

## **Intervention in Internal Conflict: The Case of Bosnia**

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The case of Bosnia presents analysts with a complex set of circumstances and factors surrounding multiple instances of intervention, carried out by a diverse set of external actors. Indeed, even the distinction between "internal" and "external" might be considered problematic in this case. For the purposes of this analysis, the conflict among Bosnian Serbs, Bosnian Croats, and Bosnian Muslims (who have since adopted the "Bosniac" label) is defined as an internal conflict over the status of the territory and its internal political organization. This conflict erupted as part of the larger set of conflicts surrounding the disintegration of the former Yugoslav federal state, of which Bosnia and Herzegovina was a federal "republic". However, the larger conflict will be treated only as context, and not subjected to detailed analysis here. The direct and indirect involvement of the neighboring states of Serbia and Croatia in the internal Bosnian conflict, which could be defined as "external" interventions by local powers, are instead treated here as dimensions of the internal conflict. The involvement of these local powers, and their very real interests in the outcome of the conflict, were important factors affecting the series of decisions by US and other Western policymakers, as well as UN actors, concerning intervention. Recent changes that have moved both Croatia and Serbia in the direction of democratization, disavowal of support for the ethnic dismemberment of Bosnia, and even affirmation of the principle of territorial integrity have improved the prospect that international intervention will ultimately succeed in establishing some form of multinational state in Bosnia, although the institutional character of such a state remains in doubt. This paper focuses on the decisions and actions of external policymakers, and US policymakers in particular, as "third parties" to the conflict, and the outcomes of their interventions in it.

Interventions in the Bosnian conflict fall into several distinct categories: diplomatic/political peacemaking intended to find a solution to the conflict; military/diplomatic peacekeeping intended at first to facilitate the delivery of humanitarian relief, then used to secure and maintain

the limited agreements reached by the parties during the course of the conflict and, finally, to carry out UN decisions taken without the support of the warring parties; humanitarian relief operations, carried out with the support of peacekeeping forces and intended to redress the suffering of the civilian population; the imposition of economic and other sanctions under the authority of the UN Security Council; acts of deterrence, carried out through a combination of military threats and the demonstrative use of force; implementation of a comprehensive strategy of coercive diplomacy, including the use of limited, but effective force; and, finally, military occupation and state-building intended to implement the settlement imposed on the warring parties. The humanitarian relief effort in Bosnia was an extension of the UNHCR operations initiated in October 1991 in response to the outbreak of fighting associated with the disintegration of Yugoslavia. It was carried out, with some gaps, for the entire duration of the war in Bosnia, and continued on thereafter. Military occupation and state-building represent essentially post-conflict involvement, designed to secure the results of intervention. This paper focuses on the forms of intervention (peacemaking, peacekeeping, deterrence, and coercive diplomacy) that reflected the gradual escalation of direct involvement in the conflict on the part of the United States, the European powers, the United Nations and, in the end, Russia.

### **Peacemaking**

The initial involvement of the European powers in the Yugoslav conflict(s) was motivated by a clearly articulated desire to prevent escalation of the political conflicts surrounding disintegration of the country into armed conflict. Several interests and motivations lay behind this desire. These included the straightforward security interest of the European states in preventing armed conflict in a neighboring state; the political interest of some states in advancing the role of common European (EC and, later, EU) foreign policy making institutions in international security affairs; the concern that armed conflict would likely generate an influx of significant numbers of refugees into Western Europe, with potentially costly and socially destabilizing consequences; and the pressure of domestic constituencies calling for action. Relatively early in the conflict, the European states deliberated and rejected military intervention in favor of a diplomatic effort to facilitate negotiation of a formula for a peaceful settlement among the Yugoslavs. Thus, the initial intervention by outside actors took the form of diplomatic and political peacemaking activities, without the backing of a credible threat of force.

Actual peacemaking efforts by the European powers were preceded by rhetorical efforts to encourage the parties themselves to resolve their differences peacefully. The Europeans expressed their support for existing internal and external borders, while the United States discouraged secession. Although the United States left the door open to border changes by "peaceful consensual means," it offered no support for such changes. The European and American positions reflected a mechanistic application of existing Helsinki principles of interstate relations. But these were designed for a period of relative stability, made possible by détente between the superpowers. Their application to intra-state or inter-group relations under conditions of enormous uncertainty and instability was ineffective. The ineffectiveness of Western and, particularly, US responses in this early period appear to have been compounded by a failure on the part of state policymaking establishments to mobilize outside expertise in these efforts. It was already clear to many academic and other experts, after a January 1991 meeting of the Serbian and Slovenian leaders, that a negotiated agreement among the regional leaders of Yugoslavia over internal borders would be essential to maintaining peace in that country; that such an agreement was likely to involve changes, perhaps substantial changes, to the status quo; and that such an agreement would be difficult to achieve by consensual means without external assistance in the form of incentives for the Yugoslavs (in the initial stages of dissolution, primarily the Serbs) to avoid the use of force. Little of this thinking appears to have been incorporated in official responses to the emerging crisis.

Convocation of the EC's Conference on Yugoslavia in September 1991 came against the background of escalating conflict in Croatia and a clear European decision, debated in August and September, not to intervene militarily. The fighting in Croatia was not seen by Western policymakers as threatening their national security interests. In the absence of any prospect of external military intervention, the Serbian and Yugoslav Army leaderships were free to pursue a strategy of seizing Serb-populated regions of Croatia. As Paul Shoup and I have pointed out, ...at the outset the Serbian leadership used the EC efforts to mediate a settlement among the former Yugoslav republics to nullify more forceful diplomacy by the international community, and in the process encouraged the JNA and Serbian nationalists to pursue their policy of creating

a Greater Serbia based on military conquest. But, when the EC took more forceful action, by imposing sanctions on Yugoslavia and calling on the UN Security Council to use its coercive powers to bring peace to the region, the Serbian effort was redirected toward greater cooperation with the international community. Yet, Western policymakers failed to respond to changes in the Serbian position as they developed, and the opportunities to exploit the nuances evident in Serb positions by early November 1991.

Western pressure in the form of negative sanctions, including adoption by the Security Council of Resolution 713 (25 September 1991) imposing an arms embargo against all of (former) Yugoslavia, was insufficient to reverse Serbian military actions. Cooperation by the Serbs extended only as far as accepting a UN-sponsored cease-fire in November 1991 and establishment of UN-protected areas in those regions of Croatia seized by the Yugoslav army, thus "freezing" Serbian gains and ending Serbian interest in further negotiations. Other provisions of the UN-sponsored Vance plan for Croatia were ignored. Once Croatia achieved international recognition in January 1992, it also had no further interest in negotiations, as these might have compromised its now internationally-recognized claim to sovereignty over the protected areas.

In Bosnia, too, international recognition of the state came in the absence of a negotiated agreement among the conflicting parties. As in Croatia, recognition offered the single most powerful positive inducement to cooperation, and granting it (denying it, with respect to the Bosnian Serbs) without first seeking to extract cooperation had the effect of ending any incentives for the parties to negotiate. The timing of recognition was a matter of intense diplomatic maneuvering by the United States and its European allies, the Bosnian government, and Serbia, as well as intense political maneuvering among the Bosnian Muslims, Croats and Serbs in the period between December 1991 and March 1992. However, much of this effort unfolded after the referendum of February 29, and the Bosnian government's declaration of independence on March 3. By the time the EC and the United States recognized Bosnia, on April 6 and 7, respectively, ethnic cleansing and localized fighting was already underway.

International recognition of Croatia in January and of Bosnia-Herzegovina in April came in the midst of unresolved conflicts over the status of these territories. Fighting over the fate of the UN-protected areas of Croatia was delayed until August 1995. In the absence of either a constitutional agreement on status among the conflicting Bosnian parties (and their neighbors) or an international commitment to defend the newly-recognized government of Bosnia or, better yet, both, recognition contributed to a rapid escalation of the conflict. Eleventh-hour negotiations to achieve such an agreement conducted for the EC by Jose Cutiliero in February and March ended in failure; in part because the lack of US interest in, or support for, the process signaled to the Bosnian Muslim leadership that they had only to withhold their agreement in order to win eventual US support. In effect, the United States had provided the Muslim-dominated Bosnian government, wittingly or not, with a positive inducement to intransigence. However, it is by no means certain that these negotiations would have succeeded even if recognition had been linked to an agreement. The negotiations began after the Muslim political leadership in control of the government declared Bosnian independence; Serbian and Bosnian Serb preparations for war may already have gone too far to be reversed; and, countervailing military action by the United States or the European powers to avert Serbian (and Croatian) aggression against the newly-recognized state appeared already to have been ruled out. Successful negotiations, even if supported by delayed recognition, would almost certainly have had to have begun much earlier, before the onset of dissolution.

The approach taken in these early Western peacemaking efforts was based on the fundamentally flawed principle that the existing internal borders of the constituent units of the Yugoslav federation should become internationally-recognized borders. This represented a mechanistic transfer of Cold War era concepts to new circumstances, rather than a nuanced response to the specific characteristics of the conflict. It ignored the lack of correspondence between borders and identities in much of the Yugoslav federation and the dynamic of political conflict that this produced. Even this flawed approach was not implemented consistently, however. The demand for recognition by the Kosovar Albanians, for example, who comprised 90 percent of the population of an autonomous province that had dual status as a constituent unit of the federation

and an integral part of the Serbian republic and thus could arguably have received the same treatment as the republics, was rejected. As Shoup and I have argued, this initial effort at peacemaking might have succeeded had the European strategy been formulated differently; in essence, holding the nationalist ambitions of dominant nations in each Yugoslav republic for international recognition hostage to prior agreement on borders and internal political order, including the effective protection of minority rights. By doing so, the Europeans, with support from the United States, would have defined a peaceful path by which each of the Yugoslav nations might have pursued its nationalist goals, a path that not only would have required each to negotiate, but would have enabled them to do so, rather than resort to force. Nonetheless, for this strategy of peacemaking to succeed, the intervening powers would have had to have mounted an effective threat to use countervailing force against any party that violated the peace. Neither the Europeans nor the Americans were prepared to make such a threat in the early stages of the Yugoslav conflicts. Indeed, the military option was explicitly dismissed on both sides of the Atlantic. With respect to the United States, at least, this can be attributed to the perception on the part of senior policymakers that no strategic US national interests were at risk.

Despite adoption by the Security Council of Resolution 757 (30 May 1992) imposing economic sanctions against Yugoslavia (Serbia and Montenegro), and the takeover of Sarajevo airport by UN peacekeepers in June 1992, it remained clear that the Western powers were not ready to impose a settlement by force when fighting broke out in Bosnia. Indeed, the agreement opening Sarajevo airport for the delivery of humanitarian relief specifically disavowed any precedent with respect to settlement of the larger conflict. US policymakers did not perceive any vital national interests to be at stake in the fighting. As a result, the United States not only resisted the use of force, but remained at the margins of diplomatic efforts to end the conflict in Bosnia for almost two years. The International Conference on the Former Yugoslavia (ICFY) was established in August 1992 under the co-sponsorship of the United Nations and the European Community and co-chaired by former US Secretary of State Cyrus Vance (acting in his capacity as special representative of the UN Secretary General) and former British Foreign Minister Lord David Owen (acting as representative of the EC). Vance and Owen attempted to address the competing interests and claims of the warring parties by adopting a strategy of extensive

territorial devolution. But each of the parties sought to use the negotiations as means of pursuing their own goals, rather than to pursue a genuine solution. The absence of any capacity to compel the parties to compromise led negotiators to offer last-minute concessions to the Serbs in April 1993 that moved the proposal toward a strategy of partition. However, not even a partition plan could work as long as parties on the ground remained wedded to force, and major outside powers remained uninterested in compelling them to agree. Despite reports at the time that the United States was ready to commit troops to enforcement of the plan, and that NATO had prepared plans for deployment, the United States and its allies could not agree on exactly how or under what conditions force might be used. The absence of any Western threat of force - either to implement an agreed settlement or to impose a solution in the absence of agreement - led one member of the Vance-Owen team to liken the negotiations to playing "baseball without a bat." These problems --the lack of engagement on the part of the United States, and a concomitant absence of a credible threat of force-- continued to plague later negotiators even as they moved toward an explicit plan for partition in 1993 and 1994.

Paul Shoup and I have documented the process by which the United States finally became seriously engaged in a strategy of coercive diplomacy in Bosnia in late 1994, when policymakers finally came to perceive the fighting as threatening US national interests. From that point forward the United States became increasingly determined to bring the fighting to an end. The result was adoption by the United States of a strategy of coercive diplomacy, described below, and what might be described as a successful case of intervention. Thus, it seems clear that the degree to which policymakers perceived the conflict as threatening vital US national interests was the critical factor in explaining the extent of US engagement and "willingness" to intervene in the conflict.

### **Humanitarian Relief and Peacekeeping**

Humanitarian intervention began in Croatia with the establishment in February 1992 of the United Nations Protection Force (UNPROFOR) for those areas of Croatia from which Yugoslav (Serbian) forces were to withdraw under the Vance plan. The mandate of UNPROFOR in

Croatia was gradually expanded both territorially and functionally. Similarly, the deployment of UN troops to Bosnia began with the June 1992 action to reopen Sarajevo airport for humanitarian supply efforts, and expanded both territorially and functionally over time. The deployment of a humanitarian relief mission to Bosnia in the midst of continuing fighting reflected both the understanding of Western policymakers that the conflict was not going to end quickly, and their reluctance to intervene in it militarily. However, the deployment of a humanitarian mission protected by UNPROFOR gradually took on the characteristics of a limited military intervention. In an effort to secure delivery of humanitarian relief to Bosnian civilians, the Western allies secured adoption of Security Council Resolution 757 (May 30, 1992) under Chapter VII authority, imposing sanctions on Yugoslavia and calling for the opening of Sarajevo airport. This was followed on June 5 by an agreement negotiated locally between UNPROFOR and the Bosnian Serbs and Muslims, allowing UNPROFOR to take control of the airport, and a decision by the Security Council on June 8 to expand the UNPROFOR mandate in Bosnia in order to allow it to implement that agreement. The agreement was not implemented, however, until after UN Secretary General Boutros-Ghali issued a vague ultimatum to the Serbs, and after French President Mitterand made a dramatic trip to Sarajevo airport that challenged Serb willingness to use force to keep the airport closed. Neither the ultimatum nor the visit offered much of a threat to the Serbs. But the agreement did offer an important positive inducement to the Serbs: control of the airport by a neutral force (UNPROFOR) that would prevent it from falling into the hands of Bosnian government, or Muslim, forces. There is also some evidence to suggest that Milosevic pressured the Bosnian Serb leadership to accept the agreement in an effort to avert implementation of the sanctions called for in Resolution 757. Indeed, the compelling effect of sanctions on Serbian (Milosevic's) behavior would grow stronger over time. It would come to play an important, if not critical, role in the success of coercive diplomacy in 1995.

Continued Bosnian Serb resistance to the delivery of humanitarian relief to Bosnian Muslim populations under siege resulted in further expansion of Western intervention through UNPROFOR. Acting under the coercive authority of Chapter VII of the UN Charter, as it had when it imposed sanctions in May, the Security Council adopted Resolution 770 (13 August

1992) authorizing the use of "all measures necessary" to deliver humanitarian assistance, and in Resolution 776 (14 September 1992) once again expanded the UNPROFOR mandate and authorized an increase in its strength. These steps toward a widening intervention in the conflict were contradicted, however, by highly restrictive rules of engagement that reflected the original Chapter VI authorization of the UNPROFOR mission, which made it dependent on the cooperation of local forces. In April 1993 Security Council Resolution 819 (16 April 1993) established Srebrenica as a "safe area." Resolution 824 (7 May 1993) extended this status to five additional areas. In Resolution 836 (June 4, 1993) the Security Council again invoked Chapter VII authority to assign UNPROFOR the task of deterring attacks on the safe areas, and defending them in the event of attack. As events at Srebrenica in July 1995 would make painfully obvious, these deployments did little to protect threatened populations, but did expose UNPROFOR troops to heightened risks and thus inevitably drew them more directly into the military conflict. As the mandate of UNPROFOR expanded, the distinction between "humanitarian" and "peacekeeping" activities, and even military intervention, became blurred. As most of the UNPROFOR troops were drawn from European NATO-member states, the distinction between UN involvement and Western intervention also became blurred.

Ultimately, escalating risks to UNPROFOR troops from NATO-member states on the ground in Bosnia created the impetus for direct US and NATO military intervention to end the fighting. The threat to NATO cohesion posed by the prospect that these troops might be overwhelmed in the absence of support from the United States, and the daunting military and political challenges of waiting to assist them until they were already under attack, created a compelling US national interest in bringing the fighting in Bosnia to a rapid conclusion. While policymakers' initial assessments that no strategic national interest was at stake limited initial engagement in the conflict, that engagement tended over time to expand incrementally in response to events on the ground and, in part, media coverage that created pressure on policymakers to "do something" in response to egregious developments. The gradual expansion of resources committed to the conflict, in turn, created a real national interest in ending it where none had existed before. Thus, the decision to intervene directly in the conflict with military force in support of a strategy of

coercive diplomacy reflected a change in national decisionmakers' calculations of the interests put at risk by the conflict.

### **Deterrence**

Over the course of the war, the United States participated in five attempts to use the threat of force to persuade or compel the Bosnian Serbs either to cease or to refrain from certain actions. Although these were limited in scope and intent, together they had the effect of expanding the Western commitment of material and other resources to the conflict. First, in response to the Serb "strangulation" of Sarajevo in the summer of 1993 that resulted from increased shelling of the city and ground action that suggested an imminent frontal assault on the city, NATO issued a vague threat of future action against those who attacked UN forces or obstructed humanitarian aid. Despite signs of differences among the allies, the Bosnian Serbs ended their immediate threat to the city. Second, in February 1994, the United States and its NATO allies responded to a shelling of the Markala marketplace in Sarajevo attributed to the Bosnian Serbs by issuing an ultimatum to the Serbs to withdraw their heavy weapons from around the city. A threat of NATO air attack led the Bosnian Serbs to withdraw, and to the establishment of a heavy weapons exclusion zone around Sarajevo.

The US and NATO threat to use force in connection with the 1993 crisis over the "strangulation" of Sarajevo, and in response to the Markala marketplace massacre in February 1994 can be considered successful, but limited acts of intervention that displayed some of the characteristics of coercive diplomacy identified by Alexander George. In each case, a threat of air attack was employed to compel the Bosnian Serbs to pull back from Sarajevo and reduce, at least temporarily, their attacks on the city. Issuance of an ultimatum was accompanied by crisis negotiations. But, in each case, special circumstances secured Serb compliance. Shoup and I have pointed out that Bosnian Serb agreement was secured in no small part by the fact that in 1993 the Serbs were not required to withdraw so far as to prevent them from renewing artillery fire on the city; were able to secure UN occupation of strategic territory, thereby denying it to the Muslims; and appeared to have pushed resolution of the conflict in the direction of a UN-patrolled partition based on the status quo. Similarly, in 1994 negotiators agreed to prevent the Muslims (Bosnian government) from gaining control over territory relinquished by the Serbs by

deploying Russian peacekeepers to the territory. In each case the demand advanced by the NATO allies was one to which the Serbs could agree. The agreements served Serb interests by keeping alive negotiations for a comprehensive cease-fire that would freeze existing Serb territorial gains. Thus, the Serbs did comply; at least in the short-run.

That neither of these episodes led to concessions that advanced the conflict toward resolution may be attributed to the fact that in both instances negotiations with the Serbs were not carried out by the coercing party (NATO and the United States), but by a third party--the UN commander--not under the control of, and with quite different interests from, those of the coercing party. The goals to which coercion was applied were in each case limited in scope. The threat of force used to secure the pullback of the Serbs from around Sarajevo was not accompanied in either 1993 or 1994 by more comprehensive efforts--at least, not on the part of the principal coercer, the United States--to settle the larger conflict. Nonetheless, the 1994 action did result in a cease-fire and a significant easing of the conflict. The use of force in these cases can be attributed to a desire on the part of Western policymakers to contain the conflict, and to respond to media pressure to "do something," rather than a commitment on their part to end it. There is no evidence that policymakers had changed their view that the conflict did not threaten strategic interests and therefore did not warrant a significant commitment of national resources to its resolution.

In some respects, however, these attempts to use force made matters in Bosnia worse. The apparent increase in US and NATO involvement and the threat of force against the Serbs contributed in each case to a hardening of Bosnian Muslim positions in the negotiations over a political settlement taking place in Geneva under the auspices of the International Conference on the Former Yugoslavia (ICFY). This contradictory outcome suggests one of the difficulties of intervening against only one party to a conflict involving multiple actors. Because the interests of the Bosnian actors were most often in opposition, threats or coercion applied against one in order to encourage that party to negotiate or comply would make one or more of the others less willing to negotiate or comply. The fact that the threat of force was not actually carried out in connection with either the "strangulation" crisis or the Markala marketplace massacre, and that the Serbs

were able both to keep their immediate concessions modest and to reverse them later, weakened the credibility of subsequent US and NATO threats in the eyes of both the Serbs and the Muslims. In effect, both these "successful" cases of limited intervention actually "upped the ante" for the later, more comprehensive intervention intended to bring the conflict to an end.

The third use of force for deterrence, in April 1994, consisted of three limited air attacks--derisively characterized in the Western media as "pinpricks"--were carried out against Serb forces threatening to overrun the Muslim-held enclave of Gorazde, in eastern Bosnia. The air attacks were followed by another NATO ultimatum to the Serbs to withdraw, and at least some consideration of the use of more extensive force against them. But any effort to use further force was blocked by Yasushi Akashi, special representative of the United Nations Secretary General, who exercised "dual key" control over the use of force by the West, which was operating in Bosnia under a United Nations mandate. This unwieldy command structure reflected the concern among contributing states that UNPROFOR troops (the majority of which came from NATO-member states) should not be put at risk by the use of air power. It was this concern that had led the Europeans to reject an earlier US proposal to "lift and strike"; i.e., to lift the arms embargo against the Bosnian government and use air power against the Serbs. An exclusion zone was established around Gorazde in 1994, but the confrontation was allowed to wind down without a definitive conclusion. However, events in Gorazde alerted Western policymakers to another possible constraint on the use of air power in Bosnia: In response to the airstrikes, the Serbs had taken some 200 UN and civilian personnel hostage. Concern for their fate may have contributed to the reluctance of Akashi to authorize further use of force in Gorazde. This standoff over the use of air power between the UN and troop-contributing countries on the one hand and the United States on the other continued until 1995, when the credibility of UN operations was finally expended, their collapse appeared imminent, and the United States had committed itself to deploying troops to secure the safe withdrawal of allied and other UNPROFOR forces. Only then was the United States able to secure the support of its allies for a strategy of coercive diplomacy. Thus, divisions between the United States and its allies over the proper course of action in Bosnia may have represented as important an impediment to decisive intervention before 1995 as the risks of intervention itself.

The fourth example of deterrence through use of force, in November 1994, consisted of NATO air attacks against a Serb airbase and three Serb SAM missile sites in the Bihac area in response to Serb attacks that threatened to overrun the Muslim-held enclave in Western Bosnia. The events in Bihac seemed to raise the stakes of the Bosnian conflict for the US and European policymakers. UNPROFOR forces were caught in the fighting and suffered several casualties. The involvement of Serb ground and air forces operating from the Serb-held territories of Croatia just across the nearby border threatened to escalate the fighting and draw the Croatian regular army into the battle, with the potential to re-ignite fighting in Croatia. After the Serbs had launched a missile attack using converted SAM missiles and air strikes from their airbase in Croatia, NATO planes struck that airbase and then, two days later, three Serb SAM sites in the Bihac area. Once again, the Serbs seized UN personnel as hostages to deter further NATO attacks. NATO leaders convened to consider both proposals to demilitarize and secure the Bihac safe area, and proposals to carry out wide-ranging air strikes against the Bosnian Serbs. They could not agree on a course of action. At the same time, however, the Serbs began allowing UN aid convoys into the pocket, and Bosnian Muslim troops began slipping out of the pocket, thereby lessening tensions. Thus, while the allies remained deeply divided over further action, this crisis, too, ended inconclusively with little net change in the status quo.

The fifth and final attempt to use force consisted of the use of airpower against Bosnian Serb in May 1995. An escalation of fighting on the ground and increased Serb shelling of Sarajevo had raised serious doubts among UN officials about continuation of the UNPROFOR deployment, and led to both threats of withdrawal and demands for the use of airpower against the Serbs from the US and European states. The UNPROFOR commander warned both the Muslims and the Serbs to halt the use of heavy weapons, and issued an ultimatum to the Serbs to withdraw from the exclusion zone around Sarajevo. When they failed to comply, NATO carried out air strikes against Serb ammunition bunkers in Pale, east of Sarajevo. These attacks failed to compel the Serbs. Rather, they produced what Alexander George might characterize as an escalatory response. The Bosnian Serbs shelled Tuzla, then seized UN personnel as hostages, using them as human shields against further attack -- a response that should have been anticipated by NATO

policymakers on the basis of earlier Bosnian Serb reactions to the use of airpower against them at Bihac and Gorazde. The Serb reaction not only compelled NATO to cease its use of force, but also forced UNPROFOR to renounce the future use of force by reaffirming its adherence to strict peacekeeping principles as a condition for release of the UN hostages. Thus, while the earlier instances of the use of force did have at least a short-term deterrent effect on the Serbs, the May 1995 events had no such effect. On the contrary, they had the effect of deterring UNPROFOR from further use of force, and thereby contributed to both the collapse of the UN mission in Bosnia and the emergence of a comprehensive, US-led strategy of coercive diplomacy.

None of these episodes of more direct, military-political intervention in reaction to specific local developments in Bosnia was undertaken on the basis of a clear plan or even concept for ending the larger conflict in which they were embedded. The May air strikes were openly criticized in the West for the lack of preparation behind them. One unnamed US official suggested that the May events amounted to little more than "drop a few bombs and see what happens." More comprehensive strategies of intervention, such as the US proposal to lift the arms embargo and use air strikes to protect the Bosnian Muslims while they armed and prepared themselves for war against the Serbs ("lift and strike"), were considered at various times during 1993 and 1994 but rejected, either by European actors concerned they might subject their troops in UNPROFOR to increased risk, or by US policymakers concerned that direct intervention represented a "slippery slope" of involvement in a potential quagmire. In August 1992, then-Deputy Secretary of State Lawrence Eagleburger had publicly drawn direct parallels between intervention in Bosnia and earlier US involvements in Lebanon and Vietnam. In August 1993, an unnamed "top policymaker" in the Clinton administration told Washington reporter Elizabeth Drew that "this thing is a no-winner; it's going to be a quagmire." In the cases of Sarajevo and Gorazde, more expansive or decisive action was precluded by UN resistance to widening the conflict or, especially, putting UN personnel at even greater risk. In the case of Bihac, it was precluded by continuing differences between the United States and at least some of its NATO allies arising out of their differing commitments and attendant risks. However, the threat to alliance cohesion evident in these differences, and particularly the conclusion drawn by some in the media that these events suggested that NATO lacked resolve, led to reconsideration of Bosnia policy by

senior US officials and, therefore, the NATO allies. Repeated use of force for deterrence underscored the cumulative impact of limited engagement on the perception of national interests. It was the perception that strategic interests, both US and common US/European, had been put at risk that led to adoption of a strategy of coercive diplomacy in 1995.

### **Coercive Diplomacy**

The above examples reinforce the view that limited interventions motivated by humanitarian concerns or policymakers' perceived need to "do something" in the face of mounting public and/or media pressure, rather than by clearly-defined national interests, result in poorly conceived and inadequately implemented actions. The uses of force in Gorazde and Bihac represented responses to what were perceived as Serb attempts to alter the military balance decisively in their favor. But the threat and use of force in Gorazde and Bihac were of only limited military value, and were not accompanied by a serious effort to extract any larger political concessions from the Serbs. Their net effect, if any, appears to have been to deepen divisions within NATO over the use of force, and erode the effectiveness of any future threat to do so. Paradoxically, however, the prospect of irreparable damage to the internal cohesion and external credibility of the NATO alliance created a powerful US national interest in bringing the war to an end on terms more favorable to the Muslims and Croats with whom NATO had been cooperating.

The divisions within the alliance that followed the limited use of force against the Serbs at Bihac in November 1994 led United States policymakers to adopt a more comprehensive approach to ending the conflict in Bosnia, and to begin to intervene more directly in the conflict to implement that approach. US policymakers concluded that the use of force alone was futile, that the Serbs had to be given incentives to accept a settlement, and that if force were to be used it had to be used to support a political settlement. US diplomats entered into direct negotiations with both Milosevic and the Bosnian Serbs, and prepared to back up their negotiating positions with a more credible threat of force. The establishment of a credible threat required intensive diplomatic efforts with NATO allies and Russia, primarily in the context of the Contact Group, so as to establish a set of shared perceptions, commitments, and goals. It also required the continuation of efforts to shift the military balance on the ground in Bosnia against the Serbs. In order to exercise control over negotiations with the target(s) of coercion, the United States had to shift

negotiations over a political settlement away from the ICFY and to the Contact Group, and to alter the very nature of those negotiations. Rather than ICFY-mediated exchanges among the warring parties in search of a mutually acceptable solution, the Contact Group powers now negotiated among themselves in search of a solution they all could accept and then impose on the warring parties. The United States can thus be said to have laid the basis for a strategy of coercive diplomacy in Bosnia in late 1994. But it was not until July 1995 that policymakers appear self-consciously to have committed themselves to such a strategy. Direct, decisive US intervention in the conflict can thus be dated either to late 1994 or mid-1995.

The decision by US policymakers to intervene more directly in Bosnia was driven for the most part by concern that US troops would be drawn into a potentially costly operation to evacuate United Nations forces, including those of the NATO allies. UNPROFOR had become the target of increasing attacks in the wake of events at Bihac. According to Richard Holbrooke, following the fall of Srebrenica and Zepa in July 1995 and the realization that the UN operation was heading for failure, "the President saw the degree to which involvement was now inevitable, and how much better it would be to have involvement built on success rather than failure." The resort to coercive diplomacy in 1995 was thus driven by a clear sense of national interest in avoiding a potential military catastrophe that might threaten the survival of the NATO alliance. But policymakers in the Clinton administration, including the President, also turned to coercive diplomacy out of a narrower sense of political self-interest; an interest in resolving the Bosnian issue in time to prevent the presumed Republican candidate for president from using it against the administration in the 1996 election. A journalistic account of the policy debates within the administration in June and July makes clear the intensity with which policymakers felt these concerns.

Unlike the earlier uses of force for deterrence in Bosnia, outlined above, the US intervention that unfolded in late 1994 and 1995 was directed toward a specific, comprehensive goal: achieving an agreement that would put an end to the fighting. This was a goal shared by the United States and its allies, who also were concerned about the consequences of a collapse of the UN mission for their troops on the ground. This convergence of allied goals around a clear shared interest in

avoiding catastrophe made the management of alliance politics over Bosnia more tractable in the period July-October 1995 than it had been at any point in the three previous years.

The success of coercive diplomacy in Bosnia in 1995 was built on changes in the military situation on the ground in the direction of a stalemate or standoff between the parties. In the literature on conflict resolution, the emergence of such a stalemate is seen as "ripening" and is characterized as "hurting" when each party is assumed to be neither willing or capable of enduring it, nor able to overcome it. In Bosnia, however, Shoup and I have demonstrated that, contrary to the spontaneous process posited in the literature, the "ripening" process in Bosnia was manufactured or engineered by the coercing power. US support for the development of the regular Croatian army and its war fighting capacity began more than a year earlier, before coercive diplomacy was adopted as a strategy. Moreover, the stalemate in Bosnia was clearly not "hurting;" it was a stalemate enforced by the United States, which was determined not to allow the strategic balance between Croatia and Serbia essential to regional stability to be tipped in favor of Croatia. It should be noted that a major role in establishing the conditions for this stalemate was played by the tragedies in Srebrenica and Zepa, which involved genocidal killing of Muslims by Serbs, but which were greeted by some US officials as events that eliminated heretofore thorny map problems.

The success of coercive diplomacy in Bosnia also involved a change in the US political position. Alexander George suggests that for a strategy of coercive diplomacy to succeed, the demands imposed on the object of coercion must in the end be ones that can be accepted. In the case of Bosnia, this required the United States to alter its demands from those based on one-sided support for the Bosnian Muslims (and Bosnian Croats, to the extent that these two parties could be kept in agreement), to those based on recognition of the need to address the real and often conflicting interests of all sides, including the outside actors, Serbia (Milosevic) and Croatia (Tudjman). A December 1994 NATO declaration calling for "equitable and balanced arrangements," signaled the onset of this transformation. It was completed by the de facto recognition of "Republika Srpska" and partition of Bosnia incorporated in a September 1

agreement negotiated by Holbrooke with Milosevic and the Bosnian Serbs, which provided the general framework for the later Dayton settlement.

The key to securing Milosevic's cooperation from this point on, including his dramatic role at Dayton, appears to have been the combination of a credible threat that the Bosnian Serbs would be defeated on the battlefield, thereby tipping the larger balance of power in the region against Serbia; and the positive inducements of recognition for the Bosnian Serb republic and a promise to lift sanctions against Serbia (formally, the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, or FRY). The threat was made credible by the successes of the Croatian army and by the application of limited but significant US and NATO air power. As noted earlier, Milosevic's interest in lifting sanctions had been clear since 1993. He had been pursuing that interest in intensive negotiations in May and June 1995 with the US diplomat then responsible for Bosnia, Robert Frasure. Milosevic's cooperation at Dayton appears to have been secured in an apparent deal with Holbrooke in exchange for sanctions-lifting.

The final factor in the successful application of coercive diplomacy to ending the war in Bosnia, of course, was the use of airpower. These words are often followed by the phrase "against the Serbs." But air power was used not only to pressure the Serbs into specific action on the ground--primarily a withdrawal from around Sarajevo--but also to pressure the Muslims into accepting the emerging partition of Bosnia; and it was the end of bombing that opened the door to a cease-fire agreement and negotiations, not its onset. The agreement on "basic constitutional principles" for Bosnia, signed by the foreign ministers of Croatia, Serbia, and Bosnia on September 8 in Geneva, was reached while the bombing was still in progress. But the bombing did not, in fact, "bring the Serbs to the negotiating table." Milosevic was already moving in early August toward establishing control over the Bosnian Serbs so as to bring them to the negotiating table, and had completed his moves before the bombing began. It appears that it was the Bosnian Muslims who were brought to the negotiating table by the bombing or, more accurately, by the threat that it would be ended if they did not agree to the US settlement. The initial decision to "suspend" the bombing on September 14 came in exchange for Bosnian Serb agreement to withdraw their heavy weapons from the exclusion zone around Sarajevo and end the siege of that city.

At the same time, the United States did not allow the combined Croatian-Muslim offensive in western Bosnia that followed the ouster of the Krajina Serbs to inflict too great a defeat on the Bosnian Serbs. To have done so might have drawn Serbia into the conflict directly and threatened the strategic balance in the region. The bombing in Bosnia constituted the "exemplary use of quite limited force to persuade the opponent to back down" consistent with Alexander George's model of coercive diplomacy. George defines "exemplary" as "the use of just enough force of an appropriate kind to demonstrate resolution to protect one's interests and to establish the credibility of one's determination to use more force if necessary." A military analyst points out that the total effort "equated to just about a busy day's sorties count for coalition air forces during the Gulf War" and characterizes it as "a strategically limited, tactically intense, high-technology, coalition air campaign, conducted under tight restraints of time and permissible collateral damage... aimed at coercing political and military compliance from a regional opponent who had no airpower." The United States and its NATO allies were careful not to use so much force as to lead either side to believe that all was won or lost, thereby creating real incentives to accept the US settlement.

To a certain extent, the "balancing act" carried out by US diplomats--led by Richard Holbrooke--in their relations with the Serbs, Croats, and Muslims, during the bombing was necessitated by the pressures exerted by the British, French, and Russians. The British and French refused to "wage war on behalf of the Muslim-led government," while the Russians continued to oppose the bombing. However, "balancing" reflected to a far greater extent the difficulties of applying the techniques of coercive diplomacy to the behaviors of multiple parties with conflicting interests. This is a far more difficult task than attempting to affect the behavior of a single opponent. By facilitating the emergence of a Croatian ground army and using air power against the Bosnian Serb army, the United States encouraged the political and territorial ambitions of the Croats and the Muslims. The United States, therefore, did not prevent the Bosnian Serbs from using artillery withdrawn from Sarajevo, and Serbian air power, to stop the Croatian and Muslim advance in western Bosnia. Whereas Holbrooke had blamed the Serbs for the difficulties of negotiations in August and September, for example, by October he was blaming the Muslims for blocking the

conclusion of a cease-fire agreement. The cooperation of Milosevic was the direct result of the coercive diplomacy ---the combination of threats, inducements, and actual use of force-- exercised by the United States. On October 4, Holbrooke cautioned Bosnian President Izetbegovic that he was "playing craps with the destiny of his country" by refusing to agree to a cease-fire, and warned him that "If you want to let the fighting go on, that is your right, but do not expect the United States to be your air force." Despite this threat, the Bosnian Muslims refused to agree to a cease-fire until they had extracted a commitment from the United States to provide them with military assistance. The United States was therefore compelled to supply both positive and negative incentives to cooperation to all the parties directly involved in the Bosnian conflict (the Bosnian Muslims, Serbs, and Croats; and both Tudjman and Milosevic) in order to ensure success. Thus, even the most successful case of direct intervention in the Bosnian conflict suggests caution: The difficulties of balancing relations among allies --coalition management-- magnifies the already difficult task of balancing actions directed against each of the warring parties in a multi-sided internal conflict.

### **Military Occupation and State-Building**

The military-political intervention characterized above as "coercive diplomacy" ended the fighting in Bosnia, but did not end the conflict among the Bosnian Muslims, Croats and Serbs. In an attempt to do so, the United States also engaged in a direct political intervention; imposing its own solution at Dayton, enforcing it through the deployment of NATO and other forces to Bosnia, and establishing a de facto international protectorate over the country. These actions have redirected the conflict to more, but not entirely, peaceful means. But they have been insufficient to resolve the fundamental conflict in any meaningful time frame. The Dayton arrangements have left power divided among the three major ethnic groups and between the central state and its constituent entities (the Federation and the Serb Republic) and lower units (cantons and local governments). Even after more than six years, there are no authoritative institutions capable of formulating and implementing policies for the whole state. As a result, the local representative of international authority in Bosnia, the Office of the High Representative, has had to intervene repeatedly to impose policy decisions where local actors proved unable or unwilling to do so on their own. Paradoxically, to the extent that international institutions continue to perform such a role, Bosnian institutions will remain internally divided and

incapable. Yet, there is no clear exit option for international forces in Bosnia that does not increase the risk of renewed violent conflict among the three Bosnian ethnic communities to unacceptably high levels. Intervention in Bosnia has thus taken on the characteristics of an open-ended commitment to administer the territory.

### **Conclusion: Assessing the Bosnian Interventions**

Intervention in Bosnia began relatively early in the conflict, but was limited in scope and objective. It represented the continuation of Western efforts to contain the destabilizing consequences of the dissolution of former Yugoslavia, rather than an effort to facilitate meaningful settlement of the issues driving the conflict to violence. Such an effort appeared to be closed off by the commitment of the West to existing borders, and therefore recognition of the former republics of the Yugoslav federation as states, prior to negotiation among the conflicting parties of an agreement on either new borders or a new political order within the existing borders. The Bosnian case offers a clear example of how even a limited commitment to containment and humanitarian relief may lead, incrementally, to a major commitment to direct intervention. Each commitment of diplomatic energy ("prestige") and military and material resources to peacemaking, peacekeeping, and successive attempts at deterrence, created the basis for arguments for further expansion of Western commitments until the level of prestige and resources committed to the conflict created a compelling national interest in securing a favorable outcome. The interests that in the end compelled armed intervention as part of the strategy of coercive diplomacy were not, therefore, the product of the conflict itself; at no point did Western policymakers appear to view the conflict in Bosnia itself as threatening to national interests.

This view of the conflict was at the time and remains today highly controversial. Some in the United States argued then, and continue to argue today that the Serbs were committing genocide against the Muslims and that the United States was not only obligated to intervene, but had a (moral) interest in doing so. The debate over the place of moral values in the definition of American national interest remained unresolved, however. The threats to national interests that in the end motivated US intervention in the Bosnian conflict derived from the consequences of the conflict for NATO cohesion and the potential consequences of the conflict for electoral politics

in the United States, not the nature of the war itself. In short, limited intervention itself created the impetus for further intervention by raising the political cost of inaction.

The coordinated military-political intervention, or strategy of coercive diplomacy carried out in 1995 can be considered successful because it achieved the primary goals of Western policymakers: it put an end to the fighting, averted a catastrophic withdrawal of allied forces under fire, and it established a Bosnian state within existing borders. It also put a halt, however belatedly, to the genocidal killing in Bosnia and stemmed the flow of refugees to the West. But intervention did not settle the conflict; it transformed the struggle among Bosnian Muslims, Bosnian Croats, and Bosnian Serbs from a military to a political conflict. The Dayton agreement left power divided among the three groups, and between the central state and its constituent entities (the Bosnian Federation and the Serb Republic), as well as the lower-level cantons and local governments. The difficulties of establishing central Bosnian government authority over the entire country, achieving inter-ethnic reconciliation, re-settling refugees in the towns and villages from which they had fled or been "cleansed," and reviving the economy during the more than five years of effective international occupation, all reflect the continuation of inter-group conflict in Bosnia. Although there are some limited signs of hope in the emergence of a multi-ethnic political party that is gaining some power and authority in the country, the international community, through the Office of the High Representative, continues to play a critical role in resolving political deadlocks, imposing public policies on the Bosnian state, and negating political processes that produce unsatisfactory outcomes. This leaves it unclear whether the Bosnian state could survive in the absence of an international civil, police, and military presence. Thus, the post-conflict tasks of occupation and state-building have turned into an open-ended commitment for the West. At best, it amounts to an effort to "buy time" for the establishment of a stable state within existing borders, the only basis for "exit" of international forces and the conclusion of the Bosnian intervention.