

Forum:	Historical Security Council
Issue:	Addressing the Bosnian War
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Introduction

In the early 1990s, the Balkans became engulfed in a catastrophic conflict as the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia disintegrated. The Bosnian War (1992-1995), the most complex and violent of the conflicts resulting from Yugoslavia's collapse, represented a tragic convergence of ethnic, political, and territorial disputes. Bosnia and Herzegovina, a republic characterized by its diverse population of Bosniaks (Bosnian Muslims), Croats, and Serbs, became the epicenter of the violence. As nationalist ambitions grew among these groups, what began as a political crisis over Bosnia's independence rapidly escalated into a brutal civil war marked by extreme human suffering and ethnic cleansing. Early international peacekeeping efforts struggled to contain the violence, but as the situation worsened, the international community ramped up its response. Eventually NATO intervened, playing a crucial role in pressuring the warring parties into negotiations, leading to the Dayton Peace Agreement that ended the war in 1995 (Clinton). However, the conflict left behind a legacy of deep ethnic divisions and instability, the effects of which still shape the region today.

With ethnic tensions boiling over and international powers scrambling to respond, the Bosnian War unfolded with unpredictable twists that altered the course of history. Armed with diplomacy, strategy, and a bit of cunning, delegates must determine the fate of this war-torn land. The decisions made during this bloody conflict, and the interventions that followed, could have forged entirely different futures—averting genocide, shifting the balance of power in the Balkans, or perhaps even reigniting old alliances in ways that could reshape Europe forever.

Definition of Key Terms

Ethnic Cleansing

The process of forcibly removing or killing members of a specific ethnic group from a particular area to achieve ethnic homogeneity. Ethnic cleansing was a defining feature of the Bosnian War, with atrocities

committed by various factions against civilians. The term first gained prominence during this conflict, though it has been practiced in numerous historical contexts. It is now widely recognized as a crime against humanity.

Genocide

The deliberate and systematic destruction of a national, ethnic, racial, or religious group. During the Bosnian War, the Srebrenica massacre of more than 8,000 Bosniak men and boys by Bosnian Serb forces is classified as genocide by international courts (Holocaust Museum Houston).

Yugoslavia

A country in Southeast Europe that existed from 1918 to 1992, made up of several republics, including Bosnia and Herzegovina. Its disintegration led to a series of wars throughout the 1990s, of which the Bosnian War was one of the most brutal. The breakup of Yugoslavia was driven by rising nationalism, economic instability, and the weakening of central authority following the death of its longtime leader, Josip Broz Tito (Office of the Historian).

1995 Dayton Accords

A peace agreement reached in November 1995 that effectively ended the Bosnian War. Negotiated in Dayton, Ohio, the accords outlined the framework for the political structure of post-war Bosnia and Herzegovina. The agreement established a complex power-sharing arrangement between the country's three main ethnic groups, which remains in place today.

Serb Republic (Republika Srpska)

An autonomous entity within Bosnia and Herzegovina, predominantly inhabited by ethnic Serbs. The creation of Republika Srpska was one of the outcomes of the Dayton Accords, which aimed to balance the ethnic division within the country. However, its existence and autonomy remain a point of tension in Bosnia's political landscape.

International Court of Justice

The principal judicial body of the United Nations, which ruled in 2007 that the Srebrenica massacre constituted genocide (International Court of Justice). The ICJ plays a key role in adjudicating legal disputes between states and providing advisory opinions on international legal issues. Its involvement in the Bosnian War highlighted the importance of international law in addressing atrocities.

History & Developments

Background of Yugoslavia

The Bosnian War cannot be understood without considering the historical context of Yugoslavia, a socialist federation that united various ethnic groups under one government after World War I. Under the leadership of Josip Broz Tito, Yugoslavia remained stable despite underlying ethnic tensions. However, Tito's death in 1980 and subsequent political and economic crises weakened central authority. The rise of nationalism, particularly in Serbia under Slobodan Milošević, set the stage for the disintegration of Yugoslavia (Ryan and Winkle).

Disintegration of Yugoslavia (1991-1992)

The Yugoslav republics of Slovenia and Croatia declared independence in 1991, prompting conflicts with the Yugoslav People's Army (JNA) and Serbian forces. Bosnia and Herzegovina declared independence in March 1992 following a referendum that was boycotted by Bosnian Serbs. The Serbs, backed by Serbia and the JNA, rejected Bosnia's independence and sought to create a Greater Serbia, which led to the outbreak of war (United Nations International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia).

Escalation of the Bosnian Conflict

The Bosnian War quickly escalated into a full-scale conflict involving Bosniaks, Croats, and Serbs, each seeking control over territory. Ethnic cleansing campaigns were carried out by all sides, though Bosnian Serb forces, under the leadership of Radovan Karadžić and Ratko Mladić, were responsible for some of the most egregious atrocities (Gunter). The siege of Sarajevo, which lasted for nearly four years, epitomized the war's brutality, with civilians subjected to constant shelling and sniper attacks.

International response

The international community initially struggled to address the conflict. The United Nations imposed economic sanctions on Serbia and established a peacekeeping force (UNPROFOR), but these efforts were largely ineffective in preventing the violence. In 1993, the UN declared certain areas, including Srebrenica, as “safe zones” for civilians. However, the fall of Srebrenica in July 1995, resulting in the massacre of over 8,000 Bosniak men and boys, exposed the failure of international peacekeeping efforts (Kyzy and Genocide).

NATO intervention and the Dayton Accords

The turning point came in August 1995, when NATO launched airstrikes against Bosnian Serb positions following the Serb shelling of a Sarajevo market, which killed 43 people (Daalder). This military intervention, combined with diplomatic pressure, led to the Dayton Accords, which were signed in December 1995. The agreement brought an end to the war, though it left Bosnia and Herzegovina deeply divided along ethnic lines.

Major Parties Involved

Bosnia and Herzegovina

Bosnia and Herzegovina, as the country where the conflict unfolded, was home to three primary ethnic groups: Bosniaks, Croats, and Serbs. Each group had distinct political objectives, which often clashed violently. The Bosniak-dominated government, led by President Alija Izetbegović, sought to preserve Bosnia’s territorial integrity as a multi-ethnic state. However, internal divisions made governance during the war difficult, and Bosniak civilians suffered the brunt of the violence, particularly in ethnic cleansing campaigns.

Republic of Serbia

Under the leadership of President Slobodan Milošević, Serbia played a pivotal role in the Bosnian War. Milošević sought to expand Serbian influence by supporting Bosnian Serb forces with weapons, funds, and military personnel. While Serbia officially denied involvement in the war, it was widely recognized as a key backer of the Bosnian Serb Republic (Republika Srpska). The International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia (ICTY) later indicted Milošević for war crimes related to the conflict.

Republika Srpska (Bosnian Serb Forces)

The Bosnian Serbs, led by Radovan Karadžić and military commander Ratko Mladić, were one of the major warring factions. Their primary goal was to create a separate Serb state within Bosnia, which led to the brutal campaign of ethnic cleansing against Bosniaks and Croats (Boghani). The Bosnian Serb forces were responsible for some of the worst atrocities of the war, including the siege of Sarajevo and the Srebrenica massacre.

Croatia

Croatia, led by President Franjo Tuđman, initially supported Bosnian Croat forces in the war. While Croats and Bosniaks were allies early in the conflict, tensions between them escalated, leading to a separate Croat-Bosniak war within Bosnia. Croatia’s military also played a crucial role in Operation Storm in 1995, which helped to turn the tide of the war against the Serbs (Human Rights Watch). Croatia was a signatory to the Dayton Accords and had a vested interest in stabilizing Bosnia due to the large Croatian population in Herzegovina.

United Nations (UNPROFOR)

The United Nations established the United Nations Protection Force (UNPROFOR) to maintain peace and protect civilians during the conflict. Despite its mandate, UNPROFOR was heavily criticized for its inability to prevent massacres, most notably in Srebrenica. UNPROFOR’s failure to adequately protect “safe zones” and its lack of enforcement power highlighted the challenges of peacekeeping in active conflict zones.

NATO

NATO’s involvement in the Bosnian War marked one of its first major post-Cold War operations. After years of limited international intervention, NATO airstrikes in 1995 targeted Bosnian Serb military positions, significantly weakening their ability to continue fighting. NATO’s intervention was pivotal in bringing the warring parties to the negotiating table, resulting in the Dayton Accords.

Timeline of Events

Date	Event Name	Description
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March 1, 1992	Bosnian Independence Referendum	Bosnia and Herzegovina holds a referendum for independence from Yugoslavia. Despite a Serb boycott, the majority vote in favor, leading to the official declaration of independence, which triggers violent opposition from Bosnian Serbs.
April 6, 1992	Siege of Sarajevo Begins	Bosnian Serb forces begin the siege of Sarajevo, surrounding the city and subjecting its residents to nearly four years of bombardment, sniper fire, and humanitarian crises. It becomes one of the longest sieges in modern history
July 10-11, 1992	Ethnic Cleansing in Prijedor	Bosnian Serb forces carry out a campaign of ethnic cleansing in the town of Prijedor, targeting Bosniak and Croat civilians. Thousands are detained in concentration camps, with widespread reports of torture, rape, and execution.
July 11, 1995	Srebrenica Massacre	In one of the darkest moments of the war, Bosnian Serb forces capture the UN-protected enclave of Srebrenica and massacre over 8,000 Bosniak men and boys. This event is later declared an act of genocide by international courts.
August 30, 1995	NATO's Operation Deliberate Force	NATO launches airstrikes against Bosnian Serb targets in response to

		attacks on Sarajevo and other civilian areas. This military intervention weakens Serb forces and contributes to pushing the warring parties toward negotiations.
November 21, 1995	Dayton Peace Accords	After intense negotiations in Dayton, Ohio, the warring parties agree to the Dayton Peace Accords, officially ending the Bosnian War. The agreement divides Bosnia and Herzegovina into two entities—the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina and Republika Srpska.

Previous Attempts to Solve the Issue

UN Treaties and Events

- UN Arms Embargo (25 September 1991)
- UN Security Council Resolution 713 (S/RES/713)
- Established UN Safe Zones (16 April 1993)
- UN Security Council Resolution 819 (S/RES/819)

Previous Attempts to Solve the Issue

- **Vance Owens Peace Plan (2 May 1993)**

One early attempt to solve the Bosnian War was the Vance-Owen Peace Plan in 1993, named after its creators, UN envoy Cyrus Vance and EU mediator Lord David Owen. The plan proposed the division of Bosnia into ten semi-autonomous provinces, largely based on ethnic lines, in an effort to decentralize

power and stop the violence. While the Bosnian government initially showed some interest, the plan ultimately failed because it was rejected by Bosnian Serbs, who sought greater territorial control. This failure underscored the deep-rooted ethnic tensions and competing territorial ambitions that complicated any diplomatic resolution.

- **The Washington Agreement (1994)**

The Washington Agreement brokered peace between the Bosniaks (Bosnian Muslims) and Bosnian Croats, who had been fighting each other in addition to the Serbs. Facilitated by the United States, the agreement created a federation between Bosniaks and Croats, which helped stabilize relations in certain areas of Bosnia. Although it did not resolve the conflict with Bosnian Serbs, this agreement was an important step in isolating the Serb forces and set a foundation for future negotiations

Possible Solutions

An effective solution would be to reform and strengthen international peacekeeping efforts in regions of conflict. During the Bosnian War, the United Nations peacekeepers lacked the mandate and resources to protect civilians, as seen in the failure of the UN-designated "safe zones." To avoid similar tragedies, peacekeeping forces could be granted stronger mandates under Chapter VII of the UN Charter, enabling them to use force when necessary to protect civilians and enforce peace agreements. Additionally, peacekeeping missions should be more robustly funded and equipped, with better coordination between NATO, the UN, and regional organizations like the European Union. Such improvements would ensure that peacekeepers can act swiftly and effectively in future conflicts, preventing atrocities such as the Srebrenica massacre.

Another key solution is the development of long-term programs to promote ethnic reconciliation and power-sharing within Bosnia and Herzegovina. The Dayton Peace Agreement established a delicate balance of power between Bosniaks, Serbs, and Croats, but ethnic divisions persist, and political deadlock often hampers progress. Implementing broader initiatives focused on inter-ethnic dialogue, educational reforms, and civic engagement could help bridge these divides. International organizations such as the OSCE (Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe) and the European Union could support these efforts by facilitating programs

that encourage cooperation between ethnic groups, particularly among the youth, to foster a shared national identity. In addition, introducing a more effective power-sharing model, perhaps modeled on successful examples like Northern Ireland's Good Friday Agreement, could create more stable governance structures in Bosnia.

Lastly, economic reconstruction and development assistance could also aid in resolving this dispute.

Post-war Bosnia and Herzegovina continues to struggle with high unemployment, poverty, and corruption, all of which fuel ongoing ethnic tensions. A solution focused on economic reconstruction and sustainable development is thus necessary to adequately address these underlying issues. The international community, particularly through the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund (IMF), and the European Union, could provide targeted development assistance to rebuild infrastructure, support local industries, and attract foreign investment. Such programs should focus on job creation, equitable economic development across all ethnic regions, and reducing corruption to ensure transparency and fairness. By providing tangible economic benefits to all communities, this solution would help reduce tensions and create a more stable and prosperous Bosnia.

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