptian nationalists discussed the need for their country to have a democratic constitution, which inspired members of the Brotherhood to respond, “The Koran is our constitution.” Kepel, *Jihad*, 27.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.* 35, 70.

<sup>30</sup> Malcolm, 220; Ivo Banac, “Bosnian Muslims,” 147-148; and Evelyn Farkas, *Fractured States and U.S. Foreign Policy: Iraq, Ethiopia, and Bosnia in the 1990s* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2003), 74.

thus creating the conditions for a total Islamic society in Bosnia. Certainly Izetbegović minces no words on the need to overthrow an existing regime when the time is right – as he puts it, just as it is wrong to overthrow a regime before the Islamic masses within that nation are ready for the sort of society he proposes, it is also wrong *not* to overthrow a government when the Islamic masses are ready for a more pure, Islamic society where “Islam [becomes] an order.”<sup>31</sup> Not unreasonably then might some Serbian and Croatian (and some Muslim) audiences worry about what kind of Bosnia they would experience under an Izetbegović regime.<sup>32</sup>

During the 1970s Izetbegović alternated time it appears between his profession as a lawyer and continuing his activities as a member of the Young Muslims, maintaining contacts with foreigners who were members of the Muslim Brotherhood.<sup>33</sup> The Communist secret police told Izetbegović a few times to cease these activities, but he remained undeterred and was not arrested for them. The Islamic Religious Community showed its loyalty to the regime by telling

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<sup>31</sup> One can add to this individual observations Izetbegović makes which, while not necessarily bad per se when viewed separately, taken cumulatively are rather worrisome – his admiration in many ways for the theocratic tendencies of Pakistan, his rather uncritical affinity for the great expansion of Islam during the early Middle Ages which coexists with his criticism of the same sort of Christian expansionism which occurred later, his call for the banning of gambling and dance halls (something that would certainly not amuse dance-loving Serbs and Croats). Simply chilling though is the animus Izetbegović expresses toward Israel (he gives the usual European canard of distinguishing between anti-Zionism and anti-Semitism) and his call for the restoration of the *zanat* or the banning of interest, a policy for which he is willing to drop his usual pacific stance and reinforce with the use of violence. Alija Izetbegović, *Islamic Declaration*, 25 28, 37, 41, 67-70. Considering all the political policies that Izetbegović proposes in his *Declaration*, it is rather odd that so *many* writers and scholars argue that this writing is somehow apolitical and just a work of philosophical speculation. Typical are Laura Silber and Allan Little, who covered the Yugoslav wars as journalists and wrote one of the prominent books on the dissolution of Yugoslavia, when they argue, “...it [the *Declaration*] was a work of scholarship, not politics, intended to promote philosophical discourse among Muslims.” Laura Silber and Allan Little, *Yugoslavia: Death of a Nation* (New York: Penguin Books, 1997), 208. On the contrary, Izetbegović has a very clear and unambiguous political ideology in the *Declaration*, one that he makes no bones about wanting to have enacted when the conditions in a particular nation are right.

<sup>32</sup> Yet John Schindler is way too extreme when he argues that the *dhimmi* status Izetbegović advocates in the *Declaration* would be equivalent to southerners in the United States espousing a return to antebellum political policies. Although a few of the passages in Izetbegović’s work could indeed be construed as suggesting second-class (or at least somewhat diminished) status for non-Muslims, there is no indication whatsoever that Izetbegović plans on making them slaves or anything close to that. As worrisome and offensive as some passages in the *Declaration* are, it is no (Schindler’s description of how Serbs saw the work) “... Islamic *Mein Kampf*.” John Schindler, *Unholy Terror*, 49.

<sup>33</sup> John Schindler, *Unholy Terror*, 44.

different imams to not support Izetbegović or his ideas.<sup>34</sup> Izetbegović's luck ran out when in 1983 he was finally arrested along with some other Young Muslims by the Communist government and charged with conspiracy against the Yugoslav state.<sup>35</sup> At his trial he was able to do an excellent job portraying himself – and rightly so, one should add – as the victim of an overzealous Communist system, something that would pay dividends for him down the road when he ran for the presidency of Bosnia. For the time being, though, Izetbegović faced a long period in confinement, with the judge sentencing him to fourteen years in prison.<sup>36</sup>

In 1984, while he was in prison, an English edition of his work *Islam Between East and West* came out. Apparently Izetbegović had written much of it after he was released from prison for the first time in 1949, but for whatever reason the entire work did not see the light of day until much later. A more theologically and philosophically-oriented work than the *Declaration*, Izetbegović's purpose in *Islam* is basically to act as an apologist for the Islamic faith and to demonstrate why he believes it to be true. Because *Islam* is less strident than the *Declaration* and politics does not play as central a role (although certainly Izetbegović expresses a particular political vision in *Islam* as well), it is tempting to see the work as representing the real and liberal Izetbegović, although it probably makes more sense to just see the two works as expressing

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<sup>34</sup> Vjekoslav Perica, *Balkan Idols: Religion and Nationalism in Yugoslav States* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 77-78.

<sup>35</sup> It is important to keep the time period in mind when thinking about why the Communists decided to arrest Izetbegović and bring him to trial. Only four years after the overthrow of the Shah in Iran by radical *shīites*, the Communists were increasingly fearful that Izetbegović and those like him might disrupt Yugoslavia in a similar manner. Unfortunately for the Communist regime, their decision to put on trial and to imprison Izetbegović and others simply elicited strong criticism from friendly non-aligned nations, as well contributing to Izetbegović's popularity and increasing Islamic nationalism within Yugoslavia. See *Ibid.*, 82-83. Indeed, the Communists had rather blundered by putting Izetbegović and other Young Muslims on trial, since by doing so they were implying that this very small minority of Islamic radicals had more influence than they really had. As Giles Kepel puts it, although the Communists were certainly correct in seeing similarities between Izetbegović and Islamic radicals in countries like Iran, Egypt, and Pakistan (where radicals in these nations wanted to create a more pure, more internationalist-oriented Islamic community), they were quite wrong in thinking that the conditions existed in Yugoslavia for a similar community. Unlike in these other nations where large masses of disaffected Muslims existed who might be attracted to such a vision, such a constituency just did not exist in Yugoslavia. "There was no devout middle class in the still-socialist Republic of Bosnia, nor was there an impoverished urban youth with the potential to unite for change." Giles Kepel, *Jihad*, 243-244.

<sup>36</sup> Alija Izetbegović, *Inescapable Questions*, 31-43.

different (but equally representative) dimensions or aspects of Izetbegović's basic world and religious view.

A book basically of two parts, in the first part Izetbegović discusses all of the contrasts or dualities which exist in the world – the beauty and freshness of life in the countryside versus the often banal, anonymous, urban existence of the city, for example, or more generally the contrasts between civilization and culture, science and art, the material world and the spiritual world, and so on. Because of this duality in the world and as a result of man's inability to achieve a synthesis of different, seemingly irreconcilable values, Izetbegović argues that people are at a loss as to how they can experience happiness or peace. He gives as an example advanced nations like the U.S. or Sweden which are abundant in material wealth, yet where people are often unhappy or depressed because they lack the necessary spiritual vision for true fulfillment – hence the terrible problem of alcoholism that the Swedes have, or the huge crime rates of the Americans. And although some ideas or systems are able to come closer than others in providing a genuine synthesis for all the dualities in life, none of them are really able to hit the mark (e.g. Christianity, which Izetbegović sees as a great and historic force, but also as inadequate because of the artificial division it draws between the Kingdom of God and the Kingdom of this world).<sup>37</sup>

Only Islam, Izetbegović asserts in the second section, enables man to overcome the many dualities in life and to affirm both his material and spiritual natures. For example, Izetbegović argues that unlike in Christianity where the saint and warrior are valued separately, Islam is able to recognize these two great archetypes in the same person, the *shaheed*. Another example is the phenomenon of science; Izetbegović harkens back to the Middle Ages and discusses how religion

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<sup>37</sup> 'Alija 'Ali Izetbegović, *Islam Between East and West* (Indianapolis, IN: American Trust Publications, 2<sup>nd</sup> edit., 1989), 61-63. As a concrete example of the artificial division that Christianity creates, Izetbegović writes about Christianity's idealization of chastity, something which he believes holds man to an ideal he is not capable of achieving because of his nature. Hence when man inevitably fails to reach the chaste ideal, he then degenerates into sexual licentiousness. Izetbegović goes on to argue that Islam, because it honestly recognizes man sexual nature and allows it to be acted upon through marriage, is able to avoid the dichotomy between a sexual permissiveness on the one hand and an angelic, sexual unworldliness on the other. See again *Ibid.*, 262-265.

and science were reconciled through the interest many Islamic thinkers had in contemplating the heavens, leading them to become some of the great medieval astronomers. More generally, Izetbegović believes, no dualities can exist within Islam but only syntheses, since such notions as sacred versus profane, secular versus spiritual, or body versus spirit, are all difficulties that Muslims do not have to deal with. Finally, because Islam is concerned not primarily with the individual but the community, individuals are not separated from one another in anticipation of some heavenly kingdom of believers (the Christian notion) but can actually experience true and holy justice in this world (the Islamic notion), since again the Christian notion of Church versus State just does not exist.<sup>38</sup> Or as Izetbegović writes, Islam is able to start as “mysticism” and end as a “state” – again, the religious and secular become one. This Islamic emphasis on synthesis is an important one to keep in mind, for as we shall see it was an ideal that Izetbegović would try in some ways to reach (especially during the Bosnian War), although with not much success and not to everybody’s happiness.

Izetbegović continued to express his political and religious ideas in prose while in prison, eventually filling 13 notebooks with *penses* on a wide range of subjects - from the ideas of the American political scientist James Q. Wilson to the philosophy of Ortega y Gasset - which were later published as *Notes from Prison* in 2002. Somewhat akin to the Lutheran Dietrich Bonhoeffer’s *Letters and Papers from Prison*, Izetbegović deals with the pain of being in prison by contemplating in true intellectual fashion such things as modern science, art, literature, philosophy, film, and religion, but most of all the nature of Islam in the modern world. He emerges from this work to this historian as someone who has apparently evolved in some ways from the earlier militancy he sometimes expressed in the *Declaration* – a sense of liberalism and a respect for the rights of minorities pervades *Notes*.<sup>39</sup> Sadly, whether because of the stressful

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<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, 213, 221-222

<sup>39</sup> Consider these prototypical lines: “True democracy is not only a government of the majority. Just as every right is the protection of the weaker, so is democracy the protection of the minority. Without the

circumstances he found himself in or because of some lack of political ability, this empathy and sophistication towards others that Izetbegović often expressed while in prison would tend, with some exceptions, to be totally absent when he was actually called upon to exercise leadership over the different Bosnian peoples in the early 1990s.

When Izetbegović was given early release in 1988, he realized that Yugoslavia was approaching a period of transition and about to enter a new era.<sup>40</sup> Actually, this transition had already started to occur soon after Tito's death on 4 May 1980, when previously forbidden nationalist sentiments began to raise their heads. Serbian nationalist propaganda especially started to come out in a steady stream, the most infamous example of which was the so-called 'Memorandum' written by members of the Serbian Academy of Sciences in 1986 and published in its entirety for the Yugoslav public in 1989. A long essay which catalogued various grievances of the Serbian peoples, much of the writers' venom was directed against the 1974 Yugoslav Constitution Tito created, which provided for the autonomy of the people of Voivodina and, more significantly, the Kosovar Albanians in Serbia. Ever since 1974, the argument of the 'Memorandum' went, the Albanians had been repressing the Serbian people, a tendency that was most notoriously demonstrated with the violence perpetrated in 1985 by some Albanians against a Serbian farmer when they shoved a broken glass bottle up his anus.<sup>41</sup> The Albanian persecution was simply part and parcel of the general "genocide" that occurred against the Serbian people over the several decades, whether it was in the form of "economic genocide" imposed by the other Yugoslav republics on Serbia or of "cultural genocide" perpetrated by other Yugoslavs against Serbian arts and letters. There was a need then, the writers argued, to provide for the

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latter, the government of the majority would be a tyranny like any other." *Izetbegović of Bosnia and Herzegovina: Notes from Prison, 1983-1988* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2002), 98.

<sup>40</sup> Alija Izetbegović, *Inescapable Questions*, 58.

<sup>41</sup> That was the story anyway, with the writers of the 'Memorandum' saying the incident was "reminiscent of the darkest days of the Turkish practice of impalement." See Trepca.net for a copy of the 'Memorandum.' Serbian newspapers devoted a wave of publicity to the case and a 485 page book was even written about it, which sold 50,000 copies. For a discussion of all of this see Noel Malcolm, *Kosovo: A Short History* (New York: HarperPerennial, 1999), 338-340.

“integrity” of the Serbian peoples in all of the Yugoslav republics.<sup>42</sup> As Noel Malcolm rightly says, the ‘Memorandum’ was “a virtual manifesto for the ‘Greater Serbian’ policies pursued by Belgrade in the 1990s.”<sup>43</sup>

Some of this Serbian propaganda was also directed more specifically against Muslims, who were portrayed either as fundamentalists who wanted to turn Yugoslavia into an Islamic state, or as strange, unEuropean creatures. Vuk Drašković, a Serbian novelist who later became a significant political figure and opponent of Slobodan Milošević, wrote a novel called “Nož” (The Knife) in 1982 which was set during WWII and almost all of the Muslim characters in the work were portrayed as murderers and as descendents of Serbs, who sold out by embracing Islam; a political scientist and “specialist” in Islam, Miroljub Jevtic, argued that Muslims were subtly infiltrating Yugoslav life through their high birthrate and construction of mosques – a gradual prelude as he saw it to an Islamic revolution; Jovan Rasković, a leader of Krajina Serbs in Croatia, espoused bizarre theories about the Muslims, arguing that the way to understand them was to focus on their “anal fixation.” Especially emblematic of this sort of hysteria was a rather clever caricature drawn (by the Serb Milenko Mihajlovic) during the 1980s for the Serbian journal *Literary Gazette*, showing a Serbian baby being circumcised by an imam and blessed by a Catholic bishop at the same time. Members of the Orthodox Church also often got into the act, talking about the need for a greater Serbia to protect the Serbs from Islam, how Islamic tendencies were diseases infecting Serbs, etc.<sup>44</sup> Yet what is striking about much of this rhetoric is

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<sup>42</sup> Bizarrely, the authors also wrote “that the Serbian people do not have their own state, as do all the other nations,” an interesting statement to say the least since the largest republic in Yugoslavia at the time was Serbia.

<sup>43</sup> Noel Malcolm, *Kosovo*, 340-341. Or to connect the ‘Memorandum’ to the past, another scholar believes that it was rooted in the ideas of the 19<sup>th</sup> century Serbian thinker Ilija Garašanin, who first advocated the idea of a greater Serbian state made up of all the Serbian peoples, although it must be said that Garašanin also believed that the minorities within such a state should be treated with dignity. Smail Cekic, *The Aggression Against the Republic of Bosnia and Herzegovina: Planning, Preparation, Execution*, trans. Branka Ramadanovic (Sarajevo: Institute for the Research of Crimes Against Humanity and International Law, KULT/B, The Fund of the Sarajevo Canton for Protection and Conservation Cemeteries of Fallen Soldiers, 2005), 200-201.

<sup>44</sup> Norman Cigar, *Genocide in Bosnia, The Policy of “Ethnic Cleansing”* (College Station, TX: Texas A&M University Press, 1995), 25, 27-28, 30-31 and Ivo Banac, “The Fearful Asymmetry of War: The



first, how much of it actually came from outside of Bosnia,<sup>45</sup> and second, how abstract and intellectual it all was. How much of this really filtered down to, say, the Bosnian Serb peasant who worked next door to the Muslim farmer every day and said hello, or to the city worker who saw the pretty Muslim girls in their tight shirts and mini-skirts?

To a lesser but still very real extent, Muslim nationalists started to become more vocal as well. In spite of the increased privileges Tito had given to Muslims, they still tended in many ways to be reticent as far as any expressions of ethnic or religious identity was concerned. By the late 1980s Yugoslavia's secularization had had its impact and Bosnian Muslims were overwhelmingly secular,<sup>46</sup> and those who remained religious either through conviction or through a simple respect for tradition, tended to be quite private and quiet about whatever religious views they held. Indeed, the scholar of Yugoslavia, Sabrina Ramet, argues that it was really the Catholics and Orthodox who were able to be open about their beliefs during the Tito years - Christians had been able to celebrate Christmas quite openly, something Muslims had not been able to do with their own religious celebrations, and the Muslim magazine *Preporod* did not write about public issues in the way an Orthodox magazine like *Pravoslavje* did, which often took an anti-Kosovo and nationalist stance. Also, since Bosnia had a tougher police apparatus, it had been more likely to clamp down on Muslims than Zagreb on Catholics or Belgrade on

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Causes and Consequences of Yugoslavia's Demise," 163-164. It should be observed though that Raskovic applied this psychobabble to other ethnic groups as well, saying that Croats suffered from a "castration complex" that always made them feel inferior and the Serbs had an "oedipal complex" which made them always want to commit tyrannicide. Indeed, Raskovic was a curious bird, embodying all sorts of contradictions towards the Croats that undoubtedly made him emblematic of many other Serbs, Croats, and Muslims who were divided in their visions of other ethnic groups - including their own. Thus he was a Serbian nationalist who at the same time wanted his grandchildren to be Croats "so they won't have the complexes I've got," an opponent of anything that reeked of the Ustase within the HDZ but also a sympathizer of Tudman as well as of the need for a Croatian state. Marcus Tanner, *Croatia: A Nation Forged in War* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1997), 224.

<sup>45</sup> Interestingly Vuk Drašković, who became a prominent Serbian politician during the 1990s, was like many Serbian nationalists actually from Bosnia but felt compelled to go to Belgrade because what he saw as the better atmosphere there. Marko Attila Hoare, *The History of Bosnia*, 338-339.

<sup>46</sup> Noel Malcolm notes a 1985 study done on Bosnian Muslims which revealed that only 17% of them were religious. Noel Malcolm, *Bosnia*, 222.

Orthodox.<sup>47</sup> There were certainly Muslims who were resentful of this treatment, and with the end of Communist rule they began to be more assertive. Thus on TV in 1990 viewers could watch Muslim rallies where there were green banners with Arabic inscriptions and women wearing traditional Islamic clothing, or *Preporod* printed a nationalist article which quoted the novelist Mehmed Selimović, “Bosnians belong to no one. Settled in the middle of a crossroad, we were always being given to someone as a dowry.”<sup>48</sup> Many Muslims were determined that they would no longer be seen as Bosnian Christians’ dowry,<sup>49</sup> and they would soon find a strong defender of this position in Izetbegović.<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>47</sup> Sabrina Petra Ramet, *Politics, Culture, and Religion in Yugoslavia* (Boulder, CO and Oxford: Westview Press, 1992). 169.

<sup>48</sup> Vjekoslav Perica, *Balkan Idols: Religion and Nationalism in Yugoslav States* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 86.

<sup>49</sup> This desire on the part of Bosnian Muslims to be more assertive about their identity was brought home to me near the end of an interview with Amir Karadžić, a forty-something Bosnian Muslim (although he considers himself to be simply a Bosnian) who was an administrator at a clothing company in Prijedor. Earlier in the interview he had discussed how before the war 70% or so of those who had occupied key positions in Prijedor were Serbs even though there was actually a larger Muslim population, something that he had thought about but he and other Muslims had never discussed or complained about it publicly. Perhaps thinking about this or something similar later when we were about to part, Karadžić suddenly become somewhat agitated and in a sarcastic tone talked about how Muslims “have always had to be quiet, to be mild.” One can reasonably guess that many other Bosnian Muslims felt this way as well, and would naturally gravitate to a Muslim leader who would be seen as doing more to affirm Muslims’ place in Bosnia. Amir Karadžić, interview with author, St. Louis, MO, 27 June 2008.

<sup>50</sup> In a related vein Giles Kepel argues that Bosnian Muslims were drawn to Izetbegović and his SDA during this time of transition mainly because through their strong emphasis on Muslim identity they were seen as best providing protection against the potential imperialist designs of Croatia and Serbia. Ironically, through their espousal of Croatian and Serbian nationalism, leaders like Slobodan Milošević and Franjo Tuđman made Izetbegović’s SDA more popular than it would have been under more normal circumstances, since during a more peaceful period many more secular Bosnian Muslims would have been turned off by the party’s strong religiosity and would have likely voted for more moderate political candidates. Giles Kepel, *Jihad*, 244.

## Chapter Two

### The Choice Between Conflict or Accommodation<sup>51</sup>

Although it may very well be apocryphal, this remark is often attributed to Otto von Bismarck: “God has a special place in his heart for children, drunks, and the United States.” Concerning the last part of the anecdote, this historian has always interpreted it as suggesting that God has been especially beneficent during the times of turmoil and transition in the U.S., granting the nation intelligent leaders to guide her people when the going gets tough. Hence Lincoln during the period of the Civil War, or FDR during the Depression. In a diametrically opposed manner, Providence has perhaps been rather lacking concerning the history of Yugoslavia, a nation that has not necessarily been short of political talent but has often lacked leaders who were suitable to the particular moment the Yugoslavs were in. There was probably not a period in which this was more true than during the late 1980s and early 1990s, a period of transition and great uncertainty in Yugoslavia when leaders with tact, prudence, respect for history, and certain magnanimity were greatly needed - especially concerning the problem of nationalism - but sadly were never able to rise to the occasion.<sup>52</sup>

To be sure, the situation at this time was a remarkably difficult one, in which the temptations for leaders to use nationalism to pursue certain purposes were immense, and the opportunities for statesmen to maintain moderate views which took into account the interests of the different Yugoslav republics or ethnicities - other than the ones they represented - were often extremely limited. This should hardly be seen as surprising, since in many ways the Yugoslav state was on its last legs at this time, having suffered since its inception in 1918 from a lack of legitimacy, as the scholar Sabrina Ramet argues. Whether it was during the years between the

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<sup>51</sup> The title of this chapter comes from the same title of a section in Steven L. Burg’s and Paul S. Shoup’s *The War in Bosnia-Herzegovina: Ethnic Conflict and International Intervention* (New York and London: M.E. Sharpe, 1999), 56.

<sup>52</sup> There was perhaps at least one such leader, the federal prime minister of Yugoslavia Ante Marković, who was able to do such a great job against the terrible inflation Yugoslavia experienced during the late 1980s. But because Milošević and not he had control over the federal army, there was little he could do about Yugoslavia’s slide into destruction.

two world wars, when the Karadžević dynasty was seen by almost all ethnic groups as unfairly favoring Serbs, or decades later during the so-called “Golden Age” of the Communist period, when something as seemingly mundane as reconstructing the “Brotherhood and Unity” highway across Yugoslavia beginning in 1975 was the source of incredible friction between the different republics concerning how public monies should fairly be used,<sup>53</sup> many of the different Yugoslav nations and ethnicities had never really felt that their aspirations and interests were being represented in a fair and democratic way by their Communist leaders. Even under such a wily leader as Josip Tito (who knew how to both suppress and allow certain freedoms) and during relatively good economic times as during the late 1970s, the Yugoslav political “equilibrium was unstable” because of such things as the approaching economic collapse (mainly as a result of the foreign debt Yugoslavia was accruing), the substitution of pseudo-democratic rule (e.g. allowing the Yugoslav republics and provinces to exercise more powers) for real democratization (e.g. allowing multi-party elections), and the incongruity between real brotherhood and unity and the continued emphasis on ethnicity. By 1989, when Communist governments were starting to collapse all over eastern Europe, when leaders like Slobodan Milošević were continually emphasizing “the national question” as it was euphemistically called, and when within Yugoslavia inflation was at 1,000% by the end of the year, “There was a growing sense that it [Yugoslavia] was breathing its last breath.”<sup>54</sup>

The problem though was figuring out what might replace this Yugoslavia which seemed to be in her death-throes. For if Yugoslavia were to be broken up into different new nation-states, there was the difficulty of the new minorities who would also come into existence. As the Balkans scholar, Gale Stokes, thoughtfully describes the dilemma, Yugoslavia was at the tail end of a process that had begun in the 1870s and had continued after World War I in eastern Europe

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<sup>53</sup> Sabrina P. Ramet, *The Three Yugoslavias, State-Building and Legitimation, 1918-2005* (Washington, D.C. and Bloomington, IN, 2006), 13, 23, 281-282. Concerning the highway, only Serbia and Macedonia had met their assigned quotas by 1980, while Slovenia and Voivodina had not even begun theirs (Slovenia had decided instead to just focus on her own highway system). See again Ramet, pages 281-282.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, 325, 347, 363.

with the dissolution of great empires, which was that of nation-building and the problem that came with this of vulnerable minorities coming to be within these new nations. The problem was not of ethnic hatreds, he argues, but of new nations and new minorities.<sup>55</sup> Countries like, say, Czechoslovakia, or Poland, had had to deal with the problems of ethnic minorities (Sudeten Germans and Ukrainians/Germans respectively) when they came into being as new nation-states after World War II, and now it was Yugoslavia's turn to deal with the problem (or to be more accurate, now Croatia's, Bosnia's, Macedonia's and Serbia's/Yugoslavia's, and later during the new millennium Kosovo's and Montenegro's, since these were the actual nation-states that would soon come into being). Considering that the minorities problems of Czechoslovakia and Poland – as well as many other eastern European nations over the last 140 years or so - were eventually dealt with through either painful expulsions of minorities (the Czechoslovak case) or the expulsions of minorities *and* the harsh redrawing of borders (the Polish case), this did not auger well for Yugoslavia in the early 1990s. Since all the different Yugoslav ethnic groups were beginning to become afraid that *they* might eventually become one of these minority groups subject to the violence of uncaring majorities, it is quite natural that they would look to leaders who would uncompromisingly support them, even if these particular leaders seemed uncaring towards *other* Yugoslav ethnicities.

Unsurprisingly in this new atmosphere then, leaders came out of the woodwork who totally disregarded the rulebook used by the Communists for the previous forty years, as Sabrina Ramet put it describing Slobodan Milošević (although her words could just as easily describe political figures like Franjo Tuđman and to a much lesser extent even Alija Izetbegović).<sup>56</sup> Rather than avoid the issue of nationalism or at least moderate its expression, again as Tito and all the previous Yugoslav rulers had done, these new leaders not only did not avoid it but endlessly dwelt on it to an unhealthy degree, focusing on historical slights and wrongs that had been done

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<sup>55</sup> Gale Stokes, "From Nation to Minority, Serbs in Croatia and Bosnia at the Outbreak of the Yugoslav Wars," *Problems of Post-Communism* 52, no. 6 (November/December 2005): 4-5.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, 342. Many of the subsequent ideas in this paragraph are also echoes of much of what Ramet says.

in the past to their particular ethnicity and bringing all the old negative ghosts back from the dead. Rather than using consensus between the different political nations in Yugoslavia in order to achieve political objectives, these leaders appealed to threats of violence against other ethnicities and the mobbish crowds. And rather than carefully consider how their actions and words could be construed by other ethnicities and their political opponents, these figures often threw caution to the winds and polarized a society at the very time in which Tito's "brotherhood and unity" were most needed.

This is not to say that any discussion of ethnicity or nationalism (or more positively, patriotism) would have been wrong at this time, or that talking about the past would inevitably have opened a Pandora's Box of "ancient ethnic hatreds"<sup>57</sup> between the different Yugoslav nations that a strong leader like Tito had managed to keep submerged but which would now rise to the surface. Discussions of ethnicity or of nationhood, as events in Yugoslavia were to quickly show, was inevitable, and could have even been salutary if addressed by Yugoslav leaders in a manner which both affirmed allegiance to an ethnic tradition while at the same time acknowledging that this was not everything and that ethnic identification had to be balanced with a respect for – and a willingness to compromise with – other ethnic groups if violence or war within Yugoslavia were to be avoided. The challenge for these leaders, of course, was finding

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<sup>57</sup> A term which, while not without a certain validity to it, is also rather imprecise and even sloppy and was often thoughtlessly and promiscuously used by a huge array of commentators and political figures – from the historian/U.S. diplomat George Kennan to the former Chairman of the Joints Chiefs of Staff Colin Powell to the journalist Thomas Friedman – to simplistically describe the reason and cause for the 1991-1995 wars in the former Yugoslavia. The use of the word 'ancient' makes no sense at all, since the Serbs or Croats did not even exist in any meaningful sense as peoples or nations during the Roman period, although the adjective was undoubtedly subtly applied in order to suggest a timeless or perennial quality to the anger between the different ethnic groups, as though it had always existed and always shall. The words 'ethnic hatreds' are perhaps a little better, *if* one is suggesting by using these words that the different ethnic groups have often become violent towards one another during periods of transition or power vacuums, such as during the 1875-1878 Bosnian uprisings or during the World War II, or that the different Yugoslav peoples have had painful memories of being victims of certain ethnic groups, memories which can easily serve as pretexts for their own violent behavior against their past aggressors (or often, perceived aggressors). But to go beyond this and suggest, as many commentators of the Yugoslav conflict basically do, that ethnic hatreds are simply something innate and indigenous within the Yugoslav peoples, and that the second a power vacuum exists in this region they will automatically – as though obeying some law of physics - be at each others throats, is to really take things to a realm that rather a historical and in many ways shallow.

ways of striking this delicate balance in the incredibly chaotic and stressful atmosphere they were in – a remarkably tall order, to say the least.

Conflict then within Yugoslavia accompanied by a certain level of violence was rather likely at the end of the Cold War, simply because of this problem of large minorities in almost all of the Yugoslav republics (Kosovar Albanians and the people of Voivodina in Serbia, not to mention a significant number of Muslims in the Sandžak; Serbs in Croatia; Muslims, Serbs, and Croats in Bosnia; Albanians and Serbs in Macedonia, etc). Perhaps if there had been a greater tradition of democracy in Yugoslavia in which ethnic differences had been settled in a liberal manner the problem might have been more manageable, but unfortunately such a tradition did not really exist. As the great dissident Milovan Đilas puts the matter, Bosnia did not have “a critical history” in which a “democratic consciousness” had taken root before the Bosnian War, thus making it most difficult for Bosnian politicians during the late 1980s and early 1990s to appeal to the Bosnian public in liberal, non-ethnic terms.<sup>58</sup> Because of this factor<sup>59</sup> as well as the others just mentioned, as Izetbegović embarked on his political career he would face a great challenge in trying to present himself in a purely non-ethnic, democratic fashion.

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<sup>58</sup> Adil Zulfikarpašić, *The Bosniak* (London: Hurst and Company, 1998), 158.

<sup>59</sup> This lack of a democratic history which intelligent Yugoslav statesmen might have appealed to was a shame, for in spite of all of the pressure and stress that had started to accumulate in Yugoslavia, up to the beginning of 1990 there still existed a surprisingly large amount of inter-ethnic affinity and a willingness on the part of many to avoid extreme or zero-sum solutions. In Croatia, for instance, a survey was conducted a few months before the 1990 elections that brought Franjo Tuđman to office, which showed that only 15% of Croats wanted independence for Croatia (64% wanted a confederation); only 37% of Croats right before the 1990 April elections said that Croatian independence was one of their top priorities, again in spite of all the nationalistic propaganda that somebody like Slobodan Milošević had already been spewing (although, to be sure, the number of those Croats who wanted independence was growing). Even as late as October 1990, after there had already been violent clashes between the Croats and Serbs, there were moderate members of the HDZ and SDS (the main Croatian and Serbian political parties in Croatia at the time) who were still willing to meet together and come up with a plan for Serbian cultural autonomy in Croatia. Alas, because it was in Tuđman’s interest for Croatia to become fully independent and because Milošević wanted to promote a Greater Serbia that would include many regions of Croatia, both leaders ostracized moderates and encouraged the political parties they oversaw to be more radical in order to both discourage inter-ethnic cooperation and encourage ethnic nationalism. For a discussion of all of this, see V.P. Gagnon, Jr., *The Myth of Ethnic War: Serbia and Croatia in the 1990s* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2004), 135-136, 145-148.

As far as the cast of characters of the Yugoslav conflict are concerned, they are quite familiar to most educated readers at this point, and will be discussed simply to show how they contributed to the radicalization of Yugoslav society. There was, first and foremost, because of the power he had as the leader of the most populous republic and the control he had over the federal army the JNA (*Jugoslovenska narodna armija*), the Serbian president Slobodan Milošević, who more than anybody else was responsible for the hell that the former Yugoslavia would become. Never a terribly dynamic speaker or charismatic presence, Milošević nonetheless had a remarkable ability to strike certain nationalistic chords which appealed to many – although certainly not to all – of the Serbian peoples in Yugoslavia, while at the same time putting the non-Serbs increasingly on the edge. Combined with this was his skill, undoubtedly built up during his career in banking and the Communist party, of ruthlessly manipulating the various Yugoslav institutions to his own ends, supporting those figures who supported him while pushing out the rest. Yet what was perhaps most frightening about Milošević was his extraordinary success during the first few years of his reign, surviving under circumstances that might have caused other leaders in his position to be overthrown. Different Yugoslav peoples either hoped – or feared – that he was some unstoppable force, because of his remarkable capacity to incrementally extend Serbian hegemony throughout Serbian parts of Yugoslavia.

Starting in Kosovo in 1987, where he famously told Serbs that “Nobody should dare to beat you!” (this “nobody”, of course, being the Kosovar Albanians), Milošević was able to very quickly gain recognition by the Serbs of Yugoslavia for whom, especially those who lived in Serbia, Kosovo was *the* issue, the lightning rod that could force even relatively moderate Serbs into a kind of frenzy.<sup>60</sup> He capitalized on this support to push out his former mentor and best man at his wedding, Ivan Stambolić, to become leader of Serbia, an early example of Milošević’s willingness to throw any former ally under the bus. From here Milošević used a mob of 15,000 to

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<sup>60</sup> A Serb from Bosnia I interviewed, who certainly had no sympathy at all for Milošević, did feel when Milošević first came to power that he might be able to finally “solve” the problem in Kosovo. A Serb from Bosnia, interview by author, St. Louis, MO, 3 July 2008.



march in the city of Novi Sad in 1988 to intimidate the Voivodian leadership into resigning (this event was hitherto referred to as the ‘Yoghurt Revolution’ because the protestors pelted the Voivodina government building with rocks and yoghurt). The Voivodian leaders were then replaced by those who owed all their authority to Milošević.<sup>61</sup> In 1989, Milošević turned his sights again on Kosovo, a year in which he was able to end that province’s autonomy (on 23 March Serbian tanks parked in front of the Kosovo provincial assembly and security police inside the building helped to provide the necessary incentive for the Kosovar legislators to pass the needed legislation) and give his great speech at the fields of Kosovo Polje on 28 June commemorating the 600<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Battle of Blackbirds, where he said “After six centuries we are again engaged in battles and quarrels. They are not armed battles, but this cannot be excluded yet.”<sup>62</sup> Also during this year crowds of marchers were able to bring down the executive leaders in Montenegro, to be replaced by supporters of Milošević, and Macedonia also became basically a satellite of Serbia.<sup>63</sup> With his control now over five of the eight members of the federal presidency (one member for each republic, as well as for Voivodina and Kosovo), many Yugoslavs were afraid that he was poised to totally take over the entire state and put a Greater Serbia into place.<sup>64</sup>

Milošević was no less successful with the various Serbian bureaucracies, most notably the media, that all-important institution which was crucial in promoting both him and his nationalist agenda. Again, it all started in 1987, when Milošević was able to get TV Belgrade to play his “No one should dare beat you speech!” again and again; it was partly for this reason that everybody in Yugoslavia eventually knew about it. The prestigious newspaper *Politika*, an honorable institution within Yugoslavia, became during the late 1980s simply a mouthpiece of

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<sup>61</sup> Adam LeBor, *Milošević: A Biography* (New Haven, CT and London: Yale University Press, 2004), 104-105.

<sup>62</sup> Noel Malcolm, *Kosovo: a Short History* (New York: HarperPerennial, 1999), 344 and *Bosnia: A Short History* (New York: New York University Press, 1996), 213.

<sup>63</sup> Ramet, *The Three Yugoslavias*, 353-354.

<sup>64</sup> Noel Malcolm, *Bosnia: A Short History* (New York: New York University Press, 1996), 213.

Milošević, with reporters not honestly covering such things as internal dissent within Serbia while at the same time fanning the flames of nationalism. Journalists in different media outlets who did not toe the Milošević line were canned, to be replaced by those who did.<sup>65</sup> Milošević was also able to co-opt much of the Orthodox Church into supporting his nationalism, with Serbian priests reciprocating the suddenly flattering treatment they were receiving in the press after years of indifference by the Communist state. A good example of this was Patriarch Pavle's opening of the Church Sabor in 1991, not in Belgrade as tradition dictated, but in Jasenovac to commemorate the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the suffering of the Serbs during World War II,<sup>66</sup> an act which would have been expressly forbidden just a few years earlier.

Not far behind Milošević in bellicosity was Franjo Tuđman, the president of Croatia elected in April of 1990. A pseudo-historian of odd obsessions who, unlike Milošević - who used ideology mainly to further his own career and who could easily disregard it when it was opportune - Tuđman seemed to really believe in the different aspects of his rather depraved Croatian nationalism. It was a nationalism fueled by dark but deeply held convictions, whether it was his belief that only 30,000 Serbs altogether were murdered at the Croatian concentration camp of Jasenovac during World War II<sup>67</sup> or his absolute faith that Bosnian Muslims were simply Croats and that any region with Bosnian Muslims should simply be considered an extension of Croatia.<sup>68</sup> Also unlike Milošević, who tended to know just how far to go with his rhetoric, Tuđman had a remarkable ability to blurt out his honest feelings and cause offense, as he did at the 17 March 1990 rally when he remarked that "Thank God my wife is not a Jew or a Serb," or at his first post-election press conference when he said that Bosnia and Croatia were one natural

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<sup>65</sup> Mark Thompson, *Forging War: The Media in Serbia, Croatia, Bosnia and Hercegovina* (Luton, UK: University of Luton Press, 1999), 18, 63-70, 56.

<sup>66</sup> Ramet, *The Three Yugoslavias*, 349.

<sup>67</sup> Jeanne M. Haskin, *Bosnia and Beyond: The "Quiet" Revolution that Wouldn't Go Away Quietly* (New York, NY: Algora Publishing, 2006), 26.

<sup>68</sup> Ramet, *The Three Yugoslavias*, 422-423.

geographic and economic unit.<sup>69</sup> But like Milošević, he did all he could to control the media in his own nation as well promote only those politicians and bureaucrats who would be his lackeys. The fact that he was at the end not able to equal the destruction that Milošević wrought on the former Yugoslavia, although he was certainly able to make his contribution, was in many ways due to lack of military resources more than anything else.

It was not for nothing then that Izetbegović once famously said “that choosing between Tuđman and Milošević was like having to choose between leukaemia and a brain tumour...”<sup>70</sup> Indeed, Bosnia at this time faced the kind of dilemma that Poland has often had to deal with in her history, of being between two ravenous neighbors who are just waiting to divvy her up. Yet in a sense Bosnia’s situation was even worse than Poland’s, for in addition to the external threats there were all sorts of sympathetic Bosnian Serbs and Croats who Milošević and Tuđman respectively could use to subvert Bosnia from within. As early as 1989, for instance, Milošević showed his typical contempt for the rule of law by illegally sending Serbian agents into Bosnia to gather intelligence as well as to propagate stories that Muslims were mistreating Serbian priests and children in order to sow ethnic division.<sup>71</sup> Or consider Tuđman, who showed in September of 1990 (just two months before the elections) who really was in control of the HDZ (*Hrvatska demokratska zajednica*, or Croatian Democratic Union, the party Tuđman and others created) in Bosnia by removing the first candidate for the post of president of that political party because that individual was not a pure Croat - his father was a Serb (Milošević had the same sort of control over the SDS – *Srpska demokratska stranka*, or Serbian Democratic Party, although he tended to be much more subtle about his influence than Tuđman).<sup>72</sup> In essence then Bosnia, and eventually Izetbegović, was facing a situation of having two big guns pointing at her from either side,

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<sup>69</sup> Marcus Tanner, *Croatia: A Nation Forged in War* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1997), 228.

<sup>70</sup> As paraphrased in Noel Malcolm, *Bosnia: A Short History* (New York: New York University Press, 1996), 228.

<sup>71</sup> Ramet, *The Three Yugoslavias*, 354, 414.

<sup>72</sup> Neven Andjelić, *Bosnia-Herzegovina, The End of a Legacy* (London and Portland, OR: Frank Cass Publishers, 2003), 167-168.

creating a rather threatening atmosphere in which the various Bosnian Serb, Muslim, and Croat factions had an incentive to act more erratically than they might have.

In spite of all of this Bosnians were still able to be rather detached about what was occurring elsewhere in Yugoslavia - for a while anyway. One of the prominent journalists of the Yugoslav wars, Misha Glenny, notes that when he went into Bosnia after covering the war in Croatia in 1991, he felt that he had entered a new world, in which Serbs, Croats, and Muslims alike were able to basically ignore what was happening just kilometers away.<sup>73</sup> Undoubtedly this Bosnian sense of being above it all was in many ways wishful thinking, a kind of anesthetic they used to numb themselves to dangers they should have been confronting more honestly, but still, this sense was real for all of that. Although there were certainly undercurrents of fear and foreboding beneath the surface, for the most part the Muslims, Serbs, and Croats were still maintaining the sort of basically peaceful relations that they had had for many decades. Exhibit A of all of this was Radovan Karadžić – future Bosnian Serb nationalist and leader of the SDS, ethnic cleanser, and war criminal - but who at this point in time right before his assumption of a political career was simply seen as another psychiatrist in Sarajevo who had always gotten along with the Muslims, many of whom he had given free medical care. As he put it in a 1990 interview, most Bosnian Muslims were not radical but cosmopolitan and European; if he had a problem it was with the Croats, who had acted so horribly to the Serbs during the Second World War.<sup>74</sup> This sort of common-sensical understanding of their different ethnic neighbors, which

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<sup>73</sup> Glenny also visited Sarajevo at this time, where everybody told him there would be no Bosnian war. Misha Glenny, *The Fall of Yugoslavia, The Third Balkan War* (New York: Penguin Books, 1993), 138-139, 153. It is harsh, although probably also necessary, to say that the Sarajevans especially at times had an almost childlike trust in the benevolence of others – first in the belief that the Serbs would in the end not resort to war, and then later that the democracies would come to their aid. Years of war would destroy this trust, to be replaced by a terrible, heartbreaking bitterness.

<sup>74</sup> Chuck Sudetic, *Blood and Vengeance, One Family's Story of the War in Bosnia* (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, Inc., 1998), 83. The attitude Karadžić expressed here was in many ways emblematic of the basic Serbian attitude within Yugoslavia at the time. As Ivo Banac has observed, even though there was some resentment of Muslims because of the relatively increased status Tito gave to them because of his non-alignment movement efforts, most of the Serbs' ire during the Communist years was focused either on the half Croat Tito himself or on the Croats in Yugoslavia in general. Tito's sacking of the hard-line, strongly anti-Albanian Serbian security chief Alexander Ranković in 1966, his decentralization policies

contained an awareness of their differences but which also saw their commonalities, was shared by much of the Bosnian population, with its most strongly held by the Muslims but to an extent by many Croats and Serbs as well. But even if it is possible that this sense of goodwill was somewhat less real than it seemed, there was most likely little desire in the hearts of most Bosnians to totally polarize their society along ethnic lines. This can be seen in polls at around this general time period, polls which - like all polls - should be regarded skeptically, but which appear to have thoughtfully gauged Bosnian public opinion. In 1990, for instance, 74% of Bosnians were against the creation of nationalist parties, and even as late as November of 1991, when the tenor of Bosnian civility and cooperation between the different ethnic groups had almost totally disintegrated, 95.5% of Muslims, 72.4% of Croats, and even a majority of Serbs – 67% - were still opposed to the division of Bosnia by ethnicity.<sup>75</sup> However naïvely cosmopolitan on one hand or intransigently nationalistic on the other a lot of the Bosnians might have been, most of them were not completely stupid – they knew what a totally fractured and divided Bosnia would mean and how it all could lead to a repetition of the nightmares their parents and grandparents had told them during constant evenings over the years about what had occurred only four decades earlier during the war.

Still, in spite of the good reasons for why it made sense for Bosnians to resist the temptations of ethnic separatism, tensions nonetheless started to increase within Bosnia in 1990 as the November elections came closer. Izetbegović was entering a realm then that would require incredible deftness on his part. He had to, on one hand, recognize the real and in many ways quite legitimate national aspirations the Muslims of Bosnia (and all of Yugoslavia, for that matter) had, who could with some plausibility truthfully argue that in spite of whatever privileges

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which aimed to give the republics more power, the creation in 1974 of autonomy for Kosovo and Voivodina, the increasing power he gave to the Kosovar Albanians – these were the sources of the major gripes that the Serbs had, not the behavior of the Bosnian Muslims. Ivo Banac, “The Fearful Asymmetry of War: The Causes and Consequences of Yugoslavia’s Demise,” *Daedalus* 121, no. 2 (Spring 1992): 147-154.

<sup>75</sup> V.P Gagnon Jr., *The Myth of Ethnic War: Serbia and Croatia in the 1990s* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2004), 43.

Tito had given them they had often had to be quiet and meek about their ethnic identity and/or religious faith. A politician cannot do any good if he is not elected, and if Izetbegović wanted to receive votes he had to be willing to espouse a certain kind of Islamic patriotism/nationalism. At the same time Izetbegović had to be cognizant of certain fears Bosnian Christians had of a resurgent Ottoman Empire or neo-Islamic state that, however unhinged these fears may have often been, were nonetheless there. The fact that in the past Izetbegović *had* espoused the creation of semi-theocratic state and was well known as a fervent Muslim dissident certainly did not make his job any easier, since even well-intentioned remarks he might make about the role Islam should play in Bosnian society could easily be twisted by nationalists and demagogues to suggest that Muslims in Izetbegović's Bosnia would be suppressing the rights of Orthodox and Catholics. Yet if there was to be any realistic hope of keeping Bosnia together he had to persuade Serbs and Croats that they would be equal citizens, a task made rather difficult by the nationalistic rhetoric already being espoused by Tudman and Milošević outside of Bosnia, not to mention the political clout they exercised within. Such a task of straddling the gulf dividing Islamic nationalism on one side and democratic multi-culturalism on the other might have been beyond the capacities of even the most talented democratic statesman – considering that Izetbegović had virtually no experience in politics it was for him probably pretty close to impossible.

Nonetheless, in some ways Izetbegović at least tried. On 27 March 1990 when Izetbegović's political party was officially founded at the Sarajevo Holiday Inn, he read a statement signed by 40 of the founders of the SDA (*Stranka demokratske akcije*, or Party of Democratic Action) which was meant to inform the public of the party's basic principles as a democratic political body (although it was not a formal depiction of the SDA's program). Notable among these principles was the desire to maintain Yugoslavia "as a community of peoples and nations;" the affirmation of the SDA as a political party which was made up of Muslims and Muslim interests *and* of those non-Muslims who were supportive of the goals of the

SDA; the necessity for democracy, the rule of law, and human rights as set out by the United Nation's Universal Declarations of Human Rights charter; the need for different political parties; the need for the protection of minorities; the right to private property; the need for free markets; and the legitimacy of the Serbs and Croats as well as the Muslims existing as legitimate peoples in Bosnia. All in all the statement was a profoundly democratic one, which unlike Izetbegović's *Islamic Declaration* clearly called for checks and balances against any sort of tyranny of the majority. Even in areas of the statement which suggested Izetbegović's penchant for state intrusion into personal lives, most notably in the section which stated that "our endeavors will be directed against all forms of pseudo culture in the shape of pulp literature, pornography, etc.," such prohibitions the SDA argued should be achieved through basically liberal and democratic means (taxes, bans on advertising, zones and periods of partial prohibition, etc.).<sup>76</sup> One could argue (or at least hope) that the statement represented the sort of Bosnia Izetbegović himself really wanted, before circumstances and other Muslims within his party would force him off into a more radical direction – a Bosnia that would perhaps be a *little* more Islamic oriented than some people might like, a little too deferential to the idea of a Bosnia which because of its Muslim plurality would have a strong Muslim feel, a bit too Puritan with the restrictions on pornography and all of that - but *nonetheless* a democracy in which the rights both of the majority and minority would be honored.<sup>77</sup>

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<sup>76</sup> Alija Izetbegović, *Inescapable Questions: Autobiographical Notes*, trans. Saba Rissaluddin and Jasmina Izetbegović (Leicester, England: The Islamic Foundation, 2003), 66-74. This coming-out event aimed to be politically ecumenical, with many Croatian HDZ members in attendance and invitations having been sent to Serbian political party members (who did not come), an example of the phenomenon that would be quite common during the election season with members of the different ethnic political parties attending the events of other ethnic parties. One of these HDZ members from Zagreb, foreshadowing an issue that would eventually become highly contentious, said in a speech that, "defending Bosnia on the river Drina [border to Serbia] is also a defense of Croatia." Such a remark could mean two things – that of being against the threat of Serbian expansion into Croatia, or of legitimizing the Croatian conquest of Bosnia. Whichever interpretation the delegates had of what he said, it caused them to go wild – not a good omen for the future. Neven Andjelić, *Bosnia-Herzegovina, The End of a Legacy* (London and Portland, OR: Frank Cass Publishers, 2003), 163.

<sup>77</sup> For this last observation I am indebted to Neven Andjelić, who makes a thoughtful distinction between those Bosnians of any ethnicity who simply saw all Bosnians as being basically the same except for their religious differences (e.g. the good, basically secular Sarajevan cosmopolitan), and those Muslim Bosnians

But considering how Bosnia was already starting to feel the tremors of nationalistic murmurings from outside and which were even starting to infiltrate the republic itself, was this simple espousal of the SDA's commitment to democratic politics enough? Perhaps the moment called for something more, especially as it was at the beginning of a new era and a time when the first real opportunity for open campaigning and honest rhetoric after decades of Communist repression was occurring. A brief window was open in which Izetbegović might have brought up such painful issues as the involvement of Muslims in some of the murderous rampages which occurred during World War II, or even more distantly the authoritarianism of the Ottoman Empire under which the rights of many Bosnian Christians had been suppressed, in an effort to offer some form of atonement for the past as well as to assure Bosnian Christians that none of those horrors would be repeated. Certainly the scholar Bat Ye'or would agree with this. She cites some remarks Izetbegović gave during an August 1992 interview (after the war started, it should be noted) in which he said, among other things, that there was a 500 year old tradition of tolerance on the part of Muslims in Sarajevo towards people of other faiths. It is such a nonchalant statement as this one, Ye'or believes, that suppressed or denied the negative impact that the Ottoman Empire had had on the Serbs, thus leading to the horrific violence of the 1992-1995 Bosnian War. Because there had been no honest dialogue about the oppression Christians experienced for five long centuries while under Turkish rule, "history unleashed a barbarous war."<sup>78</sup>

Ye'or, in the arguments she makes – which, incidentally, most Serbophiles would totally sympathize with - goes way too far in this historian's opinion in her insistence on some kind of unbroken line linking the oppression that Christians underwent at the hands of the Turks and Muslims with the violence of the 1990s, as though the former inevitably caused the latter to

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who also saw things this way but in addition believed Bosnia should have a fairly strong Muslim flavor – I see Izetbegović, at his best, falling into this second category. Neven Andjelić, *Bosnia-Herzegovina*, 152.

<sup>78</sup> *Islam and Dhimmitude, Where Civilizations Collide*, transl. Miriam Kochan and David Littman (Lancaster, UK: Gazelle Book Services Ltd., 2002), 200-201.



occur. To begin with, from a purely philosophical point of view this is a mindless determinism, a condescending, the devil-made-me-do-it sort of attitude towards the Bosnian Croats and Serbs which denies any notion of free will or the ability to make distinctions on their part - that because they heard nasty stories from their grandparents about how the Muslims treated their ancestors a hundred years ago this somehow predisposed them to view their contemporary Muslim neighbors in a similar light, especially when these Muslims (or their politicians) said or did anything reminiscent of the long-extinct Ottoman Empire. Besides, all the historical evidence points to a more complicated portrayal of Muslim-Christian relations – for every instance of tension between these ethnic groups one can just as easily document examples of cooperation and peaceful co-existence.<sup>79</sup> Consider the 19<sup>th</sup> century, when Serbian nationalism both within and without Bosnia became an extremely potent force and when much of this fervor was strongly fueled by an anti-Ottoman and anti-Islamic bias. Even with this antipathy towards the Muslims though there were many examples of Christians working with Muslims, especially concerning the often common Muslim/Christian desire to curb either the abuses of the Ottoman Empire or of the Muslim landlords within Bosnia. In the 1860s, for instance, a pamphlet from Serbia was issued to the Muslims in Bosnia seeking their cooperation against the Ottomans – “regardless of religious differences, brothers: by God, language, and fatherland.” Also at this time Christians and Muslims protested together against the high taxes they had to undergo (and conversely, there were wealthy Serbs who made common cause with the wealthy Muslim begs in an effort to maintain their privileges in areas like tax-farming).<sup>80</sup> Also, in spite of whatever anger they felt towards each other generally, Muslims and Christians lived much of their normal lives with their neighbors in relative harmony. A Swiss doctor who lived in Sarajevo during this time observed

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<sup>79</sup> Certainly many of my subjects indicated that relations between the different ethnic groups were peaceful before the war. Sukrija Dzidzovic, a 51 year old Muslim from Sarajevo who is now editor of the St. Louis-based Bosnian newspaper *Sabah*, was typical, telling me about serving in the army and how he had no idea what religion other officers were. Sukrija Dzidzovic, interview with author, St. Louis, MO, 19 December 2008.

<sup>80</sup> Marko Attila Hoare, *The History of Bosnia, From the Middle Ages to the Present Day* (London: Saqi Books, 2007), 54, 62, 64.

how during the late 1850s and early 1860s Serb and Muslim peasants would picnic on Sundays on a hillside, with no signs of rancor towards one another. And a little later, in 1897, an English visitor to the region commented on the fact that the Christians in Bosnia seemed to have little bitterness towards the Muslims, and that if some sort of land reform could come about then the major source of remaining grievances that the Christians had against their former masters would be eliminated.<sup>81</sup>

Ye'or also fails to note a rather obvious fact, which is that by the end of World War I the tables had turned and Christians – notably the Serbs - now exercised a powerful hegemony in the newly created Kingdom of the Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes. It was at this time, most significantly, that meaningful land reform was instituted, ending the major grievance that Christians had had against the Muslims. Large Muslim estates were cut up with land going eventually to 113,000, mostly Serbian, tenant families, and peasants were freed from the obligations that they had to their former, often Muslim, lords. Scores were also settled during this time, with Serbian peasants often attacking Muslims who had earlier intimidated Serbs during the First World War in their capacity as members of Austria's *Schutzkorps*.<sup>82</sup> It was also between the two world wars that almost all important political offices were exercised by the Serbs.<sup>83</sup>

Admittedly, the Second World War does provide some more evidence of an anti-Serb role being played by Muslims, most notably concerning the notorious SS *Handžar* ("Dagger") division recruited by Heinrich Himmler that approximately 1 in 30 Islamic Bosnians joined – a very small minority to be sure, but nonetheless a rather disproportionate and significant minority to join such a vile organization (It must be said though that most Bosnian Muslims joined the SS not out of any anti-Serb motive but in order to protect their towns and villages).<sup>84</sup> Especially at

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<sup>81</sup> Malcolm, *Bosnia*, 129-130, 149.

<sup>82</sup> Stevan K. Pavlowitch, *Serbia, The History of an Idea* (New York: New York University Press, 2002), 117-118.

<sup>83</sup> A typical example - the prime minister of Yugoslavia was a Serb for 264 of 268 months of the interwar kingdom's existence. Sabrina Ramet, *The Three Yugoslavias*, 38.

<sup>84</sup> Malcolm, *Bosnia*, 190.

the beginning of the German and Italian occupation, many Bosnian Muslims sympathized with the *Ustaše* government, in large part no doubt due to the fear these Muslims had of the Četniks who had perpetuated massacres against them. To an extent Serbs were also given a deceptive role of the influence of Muslims in the murder of Serbs, since at times *Ustaše* officials would dress up in Muslim robes when murdering Serbs. Finally, in Sarajevo Muslims were able to take over many Serbian businesses under the *Ustaše* regime and do quite well financially, something that did not only irritate the Serbs but the Croats as well - who felt as privileged ethnics that they deserved a greater share of the loot.<sup>85</sup> Yet although Muslims certainly played a part in the particularly cruel acts which occurred in Yugoslavia, their actions were simply par for the course at a time in which Serbs and Croats also contributed more than their fair share. As the Serbian historian Stevan K. Pavlowitch rightly describes it, violence fed upon violence during this time, and “Catholics, Orthodox and Muslims in the mixed regions became locked in a vicious circle, each willing to eradicate others from its territory...”<sup>86</sup>

It has been necessary to go into this modern Bosnian history in some detail in order to demonstrate that Ye’or’s views, as well as the views of many of her contemporaries (including a few scholars) who mindlessly subscribe to a simplistic “ethnic hatreds” paradigm of Balkan history, are overly simplistic. In denying the main thrust of her thesis though, one should not go so far as to just deny or repudiate it altogether. Even though Serbs (and to an extent also Croats)<sup>87</sup> have undoubtedly often wallowed in their suffering at the hands of the Ottomans and Muslims to an unhealthy degree, this time period *was* a painful experience for them, after all, and

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<sup>85</sup> Yeshayahu A. Jelinik, “Bosnia-Herzegovina at War: Relations Between Moslems and Non-Moslems,” *Holocaust and Genocide Studies* 5, no. 3 (1990): 279-280, 288.

<sup>86</sup> Stevan K. Pavlowitch, *Hitler’s New Disorder, The Second World War in Yugoslavia* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008), 49.

<sup>87</sup> With memories of the Ottoman Empire probably utmost in his mind Tuđman, in a 1992 meeting with the American ambassador to Yugoslavia Warren Zimmerman, gave a bizarre story of how Izetbegović was going to create an Islamic state in Bosnia by having 500,000 Turks come to the country. An Islamic Bosnian state would then extend its influence all the way to Libya, and in the process of building up a Greater Bosnia, genocide would occur against Bosnian Catholics and Orthodox. David Bruce MacDonald, *Balkan Holocausts? Serbian and Croatian victim-centred propaganda and the war in Yugoslavia* (Manchester, UK and New York: Manchester University Press, 2002), 239.

an integral part of their history. Many Balkan scholars tend to diminish, while not quite denying, the negative aspects of the Ottoman Empire, thus in some ways implying that things during that epoch – which after all lasted four centuries – were really not *so* bad for the Bosnian Christians. This is a line of reasoning that is rather difficult to sustain, for one cannot go through this time period and find any time in which Bosnian Christians did not enjoy inferior status under their Muslim betters. From the phenomenon of the *devşirme* during the 15<sup>th</sup> to 18<sup>th</sup> centuries, when Bosnian Christian boys were taken away from their families to be trained as Muslim janissaries in Istanbul<sup>88</sup> (so memorably depicted by Ivo Andrić in his *The Bridge on the Drina*), to the innumerable restrictions against Christians' building churches or participating in certain professions or even wearing certain clothing (admittedly not always enforced, but none the less offensive),<sup>89</sup> to the judicial discrimination they faced in being unable to be witnesses in trials because they were not Muslim (a practice which while banned in the 19<sup>th</sup> century nonetheless persisted until the end of the Ottoman Empire),<sup>90</sup> to the land privileges which Muslims had over Christians, to finally the great temptation of Bosnian Christians to commit apostasy in the eyes of their religious brethren by converting to Islam so that they could truly be equal citizens<sup>91</sup> – all of these factors combined to make life burdensome for Bosnian Christians.<sup>92</sup> Even when Bosnia

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<sup>88</sup> The great Balkan historian Barbara Jelavich very much takes a on-the-one-hand but on-the-the-other hand sort of approach to the phenomenon of the *devşirme*, admitting that it was indeed brutal *but* that it also provided many opportunities for young men to advance in the Turkish court or out in the field as soldiers and administrators. Barbara Jelavich, *A History of the Balkans: Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries, volume 1* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 41.

<sup>89</sup> Noel Malcolm, *Bosnia*, 66, 71.

<sup>90</sup> Bat Ye'or, *The Decline of Eastern Christianity under Islam, From Jihad to Dhimmitude: Seventh-Twentieth Century*, transl. Miriam Kochan and David Littman (London: Associated University Presses, 1996), 81-82. It should be noted that Malcolm devotes all of two sentences to this practice in his history of Bosnia. Noel Malcolm, *Bosnia*, 66.

<sup>91</sup> Gerald R. Cragg, *The Church and the Age of Reason* (London: Penguin Books, 1988), 108.

<sup>92</sup> Certainly there were Bosnian Serbs before the war who retained a sense of how they had been treated poorly under the Ottoman Empire. A Bosnian of Croatian and Serbian parentage I interviewed described a sad incident which occurred soon after the war started, when she was still school-aged. Saying hello to a friend of hers (who was a Muslim), my subject was surprised when her friend's mother told her to ignore her. Seeking an explanation of this incident from her family after school, my subject's grandfather launched into a tirade about the history of the difficult ethnic situation between Serbs and Muslims, going back to World War II and then the Ottoman Empire. Before he could get very far though my subject's mother yelled for him to stop. A Bosnian, interview with author, St. Louis, MO, 20 June 2008.

came under Austro-Hungarian control in 1878, Bosnian Serbs were not able to institute land reforms because a coalition of Muslims and Croats blocked such legislation<sup>93</sup> (something that Bosnian Serbs with long memories were perhaps fearful would happen again in the 1990s). It was only under the founding of the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes in 1918 that Serbs were able to feel they were equal citizens.

It should not be surprising then that just 70 years later Bosnian Serbs would not unreasonably feel a little trepidation about any Muslim leading Bosnia. The fact that this leader was Izetbegović, known publicly as a dissident and fervent Muslim and author of the *Islamic Declaration*, probably added to this agitation. It might have been prudent then for Izetbegović to have made some kind of speech in which he openly sympathized with the Bosnian Christians and the painful memories they had, *before* Bosnia became hopelessly polarized by propaganda and the military actions going on and when such a peace offering might have had a limited chance of success. Such a speech need not have been groveling, but simply an honest admission that the Ottoman Empire had been something painful for Bosnian Serbs and Croats and that such oppression as had occurred during that period would never happen again. He could have also used such an opportunity to *totally* repudiate his *Islamic Declaration* and not just say, as he often would in the subsequent years, that simply the conditions of Bosnia made implementation of the *Declaration* impossible.<sup>94</sup> Whether such an effort would have really made a difference in the

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<sup>93</sup> Robert J. Donia, *Islam Under the Double Eagle: the Muslims of Bosnia and Hercegovina, 1878-1914* (Boulder, CO: East European Monographs, Distributed by Columbia University Press, NY, 1981), 25-27, 179. As late as 1910 75% of sharecroppers on 6,000-7,000 Muslim-owned estates were Serbs; in 1911 91% of landlords with dependent peasants were Muslims, 56% of free peasants were Muslims, and 74% of dependent peasants were Serbs. Stevan K. Pavlowitch, *Serbia*, 77, 89.

<sup>94</sup> In July of 1990 Izetbegović would say, "We are not on the road to a national state, our only way out is towards a free civic union. This is the future.... Some people may want to want that (to make Bosnia a Muslim state) but this is not a realistic wish. Even though the Muslims are the most numerous nation in the republic, there are not enough of them.... They would have to comprise about seventy percent of the population." It can be observed though that in his statement Izetbegović did not specifically repudiate the *Declaration*. Also interesting is how Izetbegović seemed to imply that if Bosnia actually did someday have a population which was 70% Muslim, then it *would* be legitimate to install an Islamic state. Certainly this seems to also indicate that the dream Izetbegović spelled out in the *Declaration* of a supranational Islamic state was one he still held on to decades later. Laura Silber and Allan Little, *Yugoslavia: Death of a nation* (New York: Penguin Books, 1997), 208. This historian must admit that it is possible though that

long run is rather questionable when one again considers how individuals like Tuđman and Milošević were already heavily adding to the polarizing atmosphere within Yugoslavia, but at least Izetbegović could have answered some of the criticisms made of him about his supposed Islamism as well as pre-empted some of the vile propaganda attacks that he should have known were destined to come sooner or later.

To be fair to Izetbegović though, perhaps such a speech would have been politically unpalatable to the Bosnian Muslim population - a case of blaming the victim, as it were. After all, why should Izetbegović have gone out of his way to apologize for the Ottoman past of Bosnia or for his own past when leaders like Milošević and Tuđman were already doing their worst to stir up nationalist antagonisms against Bosnian Muslims? Besides, the political need to emphasize religious particularity and to make no apologies about ethnic identity was beginning to be just too great, and so Izetbegović understandably decided to veer between his avowals of the multi-ethnicity of Bosnia on one hand with a strong emphasis on Islam and Islamic identity on the other. Consider a speech he gave to some Muslim electors:

Free elections are coming, and with them the day that the Muslim nation has been waiting for more than *a hundred years* [this historian's italics]. This is a historic moment, in which there can be no 'don't knows' or neutrals.... That is why I am asking you to help on that day, by voting for the SDA, for liberty, and for Muslims. The other Yugoslav nations are going to do it for themselves. Why should the Muslims of Yugoslavia be the exception?<sup>95</sup>

Needless to say, Izetbegović's insinuation here of a return to the good old days of the Ottoman Empire could not have been better calculated to arouse the Serbs' and Croats' concerns and fears. Absent here is any appeal to universality, of the need to understand the needs and desires of the other ethnic groups, or of even the legitimacy of differing opinions among the Muslims

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Izetbegović did indeed make such a speech and that I am simply unaware of it in spite of my researches into most of the relevant secondary sources. Part of the problem of not knowing Bosnian or Serbo-Croat is that I am unable to read Yugoslav newspapers, magazines, and other primary sources and completely answer a question such as this.

<sup>95</sup> Xavier Bougarel, "Bosnia and Hercegovina – State and Communitarianism," in *Yugoslavia and After: A Study in Fragmentation, Despair, and Rebirth*, edit. David A. Dyker and Ivan Vojvoda (New York: Longman, 1996), 97.

themselves. At the same time, such an appeal to the past was perhaps the sort of red meat any successful candidate needed to throw out at this time of increasing ethnic tension. After all, all sorts of Serbian politicians were harkening back to the medieval Serbian Empire of Dušan in order to justify their calls for a Greater Serbian, so it is not surprising that Izetbegović would perhaps feel the need to hit back by referring to the Ottoman past of Bosnia's Muslims. Harder to justify though is what can only be assumed to be Izetbegović's gratuitous assent to a prominent HDZ campaign poster used during the 1990 campaign, which had the Islamic crescent and the Catholic cross on it but not the Orthodox cross, something that could easily be seen as a deliberate snub to the Bosnian Serbs.<sup>96</sup>

But again, Izetbegović was hardly alone in appealing to ethnic themes, with many members of the two other ethnic parties being just as bad in their efforts to gain as many votes as possible (as well as to encourage an ethnic separatism that they hoped would lead in the future to the eventual partition of Bosnia). Not being content to simply positively affirm their own ethnic identity, the SDS and HDZ not-so-subtly brought up the previously taboo topic of World War II, with Serbian politicians talking about *Ustaše* massacres and Croatian politicians about murders they had experienced at the hands of the Partisans. Quite likely, such negative reflections on the past encouraged the Muslims to also dwell on past grievances: On 25 August 1990 in Foča 100,000 people attended a SDA commemoration of a massacre of thousands of Muslims by Četniks during the war.<sup>97</sup> Perhaps if these sorts of references to the past had been thoughtfully and tactfully coordinated by all three ethnic groups together they could have provided some sort of catharsis and healing of old wounds, but emotions were simply becoming too strong for this to have had a realistic chance of occurring.<sup>98</sup>

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<sup>96</sup> Neven Andjelić, *Bosnia-Herzegovina*, 178-179.

<sup>97</sup> *Ibid.*, 177.

<sup>98</sup> The desire that these memorials would serve the purpose of reconciliation was certainly the hope of Adil Zulfikarpašić, a Bosnian Muslim who had helped to form the SDA. He was quite dismayed at the aforementioned meeting in Foča where a Catholic priest spoke violently about the murders of nuns by Četniks in 1942-1943 in Garazde (without also mentioning the Muslims who had been murdered), something that

Because of this heightened focus on ethnicity during the campaign, as well as the more politically mundane need to get votes, another road that Izetbegović felt he could not take was the one that would have involved more efforts on his part to build some kind of potential governing coalition that would have had a real trans-national appeal. He would build sort of a coalition with the Croats and Serbs later on during the campaign, as we shall see, but this was in many ways a marriage-of convenience designed mainly to ensure that the nationalist parties would not take votes from each other. No effort at all was made to try to form a coalition with the Reform party and the former Communist parties.<sup>99</sup> Instead there was the sort of negative attitude SDA Vice-President Muhamed Čengić incarnated at a stadium rally of 40,000, where he strongly slammed Ante Marković, the head of the Reform Party throughout Yugoslavia, since Čengić and the SDA were afraid that Marković's party would take away Muslim votes.<sup>100</sup> Yet by encouraging this sort of thing Izetbegović was burning bridges to a party that later could have lent him more support for a united, multi-ethnic Bosnia.<sup>101</sup>

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Zulfikarpašić thought "stirred up passions and hatred." In contrast, Zulfikarpašić gave a thoughtful speech at this event in which he discussed both the sufferings of Muslims and Serbs during the war. Perhaps because of the increasing emotionalism running rampant in this period though, it was the priest's and not Zulfikarpašić's speech that got mentioned by the press. Adil Zulfikarpašić, *The Bosniak*, 138. Although Zulfikarpašić's harkening for universalism was noble then, the sad fact is that the political rewards for bringing out the negative ghosts from the past were just too great for many politicians, thus making Zulfikarpašić's idealism in many ways unrealistic.

<sup>99</sup> In his retrospective of Izetbegović Gojko Berić writes that even years later Izetbegović "rejected from his national those Bosniaks who voted for the social democrats, believing that they had betrayed him by doing so." Gojko Berić, *Letters to the Celestial Serbs*, trans. Saba Risaluddin (London: Saqi Books, 2002), 266.

<sup>100</sup> *Ibid.*, 165.

<sup>101</sup> My Serb subject from Bosnia said she had really liked Marković because of his economic reforms ("What did you think of Karadžić?" I asked. "He's nuts," she said simply, although she may have been influenced in saying this by his behavior during, and not before, the war). A Serb from Bosnia, interview with author, St. Louis, MO, 3 July 2008. It is at least possible to hypothesize that many Serbs and Croats like her, who were quite prevalent in the cities of Bosnia and were skeptical of the nationalist parties, might have given their vote to a Reform\SDA coalition, especially since the Reform candidates could have been seen as a balance to whatever nationalism the Muslims might have had. A SDA/Reform/former Communist coalition might have been even better, and Zulfikarpašić mentions that Izetbegović had once been receptive to a coalition with the Communists but latter changed his mind. It is understandable though that Izetbegović would have been reluctant to pair up with the Communists; as Milovan Đilas probably rightly argues, if a party like the SDA had teamed up with the Communists during the 1990 elections when the Communists were very much in ill-repute as far as a lot of the population of Bosnia was concerned, then the SDA would have been subject to violent attacks by almost all of the Bosnian political parties. Adil Zulfikarpašić, *The Bosniak*, 144-145, 158. Also, considering all the persecution that Izetbegović had



Along the same lines, Izetbegović chose not to do as much as he might have to broaden his own SDA party and prevent it from being more dominated by its hard-line, nationalist, more religiously-oriented faction. At first Izetbegović had the support of Adil Zulfikarpašić, a prominent and wealthy Bosnian émigré who had lived in Switzerland during the Communist years, but who was now back in Bosnia and had helped in the formation of the SDA. A Muslim of a more secularist orientation who strongly believed in pluralism and openness, Zulfikarpašić might have been able to broaden the party, but the actions of Izetbegović and the SDA eventually persuaded him to leave and form his own party, the MBO (Muslim Bosniak Organization). Zulfikarpašić had been angered, for one, by the SDA's preference for Fikret Abdić over him for one of the two Muslim slots of the Bosnian presidency (with Izetbegović presumably occupying the second one), even though Abdić had been convicted in 1987 for a bizarre financial scandal involving his conglomerate Agrokomerc in northwestern Bosnia. But Abdić had a cult-like following of thousands of Muslims where he had employed many of them in his company, and he could bring these voters in the SDA fold, so there was a political need to offer him the presidency<sup>102</sup> (Considering that Abdić probably attempted a coup against Izetbegović in 1992 when the latter was kidnapped by the JNA, and later raised his own Muslim army that fought against Izetbegović's Bosnian forces, this was probably not the best choice. Yet considering that Abdić was able to make the SDA a more mass-oriented political party<sup>103</sup> when he was initially recruited, Izetbegović's decision to offer him one of the presidencies made a good deal of sense). Zulfikarpašić also got disgusted by what he saw as the growing Islamization of the SDA, which manifested itself at a September 1990 rally in the city of Velika Kladuša where members of a

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suffered under the Communists since the Second World War, participating with them now in a coalition would perhaps have been rather difficult in any event.

<sup>102</sup> Neven Andjelić, *Bosnia-Herzegovina*, 164.

<sup>103</sup> It should also be pointed out here that although Izetbegović's motives were probably mostly purely political and electoral in bringing Abdić into the SDA, the fact that Abdić was a fairly secular Muslim who was known to have good relations with Croats and Serbs does somewhat diminish the typical accusation made by Bosnian Christians that Izetbegović simply intended to make the SDA into a hard-line Muslim party.

crowd of a hundred thousand or more were yelling things like “Long live Saddam Hussein!” and “We’ll kill Vuk [Drašković]!” and hundreds were waving green, Islamic flags.<sup>104</sup>

Yet in criticizing Izetbegović here one cannot also avoid mentioning again the increasingly nationalistic atmosphere that was growing outside of Bosnia, something he could not ignore as a politician who needed to be attuned to public opinion. Indeed, it was probably impossible for even relatively well-meaning leaders like Izetbegović, much less a Karadžić, not to indulge in some kind of ethnic nationalist rhetoric considering how things were at around this same time breaking down to the west in Croatia. Reacting in many ways disproportionately to the new Croatian constitution created around the end of June, which now stated that there was only a Croatian nation – versus the previous Communist constitution, which said that Croatia was ‘the national state of the Croatian nation and the state of the Serbian nation in Croatia’ – Croatian Serbs, especially those in more rural areas, became increasingly angered and frightened by what they saw as the hard-line nationalism of a new *Ustaše* government in Zagreb (as Milošević’s *Politika* and *Politika Express*, where most Croatian Serbs actually got their news from, described Tuđman’s administration). Confrontation between Croats and the Croatian Serbs ensued, especially in the Croatian towns of Knin and Benkovac, which the Croatian Serbs mostly won because they had been given military supplies by the increasingly Serb-dominated JNA and because the Croats had been mostly disarmed by the JNA shortly before the April elections (as had the Bosnians and the peoples in all the other Yugoslav republics, with the exception of the Slovenes who had managed to hold on to a good share of their weaponry). Emboldened by these wins, on 25 August the SDS leader in Croatia Milan Babić declared that the creation of the Autonomous Province of the Serbian Krajina had occurred, based on the results of a referendum

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<sup>104</sup> Adil Zulfikarpašić, *The Bosniak* (London: C. Hurst and Co., 1998), 141. Zulfikarpašić had noticed this phenomenon at smaller, earlier meetings as well, where individuals would wave green or Saudi flags or quote *suras* from the Koran for ten minutes. Needless to say, journalists from Belgrade would appear at such meetings and eagerly take photographs. See again his *Bosniak*, 137.

in which 100% of the region's Serbs had approved of this new mini-state (Croats, unsurprisingly, were not allowed to vote in this referendum).<sup>105</sup>

Undoubtedly the violence in Croatia made its impact felt in Bosnia, with the Bosnians becoming increasingly agitated because of it. There were some violent episodes, as when a bus was stoned in the town of Livno because it was from Belgrade, but the major problem was just ethnic tensions starting to reach a higher pitch in many Bosnian areas during the summer and autumn. Politicians were saying outrageous things like "Five years will not pass, and our [Croatian] flag will be flying on top of Mount Romanija.... Bosnia is Croatian from ancient times" and people in villages wanted to join the areas where their ethnicity was in the majority. It is important to emphasize though that there were also incidents involving Bosnians who wanted to voice their displeasure against the mindless nationalism going on. In June of 1990, for instance, after Yugoslavia beat Spain in football Bosnians spontaneously took to the streets of Sarajevo and waved Yugoslav flags all night, stopping traffic to demonstrate their adherence to a multi-ethnic Bosnia. Yet even during this peaceful night violence occurred, with the car driving the mayor of Zagreb being attacked. The media, to a certain extent, started to also get into the act, with newspaper writers and radio speakers often decrying the nationalists.<sup>106</sup> Members of the nationalist parties started to worry that things were getting out of hand and that they would face a backlash, with the voters going for non-nationalist parties like Marković's, so they met on 4 November just before the election and agreed to cut out the nationalistic rhetoric. They all spoke of the need to have a civil republic, with Karadžić, for example, saying that a civil war was a "mad and impossible idea.... We can live together; living together has created some eternal

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<sup>105</sup> Marcus Tanner, *Croatia: A Nation Forged in War* (New Haven, CT and London: Yale University Press), 230-234.

<sup>106</sup> Neven Andželić, *Bosnia-Herzegovina*, 176, 182. However Mirko Pejanovic, a Bosnian Serb leader who supported the Izetbegović government throughout the war, believes that the media gave too much support to the nationalists. Pejanovic cites as an example a Radio TV Sarajevo program he participated in May of 1990 which also involved Izetbegović, Karadžić, and members of the other ethnic parties; while Izetbegović and the others gave the usual national spin on things, only Pejanovic (who was leading a socialist party at this time) and one other political figure emphasized the need for the Bosnian political parties to encourage the equality of all ethnic groups in Bosnia. Mirko Pejanovic, *Through Bosnian Eyes: The Political Memoirs of a Bosnian Serb*, trans. Marina Bowder (Sarajevo: TKD Sahinpasic, 2002) 17-18.

values and the possibilities of continuing to live together.”<sup>107</sup> Hence there was what in retrospect must be seen as the rather strange phenomenon of right before the elections Karadžić telling his supporters at Pale outside of Sarajevo to remember the centuries of good relations between the Croats, Muslims, and Serbs, as well as members of the SDA and the SDS appearing together in Sarajevo and talking about how they as Serbs and Muslims had always been good neighbors.<sup>108</sup>

It would seem that the three parties’ strategy of reconciling at the last minute worked out brilliantly, with Bosnian voters feeling secure enough to vote for them in spite of the ethnic exclusivism they had espoused for most of the 1990 campaign (although they certainly still had their misgivings). When the Bosnians voted in November 1990 they came out in overwhelming support for nationalist parties – Serbs for the SDS (Serbian Democratic Party), Croats for the HDZ (Croatian Democratic Union), and Muslims for the SDA, with parties like Zulfikarpašić’s MBO or the reformed Communists (pre-election polls had suggested that this later party would come out on top) doing very poorly. Suad Arnautović, who surveyed a great deal of pre-election data, argues that many Bosnian voters supported various candidates and parties out of fear, not so much voting *for* Izetbegović and the SDA as *against* Karadžić and the SDS, and vice-versa. Arnautović also argues that even though these voters were originally inclined to vote for the non-nationalist parties, as the elections approached they felt compelled to cast in their lot with the nationalists. Or consider the remarks of Ljiljana Smajlović, who until the Bosnian War was a journalist for the Sarajevo newspaper *Oslobodjenje*: “[Serbs] simply acted out of fear that even if they withheld their vote from a Karadžić, their Muslim neighbor would still give his vote to an Izetbegović. In the end, they were afraid of weakening their own nation in an hour presaging the ultimate confrontation.” This all suggests that under a more normal atmosphere outside and inside of Bosnia the more universalistic parties like the Reform party would have done better –

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<sup>107</sup> Neven Andjelić, *Bosnia-Herzegovina*, 179.

<sup>108</sup> A funny example of a certain SDA eclecticism - right before the election the political party staged a rally with both traditional Muslim music and rock and roll, an effort apparently to appeal to different constituencies. Robert J. Donia, *Sarajevo, A Biography* (Ann Arbor, MI: The University of Michigan Press, 2006), 261.

yet another example of how individuals like Milošević and Tuđman (as well as Izetbegović and Karadžić) had helped to *create* the stressful situation Bosnia was in, and how it just did not simply originate out of submerged passions from the past. Muslims in particular but also some Serbs and Croats also preferred Izetbegović's strong support of the interests of Bosnia, versus somebody like Zulfikarpašić, who was more idealistic about Yugoslavism and was more willing to work with Belgrade. As Izetbegović had put it in a September 1990 rally, "...Bosnia will not tolerate staying in a greater Serbia and being part of it. If it comes to that, we will declare independence..." Or as Steven Burg and Paul Shoup put the matter, "The rise of extreme nationalism in Serb nationalism in Serbia, and especially the repression of the Albanian minority in Kosovo, had made the prospect of remaining part of a Yugoslav state that did not contain Slovenia and Croatia, and thereby constituted little more than a greater Serbia, intolerable for the Muslim nationalistic leadership."<sup>109</sup> Finally, many imams, especially those from the rural areas, had been highly supportive of the SDA and helped the party get votes.<sup>110</sup> They had been at all the mass meetings during the campaign, and if just before the election they did not exactly tell their flocks who to vote for, by simply offering a description of the SDA they were able to send the message. By being so involved in the campaign they were simply copying their Orthodox and

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<sup>109</sup> For the political analysis provided here see Burg and Shoup, *The War in Bosnia-Herzegovina*, 47-49, 56-57, 120. The poor showing of the MBO might also be due partially to the fact that Zulfikarpašić – the darling of European and Yugoslav intellectuals – was in Zurich during the Communist years and had not stayed in Bosnia and suffered with his people. As a 46 year old Muslim Bosnian doctor from Banja Luka, Fikret Terzić, put it to me, "He didn't know what his country had gone through." Fikret Terzić, interview with author, St. Louis, MO, 16 June 2008.

<sup>110</sup> Adil Zulfikarpašić, for one, had argued before he left the SDA that the imams should not be involved in politics, because he wanted the political party to be a liberal one which would be open to everyone and not just to Muslims who wanted to affirm their Islamic identity. Adil Zulfikarpašić, *The Bosniak*, 136. While Zulfikarpašić's liberalism was again quite laudable, it was also again unrealistic, especially at a time in which Muslims felt they were stuck between Croatian and Serbian nationalisms and therefore felt a need to assert their own more Islamic nationalism. The problem of the imams is also a good example of the sort of Catch-22 Izetbegović often faced during the campaign. In this case, he had the choice of accepting the help of the many rural imams and the votes they could bring to him and accept along with this the more Islamic edge they would bring to his party (thus making Bosnian Serbs and Croats more nervous), or he could prohibit their assistance and lose many votes in the process. Considering that by choosing the former it was he and not Zulfikarpašić who got the necessary votes at the end, Izetbegović's decision could be said to have been vindicated.

Catholic counterparts, priests who in essence sent the same sort of message to their own flocks on who to vote for – basically the SDS and HDZ.<sup>111</sup>

Although Fikret Abdić actually garnered the most votes in the election for the presidency, some back-room deal occurred and Izetbegović – who had come in second – became president of Bosnia.<sup>112</sup> With his assumption of this position, Izetbegović faced the terribly challenging job of governing in a republic that was becoming increasingly divided; the virus of nationalism that had traveled through the different Yugoslav republics over the years had infiltrated Bosnia now as well. Yet there still was a sense of hope in the air, with the feeling being that in spite of all that had happened over the past year in Bosnia and the other republics, reconciliation between the different ethnic parties and groups might ultimately occur. Right after the election Izetbegović, Karadžić, and other political leaders of all religions and ethnicities gathered at the Evropa Hotel, celebrating each other's holidays “with brotherly enthusiasm” and giving off an “Andrić-like appearance” in the words of one observer.<sup>113</sup> Perhaps peace really would have a chance.

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<sup>111</sup> Neven Andjelić, *Bosnia-Herzegovina*, 148, 170. A sign of how religiosity had taken an increasingly prominent role in political life was given at a SDA meeting in which Izetbegović bemoaned how everyone seemed to be saying that they were simply a religious party, and asking his audience rhetorically whether they were *really* such a party, he received a response he did not want or anticipate: “Yes, we are.” Contrast this sort of behavior with a 10 October 1989 pastoral letter issued by one Orthodox and two Catholic bishops in Banja Luka, in which they espoused “mutual tolerance, peace and love” to their co-religionists – sadly, such religious ecumenism was becoming increasingly less common in the tense political atmosphere that Bosnia was becoming. Neven Andjelić, *Bosnia-Herzegovina*, 151, 170.

<sup>112</sup> A brief technical note – there were actually seven members of the presidency, with their being two Muslims, two Serbs, two Croats, and one Yugoslav, with the individual getting the most votes being the head of the presidency. Thus with Izetbegović's assumption of the presidency he was the head of the government, but in the interests of consensual politics the other six members of the presidency were also called upon to take an important executive role. By doing this Bosnians were taking a leaf from the old Yugoslav playbook, which always involved trying to have all the ethnic groups take a role in government so as to promote consensus and inter-ethnic harmony.

<sup>113</sup> Burg and Shoup, *The War in Bosnia-Herzegovina*, 60-61.

## Chapter Three

### Izetbegović's Dangerous Gamble

Of course, it did not happen that way – this residue of good will quickly broke down and seventeen months later Bosnia was embroiled in a bitter war. For those scholars who have been sympathetic to Izetbegović (or at least the Bosnian cause) the narrative they give for explaining these next seventeen months is this. As the Yugoslav republics of Croatia and Slovenia - chafing under the authoritarianism of Milošević - increasingly signaled their intentions of becoming independent states, Bosnian Muslims and Croats (and not a few Bosnian Serbs, for that matter) were greatly afraid of the oppression they would face being under the thumb of a Serbian-dominated Yugoslavia without the Croats or Slovenes to act as buffer peoples. Hence there would be the need for there to be an independent Bosnia if the Croats and Slovenes seceded from Yugoslavia, although for the time being Izetbegović could try to press for greater Bosnian sovereignty. Unfortunately Belgrade and some Serbs within Bosnia would not be able to accept this. Indeed, Milošević and others had long since been reconciled to the need to create a living space for Serbs even before the end of the Cold War, having created the so-called RAM plan which laid out in precise detail the carving up of different parts of Bosnia and Croatia that would become a part of a “Greater Serbia.” Thus commenced the RAM plan in the beginning of 1990 right after the Bosnian elections, with the secret arming of Bosnian Serbs by Belgrade<sup>114</sup> and the beginning of wave after wave of propaganda by the Serbian media, accusing the Bosnian Muslims of being Islamic terrorists and the like.

With the Slovenian and Croatian declarations of independence and the beginning of the war in Croatia and Slovenia in June of 1991, it is likely that Izetbegović started to realize that the preservation of a democratic Yugoslavia might not be possible. Add to this the discovery that the

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<sup>114</sup> For details about the RAM plan, see Marko Attila Hoare, *How Bosnia Armed* (London: Saqi Books, 2004), 36 and Adam LeBor, *Milošević: A Biography* (New Haven, CT and London: Yale University Press, 2004), 143.

Bosnian Serbs had secretly been armed by Belgrade, the creation of Serbian Autonomous Oblasts (SAOs) throughout Bosnia during the autumn (in essence Serbian dominated areas which refused to recognize the central government in Sarajevo), Radovan Karadžić's terrible words during the 14 October 1991 parliament session in which he asked if the Bosnians wanted to go down the same "highway to hell" that the Slovenians and Croats were going down by their pushing for sovereignty (and implicitly independence), and most importantly the recognition by the European Community of Croatia and Slovenia as independent states, and Izetbegović realized that things had degenerated in Bosnia to such a degree that sovereignty would not do and Bosnia would have to totally declare her independence from Yugoslavia.

With the backing of the international community in 1992 then, the Bosnian parliament came out with a referendum in which the people of Bosnia would decide whether they would support an independent Bosnia. Voting on the referendum 29 February/ 1 March 1992, the Bosnian people by a clear majority decided on Bosnian independence. Unwilling to accept this declaration of the Bosnian people's will acting in a democratic fashion, the Bosnian Serbs (with the backing of their sponsors in Belgrade and with the support of the Serbian dominated JNA) began a brutal war against the Bosnian Croats and Muslims that the latter were totally unprepared for and did not expect would happen, driving entire populations out of their homes through a combination of murder, rapes, and terror, making the term 'ethnic cleansing' known throughout the world.<sup>115</sup>

This portrayal of the run-up to the 1992 Bosnian war, which is probably the version that is most familiar to the general audience, contains a good deal of truth, although as we shall also see things were a good deal more complicated than that. We should start off by considering the very important issue of whether the Izetbegović government was really caught off guard by the

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<sup>115</sup> The preceding versions of how the Bosnian War started (with the exception of the mentioning of the RAM plan) can be found for instance in Noel Malcolm, *Bosnia: A Short History* (New York: New York University Press, 1996), 224-238 and Sabrina Ramet, *The Three Yugoslavias: State-Building and Legitimation, 1918-2005* (Washington, D.C and Bloomington, IN: Woodrow Wilson Center Press and Indiana University Press, 2006), 393-433.



advent of war in April of 1992. Contrary to the conventional wisdom, the evidence suggests it was not. Far from “suffering from terminal naivety,” about the chaos that was all around him as Sabrina Ramet put it,<sup>116</sup> Izetbegović and his cohorts probably knew exactly what would happen if Bosnia were to declare its independence: there would be war. We know this now because of the research of the political scientist Alan J. Kuperman, who interviewed Izetbegović as well as all of the important officials within the Bosnian government at the time, almost all of whom admitted that they were well aware that if Bosnia seceded, then the Serbs would initiate war<sup>117</sup> – and not merely a conventional war either, but as could be seen from the war the JNA had already started with the Croats and had demonstrated most vividly at the battle for the Croatian city of Vukovar, one which would be forged mercilessly against innocent civilians.<sup>118</sup>

To be sure, the image that Izetbegović wanted to present to the Bosnian public was precisely one of there not being an approaching war, which was probably no accident but part of a strategy. In speech after speech he gave, Izetbegović endlessly dwelled on certain themes that he repeated ad infinitum like some kind of mantra – there cannot be war because it would be suicidal, it takes two to make war, and so on, saying for example in December 1991 that he did not think the JNA would attack Bosnia, or in mid-March of 1992 - about three weeks before the

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<sup>116</sup> Ramet, *The Three Yugoslavias*, 415-416. Ramet, an excellent scholar of the former Yugoslavia, is hardly the only one to believe that the Bosnian leadership was totally caught off guard by the Serbian invasion. Marko Attila Hoare writes, “The SDA leadership did not plan for or predict the war that would break out in the spring of 1992...” Marko Attila Hoare, *The History of Bosnia, From the Middle Ages to the Present Day* (London: Saqi Books, 2007), 347.

<sup>117</sup> Sefer Halilović, the first chief of staff of the Bosnian army, was representative in thinking that a Serbian offensive against Bosnia would be massive if Bosnia declared independence. He also explained the offensive capabilities of the Serbs to Izetbegović before the war, so there is no way Izetbegović could have been ignorant. Alan J. Kuperman, “Tragic Challenges and the Moral Hazard of Humanitarian Intervention: How and Why Ethnic Groups Provoke Genocidal Retaliation.” (Ph.D diss., MIT, 2002), 51, 152.

<sup>118</sup> A minority of Bosnian officials thought that the Serbs’ response against the Bosnians would not be so harsh, with their reasoning ironically that *because* the armaments of the Bosnian army was so inferior to that of the Serbs the latter army would have no need to inflict such a devastating attack. Interestingly, Sukrija Dzidzovic, who had been a soldier in the JNA before he was purged – also believed at the time that a potential Serbian response would not be that draconian, although the reasoning he used was slightly different – he thought because the Serbian government had not had to resort to drastically violent measures in its clampdown on Albanians in Kosovo during the early 1980s then the Serbs would just repeat that performance against the Bosnians. Alan J. Kuperman, “Tragic Challenges,” 51 and Sukrija Dzidzovic, interview with author, St. Louis, MO, 19 December 2008.

war - “[t]here will be no war in Bosnia, [neither] local nor imported.” Considering that things had broken down within Bosnia by the time he made these remarks and the surreal disjunction that now existed between Izetbegović’s words and reality – many firms at this point were paying taxes not to the Sarajevo government but to different ethnic political parties and approximately 1 out of 10 Bosnians were armed<sup>119</sup> - it may seem incredible that he was not laughed off the stage. Yet amazingly much of the Bosnian public bought Izetbegović’s performance. Or perhaps not so amazingly, since by telling the people that there would not be war he was telling the people simply what they wanted to hear, or repeating out loud what they were telling themselves.<sup>120</sup> Izetbegović was playing their music, striking all the chords within the psyches of Bosnians - especially those from the cities, many of whom had grown up during the formative years of the golden age of Yugoslavia, the late 1960s and 1970s, the period of socialist prosperity when Bosnians went to the Dalmatian beaches during the summers, spent lazy evenings in cafes smoking and drinking Turkish coffee with Serbian, Croatian, or Muslim cohorts, and where they went to Christmas services even if they were Muslims or to a mosque even if they were Christians. For so long they had lived together peacefully, and even with war staring them in the face they could not believe that at five minutes to midnight they would be not be able to just sit

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<sup>119</sup> Ramet, *The Three Yugoslavias*, 418.

<sup>120</sup> Consider this rather long soliloquy conducted by a Bosnian Muslim that is quite representative of the views of the subjects I interviewed. Reflecting on the conversations heard between parents and their friends, this Bosnian said, “Some people were just unable to accept that war could occur, like an alcoholic in denial. The country had forty or fifty years of prosperity, now dictatorship or not, every doctrine has good and bad side, people who were suspecting that bad times were ahead but did not think war would occur, they believed in the sanity of humans. [This Bosnian laughed a little] ‘Okay, we can make this transition without war, some people believe this, some that, but living together is still possible’ Some were in denial, some naïve, some wanted peace too much, some refused to believe and just waited to the last minute to get out of country to save their lives. I do remember a lot of disagreement about those who had weapons and uniforms to give them up, but a lot of people agreed with that. I remember a lot of people who came to our house who agreed with Izetbegović – ‘Let’s try to get through this peacefully.’ It’s easy to say now after so many years that it was a naïve thing to do, but at the time it really kind of comforted people and it comforted me that there was the possibility of a peaceful resolution of all the craziness, so a lot of people respected the decision, and *still do* [my italics]. He [Izetbegović] did a lot of things that the people liked, such as, at least in the context of... the neighborhood in which I lived, his desire for peace.” Bosnian Muslim, interview with author, St. Louis, MO, 24 July 2008.

down, have another cup of coffee, and find some way out.<sup>121</sup> What could be better then for the Bosnian population who were coming up with every rationalization in the world for how war might somehow not come, than a leader who was echoing in public these very same rationalizations?

Much of the Bosnian public may have believed – or wanted to have believed – what their president said; Izetbegović himself probably did not. Yet even though Izetbegović may not have believed the very his own words, he certainly hoped his audiences believed him. And the most important audience Izetbegović probably had in mind was not his own people, but rather the international community. For Izetbegović was playing a very dangerous game here, proclaiming that Bosnia was totally dedicated to peace and would never go to war while at the same time hoping that when the war actually came – which again probably he knew would come in spite of what he was saying publicly – the international community would be so shocked by the aggression imposed by the Serbs on the Bosnians and be so aware of the helplessness of the Bosnian position that they would feel compelled to intervene on the Bosnians' behalf. In order to be seen simply as the victim in this war though, not only would Bosnia have to be seen as totally pacific before the conflict,<sup>122</sup> but once the war started they would have to be seen as totally *losing* the military campaign, since if there was some parity in the war then there was the danger that the international community would simply see the conflict as just another civil war, rather than as a war of aggression on the part of the Serbs against the Bosnians. The upside to this strategy, of

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<sup>121</sup> The cup of coffee metaphor comes from the Balkans scholar Dennison Rusinow, who wrote right before the JNA invasion of Croatia, “Yugoslavs have a habit of going to the brink of some abyss, apparently poised to jump over, only to adjourn for another cup of coffee and further consideration.” Dennison Rusinow, “Yugoslavia: Balkan Breakup?” *Foreign Policy*, no. 83 (Summer 1991): 143.

<sup>122</sup> Kuperman cites the fact that the Bosnians refused to raid the federal weapons caches before the war as the Slovenes and Croats had done before their wars, even though it would not have been very hard for them to do so. The danger, according to the SDA official Hasan Čengić, was that in raiding the caches they would present the image of being an aggressor against the Serbs to the international community, and the latter then would not come to the Bosnians' aid when war broke out. There was also the danger that the image of being an aggressor would prevent the international community from recognizing Bosnia; therefore, as one of the creators of the Bosnian army, Rusmir Mahmutcehajić put it, the Muslims could not allow any sort of violence to occur before the war. Kuperman, “Tragic Challenges,” note 56 on page 111 and 112.

course, was even though the Bosnians would have to fight for a while and pay the terrible price of many military *and* civilian casualties, it would be worth it in the long run because then the sympathetic international community would come to their rescue.<sup>123</sup>

Although this account of the Bosnians' strategy of getting the international community to side with them in the case of war cannot be proven as substantially (I think) as the case of the Bosnians' expecting there to be conflict when they declared independence, and as we shall see later in the conclusion of this essay that there are some real problems with it, there is still a lot of evidence to recommend it. Again, a lot of Kuperman's evidence comes from interviews.<sup>124</sup> As Izetbegović himself admitted, "Our tactics were to buy time...[we pursued] a zigzag line for independence... so the international community would defend this country." Or consider the words of the foreign minister at the time, Haris Silajdžić, "My strategy was to get Bosnia independent so that it would be granted rights by the international community" – rights that he hoped would be defended by the use of force on the part of the European and/or Americans.<sup>125</sup> Silajdžić and another SDA member Ejup Ganić also told Adil Zulfikarpašić in the summer of 1991 that if Bosnia were able to receive U.N. recognition then the Muslims would "receive protection" and Muhamed Cengic, the SDA Vice-President said to Kuperman, "We thought Europe or the United Nations would do anything in their power to stop or prevent war."<sup>126</sup>

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<sup>123</sup> For an overview of what Kuperman sees to be as the general Bosnian strategy of getting the international community to support them against the Serbs, see *Ibid.*, 109-115.

<sup>124</sup> It needs to be noted here that no other scholar that I am aware of has demonstrated that the Bosnians' strategy *before the war started* was to bring the international community into the conflict (although some scholars hint at it), although different writers *have* argued that it was the Bosnians' strategy *once the war began*. Also important is the fact that no other scholar that I know of has incorporated Kuperman's findings into his work, since if true his argument makes an important contribution to our understanding of the Bosnian conflict. Whether this omission has to do with the fact that Kuperman's work is a PhD thesis that many people are not aware of, or if it is because scholars do not want to grapple with the implications of his argument I can not tell.

<sup>125</sup> Kuperman, "Tragic Challenges," 114. Kuperman also offers what I basically see as the Ockam's Razor principle (page 51) in defense of his thesis that the Bosnian government believed the international community would save them – since Izetbegović and others knew the Serbs would smash them militarily if they declared independence, and they also knew they were woefully unprepared to fight, the only reasonable explanation for their still declaring independence is that they felt the international community would be there for them.

<sup>126</sup> *Ibid.*, 148, 160.

How much of a foundation was there for their hope though, that when the arms clashed the U.S. and Europe would be there at the breach? Certainly as far as the American response was concerned, next to none, at least until a few months before the war when the American response might have seemed as being more sympathetic. Although so many works have been penned analyzing the different currents running through the American government in their response to the impending Balkan crisis and as difficult as it is to wade through them all, it is nonetheless fairly easy to find a good deal of consensus about what the basic American attitude was at the time, at least as far as the Bush administration was concerned. Basically, their response was very much a muddled one in which they preached the preservation of Yugoslavia on one hand, with respect for democracy on the other, unaware as they were that these two goals were irreconcilable and made little sense as a practical policy for what was really happening in Yugoslavia.<sup>127</sup> And if the Bush's administrations policy for Yugoslavia was cryptic then the means for backing up whatever that policy was were non-existent, with their giving no assurance whatsoever that they would intervene in Yugoslav affairs or enforce any sort of agreement with military might. As one astute observer rightly saw the tough-sounding talk the Secretary of State James Baker gave to Slobodan Milošević and others during his famous 21 June 1991 meeting with the Yugoslav

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<sup>127</sup> Or were they really unaware of this? Many writings depict the U.S. government as being totally clueless about what was happening in Yugoslavia during the late 1980s and the early 1990s, focused as they were on more important foreign policy issues such as the state of the post-Soviet Union, the reunification of Germany, and the problems in the middle-East. Indeed, if they thought about Yugoslavia at all it was often in connection to their much greater concern for Russia and their support of Mikhail Gorbachev, with their being fearful that if they gave too much support to countries like Croatia or Slovenia they would hurt Gorbachev's standing and give ammunition to right-wing nationalists within Russia (Considering the ruckus that the nationalist Vladimir Putin raised with the independence of Kosovo recently, this was hardly not an illegitimate concern). While it is certainly true that these afore-mentioned issues took priority, it is simply false to suggest that the administration and other agencies did not know what was happening. Lawrence Eagleburger, after all, who was the number two man in the State Department at the time, had been the ambassador to Yugoslavia during the 1980s, and was well-briefed on what was happening there; Brent Scowcroft, the National Security Advisor under President Bush had also served in Yugoslavia; many other staffers within the State Department were advocating greater American involvement. The problem then was not lack of knowledge, but simply the fact that Yugoslavia did not receive a high priority and no high official within the administration was willing to pound the desk and make it one – something that would be a source of shame and guilt later on for officials like Eagleburger who had made remarks about how Yugoslavia was a land of deep hatreds and all that at the time but who deep down had a more sophisticated understanding of what was happening. For a discussion of this issue, see David Halberstam, *War in a Time of Peace, Bush, Clinton, and the Generals* (New York: Scribner, 2001), 31-46.

leaders, Baker did not give a green light to Milošević to invade the republics but he did not give a red light either, since there was not “a single member of Congress.... [who] advocated the introduction of American military power.”<sup>128</sup> Not surprisingly Milošević saw the lack of a red light as a green one and believed the Americans were going to do nothing militarily then to protect Bosnia or any other Yugoslav nation.

But what about the hope for a European response? It is easy to mock now Jacques Poos’ infamous statement, “The age of Europe has dawned,” and other remarks he made that suggested the Americans were not needed any more and the Europeans could take care of things now, thank you very much, but during the early 1990s there was, after all, a renewed confidence within European nations that they could now handle the problems in their own sphere of influence without running this time to the Americans for help. The Cold War had just ended, ending the terrifying prospect of a nuclear war; the Russians were leaving Eastern Europe peacefully and fairly expeditiously; the two Germanys were headed towards unification in a seemingly benign fashion – all of this serendipitous good fortune seemed to herald an approaching golden age of European strength and unity. Since there was no longer the need to worry about the Soviets, the thinking went, Europeans could now devote more of her energies to solving problems like the Yugoslav cauldron. The prosperous western European nations, then, would show the different Yugoslav states that it made no economic and politic sense in this modern era to war over petty ethnic differences, that such problems could be dealt with intelligently and with compromise, and that if the Yugoslav states were willing to sensibly work out their disagreements then they too could eventually be a part of the wealthy European community. And to be fair, such a response might have succeeded if the Yugoslav states had been led by moderate, reforming leaders. But of course they were not, and were instead led by nationalists like Milošević and Tuđman who would not be stopped through peaceful coercion or economic carrots – they only could be stopped by

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<sup>128</sup> Warren Zimmerman, *Origins of a Catastrophe, Yugoslavia and its Destroyers – America’s Last Ambassador Tells What Happened and Why* (New York and Toronto: Times Books, 1996), 137.

force.<sup>129</sup> Alas, this was the one chink in the European arsenal, the one alternative that they were unwilling to resort to.<sup>130</sup>

That this all should have been very apparent to Izetbegović rather quickly can be seen in the European response to the war in Croatia in 1991 which, to put it most charitably, left a lot to be desired. As Gregory F. Treverton, a Senior Fellow at the Council on Foreign Relations, noted at around this time, the European Community (EC) was able to do a few things to help – they were able to send some foreign ministers to monitor the conflict, they were able to apply sanctions against Yugoslavia (i.e. Serbia) in November of 1991 (although rather belatedly), they were able to broker a ceasefire (actually he – it was the U.N. envoy and *American* Cyrus Vance who was able to get the deal), and they were able to then deploy 10,000 peacekeeping troops. Yet as he also pointed out the European response was in many ways ineffective, with divisions between the Serbophile French and British and Croatophile French, an inability to act on the idea of sending 30,000 European troops to settle the conflict, the collapse of approximately a *dozen* ceasefires during the war, and Vance’s ceasefire succeeding only because the Serbian-dominated JNA was beginning to lose the war and thus willing to stop its offensive.<sup>131</sup> On the minus side of all of this one must also add that Milošević had pretty much conquered the areas that he wanted in Croatia and was able to quit while he was ahead. Considering the fact that there was no EC

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<sup>129</sup> Gale Stokes rightly points out, “...Yugoslav republics [were unwilling] to bury the hatchet in 1991, despite the large numbers of contracts with foreign firms that had been signed under Ante Marković’s regime and despite the significant financing that the international community was prepared to offer a stable Yugoslav state. The eagerness of nationalists throughout the former Yugoslavia to destroy economic assets in the name of their nation, not to mention to kill neighbors and burn villages, should make it clear that nationalists in their crudest form are motivated primarily by an idea, not any cost-benefit analysis.” Gale Stokes, “Solving the Wars of Yugoslav Succession,” in *Yugoslavia and Its Historians: Understanding the Balkan Wars of the 1990s*, edit. Norman M. Naimark and Holly Case (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2003), 204.

<sup>130</sup> Indeed, it would have been very difficult for the Europeans to have resorted to force even if they had wanted to. The European Community, for instance, had no military at all and the Europeans did not want to use NATO troops because that would involve the Americans. That basically left the U.N., whose soldiers unfortunately were trained more for peacekeeping than for combat, as the Bosnian war would make painfully evident. For a discussion of this problem, see Halberstam, *War in a Time of Peace*, 89-90 and James Gow, *Triumph of the Lack of Will: International Diplomacy and the Yugoslav War* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997), 61, note 45.

<sup>131</sup> Gregory F. Treverton, “The New Europe,” *Foreign Affairs* 71, no. 1 (1992): 103-106

mechanism forcing Milošević to forgo his conquests – Serbian “police” were allowed to maintain order there – it was all a very sweet deal for him, and this precedent of military lack of teeth on the part of the EC should have made Izetbegović and his cohorts rather skeptical about the Europeans being able to save their skins.

Something that should have made Izetbegović even more skeptical is that when *he* asked for peacekeepers on 21 November 1991, both the Americans and Europeans were unwilling to provide them for him at this time.<sup>132</sup> Or consider the middle of March 1992, right before the war started, when Haris Silajdžić came to talk to an official of the National Security Council to ask - among other things - for American military support – the official had to sadly tell him no.<sup>133</sup> This lack of help should not have been surprising to Izetbegović; he had personally met with American officials in Washington in 1991, and although he had found Senator Bob Dole sympathetic to his dilemma he felt “the Bush administration had no understanding of the Yugoslav crisis.”<sup>134</sup> It was for these sort of reasons undoubtedly that when asked by Adil Zulfikarpašić in July of 1991 whether Izetbegović had received any offers of foreign support, Izetbegović had to admit that he had not.<sup>135</sup>

To be fair though to Izetbegović and most of the top Bosnian officials, they were thinking that even if the international community might not promise to get involved before the war, once

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<sup>132</sup> It is important to note that the American ambassador to Yugoslavia Warren Zimmerman, who probably was the most sympathetic high-ranking official to the needs of the Bosnians at the time, admitted that he did not press as hard as he should have for the peacekeepers – yet another example of a bureaucrat who did not want to do battle against the forces of inertia. This in spite of the fact that he liked Izetbegović and thought the leader was doing everything he could to promote peace. As Zimmerman writes, “I noted during the conversation [in late October 1991] the moderate nature of Izetbegović’s views and his charity to people – Tudman, the JNA leadership, the Bosnian Serbs – who were reviling him in the most scabrous way.” Also significant is Zimmerman’s observation that the only person Izetbegović seemed to trust in the government was his own daughter Sabina, who was always a ubiquitous presence in his office answering the phone and greeting visitors. Apparently Izetbegović had no Harry Hopkins-type figure he could rely on for help and guidance through the heavy thickets of Balkan politics. Warren Zimmerman, *Origins of a Catastrophe*, 172-174.

<sup>133</sup> Robert L. Hutchings, *American Diplomacy and the End of the Cold War: An Insider’s Account of U.S. Policy in Europe, 1989-1992* (Washington D.C. and Baltimore: The Woodrow Wilson Center Press and The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997), 315.

<sup>134</sup> Alija Izetbegović, *Inescapable Questions : Autobiographical Notes*, trans. Saba Rissaluddin and Jasmina Izetbegović (Leicester, England: The Islamic Foundation, 2003), 89, 94.

<sup>135</sup> Kuperman, “Tragic Challenges,” 125.



the war actually started and Europe and America became horrified at the carnage that the Serbs were causing, *then* they would intervene and stop the madness. Considering the fact though that the Europeans would only send a few thousand basically useless (and at times worse than useless) U.N. peacekeepers over the next three and a half years and that American troops would not be in Bosnia until *after* the war was actually over (although of course the American-led NATO did bomb the Serbs sporadically in 1994 and quite intensely in 1995), it is easy to say in retrospect that this hope was obviously severely misguided. Yet it was this policy that they decided to go with and which determined the moves that the Izetbegović government made not only before but also during the war as well, right up to the Dayton Accords in November of 1995. Indeed, a major downside of this policy was that it in effect made Izetbegović stuck in a way that limited his options and forced him into a corner which made it impossible for him to consider certain choices over the years that might have been better for Bosnia.

To get back now to the time period right after the 1990 elections where we left off, it should be said that in one sense at least Izetbegović was willing to be flexible, insofar as he was determined to provide at least *some* military strength for his nation through his own resources – hence the development of the Patriotic League as early as December of 1990 and the first few months of 1991, a military force which was beholden to the SDA party and not to the general, coalition Bosnian government.<sup>136</sup> Izetbegović and his close advisors had decided upon this action almost right after the recent elections when the actions of the three major ethnic political parties showed how brittle their coalition of convenience really was. Unlike during the end of the campaign when the three political parties were able to be lovey-dovey with each other, when they actually had to govern they were almost immediately at each others' throats. Perhaps the passions unleashed over the last year inside and outside Bosnia had just been too much for the nationalist leaders and their parties, and once in power the only people they felt they could trust

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<sup>136</sup> Steven L. Burg and Paul S. Shoup *The War in Bosnia-Herzegovina: Ethnic Conflict and International Intervention* (Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe, Inc., 1999), 63 and Marko Attila Hoare, *How Bosnia Armed* (London: Saqi Books, 2004), 29-30.

were their own ethnic kin. This could be very easily seen right after the elections had barely been concluded when the SDA, HDZ, and SDS respectively all performed purges of the various local governments in Bosnia where they were each dominant, something that Izetbegović for his part apparently did nothing to stop. In Sarajevo, for example, the Muslim-dominated SDA managed to dominate the central Bosnian government, undoubtedly stoking Serbian and Croatian fears of Muslim dominance at least as far as Bosnia as a state was concerned. So much then for the democratic ideals Izetbegović had earlier expressed at the Sarajevo Holiday Inn – they were to be replaced by an authoritarianism that tended to disregard public opinion and was often insensitive to the rights and fears of the different ethnic groups and those with different political sympathies. One suspects that even at this early point Izetbegović personally felt that some sort of accommodation with the Serbs would be remarkably difficult to achieve, and that in spite of whatever noble efforts he might attempt conflict was in many ways inevitable and therefore there was a need to arm secretly.

And so it went – for the next fifteen months until the advent of the war the situation in Bosnia remained bleak, and although the two major players during all of this – Izetbegović and Karadžić (and behind this latter figure, his patron Milošević in Belgrade, as well as to a certain extent the Bosnian Croat leadership and *their* patron in Zagreb, Tudman) – did in some ways try to alleviate the stress and find some way out of the impasse, it is hard to avoid the conclusion that their positions were mostly set and that there was little that could have been done to avoid war in 1992. For in essence the matter was really fairly simple – at the end of the day Izetbegović was not willing to do anything that would put Bosnia under Serbian control *or* that would compromise Bosnia's territorial integrity, and Karadžić was never willing to accept a situation in which the Serbs within Bosnia would be in a minority. It was a circle that just could not be squared. What is critical then is to try to empathize with the situations they felt they were in and the limitations they faced, assess them honestly, and determine whether there were really no ways out for either one of them. By doing this we can hopefully answer the important question which obviously

continues to divide many people – Who was *really* responsible for the outbreak of war and who should the onus really be applied to? To determine this, it is necessary to critically evaluate the statesmanship and character not only of Izetbegović, the subject of this thesis, but also to an extent that of Karadžić, since the actions of one were highly contingent on the actions of the other during this critical time. In order to understand Izetbegović, we also have to understand Karadžić.

One very important issue to consider is whether Izetbegović should have done more to create a government that had more checks-and-balances and would seem much more secure for the Serbs. Basically he subscribed to the one-man, one-vote principle, that government should be based on the majority and that no reference to ethnicity should be made. The problem with this, of course, was that two ethnic groups like the Muslims and Croats could always form a coalition that would enable them to outvote the Serbs, for instance on an issue like the independence of Bosnia over which they would strongly disagree. This went against the sort of maneuvering which occurred during the Titoist era, when the Communists worked hard at achieving a kind of consensus in which one group did not get out of line and all groups felt protected.

Izetbegović could have provided some reassurance to the Serbs then by creating some government mechanism which would give more veto power to the Serbs, but there is no indication that such an effort was even attempted. Much attention has been given to Karadžić's "highway to hell" speech in October of 1991, but perhaps the even more significant event occurred after the Serbian delegation had walked out of the Bosnian parliament and the remaining Croat/Muslim members voted on the sovereignty of Bosnia through the so-called "Memorandum." Although this memorandum paid some lip service to affirming the rights of minority groups, it provided no real mechanism to act as a brake on any potential tyranny of the majority. In other words, Croats and Muslims could in theory simply form coalitions and outvote the lesser represented Serbs on any issue, something that certainly had a precedent in earlier times (e.g. under the Habsburgs, when Croats and Muslims and a few Serbs were able to block

meaningful land reform which would have benefited the Serb peasants). There had been the creation of a “Council for National Equality,” in July of 1990 that might have been given some teeth to act as a brake on legislative control, and there was also some consideration concerning the creation of two houses of parliament, one national and one regional (something supported by the more moderate Serb Nenad Kecmanović, since he felt that Bosnia was not ready for a true civil society and real democratic governance, and that much power needed to be given to certain Bosnian regions where Serbs would be able to have a greater say), but the Muslims and Croats decided not to adopt these.<sup>137</sup>

Yet in criticizing Izetbegović for this, one has to also consider the problem of Karadžić and whether he would have used his veto power in a prudent and conscientious manner, or if at this point he was too much a creature of radical nationalism and of Milošević and would have used the veto to simply repudiate any decision he and his fellow Serbs did not like. The evidence seems to mostly support the latter. Even before the 1990 elections Karadžić had shown that he was totally unwilling to accept any situation that left Bosnian Serbs in the minority, notwithstanding any goodwill that the rest of Bosnia might promise. This can be seen in the decision at this time to create an ‘An All Serb Assembly’ in the important Bosnian city of Banja Luka and other Bosnian cities where a significant number of Serbs resided and which was seen a clear threat to the Bosnians to not support the establishment of an independent Bosnian state.<sup>138</sup> In defense of this uncompromising stance Karadžić was often bullying and bellicose, in his “highway to hell” speech of course but also in other utterances he gave as well. Zimmerman, for instance, notes often in his memoir Karadžić’s lack of perspective and moderation, how the latter would call Croats “fascists” and Muslims “Islamist fanatics,” or would argue that since the Serbs were more rural they were entitled to a much larger share of Bosnian territory, and so forth.<sup>139</sup>

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<sup>137</sup> Burg and Shoup, *The War in Bosnia-Herzegovina*, 76-79.

<sup>138</sup> Neven Andjelić, *Bosnia-Herzegovina: The End of a Legacy* (Portland, OR and London: Frank Cass Publishers, 2003), 178.

<sup>139</sup> Zimmerman, 175, 180.

Still, part of being a statesman is knowing when to deal, even with other leaders who are rather unattractive – like Karadžić. This brings us to the question of whether Izetbegović should have compromised and agreed to one of the two important peace proposals that came to him and which, theoretically at least, could have averted war. The first of these was the so-called Belgrade Initiative that came about in July of 1991, which basically involved Bosnia remaining in a rump Yugoslavia without Croatia or Slovenia, and in exchange Belgrade would not support any SAOs in Bosnia and would respect Bosnia's sovereignty. Izetbegović, probably more aware of the dangers and risks of declaring independence than he allowed publicly or to certain hard line members of his party by this time, at first accepted the agreement but then repudiated it after hardliners in his party apparently protested that Bosnia would simply continue to be a victim of Milošević's aggression by staying within Yugoslavia.<sup>140</sup> Critics of various persuasions have ever since condemned Izetbegović for his decision, seeing in it his rejection of the only possibility at that point for avoiding a dreadful war that he himself knew the Bosnians were not prepared for. Adil Zulfikarpašić, who was one of the originators of the plan, is one of the harshest, arguing that not only would his plan have averted war but it would have also have provided for "Bosnia's independence" and the Muslims' being recognized as an "ethnic group, as a nation." Milovan Đilas concurs with this and believes the plan was premised on the idea that the Serbs and Muslims would always be on equal footing in a rump Yugoslavia.<sup>141</sup> Kuperman quotes approvingly Steven Burg and Paul Shoup, two of the most detached scholars of the Bosnian conflict, who argue that this plan might have been a good one for the Bosnians to have agreed to since it would have headed off war and Bosnia most likely would have been able to retain many of her rights as a republic in a rump Yugoslavia.<sup>142</sup>

Yet as Burg and Shoup *also* argue (and as Kuperman fails to mention that they also argue), it is doubtful that the Serbs themselves would ultimately have agreed to this plan, or at

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<sup>140</sup> Kuperman, "Tragic Challenges," 126-127.

<sup>141</sup> Adil Zulfikarpašić, *The Bosniak* (London: C. Hurst and Company, 1998), 164-165.

<sup>142</sup> Kuperman, "Tragic Challenges," 146.

least Zulfikarpašić's version of it since it called for such things as the uniting of the Sandžak region of Serbia – a region with a large number of Muslims – with Bosnia, and gave the Bosnians more power than Milošević would have been comfortable with.<sup>143</sup> But a more fundamental objection is that the Zulfikarpašić proposal was rather naively premised on the idea that Milošević was a sensible, pragmatic statesman who in spite of all he had done would now suddenly reform and become a great respecter of Muslim rights. Those who think that Bosnians should have given peace a chance and had such a faith in a new Milošević have to ignore a lot of things he did during the late 1980 and early 1990s. And even if it is true that Milošević was ultimately an opportunistic politician who would as easily switch to peace as commit to war, no sensible person had any illusions that given a pretext or opportunity Milošević could just as easily go back on his promises and become tyrannical again.

Yet even if armchair historians are willing to give Milošević and the Bosnian Serbs the benefit of the doubt, the point is ultimately moot, for all of the evidence seems to demonstrate that the Bosnians *themselves* were not. In the end the Belgrade Initiative probably could not have happened if for no other reason than that all those who were not Serbs would never have allowed it. We have already seen that one of the reasons Bosnians favored Izetbegović over Zulfikarpašić was because the latter was seen as too accommodating to the interests of Belgrade, and there is little reason to believe that the mentalities of Bosnians had changed a year later as far as this issue was concerned. Even Kuperman quotes an important Bosnian official who admitted that “average Bosnians” saw officials like Zulfikarpašić as weak “quislings.... of the [Milošević] regime” for their proposal of such a plan.<sup>144</sup>

Still, it is always possible that Milošević would have been magnanimous in victory and realized that the eyes of the international community would be on him, thus doing all he could to treat a Bosnian republic in Yugoslavia with generosity and respect. Another indictment to make

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<sup>143</sup> Burg and Shoup, *The War in Bosnia-Herzegovina*, 72.

<sup>144</sup> Kuperman, “Tragic Challenges,” 127.

of Izetbegović then is that in his rejection of the Belgrade Initiative he - as a democratic representative of the people, had an obligation then to present to the Bosnian public the harsh reality of what his rejection would mean - which is that the price of not remaining in Yugoslavia would almost certainly be war. Or to go even further, perhaps he should have put it on the shoulders of the Bosnians to decide whether they wanted to remain in a rump Yugoslavia and take their chances on a reformed Milošević. To put the matter another way, it was the Bosnians - like the people of any democratic society - and not Izetbegović and his cronies who had the right to decide whether they wanted either an unjust peace or justice at a terrible price, and Izetbegović was wrong in denying them this choice. The problem with this though is that if Izetbegović had asked the people to decide on this issue through a referendum or what-not and they voted to refuse the Belgrade Initiative, then Karadžić and Milošević could have seized upon this repudiation as evidence that the Bosnian people were uninterested in peace and could care less about the rights of the Serbian people. Hence when the Serbs initiated war it could be more easily justified as not a war of aggression but simply a military action designed to protect the Serbs, something the international community might have been willing to accept. Another problem is a more obvious one, namely the difficulty Izetbegović would have had in trying to explain to the Bosnian people why they had to tolerate living under a Milošević regime. No democratic politician likes to admit failure, and Izetbegović was understandably no exception to this general rule.

The second peace plan (or plans, to be more precise, since different versions of the plan were proposed over a number of months from February 14 to July 28 1992) was the Cutileiro Negotiations, led by the EC mediator Jose Cutileiro, which called for a united Bosnia with national regions. Kuperman argues that even before these negotiations Karadžić and other Serb leaders had offered Izetbegović such a cantonization plan, in which the different ethnic groups would have had control over the cantons in which their group was in the majority, and these cantons would be non-contiguous so their plan could not be seen as supporting the partition of

Bosnia. Izetbegović and other Bosnian Muslim leaders were initially supportive of it and it was thought that peace was at hand, but then yet again hard-liners within Izetbegović's party pressured him into doing an about-face and he ended up rejecting this plan. Later during the Cutileiro Negotiations other cantonization plans were offered, significantly the March 18 one which would have given Muslims the same amount of territory as Serbs and far fewer Muslims would have lived in cantons as minorities than Serbs or Croats. During these negotiations Izetbegović demonstrated his typical flexibility of conviction, first agreeing to a cantonization plan because of heavy pressure from Cutileiro - who threatened to withdraw recognition of Bosnia if Izetbegović did not agree to it – then repudiating it when he later got slammed by party members in Sarajevo. Later Izetbegović would agree to the March 18 cantonization plan, then repudiate it about a week later, and then at the end of March agree to the principle of cantonization once again, with his flip-flops being based on fear of losing international recognition of Bosnia if Europe and the Americans thought he was not doing his part to promote a peaceful solution by supporting cantonization. Again, Kuperman argues, peace could have been had but Izetbegović and the hard-liners in the SDA blew it.<sup>145</sup>

Yet Kuperman ignores some good reasons for why Izetbegović and others would be unsatisfied with these various proposals. Concerning the original plan before the Cutileiro Negotiations that Karadžić and others were so wild about, for instance, it assigned an overwhelming amount of the territory of Bosnia to the Serbs even though their population was

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<sup>145</sup> *Ibid.*, 131-137, 159. A brief mention should be made about the increased role of the Americans at this time. After Germany and the rest of Europe recognized Croatia and Slovenia at the end of 1991, America decided to take a more active role in the Balkans and started to push hard for the recognition of Bosnia as well. So although the U.S. had promised no military aid, there was still a sense on the part of the Bosnians that the Americans were getting on the ball and that down the road they would be willing to provide some kind of military assistance. The door, that for so long had seemed closed, was now open. That was enough for the Bosnian leadership, who were willing to seize upon the slightest actions as signs that the international community would be there at the end to save them. This sort of faith took tragic proportions, as when the first UNPROFOR Commander set up shop in Sarajevo in mid March of 1992 in order to calm things down there, although his area of jurisdiction was actually Croatia – this sent a message to the Bosnians that the U.N. might intervene in Bosnia in a military capacity. Gow, *Triumph*, 210 and Robert J. Donia, *Sarajevo, A Biography* (Ann Arbor, MI: The University of Michigan Press, 2006), 299-300.



smaller than the Muslims, and if it was not a partition per se then it was certainly partition-lite with the Bosnian Serb held areas being easily accessible to Serbia – these things would have certainly been difficult for Izetbegović to explain to his people (and was perhaps one of the reasons why the hardliners in Izetbegović’s party told him to reject it).<sup>146</sup> And as far as all of these plans were concerned, none of them provided any real enforcement mechanism for guaranteeing Bosnian’s territorial integrity and helping to assure that the Serbs on the east and the Croats on the West would not be able to assert their reach into cantons that were theoretically Bosnian but in a real *de facto* sense simply parts of a greater Croatia or Serbia. Under the 18 March cantonization plan, for instance, there was no sense of whether there would only be a federal army or if all the regions would have their own army, and each national region would have been able to have foreign relations with other states as long as the maintenance of Bosnia was maintained – a sure recipe for endless disputes between the different ethnic groups. It was not for nothing that Karadžić asserted that the March 18 plan created three different Bosnias. So the Bosnians were not just throwing away a chance for peace because they wanted to have total control over Bosnia without any sort of regional autonomy – they could rightly argue that all of these peace plans simply provided a slippery slope to a partitioned Bosnia in all but name.<sup>147</sup>

In rejecting what they regarded as unjust peace plans though, were Izetbegović and other Bosnian officials doing something just as bad through their affirmation of a united Bosnia in which the Muslims would be in the majority and in which they would be seen as a threat to the Christians living there? To be sure, in at least some ways the Izetbegović led government was just as corrupt and illiberal as were their non-Muslim counterparts. Yet to say that Izetbegović was simply just as bad as, say, Karadžić seems to miss some important distinctions between their movements and what they represented. In evaluating Karadžić and his SDS, and to an extent the Croatian HDZ, it is rather difficult to see them as being anything other than fundamentally crude

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<sup>146</sup> Robert M. Hayden, “The Partition of Bosnia and Herzegovina, 1990-1993,” RFE/RL Research Report 2, no. 22 (28 May 1993): 4-6.

<sup>147</sup> Burg and Shoup, *The War in Bosnia-Herzegovina*, 108-111.

and belligerent in the methods they used to advance their agendas. Before the war there is no evidence that Izetbegović advocated a policy in which Muslims violently threatened other Muslims who seemed to be too friendly to the Serbs, a phenomenon that was quite common with the Bosnian Serbs during this time. Izetbegović never gave a public interview like the one Tuđman did, when in July of 1991 the latter quite frankly admitted without any sense of guilt that he and Milošević had wanted to divide up Bosnia. Or consider a stunt most likely performed by the JNA, who leaked a story to the 21 November 1991 issue of the tabloid *Slobodna Bosna*, which said that SDS paramilitaries were getting ready to attack Sarajevo and that the JNA was helping them – this sort of thing was clearly designed to frighten and intimidate the Bosnians.<sup>148</sup>

There was also something rather dispiriting about the nationalisms of Karadžić or somebody like the Croat leader Mate Boban – whose strings were pulled by Tuđman – that contrasted greatly with the liberalism of the many Serbs, Croats, and Muslims who believed in a multi-ethnic, democratic Bosnia. On the one hand there were the Croats like the Franciscans, an order which went back to the Middle Ages when they first started to evangelize those uncouth Slavs, who nobly advocated a united Bosnia where all ethnicities would be able to live together peacefully. On the other hand there was the Croat Tuđman, who had simple contempt for the Bosnian Muslims, seeing them just as Islamized Croats who had no right to land that properly should just be annexed to Croatia. There was a tradition then of being Bosnian, that was upheld by all the ethnic groups who saw no contradiction between being a Serb and belonging to the Bosnian nation, and which at the same time was also sadly denied by nationalists like Karadžić who saw no sort of compatibility between the two. The fact that this tradition had perhaps not yet had the time or ability to have made Bosnia a true nation at this point in time does not mean that this idea of Bosnia did not exist, or that because some Bosnians too naively overemphasized the cosmopolitanism of Bosnia that this meant that such cosmopolitanism was untrue. The idea of

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<sup>148</sup> For these incidents see Tim Judah, *The Serbs, History, Myth, and the Destruction of Yugoslavia* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2000), 195-196, 198.

Bosnia did exist, and its cosmopolitanism was true, and even if Izetbegović's advocacy of these values was less than might be desired, his performance was still better than Karadžić's or those of other nationalist leaders.

Yet even if Izetbegović's behavior was in many ways more noble and not nearly as extreme as others before the war, was it still not in many ways rather poor? Did he not fail to live up to his responsibilities as a leader who had to be acutely sensitive to the feelings and sentiments of other ethnicities in a multi-ethnic nation that had had more than its fair share of inter-ethnic violence in the past? To an extent, yes, but one must also acknowledge the limitations he faced and the difficult circumstances of the time. Consider Izetbegović's efforts to publicly curry favor with influential Islamic nations abroad, which not unnaturally reinforced the suspicion that in spite of whatever liberal pieties he might espouse in public to show that he was a great democrat, deep down he was simply a theocrat who had fundamentalist sensibilities. He visited in February 1991 Libya and then Turkey, where observers noticed that he refused to pay homage at the grave of the man who had helped to secularize Turkey - Kemal Atatürk.<sup>149</sup> A few months later in May Izetbegović visited Iran. Finally in July 1991 Izetbegović traveled again to Turkey and asked that Bosnia be able to join the Organization of the Islamic Conference, a forum which many saw as having fundamentalist tendencies. All of these overtures to Islamic nations were seen as provocative to many, especially of course to the Serbs.<sup>150</sup> Yet it is hard to see what choice

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<sup>149</sup> This repudiation of Atatürk is significant to note, for it suggests Izetbegović's strong aversion (along with many other prominent Islamic thinkers during the 20<sup>th</sup> century) to the idea of secularism, or of the separation of religion and state which Atatürk strongly represented. As the scholar of Islam Bernard Lewis argues, what many Muslim "fundamentalists" - an imprecise term in Lewis' eyes - have agreed on is the need to roll back many secularizing reforms and to go back "to the holy law of Islam and the Islamic political order." Bernard Lewis, *Islam and the West* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), 184-185. To allude to this imprecision of "fundamentalist" though, the interesting question to ask is whether that term really describes Izetbegović. In other words, although Izetbegović did believe in the need for some Islamic customs to exist within Bosnia (for example the liberal restrictions of alcohol and pornography he advocated in the SDA platform), does the fact that he apparently also believed in certain liberal ideas as well (again, those democratic ideas from the SDA platform) make him still a fundamentalist? It will be instructive to look at his conduct during the Bosnian War in an attempt to formulate an answer.

<sup>150</sup> These actions were indicative of a problem Izetbegović had, which was his unwillingness to recognize that he had to be a good politician and be very careful with his words, as well as be aware of how

Izetbegović had here, since there was a need for him to develop closer relations with Islamic nations so that he could acquire weapons and other forms of assistance from them in the case of war. Perhaps harder to understand is something like Izetbegović's unwillingness to unequivocally condemn his *Islamic Declaration*, not only before but after the 1990 elections as well, which made it that much easier for his opponents to question his motives. On around 23 May 1991, for instance, Karadžić not unreasonably - although undoubtedly he had ulterior motives - in a press conference asked Izetbegović to publicly disown the *Declaration*, something that as we have seen Izetbegović apparently never did.<sup>151</sup> But again, one must acknowledge that Izetbegović perhaps faced certain constraints, in this case the hard-line faction of the SDA who might have been angered by such a dramatic attempt on his part to ingratiate himself with the Bosnian Serbs and Croats.

On a more mundane level, one can point to the fact that Izetbegović either did not or was unable to do anything about ethnic favoritism at the government level, with corruption and paralysis continuing to affect government right up to the eve of war. In the Bosnian parliament, for instance, Muslim members would leave sessions to pray. For a member of a delegation to the Federal Parliament, rather than the required Yugoslav, the SDA sent a Muslim.<sup>152</sup> And so on. To be sure, all three of the major ethnic political parties did these sort of shenanigans, but that is exactly the point – Izetbegović was just as bad as the others as far as this government corruption was concerned and was not able to rise above it all and provide an example of dispassionate, fair

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seemingly innocent actions on his part could be construed in a very different way by others. Consider an interview Izetbegović gave when he was just starting his career as a politician – he was asked whether there should be *sharia* law in Bosnia, and he answered no. But then Izetbegović asked rhetorically, “But if you think about it... what is wrong with the Shari’a? Is it less humane to cut off a man’s hand than to take several years from his life in prison? You cut off the hand, it is done. I don’t know. I’m just thinking out loud.” Brian Hall, *The Impossible Country: A Journey Through the Last Days of Yugoslavia* (Boston: David R. Godine, Publisher, Inc., 1994), 162.

<sup>151</sup> John Schindler, *Unholy Terror: Bosnia, Al-Qa’ida, and the Rise of Global Jihad* (St. Paul, MN: Zenith Press, 2007), 53-54, 64-65. Concerning his trips to Islamic nations Izetbegović displays his typical nonchalance, seemingly ignorant that such overtures might have made others legitimately nervous about his intentions. Also consider his remarkably mild condemnation of the Iranian justice system; all he has to say is that “Iranian laws on murder and drugs are very strict.”

<sup>152</sup> Neven Andjelić, *Bosnia-Herzegovina*, 195-196.

leadership that members of all ethnic groups in Bosnia could look up to. Izetbegović's unwillingness or inability to create a broad coalition during the 1990 campaign was coming back to haunt him now, with hardliners in his party being able to radicalize the SDA because the moderates within it were too weak.

Too much should not be made of Izetbegović's negligence here though, especially considering how hard it is to fight governmental corruption in any event. But let us suppose the Izetbegović government actually had tried to create better safeguards which lessened corruption within the government (e.g. prevented Muslims from unfairly dominating regional governments where they were in the majority), or Izetbegović himself had been much more clear and vocal in repudiating his *Islamic Declaration* and more forceful in arguing for a Bosnia that would guarantee the rights of *all* of her citizens (and actually carrying out this commitment once he gained power) - would this have made a difference? Probably not, since the forces outside of Bosnia were exerting such a powerful and negative influence that even if Izetbegović had been a Vaclav Havel-like figure it would not have made much difference. Although Bosnian Christians could reasonably complain about some aspects of Izetbegović's public rhetoric as well as some of the corruption he condoned from the elections of November 1990 to the beginning of the Bosnian War in April 1992, it was not these complaints which were propelling them to want to secede from Bosnia – it was instead the Croatian and Serbian nationalisms being espoused from within and without the Bosnian republic. Compared to the provocations of a Milošević or a Tuđman or a Karadžić, Izetbegović's pale in comparison.

## **Chapter Four**

### **War Bringing Out the Worst**

Ask almost any thoughtful Serb about the Bosnian war, and unless he is totally radicalized what he will likely say in the course of the discussion is something like this: Yes, the Serbs were not blameless during the conflict, but it was a conflict that not only one but all three ethnic groups contributed to, and it is false or wrong to hold the Serbian leadership and those who went along with them as being uniquely, or even more responsible, for the starting of the war and/or the atrocities which occurred during it. It is an understandable sentiment, one which is not without truth. As we have already seen, although Izetbegović may have not been as openly threatening in his acts and rhetoric as individuals like Karadžić were before the war, he did do his fair share as far as promoting an exclusivist Muslim ideology was concerned and making a contribution to the boiling cauldron of Bosnia. And during the war itself as we shall see, along with their Muslim counterparts many Serbs and Croats civilians were victims of Bosnian aggression, whether they were murdered or ethnically cleansed by Bosnian forces, or were subjected to lesser but no less-real indignities by Bosnian officials. Because of all of this, it is unsurprising that most Serbs and quite a few analysts and scholars argue that what happened in Bosnia was not a war of aggression at all but simply a civil war, where any sort of blame cannot be attributed to any one side.

It is the fact that the Serbs started the war, and even more significantly, the way they started it, that more than anything else makes it most difficult, and indeed impossible, for this thesis to be sustained. As Gale Stokes common-sensically puts it, the Serbs were not entirely illegitimate in wanting some kind of autonomy in Croatia and Bosnia, especially since Kosovo and the Voivodina in Serbia had been granted autonomous status in the earlier years of the Yugoslav state by Tito; what was illegitimate was trying to solve this problem not by appealing to the international community but simply ethnically cleansing the Bosnian and Croatian territories

of non-Serbs.<sup>153</sup> Up until the outbreak of the war, it would not be implausible to argue that in spite of the vulgarity and provactiveness of many of their actions, Karadžić and his supporters were simply playing hardball and doing all they could to avoid being put in the position of a Serbian minority in a Muslim-majority state. Thus even something like the secret arming of the Serbs, while not admirable or ethical per se, was simply the way the game was played in the brutal world of Balkan politics, and the Serbs were simply a lot better at this dangerous game than Izetbegović and his Bosnians. Nasty *realpolitik* it might have been, but still potentially justifiable. When the Serbs decided to invade Bosnia though, terrorize non-Serbs and even murder them, and drive countless civilians out of their homes, they crossed the line which separates legitimate statecraft from simple barbarity. Whatever the flaws of Izetbegović before and at the beginning of the war, he was not guilty of that kind of barbarism.

What Izetbegović *was* guilty of at the beginning of the war was of being rather unprepared. When the JNA and the Bosnian Serbs initiated their vicious assault on towns like Biljena and Zvornik in eastern Bosnia, Izetbegović and his army was already in a weak position as it was because of the severe inferiority of their arms, with the Serbs having a 9:1 advantage in weaponry.<sup>154</sup> But Izetbegović made things worse through many of his actions that can in no way be blamed on his army's military deficit. Perhaps the strangest aspect of Izetbegović's conduct at this time was his trust that the JNA would simply act to keep order in Bosnia rather than as an arm of Serbian aggression. For example, earlier at the end of 1991 Izetbegović had submitted to

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<sup>153</sup> Gale Stokes, "From Nation to Minority: Serbs in Croatia and Bosnia at the Outbreak of the Yugoslav Wars," *Problems of Post-Communism* 52, no. 6 (November/December 2005):13-14. One might quibble a little with Stokes' reasoning, arguing that Serbian unwillingness to utilize the international community's help in solving their autonomy problem might not have been terribly wrong considering the UN's subsequent ineffectiveness during the 1992-1995 war. Still, Stokes' larger point is correct.

<sup>154</sup> Peter Andreas, *Blue Helmets and Black Markets, The Business of Survival in the Siege of Sarajevo* (Ithaca, NY and London: Cornell University Press, 2008), 26. However, Izetbegović deserves some credit for attempting to create an army that was truly multi-ethnic – a Croat was the chief of staff and a Serb was deputy commander. A handbook printed at the time had military emblems named after a Serbian, a Croatian, and a Muslim historical figure, and both the Latin and Cyrillic alphabets were used. Finally twenty percent of the army was Serb and Croat. Also at the time a new Bosnian flag came out with the medieval *fleurs-de-lis* on it, a representation of Bosnia's multi-ethnicity. Marko Attila Hoare, *The History of Bosnia: From the Middle Ages to the Present Day* (London: Saqi, 2007), 366-367.

the late 1991 JNA order for the Bosnian TOs (Territorial Defense units, or local army units within Bosnia) to give up their remaining weapons to the federal army, although this order was at times not obeyed at the local level.<sup>155</sup> This sort of action made no sense, since Izetbegović had already seen how the JNA had pummeled Croatia and driven out populations there in 1991 – how could he have expected the JNA to have treated Bosnia any differently? Since the role of the JNA had always been that of a federal army designed to preserve the entire state of Yugoslavia anyway, why was it going to act to preserve order in Bosnia after she had just seceded from the Yugoslav state?

It was also during this time that one of the most terrible episodes of a very terrible war occurred, the murders, rapes, and ethnic cleansings of mostly Bosnian Muslims who had willingly given up their arms to their aggressors just a few months or weeks before. This disarmament had been a result of Izetbegović's peace efforts before the war started, in which he had exhorted Bosnians to demonstrate their pacifistic intentions by relinquishing their arms to the JNA. Amazingly, many Bosnians listened to their president and complied, undoubtedly further stimulating the aggression of the Serbs and severely diminishing the morale of those Bosnians who realized during the first few months of the war that they had been taken for fools by just giving away their arms to their eventual murderers. But because Izetbegović's strategy apparently dictated that the Bosnians be seen as victims at the beginning of the war, this action makes some sense since if the Bosnians had openly kept their weapons then the Serbs could have argued that they were being intransigent, and the international community might have seen the Bosnians as just one of the warring parties in a civil war.

Finally, any nationwide coordinated plan of defense was lacking as far as many of the government officials in cities and towns of Bosnia were concerned, with many of them simply having no idea of what to do when war started. For example, at the beginning of the Serbian offensive the Muslim and Croatian-controlled municipal assembly in Modrica would not mobilize

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<sup>155</sup> Marko Attila Hoare, *How Bosnia Armed* (London: Saqi Books, 2004), 23.



the local territorial defense units for fear of antagonizing local Serbs.<sup>156</sup> Or consider what Amir Karadžić, who was in Prijedor when the war started, told me, “When we had a curfew in the morning, so I knocked on my mayor’s door and said to him, ‘You were my language professor, now mayor, tell me what I should do!’ He answered, ‘I don’t know.’ Disappointing answer for me!”<sup>157</sup> Considering that the mayors and administrators in a few towns and cities were able to take the initiative on their own and provide some form of resistance for a time - in the eastern city of Tuzla, for instance, Serbs, Muslims, and Croats worked together to put up a defense until May 1992<sup>158</sup> - it is interesting to speculate what a well-coordinated, guerilla warfare-type action on the part of the towns and cities of Bosnia might have accomplished against a Serbian aggressor that, all of their armament superiority notwithstanding, were often quite cowardly in their fighting capacity.<sup>159</sup> Still, the military might of the Serbs and JNA eventually told, and by the end of 1992 much of Bosnia, with the exception of central Bosnia, northwest Bosnia, and isolated cities in the east was either under Croatian<sup>160</sup> or Serbian control.<sup>161</sup>

In spite of the many difficulties Izetbegović now faced, there seemingly was a light of hope shining across the ocean in the United States, where the-then governor of Arkansas Bill

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<sup>156</sup> Marko Attila Hoare, *How Bosnia Armed*, 53.

<sup>157</sup> Amir Karadžić, interview with author, St. Louis, MO, 27 June 2008.

<sup>158</sup> Steven L. Burg and Paul S. Shoup, *The War in Bosnia-Herzegovina, Ethnic Conflict and International Intervention* (Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe, Inc., 1999), 129-130.

<sup>159</sup> Indeed, throughout the war Serbian soldiers did not have to display courage in combat all that often, with their targets often being unarmed civilians who they fired at with heavy weapons from long distances. And again, they could be quite cowardly – one prominent example of this involved a Serbian unit who were told that they would either fight or take off all of their clothes, including their underwear. The soldiers chose to do the latter. Albert W. Wohlstetter, “Creating a Greater Serbia,” *The New Republic*, 1 August 1994, 26.

<sup>160</sup> At around the beginning of the summer in 1992, Croatian separatists in Herzegovina (where Bosnian Croats were densely populated in many areas) felt inspired to assert control over much of this region.

<sup>161</sup> Sabrina Ramet, *The Three Yugoslavias: State-Building and State-Legitimation, 1918-2005* (Washington D.C. and Bloomington, IN: Woodrow Wilson Center Press and Indiana University Press, 2006), 433. Izetbegović’s spirits were undoubtedly not lifted when Boutros Boutros-Ghali, the General-Secretary of the United Nations, told Izetbegović at around this time that “The international community is currently in favor of the Muslim population of Bosnia and is sending humanitarian assistance to you. [By contrast] I could give you a list of countries who are receiving nothing and whose problems are considerably more difficult than those faced by Bosnia.” A few months earlier Boutros had been “inclined to agree” with what Lord Peter Carrington said about Bosnia, which was that “the Serbs *are* wicked, but so are the others.” Boutros Boutros-Ghali, *Unvanquished: A U.S.-U.N Saga* (New York: Random House, 1999), 42, 51.

Clinton was running a competitive campaign to unseat President Bush. One of Clinton's major foreign policy themes was Bush's ineffectiveness in the Balkans and the need to do more there (e.g. bombing Serbian targets), with his saying for instance on 2 August 1992, "If the horrors of the Holocaust taught us anything, it is the high cost of remaining silent and paralyzed in the face of genocide. We must discover who is responsible for these actions and take steps to bring them to justice for these crimes against humanity."<sup>162</sup> Such rhetoric naturally gave Izetbegović hope that with the potential inauguration of a Clinton administration at the beginning of the next year, the power of the U.S. could be brought to bear against Serbian and Croatian aggression.

This trust in the assistance of the Clinton administration, who were elected in November of 1992, was undoubtedly influential in Izetbegović's decision to at times not support the Vance/Owen Peace Plan, the earliest of various proposals during the Bosnian war which were aimed at ending the fighting. This plan, which in essence divided Bosnia into 10 cantons under a weak central government, while not actually repudiated by the Clinton administration, was never strongly defended by them either since it was seen as simply rewarding Serbian aggression. Izetbegović was able to pick up on this lack of enthusiasm and along with the Bosnian Serbs was able to obstruct its development through the autumn and winter of 1992/1993; Vance/Owen eventually died. It was replaced by suggestions that Clinton would endorse the "Lift and Strike" Plan, which aimed to end the arms embargo that had been imposed on all of the Yugoslav nations the previous year, and to have NATO bomb Serbian targets. Although Izetbegović's military difficulties had increased even more by this point with the beginning of clashes with the Bosnian Croats a few months earlier,<sup>163</sup> creating what would soon be a war on not one but two fronts,<sup>164</sup> he

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<sup>162</sup> Hanna Rosin, "I did the best I could," *The New Republic*, 7 August 1995, 14. Such words were naturally music to the Bosnians' ears, inspiring them to tell American reporters how much they admired Clinton's campaign rhetoric about how he would be tougher on the Serbs than Bush and how he would lift the arms embargo. David Halberstam, *War in a Time of Peace: Bush, Clinton, and the Generals* (New York: Touchstone, 2001), 198, 225.

<sup>163</sup> A good summary of the sort of machinations that went on between the various parties during the Vance/Owen process as well as of the genesis of "Lift and Strike" can be found in Burg and Shoup, *The War in Bosnia-Herzegovina*, 214-252. See also David Halberstam, *War in a Time of Peace*, 197-198, 224.

could still be comforted by the fact that NATO would apparently soon get into the act with air strikes against Serbian targets and that he would be able to get more weapons to his severely unarmed soldiers due to the ending of the arms embargo. Seemingly the strategy of getting the international community on his side had worked, and although he had a tremendous amount of ground to make up he could take some satisfaction in the situation after the last horrible year.

Needless to say, Izetbegović was soon to be cruelly disappointed. Clinton, fearful of the dangers of being drawn into Bosnia and having to send troops just as the Bush administration had been, started to have second thoughts and decided not to give forceful support to his “Lift and Strike” policy. Because Clinton was not fully committed, when the Secretary of State Warren Christopher tried to sell “Lift and Strike” at meetings with European leaders in May 1993 they all rather harshly said they could not support it, fearful as they were that the peace keepers they had recently installed in Bosnia would get harmed, and that the war could spread into other countries and be prolonged. Instead the Europeans wanted to create “safe areas” for Bosnians, a policy Izetbegović said amounted to putting Muslims on “reservations” – nonetheless the Americans would eventually agree to this policy and the Bosnians had to go along. About two weeks later Christopher testified before a House Affairs Committee and in a huge about-face said that acts of genocide were being perpetrated by the *Muslims* against *Serbs*, and in June he said that Bosnia involved America’s humanitarian interests but not her vital interests. Also in June new negotiations were being conducted in Geneva for a three-way partition of Bosnia, with the Muslim area only being 23% of the territory,<sup>165</sup> and the diplomat David Owen put pressure on Izetbegović by supporting his rival Fikret Abdić - who had earlier simply left his place in the

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<sup>164</sup> The cause of the war between the Bosnians and Croats is complex, with Sabrina Ramet seeing a myriad of causes: Tuđman’s encouragement of succession in Hercegovina, the arrival of *mujahideen* who struck fear into the hearts of Croats, propaganda from both sides which further stoked fears, the unwillingness of Bosnian Croat soldiers to fight under the Bosnians, and so on. Sabrina Ramet, *The Three Yugoslavias*, 433-436.

<sup>165</sup> David Halberstam, *War in a Time of Peace*, 224-231 and Burg and Shoup, *The War in Bosnia-Herzegovina*, 254, 264-266.

presidency to go back to his fiefdom in Bihać and who was now openly supportive of making a deal with the Serbs.<sup>166</sup>

Along with these terrible signs coming from the international community was the bad situation on the military front. The Bosnians were suffering from a severe shortage of arms at this time, with only one out of two soldiers even being able to field a gun as late as the end of 1993<sup>167</sup> – this while trying to fight against two armies simultaneously. The Serbs had managed to widen the so-called Brcko corridor on 12 July 1993, a crucial strip of land in northern Bosnia which linked the Serbs in Croatia and in western Bosnia with the Serbs in Serbia and eastern Bosnia (basically a conduit for weapons flows between the Serbs in Serbia and the Serbs in Bosnia).<sup>168</sup> Ethnic cleansing of towns and villages around Bosnia was continuing, and the siege of Sarajevo was well into its second year now, with the poor residents there perhaps still being capable of amazement that the international community was doing nothing to help them.<sup>169</sup> Pretty soon though this incredulousness would largely change into a feeling of betrayal, with the Bosnians in plain English believing that they had simply been screwed by the U.S. and Europe (or stabbed in the back, allowed to become the Palestinians of Europe – pick your metaphor). Izetbegović himself started to take on a despairing tone at this time and seemed to suggest that some kind of partition might be inevitable. On 5 July Izetbegović gave an interview in which he made such statements as, “Sometimes I ask myself, ‘How can I live at all?’” and “I can’t accept it

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<sup>166</sup> Charles Lane, “Picked Pocket,” *The New Republic*, 19 December 1994, 13. This was not the first time Lord Owen had shown his toughness to the Bosnians – the year before in December 1992 he had told them, “Don’t, don’t, don’t live under this dream that the West is going to come in and sort this problem out. Don’t dream dreams.” Rich Lowry, *Legacy: Paying the Price for the Clinton Years* (Washington D.C.: Regency Publishing, 2003), 262.

<sup>167</sup> Sabrina Ramet, *The Three Yugoslavias*, 434.

<sup>168</sup> Burg and Shoup, *The War in Bosnia-Herzegovina*, 269.

<sup>169</sup> One reporter who had surveyed the scene in Sarajevo the previous summer came across two girls whose only English were three words they kept repeating over and over, “U.S. military forces, U.S. military forces....” Charles Lane, “Besieged,” *The New Republic*, 27 July 1992, 36.

[partition], but it seems that it is becoming an ugly, tragic reality.”<sup>170</sup> It was definitely the worst of times for Izetbegović and his people.

It was the horror of what Bosnia was going through, and connected to it the failure of the West to defend Bosnia that at least one scholar, Marko Attila Hoare, sees as the key reason for why Izetbegović and the SDA ended up more radical and promoted a more Islamic-oriented state. Since they were starting to realize that the chances of a whole and united Bosnia were becoming increasingly unrealistic, the reasoning goes, then at least they could have the consolation of a smaller nation made up mostly of Muslims which would be more fully devoted to Islamic principles.<sup>171</sup> It is a very important argument to think about as we survey Izetbegović’s actions and rhetoric henceforth, for it raises what could be called the functionalist/intentionalist problem – Was it Izetbegović’s desire all along to create an Islamic state within Bosnia, as some of his harshest critics would argue, or was it the pressures of war as well as the new situation he faced that pushed him in this new direction? Or, to think common-sensically, was it a little of both? Since the evidence is fragmentary and there is no smoking gun to provide any sort of definitive answer, we must be content with educated guesses. Nonetheless, in spite of the fact that no certainty can be provided for this question, understanding at least might be possible.<sup>172</sup>

For evidence of war itself making Izetbegović more nationalistic, Hoare points to a speech Izetbegović gave to the Bosnian parliament on 27 August 1993 (when the military situation was still very precarious) where he again sadly said that Bosnia might well have to be partitioned; at around the same time war aims were being developed for a Bosnia limited to only

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<sup>170</sup> On the other hand, Izetbegović also said, “All my cards are in my enemies hands. Still, how can I surrender?” Along with his proclivity towards indecisiveness and despair, there was almost always also that fighting spirit and thirst for justice. John Pomfret, “Bosnian Mourns ‘Tragic Reality’ of Partition,” *The Washington Post*, 6 July 1993, A1. LEXUSNEXUS

<sup>171</sup> Another scholar, Vjekoslav Perica, is even stronger in his emphasis on the importance of the war: “[Because of the war] ...Izetbegović became convinced that nothing else but the creation of an Islamic state.... could secure survival for Europe’s only native Muslim community.” Vjekoslav Perica, *Balkan Idols: Religion and Nationalism in Yugoslav States* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 168.

<sup>172</sup> This distinction between understanding and certainty is an approach that the excellent historian John Lukacs uses for his craft, with the latter almost always being impossible to achieve, but the former can often be within reach.

those areas in which Muslims were in the majority before the war. Hoare also mentions a 27 September 1993 session of parliament in which the members voted to call all Muslims Bosniaks, a term that had traditionally referred to Bosnians of all ethnicities but no longer – Bosnia would now be considered the national home of Bosniaks/Muslims, just as Croatia was the home of Croats and Serbia of Serbs. The intent of this was to influence Bosnians into seeing their country as a country simply for Muslims, and not one also for Serbs and Croats.<sup>173</sup> Izetbegović would give an example of supporting this ethnic separatism the next year by publicly condemning the habit of many Sarajevans' tying different nations' flags together to symbolize the multi-ethnicity of Bosnia.<sup>174</sup>

Consider also the many refugees from smaller towns and villages, many of whom were more nationalistic and religiously-oriented Muslims who brought their more fervent beliefs with them when they fled to Bosnia's cities, thus diluting the more secular milieus there. The war and the perceived failure of the West to help them in their great time of need also not unnaturally made more traditionally secularist Muslims in the cities seek solace in religious belief. Izetbegović's greater stress then on encouraging a more public and dogmatic Islam within Bosnia as the war progressed could simply be seen as a reflection of the same phenomenon that was going on within the Bosnians themselves.<sup>175</sup> Yet there are also certainly links which can be made between Izetbegović's actions here and some of the pronouncements he had made in his *Islamic Declaration* decades earlier. Izetbegović's strong stress on educating Muslims for instance in the *Declaration*<sup>176</sup> can find its counterpart in the rather heavy-handed evangelism the SDA promoted

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<sup>173</sup> Marko Attila Hoare, *The History of Bosnia: From the Middle Ages to the Present Day* (London: Saqi, 2007), 380-382. Hoare also mentions here a constitutional plan which Izetbegović and another SDA leader had come up with as early as the Vance/Owen negotiations, which called for an 'Islamic state of Bosnia-Herzegovina' in the cantons which the Muslims would receive.

<sup>174</sup> Ian Traynor, "Sarajevo Turns an Illiberal Face to the World," *The Guardian* (London), 15 October 1994, 27. LEXISNEXUS

<sup>175</sup> My Serbian subject from Bosnia expressed the phenomenon this way, saying that before the war most Muslims and Christians in the cities were not very religious. Then she said succinctly, "Now everybody is religious." A Serb from Bosnia, interview with author, St. Louis, MO, 3 July 2008.

<sup>176</sup> "...the struggle for the Islamic order today is for the essentials of Islam, which means ensuring the religious and moral education of the people..." Alija Izetbegović, *Islamic Declaration*, 59.

in Sarajevo during the war, where pamphlets on the Koran were passed out one day at a SDA party rally or where public schools would only allow religious classes on Islam and not Orthodoxy and Catholicism as well as had traditionally been the practice. The Bosnian cultural minister also said that Muslims should only marry other Muslims, although some observers saw this as more of a nationalistic exhortation than a religious one.<sup>177</sup>

Another echo of the *Declaration* can be found in Izetbegović's efforts to ensure uniformity within the SDA and other organizations – one of the faults of the Pakistan experiment, he had written decades earlier, was that the Pakistani leaders had failed to have “tried and true individuals at the head of a resolute and homogenous organization.”<sup>178</sup> During the Bosnian War, this often translated into purging those who did not toe the religious or political line of the SDA. In the army for instance, the original multi-ethnicity of that entity began to be repudiated and Serbs and Croats were eventually weeded out or decided to leave because of Muslim pressure. There was also the problem of a lack of competency on the part of officers, many of whom were assigned to positions not because of their ability but as a result of their devotion to Islam or the Izetbegović government.<sup>179</sup> Needless to say, this had a deleterious impact on the army's performance. Individuals in professions outside the government, for example journalists, also lost their jobs if they were not members of the SDA.<sup>180</sup>

One very important aspect of the increased Islamization and radicalization of Bosnia during the war years though which has received much attention, that of the incursion of Arab fighters or *mujahideen* into the country,<sup>181</sup> probably cannot be said to be linked to any plans

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<sup>177</sup> The information in this paragraph is mostly from Ian Traynor, “Sarajevo Turns an Illiberal Face to the World,” 27 and John Porphret, “Islam Forms Loyalty Test For Bosnia's Muslim Party; As War Drags On, Push For Religious Conformity Spells End Of ‘Multicultural, Multiethnic’ Ideal,” *The Washington Post*, 16 November 1994, A19.LEXISNEXUS.

<sup>178</sup> Alija Izetbegović, *Islamic Declaration*, 58-59.

<sup>179</sup> John Schindler, *Unholy War*, 199-202.

<sup>180</sup> Mirko Pejanovic, *Through Bosnian Eyes: The Political Memoirs of a Bosnian Serb* (Sarajevo: TKD Sahinpasic, 2002), 151.

<sup>181</sup> It is estimated that 3,000 or so *mujahideen* were in Bosnia during the war, with some of them staying in Bosnia afterwards and even forming small communities where they practiced *sharia* law. After September 11<sup>th</sup> though the Bosnian government (which Izetbegović no longer headed) really cracked down on the

Izetbegović might have had to make Bosnia into a more Islamic nation. There is no evidence at all that Izetbegović had any sympathy for the cruelty or the crudeness of the *mujahideen*'s ideology, which would make sense since even in the *Declaration* as we have seen he had generally argued against the use of violence in promoting Islam except in the case of overthrowing the state of a people who had already mainly accepted Islam. Besides, in a practical sense the *mujahideen* were mostly nothing but trouble for Izetbegović, creating havoc in central Bosnia (where they were mostly located) through such things as their mutilations of soldiers and civilians, ethnic cleansing of Croats, and intimidation of the local Muslim populations who tended to be totally turned off by the practices of these long-haired and uncouth fanatics. Izetbegović had to let them fight though because he was so reliant on the military and financial aid of countries like Saudi Arabia and Iran, for whom money and arms was contingent on allowing these fighters to come into Bosnia.<sup>182</sup> Because the arms embargo was still in place and the West would not, in the main, provide the Bosnians with any military supplies or training,<sup>183</sup> Izetbegović could quite reasonably argue that he was simply accepting friends where he could find them, a perfectly legitimate principle that certainly has a long pedigree in the history of foreign relations (Just consider the anti-apartheid activists in South Africa who accepted help from countries like the Soviet Union and Libya). Also, truth be told, these foreign fighters were often brave and strong soldiers and were useful for certain operations, especially near the end of the war. The price of all of this though was a certain stigma that would be placed upon Bosnia as

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*mujahideen*, with their even deciding to expel some Algerians who the Bosnian Supreme Court had found innocent of any sort of terrorist action. Alma Imanovic, "Wahhabism in Bosnia and Herzegovina in the Context of Global Political Islam" (master's thesis, Webster University, June 2005), 55-57.

<sup>182</sup> Peter Andreas, *Blue Helmets and Black Markets*, 98.

<sup>183</sup> The U.S. did turn a largely blind eye to the military and financial aid that a country like Iran was giving to Bosnia as early as 1992, and might have even given some sort of assistance in making sure that aid from the Middle East arrived in Bosnia, although this latter point was denied by American officials. *Ibid.*, 110-111.



a result of her becoming a terrorist base for Al Qa'ida, the establishment of which was the real motive for some *mujahideen* coming to fight there in the first place.<sup>184</sup>

Not all the negative aspects of Izetbegović's conduct during the war should necessarily be linked to his desire to make Bosnia a more Islamic society. There was for instance the much more old fashioned and mundane corruption and nepotism he allowed to thrive within the SDA. Izetbegović ran not merely a tight but a remarkably closed ship, with little room for alternate views or disagreements – never a good thing for a statesman who needs always fresh information and who at times needs to be told things that he does not want to hear. As one high official encapsulated the situation, “Everyone who wasn't obedient was gotten rid of. Instead of organizing people, they were only hoping for help from abroad.” This lack of pro-active spirit that the official was referring to was manifested for example in the lack of weapons which were produced within Bosnia. Such military production was very doable, but was mostly prevented by SDA members who were skimming the cream off the top of donations given by Middle Eastern countries; these officials did not want to risk the money they embezzled going to Bosnian businessmen who would actually produce weapons. Since the major problem the Bosnian soldiers had during the war was lack of arms, there was naturally something very odious about all of this. This problem of financial corruption also went right up the ranks of the SDA to the president, with political and financial patronage clearly flowing to Izetbegović and to members of his family like his son, Bakir.<sup>185</sup>

Even worse, this corruption probably had the coarsening effect of deadening Izetbegović and the SDA's moral sense or feelings of responsibility for human rights abuses which were occurring under their noses. An apparent example of this involved the Sarajevo gangster Caco,

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<sup>184</sup> For a good analysis of the *mujahideen* phenomenon in Bosnia and the source of much of the information listed here in this paragraph, see Even Kohlmann, *Al-Qaida's Jihad in Europe: The Afghan-Bosnian Network* (Oxford, UK and New York: Berg, 2004), 53, 85-86, 93, 98, 108-112, 115, 125-144.

<sup>185</sup> Peter Andreas, *Blue Helmets and Black Markets*, 99, 95-97. It is rather ironic and sad that Izetbegović indulged in political and financial corruption during the war, since he had strongly argued in his *Declaration* years earlier that corruption had severely compromised the in many ways noble Islamic revolution in Pakistan. Alija Izetbegović, *Islamic Declaration*, 58.

who helped to provide order in the city during the first part of the war in exchange for the SDA 's turning a blind eye to his extortion schemes and murders of Serbs. To be fair this sort of nastiness is a perennial feature of war, with the rule of law at times being legitimately neglected because energies must be devoted to other more pressing concerns. With the need to fight back against the Serbs in the hills surrounding the city, it could be argued, the Sarajevo government officials could not always devote as much attention or resources as they would have liked to actually policing the city, and the extreme situation they were in forced them to temporarily rely on such unsavory characters as Caco. Yet when the SDA government finally decided that they had had enough of Caco and his gang and raided their headquarters on October 1993, killing Caco in the process, their motive for doing this seems to have simply been that they were fearful of what he knew about the SDA and their shady dealings, and not the fact that he was unleashing such chaos in the city.<sup>186</sup>

Much more significant and important is the more general issue how much this lost moral sense contributed to the SDA/Bosnian government's persecution of Serbs and Croats during the war, and indeed whether much of it was pre-meditated rather than being spontaneous. As many Serbs especially would argue, during the war the Bosnians decided that what was good for the goose was good for the gander, and with their persecution the Muslims would in turn oppress, murder, and ethnically cleanse Croats and Serbs. The only difference between Muslim suffering and Christian suffering, goes this argument, was that only the former was reported, but if reporters had done their jobs then they would have realized that the Bosnians were as responsible for terror during the war as the Serbs and Croats were. As can be imagined, trying to find a

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<sup>186</sup> Peter Andreas, *Blue Helmets and Black Markets*, 95-97 and John Schindler, *Unholy War*, 103-105. To give another example of how war can degrade moral sensibilities - the Sarajevo government did not quickly allow a water system to be installed into the city which would have allowed Sarajevans easier access to that vital resource, one of the reasons quite possibly being that they did not want to give up the photo-ops or television images of Bosnians' risking being shot down by snipers while carrying their water buckets around the city. See again Andreas, 100-103.

satisfactory response to this regarding the Bosnians in general is very tricky, and in regards to Izetbegović even more so.

First, to get back to the intentionalist/functionalist problem, is there any evidence that even before the war Izetbegović desired any sort of ethnic cleansing or oppression against Bosnian Christians that would have made it easier to realize his supposed dream of an Islamic Bosnia? Absolutely none – as has already been mentioned twice Izetbegović was exactly against this kind of violence.<sup>187</sup> What about when the war actually started though – did it then give Izetbegović a green light to pursue the Islamization of Bosnia through the expulsion of Christians when it would have been red in a time of peace? There is no evidence which can conclusively show this. In the *Declaration* Izetbegović does express great admiration for Islamic liberation movements like those conducted against the French in Algeria and against the British in Suez, seeing these as moving examples of the Muslim masses rising against oppressors<sup>188</sup> - naturally a comparison could be made with the Bosnian (made up mainly, although certainly not exclusively, of Muslims) struggle against the Serbs and Croats, although I have not found an example of Izetbegović making such an analogy during the war. One can also point out that when the joint Bosnian-Croat Federation was inaugurated in March of 1994 (see paragraph below) only Croats and Bosniaks were considered to be constituent peoples in the Federation constitution,<sup>189</sup> but this exclusivist attitude could easily have stemmed as much from simple bitterness against the Serbs because of their war aggression as from any desire to create a more Islamic state.

Second, was there - for whatever reason - a deliberate policy of persecution conducted by the Izetbegović government against the Bosnian Christians that cannot be attributed simply to the sort of mindless violence that arises in the heat of war? Undoubtedly the SDA at least condoned or indirectly encouraged a general policy of discrimination against Serbs and Croats, as can easily

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<sup>187</sup> One can also point to Izetbegović's books *Islam Between East and West* and *Notes*, where he demonstrates in many places an admiration and respect for Christianity, even while he sees Islam as a superior religion.

<sup>188</sup> Alija Izetbegović, *Islamic Declaration*, 24-25.

<sup>189</sup> Burg and Shoup, *The War in Bosnia-Herzegovina*, 295.

be seen in the just-mentioned Federation constitution, and also in such things as Serbs' being forced to leave their professions, and criminals or unscrupulous individuals being given basically free rein to frighten Serbs into leaving cities like Zenica, Sarajevo, and west Mostar. This was truly sad, since thousands of Bosnian Croats and Serbs throughout Bosnia had demonstrated their fidelity to a multi-ethnic and democratic Bosnia by staying in the cities and not joining Karadžić's or Mate Boban's armies in the first year and a half or so of the conflict<sup>190</sup> (50,000 of the 250,000 Sarajevans were Serbs as late as July 1993).<sup>191</sup> By the end of 1993 most Serbs had left the cities and had gone to the Republic of Serbia, Montenegro, Serbia, or abroad with only 80,000-100,000 Serbs left in the Federation after the war.<sup>192</sup> Although Izetbegović's SDA surely was not responsible for this entire exodus, it was at least partly. There is the even more significant question of whether there was any sort of deliberate SDA policy to murder Christian civilians during the war or to intently drive them out of their homes that cannot be better ascribed to the normal – if that is the best word – sort of collateral damage that occurs in any war. To refer again to Hoare, who carefully studied the military aspects of the Bosnian war, he argues that there is no evidence of that, with his citing as an example the Bosnian chief of staff for the first year or so of the war Sefer Halilović, who was summoned to the Hague for war crimes but was acquitted of any sort of wrongdoing.<sup>193</sup>

Finally, we can step back to a third level and address the even more general question of how the sufferings of Bosnian Christians can be compared with those of the Bosnian Muslims during the war. Although this question touches on Izetbegović more indirectly, it can help out somewhat with that issue of proportionality, in which we can attempt to judge in a negative sense

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<sup>190</sup> Mirko Pejanovic, *Through Bosnian Eyes*, 146-151.

<sup>191</sup> Tim Judah, *The Serbs: History, Myth, and the Destruction of Yugoslavia* (New Haven, CT: Yale Nota Bene, 2000), 216.

<sup>192</sup> Mirko Pejanovic, *Through Bosnian Eyes*, 143. It should be added here though that Pejanovic, who again is a Bosnian Serb, on page 147 is honest enough to admit "that the SDS was by far the most extreme in implementing radical methods, and pushing its sympathizers into war crimes in order to achieve the goal of an ethnically pure territory."

<sup>193</sup> Marko Attila Hoare, *The History of Bosnia*, 383. Hoare also mentions here that unlike the Croatian and Serbian armies who destroyed countless mosques during the war, the Bosnian army left Catholic and Orthodox churches on the whole unharmed.

how much separates Izetbegović and his Bosnians, from say, Karadžić and his Serbs, in the harm that he and they contributed to others during the war. Consider the number of war dead from the Bosnian war, according to one recent estimate to be 93,837, of whom 63,687 were Muslims, 24,216 Serbs, 5,057 Croats, and 877 others. For our purposes though the more significant – although not more valuable or important - numbers involve civilians, since unlike the killing of soldiers the killing of civilians carries a greater stigma, and especially if done intentionally in which it constitutes war crimes. Here the disparity between Muslims and Serbs is very wide, with 30,514 Muslim civilians being killed or murdered to 1,978 Serbian civilians being killed or murdered,<sup>194</sup> a 15:1 ratio. This does not, of course, suggest that the loss of a Serb is any less tragic than the loss of a Muslim. It does strongly suggest though that as far as the responsibility for harm done to individual peoples, Karadžić, the SDS, the JNA, the Bosnian Serb army, and those Bosnian Serb civilians who supported them were far guiltier of inflicting unjust force – namely intentional and premeditated murder – against Bosnian Muslims in proportion to what Izetbegović, the SDA, the Bosnian Army, and their supporters inflicted against Serbs. For this reason at least, the argument that Izetbegović and his Bosnians was simply the moral equivalent of Karadžić and his Serbs during the war is another thesis that is also unsustainable.

Up to this point the coverage thus far of Izetbegović has been fairly negative, so it behooves me to say that no individual is of one piece, and any honest assessment of Izetbegović and his statesmanship must also include the positive features he brought to his exercise of the Bosnian presidency (admittedly, features which were not Herculean, but positive nonetheless). One of his strengths was his ability to grab the world's attention and keep it focused on what was happening in Bosnia for so long. Celebrities and journalists were a perennial fixture in Bosnia, whether it was Susan Sontag staging a performance of *Waiting for Godot* with malnourished Bosnian actors and or actresses, or Bianca Jagger making her appearance for a few hours at the Sarajevo airport and then quickly flying off again, or Timothy Garton Ash finding Sontag and the

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<sup>194</sup> Marko Attila Hoare, *The History of Bosnia*, 402.

journalists Christopher Hitchens and David Rieff (Sontag's son) in a bar in Tuzla. The shenanigans of say, a Julie Christie taking photographs of Bosnian children giving a 'V For Victory' sign or reading poems with this line, "Sarajevo, glowing white... as a translucent china cup....", this may have all been a bit much for the people of Bosnia,<sup>195</sup> but such things did after all help to keep Bosnia on the world's radar, even while this did not compel the world leaders to do much. Still, the fact that Bosnia was always on the television screen and in the newspapers because of the actions of these journalists and celebrities did at least prevent the statesmen from ignoring what was happening, and in the end they did feel they had to do something.

Again, some of this at least was the doing of Izetbegović, who was capable of being a bit of the showman in his beret and military fatigues, the philosopher/king who would rather be sitting in a café and pontificating about Kant but for the time being was simply doing his duty as a soldier. To many reporters and Westerners no doubt he was able to project the image of the *chic* and thoughtful Muslim, a clean-shaven, articulate, and often shy man who was devout but not threatening, and certainly not at all like those nasty, dark, bearded guys from the Middle East. *They should all be like this*, is maybe what some of them thought. Consider a question Christopher Hitchens, the prototypical example of the hard-boiled reporter, asked Izetbegović at a 1992 press conference: What did he think of the *fatwa* against Salman Rushdie? In Hitchens' words, "He [Izetbegović] gave the defining reply of the "moderate" Muslim, saying that he did not like the book but could not agree to violence against the author."<sup>196</sup> Probably Izetbegović's

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<sup>195</sup> Timothy Garton Ash is appropriately droll about an attractive Sarajevan who has had to deal with three and a half years of war, and perhaps almost as bad, annoying journalists who zip in and then out of Bosnia. "Like it or not (and she doesn't), Dijana is a Western television producer's dream victim. Beautiful in black and white, eloquent, bitter. *Victim*, the new fragrance from Calvin Klein." Timothy Garton Ash, *History of the Present: Essays, Sketches and Despatches from Europe in the 1990s* (Harmondsworth, Middlesex, England: Allen Lane, The Penguin Press, 1999), 199-202.

<sup>196</sup> Hitchens, who wrote this piece in 1992 - that is, near the beginning of the war - was also quite prescient when he commented, "None of the Bosnian Serbs I met complained of cruelty or discrimination, and where they had heard of isolated cases they reminded me that it was the Serbian forces who had stormed the River Drina, thus breaching a centuries-old recognition of the integrity of the Bosnian patchwork. If, however, that patchwork is ripped to shreds and replaced with an apartheid of confessional Bantustans, those who like to talk ominously of Bosnian Muslim fundamentalism may get their wish..." Christopher Hitchens,

biggest catch was Bernard-Henri Levy, who did all he could to influence his fellow French to support the Bosnians (e.g. he influenced Francois Mitterrand to make his famous trip on June 28 1992 to open the Sarajevo airport).<sup>197</sup> Levy also made a film that prominently featured Izetbegović in a positive light - *Bosna!* - which was played at the Cannes Film Festival in 1994, he and would publicly defend Izetbegović against such accusations as that of being an Islamic fundamentalist.<sup>198</sup>

Another virtue of Izetbegović's was his perseverance, the flip side of his more regrettable tendency to be indecisive. Although it might sound flippant or shallow to say so, the fact is that Izetbegović was simply able to hang in there when the going got tough,<sup>199</sup> and was able to wait things out when Bosnia's situation was at its darkest.<sup>200</sup> We have seen that Izetbegović offered hints of capitulation to partition in July of 1993, but whether it was because of yet again the prodding of members of his party or simple personal conscience, he decided against this and he – and Bosnia – fought on.<sup>201</sup> And after a few months the tide did start to turn slightly, with the Bosnians winning a battle against the Croats on 4 November 1993 in the town of Vareš. At

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“Why Bosnia Matters,” in *Why Bosnia? Writings on the Balkan War*, edit. Rabia Ali and Lawrence Lifschultz (Stony Creek, CT: The Pamphleteer's Press, Inc., 1993), 10.

<sup>197</sup> Roger Cohen, “An Alarm for the New Europe Is Sounded From a Paris Salon,” *The New York Times*, 13 December 1992, Section 4, 9. LEXISNEXUS

<sup>198</sup> “A compromise with evil; If ethnic cleansing wins in Sarajevo, it will win everywhere else,” *The Gazette* (Montreal), 13 March 1993, B5. LEXUSNEXUS

<sup>199</sup> To be sure, the example of Izetbegović's perseverance and resistance during the war was not always Churchillian. One Bosnian Muslim subject remembered how she and her friends had joked about Izetbegović's once calling on the Bosnian peoples to protest against the war by simply turning the headlights of their cars on and off, over and over again. A Bosnian Muslim, interview with author, St. Louis, MO, 28 May 2008.

<sup>200</sup> In discussing Izetbegović's perseverance, it is helpful to examine one of the sections in his *Islam Between East and West*, “Duty and Interest,” where he writes rather movingly about heroes who fail. To Izetbegović, one of the signs of God's existence lies in the fact that such heroes are willing to make great sacrifices even when it totally goes against their own interests, and that they make attempts at doing good in this world even when the actual possibilities of arriving at justice are slim. ‘Alija ‘Ali Izetbegović, *Islam Between East and West* (Indianapolis, IN: American Trust Publications, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., 1989), 109-110. It is quite likely that Izetbegović often saw himself as such a hero during the Bosnian War, believing that there was greater value in fighting on rather than accepting some peace that would be more in the Bosnians' “interest.”

<sup>201</sup> Former president Bill Clinton offers this homage to Izetbegović's perseverance, writing that the United States' peacemaking efforts in Bosnia were “immeasurably helped by the Croatian and Bosnian military gains on the ground, and the brave and stubborn refusal of Izetbegović and his comrades to give up in the face of Bosnian Serb aggression.” Bill Clinton, *My Life* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2004), 684.

around the same time the more liberal-oriented SDA member Haris Silajdžić, who was very opposed to any sort of partition, was made prime minister, an action that many saw as an example of the Bosnians' resolution.<sup>202</sup> Then a few months later the Croats and Muslims decided it was in their interests to bury the hatchet and to focus their attention on the Serbs, something that eventually led to their signing an agreement in Washington in March of 1994. This Washington Agreement, as it was called, brought about the Bosnian-Croat Federation, the one half of the future Bosnian state. Although by signing this agreement he was in essence submitting to what would eventually end up being simply another form of partition separating the Bosnian Muslims and Croats from the Bosnian Serbs, Izetbegović at least had the consolation of knowing that his Muslims would not just be in some mini-state stuck between what could have easily been a greater Croatia and a greater Serbia.

Still, things had not become all that much better for Izetbegović - although he did not know it, he was facing another year and a half of war. Again though, he continued to persevere, yet one is hard pressed to find more to his military strategy than simply his hanging in there and fighting on, hoping the Europeans and the U.S. would becoming more involved in the conflict,<sup>203</sup>

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<sup>202</sup> Burg and Shoup, *The War in Bosnia-Herzegovina*, 283.

<sup>203</sup> An important question to deal with here is whether Izetbegović and the SDA went to unjust lengths to get the international community to sympathize with the Bosnians' plight (in addition to the aforementioned example of the SDA's likely delaying the instillation of a water-treatment system in Sarajevo in order to provide continual civilian targets for Serbian snipers). For instance, did they go as far as to bomb or shoot their own people and then claim that it was actually the Serbs who had perpetrated these dastardly acts, in a further effort to portray themselves as victims to the international community? Shoup and Burg argue that the Bosnians were not above doing this sort of thing, citing for example a detailed November 1994 U.N. report which documented a mortar attack the Bosnian army had conducted against a Sarajevo neighborhood that they had control over (the Bosnian army also killed a child during this attack). As to the more significant question though as to whether the Bosnian government or the Bosnian Muslims in general were responsible for any of the three major Sarajevo massacres (the 27 May 1992 breadline massacre, the 5 February 1994 Markala marketplace massacre, and the second Markala massacre on 28 August 1995), which were instrumental in drawing the international community further into the Bosnian War on the side of the Bosnians (the 5 August 1995 Markala marketplace massacre, for example, which the Bosnians argued had been the result of Serbian aggression, compelled the U.S. to launch serious NATO strikes against Bosnian Serb military targets), is something that cannot be known. The most that can be said is that it is *possible* that the government or Muslims were responsible for any of these massacres – Burg and Shoup again cite written accounts as well as diagnostic tests conducted by the U.N. which indicate that the evidence is inconclusive as to whether the Serbs or the Muslims were ultimately at fault. They also argue that the massacres clearly demonstrated a significant divergence of opinion between the western media on the one hand (who automatically assumed, for instance, that the second massacre had been committed by



and taking territory back from the Bosnian Serbs. But then maybe nothing else was really necessary. One thing that I have been impressed by in interviewing my admittedly limited number of subjects is how little they have criticized Izetbegović, and the one criticism that has been made of him by Amir Karadžić from Prijedor is that, unsurprisingly, Izetbegović was not able to get Prijedor back from the Serbs.<sup>204</sup> There seems to have been little desire on the part of the Bosnians to accept a deal during the war that would be totally dishonorable, in spite of all of their suffering. From this time on it does not seem that Izetbegović himself gave any thought to such a deal either (until the Americans would force him to accept one in 1995), and he experienced no political price because of it. Indeed, this is rather faint praise, but it could be argued that a positive aspect of his political leadership was that no effort was made at all to knock him off from the presidency (politically or violently), and that for all three and a half years of the war his position was utterly secure. Some of this was probably due to his authoritarianism and the rally-around-the-leader phenomenon which often occurs during war, but to have lasted for as long as he did Izetbegović must have been making at least some connection with his people – no small thing, that.

No small thing either was his ability to get up morning after morning to lead the Bosnians, since it was a matter of, as they say, one damn thing after the other. General Mladić of the Bosnian Serbs in April 1994 taking UN peacekeepers hostage and tying them to trees, causing Yasushi Akashi the special UN envoy to refuse to authorize NATO air strikes – a pathetic display if there ever was one. Izetbegović, a Bosnian, having to fight another Bosnian, his rival Fikret Abdić at his fiefdom in Bihać, something that caused many of Izetbegović's troops to be bogged

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the Serbs) and U.N. officials who cast a more wary eye on the purposes of the Muslim government. *Ibid.*, 164-169. This dichotomy between what the media and what U.N. officials believed about the goodness of the Bosnians would be a perennial theme throughout the Bosnian War. Finally, it can be pointed out that the Bosnian army (which presumably Izetbegović and the SDA had control over) was sometimes responsible for breaking local ceasefires in efforts to provoke U.S. intervention, something that again made U.N. officials (who needed these ceasefires in order to bring aid to suffering Bosnian civilians) suspicious of the Bosnian government's motives (and again, the media tended to criticize the U.N. officials who condemned the Bosnians for breaking ceasefires). James Gow, *Triumph of the Lack of Will: International Diplomacy and the Yugoslav War* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997), 95-96.

<sup>204</sup> Amir Karadžić, interview with author, St. Louis, MO, 27 June 2008.

down in northwest Bosnia for two months in November and December of 1994. The massacre of thousands of men and women at Srebrenica, a so-called “safe haven” in July 1995, the worst of its kind since World War Two. The looting and torching of the town of Žepa by the Serbs at around the same time.<sup>205</sup> During all of this time the arms embargo was never lifted, and no significant bombing of Serbian targets occurred.

Yet God writes straight with crooked lines, and of all people Franjo Tuđman helped come to Izetbegović’s rescue. Although Tuđman totally despised Izetbegović and under normal circumstances would have done nothing to help him, he wanted to make sure that a huge constellation of Bosnian Serbs was not massed on the Croatian Krajina border. Thus Croatian forces joined up with Bosnian forces in August 1995, and together they were able to take significant areas in northwestern Bosnia during Operation ‘Storm.’ At around the same time, after a Serbian shell had struck a Sarajevo marketplace and caused a massacre, NATO finally started to bomb Serbian targets in Bosnia.<sup>206</sup> These two factors would help create the incentive for the Serbs to deal, and later of course in November Izetbegović, Tuđman, and Milošević would meet in Dayton to attempt to arrive at peace.

What is interesting to mention though is a meeting Izetbegović had with Richard Holbrooke, the new American negotiator for Bosnia, in Paris at the end of August 1995 when the NATO bombing was going on. Holbrooke asked Izetbegović if he wanted a united Bosnia or a Bosnia that was divided into two parts, and although Izetbegović seemed rather ambivalent about it, he said he wanted a united Bosnia but that he would be willing to allow a lot of autonomy to the Serbian part of it.<sup>207</sup> Why he answered this way it is difficult to say; perhaps he hoped for a united Bosnia that the Muslims would eventually be able to gain the upper hand in, or thought that by simply allowing the Serbian portion to separate he would be rewarding Serbian aggression. Yet one might hope that there was still a part of Izetbegović that remained committed

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<sup>205</sup> Sabrina Ramet, *The Three Yugoslavias*, 447, 451-452, 460-462.

<sup>206</sup> Marko Attila Hoare, *The History of Bosnia*, 395-396.

<sup>207</sup> Richard Holbrooke, *To End a War* (New York: Modern Library, 1999), 97.

to a democratic, multi-ethnic Bosnia, and was worthy of the honest but praiseworthy description Holbrooke would later make of him:

He [Izetbegović] had kept the “idea” of Bosnia alive for years under the most difficult circumstances. It was an extraordinary achievement, a tribute to his courage and determination. At the age of seventy... he saw politics as a perpetual struggle. Even minor gestures of reconciliation to those Serbs who were ready to re-establish some form of multi-ethnic community were not easy for Izetbegović. His eyes had a cold and distant gaze; after so much suffering, they seemed dead to anyone else’s pain. He was a devout Muslim, although not the Bosnian ayatollah that his enemies portrayed. Yet though he paid lip service to the principles of a multiethnic state, he was not the democrat that some supporters saw. He reminded me a bit of Mao Zedong and other radical Chinese communist leaders – good at revolution, poor at governance. But without him Bosnia would never have survived.<sup>208</sup>

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<sup>208</sup> *Ibid.*, 97.

## Conclusion

### A Leader Despite Himself?

Alija Izetbegović's statesmanship after Dayton is in many ways a melancholic tale, in which some of his most negative traits (e.g. his penchant for authoritarianism) seemed to come to the forefront. The year after Dayton, 1996, was an election year, and the SDA prime minister of Bosnia, Haris Silajdžić, decided to form his own party, the more secular, multi-national Party for Bosnia and Herzegovina, having had enough of the Islamic fundamentalism and heavy-handedness of Izetbegović and his cohorts. Silajdžić and other candidates entered the presidential race at quite a disadvantage, though, as a result of the SDA's control over the state airwaves which limited their exposure, and one private media outlet, Radio 99, which was willing to give other candidates more airtime was prohibited from setting up a television station because of the SDA's influence.<sup>209</sup> SDA goons in northwest Bosnia intimidated and beat up political opponents,<sup>210</sup> and the political party continued to promote an intolerant ethnic nationalism.<sup>211</sup> As with so many "anti-Communist" nationalist leaders in post-1989 Europe, Izetbegović in his statesmanship had in many ways become a carbon copy of the previous Yugoslav Communist leaders, using their methods and imitating their actions.<sup>212</sup>

Because of all his political advantages Izetbegović was able to come in on top during the elections and was elected the first president of a federal Bosnia. During the four years of his presidency Izetbegović encouraged or at least allowed a certain Islamic

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<sup>209</sup> Misha Glenny, "The Price of Peace in Bosnia," *The New York Times*, 3 March 1996, Section 4, 15. LEXUSNEXUS.

<sup>210</sup> Mike O'Connor, "Bosnian Rulers Are Terrorizing The Opposition," *The New York Times*, 17 August 1996, 1. LEXUSNEXUS

<sup>211</sup> One prominent campaign slogan of the SDA in 1996 was: "Croats know who they're going to vote for... Serbs know who they're going to vote for.... And you?" David Rhode, *Endgame: The Betrayal and Fall of Srebrenica, Europe's Worst Massacre Since World War II* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1997), 381.

<sup>212</sup> Another irony during the Bosnian War was how so many of the more militant, religious members of the SDA had been members of the Communist party only a few years before. Such political opportunists were referred to as "traffic lights" by the cynical Bosnian population – Communist red before 1990, Muslim green after. Ian Traynor, "Sarajevo Turns an Illiberal Face to the World," *The Guardian* (London), 15 October 1994, 27. LEXUSNEXUS

fundamentalism\nationalism to flourish, whether it was through his efforts to get Father Christmas - a traditional and ecumenical figure of Sarajevans who had always brought gifts to little children and remained popular even in the post-Communist period – banned because of the figure’s association with the Communist past,<sup>213</sup> or his government’s encouragement of a more Islamic educational curriculum in schools where students learned of such things as the richness and greatness of the Ottoman period in history. Some of this emphasis on Islam, such as the-just mentioned education example, was undoubtedly a legitimate reaction to the denial of Bosnia’s religious traditions over decades of Communist rule, but other aspects of this Islamic renewal were a little more radical, like the new requirement of greeting others in offices of the Bosnian Federation with the greeting “Selaam aleikum” rather than the more traditional “Dobar dan.”<sup>214</sup>

As always though another, more noble side of Izetbegović could come out, as it did when Izetbegović appeared in Tehran in December of 1997 and spoke of the need for the Islamic world to have a greater understanding for the West. Telling his audience some “bitter truths,” Izetbegović argued that the West was better educated, had more respect for human rights, and provided more for the poor than the Islamic world. Acknowledging that there was also a “dark side,” to the achievements of the West, Izetbegović nonetheless proceeded to take his own Muslim brothers to task, saying that “Islam is the best, but we are not. These are two different things, which we confuse. Instead of hating the West, we should compete with it. Didn’t [the] Koran order this: compete in goodness.” Finally, Izetbegović strongly condemned terrorism in his speech, not only because it was wrong and the Koran prohibited it but also because it was “impractical” and “a possible cause of our future impotence.”<sup>215</sup> It was Izetbegović at his best,

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<sup>213</sup> Peter Beaumont, “Nationalists triumph as ‘Grandfather Frost’ banned in Sarajevo infant schools,” *The Observer* (England), 21 December 2008, 28. LEXUSNEXUS

<sup>214</sup> Vjekoslav Perica, *Balkan Idols: Religion and Nationalism in Yugoslav States* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 169.

<sup>215</sup> “Bosnian president addresses Islamic summit: urges cooperation with West,” *BBC Summary of World Broadcasts*, 13 December, 1997. LEXUSNEXUS

issuing a clarion call for an Islamic humanism which combined the best of religious and secular traditions.

But again as was so often the case with Izetbegović, there was a gap between his rhetoric and his actions and he was not able to apply this kind of humanism in his own realm. This can most easily be seen in his unwillingness to expel all of the *mujahideen* from Bosnia, a condition he had agreed to when he signed the Dayton accords in 1995. Perhaps Izetbegović's and other SDA members' bitterness at what they felt was the neglect of the West during the war was too much for them, and with all of the flaws of the *mujahideen* these fighters had at least been there at Bosnia's side during her time of need, so Izetbegović and the SDA could not just get rid of them. Thus a man like the Algerian Abu el-Ma'ali, who was responsible for terrorist actions within Bosnia and in other countries like France during the late 1990s and had connections to Usama bin Laden and Al'Qaida, was given protection by Izetbegović, and approximately two hundred *mujahideen* were given Bosnian passports after the Dayton Accords. For a few years the U.S. was willing to tolerate this, chastising the Bosnian government and saying the *mujahideen* had to go while at the same time not doing too much about it, but September 11<sup>th</sup> changed all of that. The Americans put enormous pressure on the Bosnian government then to be done with the *mujahideen* problem and the Bosnians complied, expelling any Arab fighters who appeared at all threatening. The foreign minister of Bosnia later said that on 11 September, "the world.... split into a modern civilization and one of barbarism and terrorism.... Bosnia-Herzegovina has chosen to ally itself with the civilized world. It has decided to be part of the solution, not part of the problem... For our own sake... we chose sides." The Bosnians and Bosnian media started to get wind of Izetbegović's foot dragging as far as the *mujahideen* had been concerned and raised some ruckus about it, and apparently the U.S. government made its displeasure known to Izetbegović as

well. In October 2001 Izetbegović relinquished his position as leader of the SDA, a year after he had stepped down from the presidency for reasons of health.<sup>216</sup>

Perhaps Izetbegović's poor health was augmented by the realization on his part that the more pure, Islamic-oriented society which had been his hope for Bosnia was nowhere close to coming to fruition. In spite of the efforts of the SDA over the years to create a more Islamic milieu within Bosnia, as well as the rediscovery some Muslims individually had of their faith as a result of the war, most Bosnian Muslims remained – or eventually fell back to being after an initial period of religious fervor – fairly secular in their outlook. Although countries like Saudi Arabia would continue to pour millions of dollars into Bosnia after the Bosnian War, through the building of new mosques or the sending of missionaries to instruct the Bosnian people, most Bosnian Muslims were turned off by the ugly Saudi architecture which replaced centuries-old Ottoman era mosques or the fanatical lecturers of Wahhabi theology who could care less about Bosnian Islamic traditions.<sup>217</sup> Places like the Iranian Cultural Center in Sarajevo remained empty while mini-skirted women headed off to the nearest bar, and Bosnians thought more about the troubled economy and keeping Muslim-inhabited territory than about such abstract ideas as belief or salvation.<sup>218</sup> Even the success of Izetbegović's own SDA, interestingly enough, depended upon their in many ways being more nationalistic in an ethnic sense than being totally religious, since they still had to appeal to voters who remained for the most part secular. The SDA therefore

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<sup>216</sup> Evan F. Kohlmann, *Al-Qaida's Jihad in Europe: The Afghan-Bosnian Network* (Oxford, UK and New York: Berg, 2004), 17-173, 175, 192, 202, 217-219, 229-231. Perhaps Izetbegović's tactics with the *mujahideen* was the proverbial straw on the camel's back as far as the public's toleration of Izetbegović was concerned; there had already been developing for some time a general disillusionment with Izetbegović's style and leadership, with previous supporters starting to turn their backs on him. As a Bosniak *philosophe* admitted in 2000, "I would never recommend to Bosnian Serbs and Bosnian Croats that they submit to Bosniak authority such as it is now, for even the Bosniaks can't endure it... With a government like this, Bosnia is conclusively heading for extinction." Gojko Berić, *Letters to the Celestial Serbs*, trans. Saba Risaluddin (Saqi Books, 2002), 265.

<sup>217</sup> Alma Imanovic, "Wahhabism in Bosnia and Herzegovina in the Context of Global Political Islam" (master's thesis, Webster University, June 2005), 59-60, 63-64, 76-77. One can assume in all fairness that Izetbegović was turned off by many of the Saudi efforts as well. Although he was a Puritan he was no Philistine, and it is certainly doubtful that he appreciated the plain Saudi walls which were plastered over the beautiful art designs in Bosnian mosques, or the angry, violent rhetoric of Saudi missionaries.

<sup>218</sup> Jeffrey Fleishman, "A Cosmopolitan Islam Taking Form in Bosnia/Middle East Fundamentalism Loses Its Appeal," *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, 4 October 1998, A01. LEXUSNEXUS

faced this Catch-22 – if they went overboard in their promotion of certain Islamist ideas they would become irrelevant, but if they desired to remain in power they increasingly would have to jettison their religious beliefs.<sup>219</sup> Rather than being a great meeting point between the Christian West and the Muslim East, to allude to the title of one of Izetbegović's books, Bosnia was becoming a secular nation just like the rest of Europe. With this awareness perhaps Izetbegović passed away on 19 October 2003.<sup>220</sup>

The authors of the obituaries and eulogies who discussed Izetbegović's legacy after his death tended to be fairly predictable and mundane in what they wrote about him, albeit honest and balanced. The anonymous scribe of *The Economist's* obituary was typical, noting that Izetbegović's true allegiance was to the sacred and not the more worldly milieu of the political, something that made him unsuited to the role of president of Bosnia. The writer also gave the usual lines about the West not giving Izetbegović the help he expected, the unwillingness of

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<sup>219</sup> As Giles Keppel argues, "...the president [Izetbegović] himself, without renouncing any of his former engagements, continued to make public declarations that were tinged with political realism. It appeared to be his belief that the instillation of an Islamic state, or any attempt to apply the sharia, would arouse the overwhelming opposition of Bosnian voters and seriously undermine the SDA administration." Giles Keppel, *Jihad: The Trail of Political Islam* (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2002), 352-353. The fact that political and social circumstances as Keppel mentions seemed to have precluded some extra efforts on Izetbegović's part to make the Bosnian Federation a more Islamic society, makes it difficult to answer the question alluded to earlier of what kind of "fundamentalist" Izetbegović really was. As we have seen, during the war Izetbegović or the SDA took certain illiberal measures, such as restricting the teaching of Christianity – while allowing Islam to be taught - in public schools, or extended the reach of religion into certain areas in a manner that liberal states tend not to permit (e.g. the SDA's promoting soldiers not on merit but on how much they subscribed to Islamic religious doctrine). Yet if one stipulates that Izetbegović was a fundamentalist in Lewis' sense – one who wants to bring Islamic law back into the normal mechanisms of the state – he certainly seems to have been a fairly mild fundamentalist in comparison to other Islamic statesmen. Never during the war, for example, when his power was probably at its height, did Izetbegović do anything that could be considered truly radical. Izetbegović never punished others because of religious belief during this time, something that is unfortunately rather common in many Islamic societies. Although he helped purged such entities as the military of Bosnian Christians during and after the war, he also allowed many Serbs and Croats to continue to serve in government, whether it was Serbian and Croatian politicians in the parliament or bureaucrats in the ministries – hardly the behavior of an authoritarian theocrat. And although members of his SDA would attempt to limit certain liberties during the war, such as asking some comedians in Sarajevo to turn down some of their more risqué routines, they did not go very far to enforce these limitations (Concerning the comedians, all they did was simply ask).

<sup>220</sup> It was perhaps in some ways a blessing that Izetbegović died in 2003, for the Hague was about to investigate him for his culpability in war crimes that the Bosnian Army had committed against Croatian and Serbian civilians. Ramet, *The Three Yugoslavias: State-Building and State-Legitimation, 1918-2005* (Bloomington, IN and Washington D.C.: Indiana University Press and Woodrow Wilson Center Press, 2006), 488-489.



Izetbegović and the Bosnians to be a part of “Serboslavia,” Izetbegović’s sympathy for some radical Islamic philosophies, and so on.<sup>221</sup> Paddy Ashdown, one of the High Representatives sent to Bosnia to oversee and help implement the Dayton Agreement there in 2002, was – as can be expected – diplomatic in his assessment of Izetbegović, saying that in his role as elder statesman Izetbegović had been committed to “the peaceful reconstruction of Bosnia,” even while not always agreeing with the policies Ashdown felt should be enacted. Ashdown also recycled Holbrooke’s line by saying that more than anybody else Izetbegović helped provide for the survival of Bosnia.<sup>222</sup>

Much more interesting and perceptive was an unpublished essay written by the Bosnian Serb columnist Gojko Berić of that noble institution *Oslobodjenje*, the Sarajevo newspaper which remained multi-ethnic during the terrible years of the Bosnian war. Titled “A Leader Despite Himself,” it was a political and not a real obituary, written right after Izetbegović had stepped down from the presidency in October 2000, but in many ways Berić was still providing what obituary writers traditionally provide, which is the summing-up of a life and career (although with his unique knowledge of the Bosnian political scene Berić is able to provide a much more nuanced and comprehensive view of Izetbegović that his future obituarists would not be able to match). It is a useful essay then to analyze in some detail as we approach the end of this essay,

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<sup>221</sup> “Alija Izetbegović,” *The Economist*, 25 October 2003, Obituary section. LEXUSNEXUS

<sup>222</sup> Ian Traynor and Paddy Ashdown, “Obituary: Alija Izetbegović: Bosnia’s first president, a devout Muslim who fought for his country’s survival in war and peace during the 1990s,” *The Guardian*, 20 October, 2003, 21. It is probably apposite to mention *The New York Times* obituary here also, in which the author, David Binder, gave the usual summary of Izetbegović’s life and political career - but with one significant extra detail. According to Binder, Izetbegović had four wives when he died, the third of whom he married during the Bosnian War in 1993 under *sharia* law, and the fourth he married in 1995 (something the newspaper *Slobodna Bosna* congratulated Izetbegović for). I have not been able to confirm this information in any other source, although Izetbegović perhaps hints at it by mentioning in his memoir his children as being a great source of comfort while he was in prison during the 1980s but not mentioning at all his (first?) wife Halida. See Alija Izetbegović, *Inescapable Questions: Autobiographical Notes*, trans. Saba Rissaluddin and Jasmina Izetbegović (Leicester, England: The Islamic Foundation, 2003), 49.

for it provides a matrix to evaluate the important events in Izetbegović's political career as well as his political leadership, and it also can be used to help determine what his legacy might be.<sup>223</sup>

Attention should first be given to the obvious truth Berić points out, which is what a strange bird Izetbegović really was and how he truly beat, as the expression goes, to his own drum. Berić tells the story of the autumn 1998 elections which were approaching and journalists were asking Izetbegović if he would run for a third term as a member of the state presidency. The immediate answer Izetbegović gave them was bizarre: "If I were in my right mind, I wouldn't stand. I haven't the strength for the problems, the difficulties, and the things that have to be done." Yet later Izetbegović would again appear before the gathered journalists and tell them, "Balkan leaders don't like stepping down from power. I've decided to stand again." There was Izetbegović then in a nutshell – candid if not necessarily honest, flippant, and piously otherworldly while at the same time demonstrating that he greatly coveted political power.

Perhaps more than anything else though the statements demonstrated Izetbegović's perennial indecisiveness. As Izetbegović himself once put the matter publicly - "I catch myself thinking one thing in the morning, and completely the opposite in the afternoon." Berić thinks that Izetbegović's opponents took advantage of his statement and made him look shifty and without principle,<sup>224</sup> which may very well be. But perhaps more importantly, did such indecisiveness prevent Izetbegović from exercising his authority when it was most needed, most significantly during the discussions over the various peace proposals before the war when the

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<sup>223</sup> What follows to an extent over the next few pages will be what is often pejoratively referred to as counter-factual history, or imagining what would have happened if Izetbegović had decided to do X rather than Y. It is an endeavor that has many pitfalls - as I remember Richard Mitchell, a professor of modern Japanese history at the University of Missouri once saying to the class, it is hard enough to figure out what actually happened in the past, much less trying to determine what *might* have happened. My purpose here for the most part is more modest though, in which I will actually in some ways attempt to act as an advocate for Izetbegović, and show the problems not only with what he did but the weaknesses as well with what he did not do. In other words, there will be criticism not only of Izetbegović but of his critics and their indictments as well, and how the alternatives he might have pursued could easily have been as bad as the choices he did actually end up making. I also hope to offer homage to the difficult circumstances he was in, and show how to a large degree he was simply on top of the saddle of Bosnian history, riding events.

<sup>224</sup> Gojko Berić, *Letters to the Celestial Serbs*, 262.

hard line elements in his SDA overruled the direction Izetbegović wanted to take? One could argue that Izetbegović's original inclinations to make deals with the Serbs and hopefully avert war may or may not have been correct, but they were certainly consequential for the people of Bosnia. Or rather, the unwillingness of Izetbegović to actually act on his convictions was profoundly consequential – war might have still been possible if Izetbegović had agreed to something like the Belgrade Initiative or the various cantonization plans the Serbs and Europeans presented, but in his rejecting these plans he made war not just possible but inevitable. If a key test of leadership is a willingness to follow one's beliefs and convictions in spite of what others' say, then Izetbegović arguably failed this test miserably. Yet this indictment fails to take into account the perennial difficulty that we have seen Izetbegović constantly had to face, which is that of public and party opinion. Although Izetbegović's constant changes of opinion might have been regrettable then, they were also in many ways necessary. For however much he may not have liked it, Izetbegović had to be willing change positions if he saw that the public or the SDA were just not willing to go along with him.

Another test it could be said that Izetbegović failed was his ability to use rhetoric to achieve certain important political ends. The capacity to lead depends so much on a statesman's talent to use words in order to appeal to certain emotions and feelings of his countrymen. In the case of Bosnia during the stressful transition she was going through during the early 1990s there was a great need for Izetbegović to speak of traditions of Bosnian unity and to provide a vision for the future in which Serbs, Croats, and Muslims could live together. Instead Izetbegović's vision was rather parochial – as Berić says, “He was not particularly enthusiastic about its [Bosnia's] traditional multi-cultural society... but conceived multi-ethnicity as a mechanical assembly of three essentially separate nations.”<sup>225</sup> That seems to me fairly true. It is interesting when reading Izetbegović's works -whether it be his *Declaration* or his prison journals or *Islam Between East and West* – to see how little importance Bosnia actually had for him. He wrote

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<sup>225</sup> *Ibid.*, 263.

page after page of course about Islam, or about the nature of science or even about Serbian thinkers, but pondering what Bosnia meant to him seems to have been beyond his ken.<sup>226</sup> Even if Izetbegović could have been motivated to talk more about his Bosnian vision then during the 1990 campaign, probably the only time it might have made a difference, it is likely he lacked the much of the necessary vocabulary to do so.<sup>227</sup>

But again, it must be emphasized that it is fairly unlikely that even if Izetbegović had had such rhetorical, Andric-like abilities in spinning some kind of narrative for the ethnic groups of Bosnia that would have provided some great rationale for their being able to live together peacefully, it is hard to see how such abilities would have prevented Bosnia's disintegration. Words may often be powerful but they cannot stop a bullet, and especially with the introduction of arms into Bosnia at the end of 1990 people felt compelled to take sides. To again quote something John Lukacs says in many of his books, hard minorities are often more powerful than soft majorities, and in the case of Bosnia especially there were those minorities who started to have weapons and began to threaten those majorities – Serbs, Muslims, and Croats alike - who in more normal circumstances might have had a live-and-let-live attitude but who now were becoming frightened, radicalized, and defensive.

Berić goes on to argue the important point that war was inevitable because Bosnia never could have submitted to have been a part of what Berić describes as Milošević's fascist regime. Put plainly, Berić thinks it would have been a kind of hell for Bosnia to have remained in a rump Yugoslavia, so Izetbegović had no choice but to push for independence. By making this assertion Berić is also criticizing that "Bosniak elite" (presumably Berić means here figures like Zulfikarpašić) who believed that war could have been prevented by consenting to live under a

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<sup>226</sup> To be fair to Izetbegović, it is likely that a vision of Bosnia which appealed to all ethnic groups would have been beyond the ken of most other Bosnians as well. As Marko Attila Hoare points out,

<sup>227</sup> During the war also, as we have seen, Izetbegović did not promote a multi-ethnic Bosnia, although Berić observes one moment in 1992 when he attempted it. It was a few months after the war started, when from the hospital he wrote a public letter in which he espoused the need for the different ethnic groups to be "citizens of Bosnia-Herzegovina." But Izetbegović, according to Berić, did nothing to follow-up on this. *Ibid.*, 263.

Milošević regime that, ultimately, would not have been so awful.<sup>228</sup> This problem of whether Izetbegović should have accepted some kind of deal with the Serbs has been touched upon in chapter three, but because it is such a critical question a lot more analysis is called for.

As was argued before, there is little reason to believe that any efforts Milošević might have made to reform his rule would have *definitely* been permanent and long-lasting, and it is quite easy to imagine Milošević's abusing the rights of Bosnian Croats and Muslims within a rump Yugoslavia if it had suited his interests. Yes, it might have been true as Zulfikarpašić said to Alan Kuperman that after the Serbian invasion of Croatia in 1991 it was in Milošević's interests then to be gracious to the Bosnian Croats and Muslims, that Milošević wanted to demonstrate a benevolent image to the West so that the economic embargo that had earlier been imposed on Yugoslavia would be lifted.<sup>229</sup> In victory, magnanimity, as Churchill would say. But what about a year or so after this, when the West's attention would be elsewhere, the idea of Bosnia's independence now being a dead letter as far as the world was concerned, and Milošević having free rein to subtly repress the rights of Muslims and Croats within his Yugoslav state? We have already seen that Milošević was willing to purge such institutions as the Serbian government and media of those who would not support him during the late 1980s, that he encouraged the use of violent crowds to achieve his interests in all of the republics, that he was willing to use the Serbian military to intimidate members of the Kosovo assembly, and so on. Can there be any doubt that Milošević would not have used these methods again in Bosnia if they could have helped him to receive political support or achieve political objectives? Certainly Milošević showed an inclination to continue to commit human rights abuses within his own realm after Dayton in 1995, cracking down on political opposition within Serbia and killing Kosovar Albanians. Democratic statesmanship was simply something unnatural for Milošević, as he himself basically admitted to a French reporter when he said that he did not like multi-party

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<sup>228</sup> *Ibid.*, 260-261.

<sup>229</sup> Alan J. Kuperman, "Tragic Challenges and the Moral Hazard of Humanitarian Intervention: How and Why Ethnic Groups Provoke Genocidal Retaliation" (Ph.D diss., MIT, 2002), 146.

systems, that a “system without parties” was better.<sup>230</sup> Why then should Bosnians ever have given this guy the benefit of the doubt?

Still, in considering the drawbacks of Bosnia’s remaining in a rump Yugoslavia, one also has to honestly consider the possibility that a Milošević-led regime might not have been so bad for the Bosnians, after all. One argument that Kuperman uses to defend this position is to observe that Milošević’s rule over certain parts of Yugoslavia during the Bosnian War, while not exactly benign, was not particularly harsh either. He points out, for instance, that the Hungarians in the Voivodina and the Montenegrins were left alone by Milošević after he had made his rule secure over those two peoples, as were the Muslims in the Sandžak region of Serbia who – unlike the Muslims in Bosnia – were not subject to ethnic cleansing. He also quotes Zulfikarpašić, who believed the perennial fear Bosnian Muslims had of being treated like Kosovar Albanians was misguided: “The Kosovo excuse is the excuse of losers who are guilty for the catastrophe. It would never have been the same here as in Kosovo.” Instead, Zulfikarpašić thinks Bosnia’s situation would have been the same as Montenegro’s was during the war, a country “that did pretty well. It survived and is fairly autonomous....”<sup>231</sup> (Indeed, Montenegro was able to avoid war *and* eventually gain independence from Yugoslavia only fourteen years after Bosnia was able to gain hers). While it is hard to believe that Bosnia’s situation would have been as smooth as in a country like Montenegro, which is mostly made up of Serbs and does not have a large population of Muslims as Bosnia does, Zulfikarpašić is probably right to suggest that Bosnia would not have been like Kosovo, where there have always been great tensions between the Albanians and the Serbs.<sup>232</sup>

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<sup>230</sup> Sabrina Ramet, *The Three Yugoslavias*, 349.

<sup>231</sup> Alan J. Kuperman, “Tragic Challenges,” 145-146.

<sup>232</sup> For a defense of Zulfikarpašić’s view, it worthwhile to quote Steven Burg and Paul Shoup at some length: “... there were a number of reasons why linking up with Yugoslavia might have looked attractive to the Bosnian Muslims. First, it would have brought the Yugoslav army into the Muslim camp and avoided civil war between the Muslims and Serbs. Second, while it might initially have involved political costs, since the new federation would be dominated by Serbs and Milošević, it would have united all the Muslims of former Yugoslavia into one state (that is, Muslims from Kosovo, Sandzak, and Bosnia-

But even if Bosnia under Milošević's control would have been less benign than somebody like Zulfikarpašić imagines it would have been, would not even that have been better than what Bosnia ultimately had to go through – three and a half years of war, a hundred thousand dead, and millions expelled from their homes, many of whom will probably never return to them again? There is a bitter joke that has apparently been making the rounds around Bosnia over the last few years – What is the difference between the Vance/Owen peace plan of 1992/1993 and the 1995 Dayton Accords? Thousands of corpses. Like many jokes, this one has a certain truth to it, since the differences between the two peace plans were not that great. Considering what was achieved through war was really no better than what could have been had through Vance/Owen, or even more relevantly before the war with a compromise deal with the Serbs in 1991 or 1992 – was not Izetbegović's decision to pursue independence one huge blunder?

One problem with this sort of thinking is that it involves thinking about things in retrospect when all the facts are at hand; things were less clear in 1992 than 1995, although they were more clear than some would like to admit. Bosnians could not have known for sure, for instance, just how awful the Bosnian War would be, although as we have seen they had good reason to guess that it would be painful, based on the precedent they had just seen set in Croatia, and probably on the memories of what the costs of World War II had been as well. Remember again Karadžić's 1991 "Highway to Hell," speech in the Bosnian parliament, when he threatened the Bosnians with extinction if they declared independence; a Bosnian official admitted to Kuperman that a "chill ran down my spine" when he heard Karadžić say that.<sup>233</sup> As we have

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Herzegovina). Eventually, one can surmise, the Muslims would have been a political force to be reckoned with in the new Yugoslavia. Finally, Bosnia-Herzegovina probably would have been able, with the support of Montenegro, to retain its status as a republic and many of the powers it had enjoyed in the old Yugoslav federation." Steven L. Burg and Paul S. Shoup, *The War in Bosnia-Herzegovina: Ethnic Conflict and International Intervention* (Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe, 1999), 71-72.

<sup>233</sup> *Ibid.*, 51.

seen, most of the SDA officials were aware that a Bosnian war would be bad, so they cannot be allowed the excuse of not being able to know what would happen.

Another objection than can be made is that even if a deal had been struck and Izetbegović had agreed to, say, one of the 1992/1992 cantonization plans, the Serbs would not have kept their end of the bargain and war would have ensued anyway. In response to this Kuperman quotes the Bosnian Serb leaders he interviewed, who insisted that under the various peace plans they would have been under secure Serbian governments and would have had no need then to resort to ethnic cleansing. What Biljana Plavšić, a Serbian member of the collective presidency before the war, said was typical – she argued that she was very supportive of the original non-contiguous cantonization proposal the Serbs brought forth in 1991, and it was only when independence was declared that she and the Serbian leadership believed they had to resort to partition (and by implication, ethnic cleansing) in order to provide for their security.<sup>234</sup> Considering that Plavšić is now sitting in a prison cell in Sweden, having been given an eleven prison sentence after being tried by the International War Crimes Tribunal of the Former Yugoslavia (ICTY) at the Hague for war crimes, some skepticism is in order about statements she and other Serbs have made in retrospect. It is quite natural at this point that they will want to rehabilitate their images and do anything they can to shift blame from their own actions and apply it to the Izetbegović government.

In addition, it is easy to imagine scenarios existing for continued conflict and violence even if something like the one of the cantonization plans had come into being. Suppose the “generous” 1991 cantonization plan originally offered by the Bosnian Serbs had been agreed to by the Izetbegović government. Even though this plan provided for Muslim-controlled cantons in the areas in which they were the majority, there still would have been plenty of Muslim minorities elsewhere who would have felt threatened being under Serbian or Croatian authority (not to mention the Bosnian Serbs and Croats who would feel threatened being under Muslim

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<sup>234</sup> *Ibid.*, 131.



authority). Remember also that this and other 1992 cantonization plans provided very little authority to the central government, and that the Croatian and Serbian cantons would be free to have relations with Croatia and Serbia/Yugoslavia – this would provide a huge incentive for Croatia and Serbia to continue to meddle into the affairs of their countrymen's' cantons, providing military supplies, encouragement for the Croatian and Serbian cantons to draw closer to Croatia and Serbia/Yugoslavia respectively, and so forth. Since undoubtedly all sorts of tensions would develop in the course of the implementation of these plans, it is also easy to imagine population transfers occurring (sort of an ethnic-cleansing lite) on either a voluntary or involuntary basis, something that would have most likely been a nightmare to oversee. Chances are that it would have been the job of U.N. peace keepers to try to manage all of this, a case again of their getting involved in an endeavor that was totally over their heads and which they were in no way equipped to implement. Numerous potential sparks existed then, any of which could have lit up into full-blown war.

Again though, honesty dictates the need to imagine a more benign scenario, although in this case it is harder. One could argue that population transfers, for instance, however illiberal and nasty they may be, are not necessarily the worst things in the world, and have been used in unique situations in the past to make the best out of a bad situation in which the likely alternatives are even worse. The scholar Michael Dark writes about such difficult situations, in which he shows how such population exchanges as in 1919 between Greece and Bulgaria and in 1923 between Turkey and Greece were ways of cutting the Gordian Knot of the problem of minorities in different states, and lives were saved in the process. Concerning the Bosnian case, he argues that if the international community had actually taken a hands-off approach to the Bosnian conflict and done nothing, then the Croats, Muslims, and Serbs themselves would have bowed to the inevitable and allowed for the transfer of populations, since there would have been no way of

minorities and majorities living together peacefully in Bosnia.<sup>235</sup> It is an argument that I do not find entirely persuasive, since he does not really provide, for instance, many specific examples to show that Muslims in Bosnia condoned or promoted population transfers during the war, although he does provide some.<sup>236</sup> For Izetbegović to have advocated this to the Bosnians during a period of “peace” would have been quite a job to say the least, although he could also have pointed out that the alternative was a brutal war in which an even more violent population transfer would inevitably occur. “Pick your poison,” Izetbegović would have been saying to the Bosnian people, a statesmanship-like exhortation to be sure but perhaps also the death sentence of his political career.

But enough with such counter-factual examples for a moment; they are in the end fairly moot, since Izetbegović and the SDA decided, after all, to cast their lot with the international community and hope they would bail the Bosnians out. Yet it is fair to this point to ask this germane question: Was their trust and hope in the international community as sincere as they later made them out to be? Or to put the question another way, it would have made sense for Izetbegović to take a gamble and accept the risks of declaring independence rather than going with the peace plans *if* he could be fairly certain the international community would back him up - but can it be said that he was reasonably certain of this? To turn yet again to Kuperman, he provides examples of how he believes the Americans in particular misled the Bosnian leaders into thinking that the U.S. would protect Bosnia. To understand this, we must go back to February of 1992, when the European Community had proposed its own various cantonization plans as means of avoiding war. American officials, and in particular Warren Zimmerman (who, as can be

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<sup>235</sup> Michael William Anthony Dark, “Population Exchange and Peacemaking.” (Ph.D diss., Princeton University, January 2005), 226.

<sup>236</sup> For example, Dark points out that although the mayor of Zenica was reluctant to do it, he finally submitted to exchanging Serbs and Muslims between Zenica and Banja Luka in October 1993 because he was under a variety of pressures to do it (e.g. there were Muslim refugees who needed homes in Zenica). Yet there were certainly many examples of Muslims’ being against such transfers, as on 1 October 1993 when 342 Serbs (most of them willingly) and 300 Muslims (unwillingly) were exchanged between Doboje and Tuzla. *Ibid.*, 218-219.

recalled, was quite sympathetic to the Bosnians) encouraged Izetbegović to reject the latest EC cantonization plan since it was seen as unjust by the Americans and the Bosnians. Yet by doing this and then still declaring Bosnian independence in just a few weeks without providing for a cantonization plan that would make the Bosnian Serbs and Croats feel more secure, Izetbegović knew that the Americans were suggesting that the Bosnians do something rather risky.

According to Kuperman, precisely *because* the Americans were asking the Bosnians to do something risky, Izetbegović and his government could logically gather from this that the Americans were also suggesting – if not exactly saying – that the U.S. would be there for them in the likely case of war. And although the U.S. government certainly did not see things this way, for their part they were hoping that by being seen as strongly supporting Bosnia’s international recognition as a state, the Serbs would not call the Americans’ bluff and would leave Bosnia alone.<sup>237</sup> It all ended up being a tragic miscalculation on the part both of the Bosnians and Americans.

But as far as the Bosnians were concerned, was it more than *just* a tragic miscalculation? For how could they really have believed that the Americans would provide any military assistance, or enough anyway (i.e. more than just air strikes) to have really stopped a Serbian juggernaut? It was mentioned already in chapter three that Sijladžić was specifically informed by a major National Security official that the U.S. could not provide any military assistance, although to be fair this was a few weeks after American officials had given the Bosnians encouragement in February 1992 to reject the EC cantonization plan. Still, there were absolutely no *definitive* assurances at all and at any time before the war by the Americans or anybody else that the Bosnians could expect any help if the Serbs attacked them. For somebody like Izetbegović to have thought along the lines of *Well, the Americans suggested I reject the cantonization plan and risk the danger of war, and although they did not actually promise military aid they certainly would not let us do something so dangerous and then not support us,*

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<sup>237</sup> Alan Kuperman, “Tragic Challenges,” 162-167.

*would they?* suggests not merely naiveté on his part but a serious dereliction of duty as leader of his country.<sup>238</sup> Or consider what Zulfikarpašić claims Izetbegović said to him in the summer of 1991, that “the United States and United Kingdom will not allow a single massacre [of a Bosnian],” a statement that is so amazing if true that it is hard to believe Izetbegović could really have believed it when he said it. More likely is that he was just saying this for show, and it is possible that he concurred with what Zulfikarpašić and another prominent political figure Muhamed Filipović apparently told him in response, “They will never send troops. They will send medicine and blankets and will count the dead.”<sup>239</sup>

Why did Izetbegović not agree to any of the peace plans then, since that appears to have been his original inclination anyway in 1991 and 1992? Part of the answer can perhaps be found in his indecisiveness, with Izetbegović thinking at times the international community would help, and other times thinking they would not. Perhaps another part lies in a simple lack of backbone, with his not being willing to stand up to other members of the SDA. Yet I suspect (although it cannot be proven) that the major reason is that it was just easier for Izetbegović and others to hope, or want to believe, that the international community would help them, rather than just facing the facts and acknowledging that the Europeans and Americans would not help them and they would have to face the vastly superior Serbs alone. If Izetbegović were to have faced this fact though, then he and other members of the SDA would also have had to face the possibility that it might have made more sense to deal, since again being either a part of a rump Yugoslavia or in a partitioned Bosnia might have not been the best thing in the world and might not have

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<sup>238</sup> This provides the opportunity for another criticism of Izetbegović’s and other members of the SDA’s leadership, which would be an insufficient appreciation of American history. For when the Americans told them that they would support them without any definitive promises of military supports, the Bosnian officials should have thought to themselves, *We have seen this movie before*. In 1956, when Eisenhower and John Foster Dulles earlier had encouraged the eastern Europeans to “rollback” the Soviets, and peoples like the Hungarians thought that if they did the Americans would be there for them; Cubans in 1961 who thought that Kennedy would provide air strikes to help them overthrow Castro; Kurds in Iraq in 1991 who thought the Americans would help them if they rose up against Saddam Hussein, etc, etc – precedents which should have made the Bosnian officials think twice.

<sup>239</sup> *Ibid.*, 148.

even prevented war, but there was good reason to think that the alternative to these options was even worse.

Which brings us back in a rather convoluted way to Berić's original point, that the war that actually occurred was inevitable because Bosnians never could have submitted to having been a part of "Serboslavia," or by implication to a partitioned (or partition-lite) Bosnia. After the preceding analysis though, it could be argued that Berić is wrong about this, that because it should have been seen as self-evident to everyone that some things could indeed be worse than remaining in a rump Yugoslavia, it would have been possible for Izetbegović then to have persuaded the Bosnian public of the folly of declaring independence. But this brings us also to another point made in chapter three, which is the ability of Izetbegović to have made such an argument would have been incredibly difficult. No people like to be told that they really have no good alternatives, that the game is up, that they have been presented with a *fait accompli* (to use just a few political clichés), but in a more diplomatic and sugar-coated manner that is basically the news Izetbegović would have had to present to the Bosnian people. Would they have accepted it? This brings us again to the *terra incognita* of hypotheticals so some skepticism is again in order, but if the history of other nations is any guide then there is good reason to believe the Bosnians would not.

Consider the thesis Donald Kagan presents in his fine work *On the Origins of War and the Preservation of Peace*, where he alludes to the ideas of Thucydides and argues that peoples go to war for three reasons (or out of three motives) – fear, honor, and interest. Kagan goes on to point out that although it makes sense to most people that a nation would go to war out of interest and fear, the fact that nations go to war simply because they believe it is honorable is much harder to comprehend, since there seems to be something retrograde and ancient about that. However, it does not make it any less true – as Kagan puts it, "If... we understand its [honor's] significance as deference, esteem, just due, regard, respect, or prestige we will find it an

important motive of nations in the modern world as well.”<sup>240</sup> Many of these preceding notions just listed could be used to explain why Bosnians – like the Slovenes and Croats before them – would have found it dishonorable to have remained a part of a rump Yugoslavia or consented to the partition of their nation. After all that Milošević had already done in the various Yugoslav republics for example, how could Bosnians have had regard for themselves – to pick just one of Kagan’s words – if they then just submitted to this leader’s sovereignty? As one of my Bosnian subjects, Amir Karadžić, said to me, “We recognized that if we were to be part of Serbia we would almost be slaves, we would not be able to keep our nationality, so we had no choice [but to become independent].”<sup>241</sup> Strong words, these. One could object that Karadžić is being rather hyperbolic here, but that is exactly the point, for just being under Milošević’s rule would have been dishonorable for him. In the end then, Izetbegović probably could not have accepted any of these peace plans even though he was personally inclined to accept them, simply because too many of the Bosnian people and influential figures within his party would not have accepted them along with him.

Berić goes on to discuss Izetbegović’s conduct during the war and says something we already know, which is that war as well as “the hypocritical attitude of the West to the genocide against the Bosniak people” pushed Izetbegović into a more militant direction.<sup>242</sup> A good question to ask then is if Izetbegović at this point was already inclined to create a more Islamic state anyway, why did he not cut his losses and just agree to what would have been a Muslim mini-state between Croatian and Serbian states? The cynical, although perhaps also realistic, answer is that he and the SDA simply wanted to get back more territory from the Croats and Serbs that they could then incorporate into their Islamic-oriented part of Bosnia. The more positive answer is that though his more Islamic attitude predominated, he perhaps did still have

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<sup>240</sup> Donald Kagan, *On the Origins of War and the Preservation of Peace* (New York: An Anchor Book, Published by Doubleday, 1995), 8.

<sup>241</sup> Amir Karadžić, interview with author, St. Louis, MO, 27 June 2008.

<sup>242</sup> Gojko Berić, *Letters to the Celestial Serbs*, 261.

some feelings after all for the multi-ethnicity of Bosnia. Chances are that there is truth to both of these responses.<sup>243</sup> Since it was his Muslim nationalism that many Bosnian Serbs and Croats saw though, it made it more difficult for the Bosnian army to retake territory because Bosnian Christians wanted no part of a SDA government dominating over them.<sup>244</sup>

When the war finally ended and Izetbegović came back to Bosnia after Dayton in 1995, Berić notes that there was no celebration at all in the streets of Sarajevo.<sup>245</sup> Probably some of this was just a matter of war fatigue, but much of it was also undoubtedly due to the fact that the Sarajevans were thinking something along the lines of “We put up with three and a half years of war for this!” It is hardly surprising that they would have thought this – to allude to the joke mentioned earlier, there really was not much more that was achieved through Dayton that would not have also been had through Vance/Owen. Indeed, in one way at least Dayton was worse, since it allowed for the Republic Srpska to maintain relations with Yugoslavia/Serbia, something that was not allowed under Vance/Owen. And like the European Community proposals before the war, it allowed for what was a *de facto* partition of Bosnia, with the country in many ways being two nations with separate government institutions (both the Federation and Republic Srpska were allowed to have armies, for instance) held together by a weak central government in Sarajevo.<sup>246</sup> True, there were now at least 60,000 European and American troops to hold the country together, but their stay there would be only temporary. And now, fourteen years after Dayton was concluded, there remain only 2,000 European troops, with signs of fissures appearing at the seams of the Bosnian fabric and with talk of the Republic Srpska seceding from Bosnia and joining up with Serbia.

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<sup>243</sup> Lord David Owen, who worked with Izetbegović obviously during the Vance/Owen negotiations, suggests something like this when he writes, “He had two loyalties, to multi-ethnic Bosnia and his own Muslim party, but it was religion that gave him an inner certainty and composure.” David Owen, *Balkan Odyssey* (London: Victor Gollancz, 1995), 38.

<sup>244</sup> Marko Attila Hoare, *The History of Bosnia*, 398.

<sup>245</sup> Gojko Berić, *Letters to the Celestial Serbs*, 261.

<sup>246</sup> Burg and Shoup, *The War in Bosnia-Herzegovina*, 362, 367-368.

From this analysis then, it would seem that Izetbegović's tenure as president of Bosnia was in many ways was a failure, and that he cannot be considered to have been a leader despite himself. Perhaps the only way his image might take on a more positive tone in the future is if reconciliation begins to occur between the ethnic groups in Bosnia and Izetbegović's unwillingness to allow for the break-up of Bosnia or her becoming a part of Yugoslavia will have been vindicated, something that shows no real possibilities of happening as of yet. If it does someday though, and Bosnia can truly be said to be a nation and not just a motley collection of three ethnic groups, perhaps then will Izetbegovic's statesmanship have brought something of real value to the Bosnian people..



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**Appendix**

**Letter of Acceptance from the Institution Review Board of the University of Missouri-St.**

**Louis**







## OFFICE OF RESEARCH ADMINISTRATION

### Interdepartmental Correspondence

The UM-St. Louis Human Subjects Committee reviewed the following protocol:

Name: Jason Carson

Title: Oral histories of Yugoslav refugees and immigrants

This proposal was approved by the Human Subjects Committee for a period of one year starting from the date listed below. The Human Subjects Committee must be notified in writing prior to major changes in the approved protocol. Examples of major changes are the addition of research sites or research instruments.

An annual report must be filed with the committee. This report should indicate the starting date of the project and the number of subjects since the start of project, or since last annual report.

Any consent or assent forms must be signed in duplicate and a copy provided to the subject. The principal investigator is required to retain the other copy of the signed consent form for at least three years following the completion of the research activity and the forms must be available for inspection if there is an official review of the UM-St. Louis human subjects research proceedings by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Office for Protection from Research Risks.

This action is officially recorded in the minutes of the committee.

Protocol Number 071211C	Date 2-21-08	Signature - Chair <i>Col J. Puri</i>
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*Scanned & sent 4/14/08*