

# Hateful Neighbors

By John J. Mearsheimer  
and Stephen Van Evera

**T**he recent Bosnian election confirms that the Dayton accord's vision of a multiethnic Bosnia is doomed and that the partition of Bosnia is inevitable. Fierce nationalists won resounding victories at every level in all three communities — Muslim, Serb and Croat. Two of the leaders elected to the three-person presidency — Kresimir Zubak, a Croat, and Momcilo Krajisnik, a Serb — have publicly declared that Bosnia should be partitioned. The people of Bosnia have spoken, saying "no" to living together.

Yet the Clinton Administration, still on the wrong course, seeks to keep Bosnia intact. John Kornblum, Assistant Secretary of State for Europe, says he expects the election to "build structures where people not only can but have to work together." He, too, is wrong. The Administration should junk the Dayton framework and organize the peaceful division of Bosnia.

There is no alternative to this division. Resisting it will cause more war and may lead to the subjugation of the Muslims, the conflict's principal victims so far.

Even before the elections, abundant evidence showed that partition was inevitable. Since the Dayton accord was signed last December, each region has grown more homogeneous as minorities have fled to areas dominated by their own ethnic groups. Almost all Serbs have left Sarajevo, now fast becoming a Muslim city. In all, roughly 100,000 Bosnians have moved this year, voting with their feet to reject the cohabitation envisioned by Dayton.

Efforts to fulfill the Dayton promise to return refugees to their homes have foundered on enduring hatred. For most, return is impossible; the hatreds that forced them out in the first place are as intense as ever.

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Trying to keep  
Bosnia intact is  
a dangerous goal.

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Similarly, efforts to foster political cooperation among the three factions have failed. The European Union spent much time and money to reunite the bitterly divided Croats and Muslims of Mostar. The Croats fought the effort at every turn, and when city council elections in June produced a Muslim majority, they simply refused to accept the results. Mostar today remains divided between two hostile communities.

A survey conducted in July by the United States Information Agency highlights these divisions throughout Bosnia. Ninety-five percent of Bosnian Serbs said that their "future lies more with Serbia than Bosnia," and 88 percent of Bosnian Croats believe that their "future lies more with Croatia than Bosnia." Only the Muslims (97 percent) said that Bosnia should not be partitioned. When asked whether "a unified Bosnia is a cause worth dying for," 65 percent of Bosnian Muslims answered yes, while 95 percent of Bosnian Croats and 96 percent of Bosnian Serbs answered no.

Thus two of Bosnia's three communities want out, and the Muslim

endorsement of unification is not encouraging, since it assumes that a unified Bosnia would be Muslim-dominated. Bosnian Muslims, who elected Alija Izetbegovic to the three-man presidency, have proved unwilling to live together with Serbs and Croats on equal terms. Instead, they relentlessly discriminate against Serb and Croat residents of the currently Muslim zone.

The violence of the war that began in 1992 has magnified hatreds and fears that were already strong enough to tear Bosnia apart. All sides now want vengeance for the wartime cruelties of the others; none show contrition. In lieu of offering regrets, for example, Serbs in Srebrenica held a horrifying celebration of "liberation day" last summer, on the first anniversary of their mass murder of 8,000 Muslims. The war has also sown fears that make cohabitation impossible. Minority populations everywhere now know from experience that their neighbors may become their killers. No community can function amid such terror.

Finally, the American effort to keep Bosnia intact is an imprudent departure from a past policy of laissez-faire toward crumbling states.

**M**any multiethnic states and empires have disintegrated over the past century without United States interference or major harm to American interests. The Austro-Hungarian and Ottoman empires expired after World War I; the great European seaborne empires collapsed after 1945; later Pakistan, the Soviet Union, Czechoslovakia, Ethiopia and Yugoslavia followed suit.

These collapses reflect the vast power of modern nationalism, a force that overwhelms other political currents. In each case the United States wisely let nature take its course and avoided putting itself crosswise to nationalism's roaring current. President Clinton's policy of resisting nationalism in Bosnia is an experiment doomed to failure by the strength of the nationalist forces it seeks to contain. It puts America on the wrong side of history.

Partition in Bosnia is unavoidable. There are only three scenarios for Bosnia's future.

- The United States could stick with the Dayton program for Bosnian unification and the timetable for withdrawing American forces. But after the troops depart, war is sure to reignite. Bosnia's partition will be shaped by a bloody decision of arms; borders will be adjusted and minority populations transferred by terror, murder and rape. The Croats and Serbs may combine against the Muslims, who will face further massacres and might end up stateless.

- The United States could maintain Dayton but defer troop withdrawal indefinitely to forestall these disasters. But this would be a disaster of its own: America cannot afford to be permanent baby sitter for the world's angry nationalities, and the American public will never allow it.

- The United States can abandon Dayton and move to organize a peaceful three-way partition of Bosnia. Creating a viable Bosnian Muslim state should be the main goal. Toward that end, current communal boundaries must be redrawn to give the Muslims more territory and to enclose most Muslims in a contiguous state with defensible borders. The Muslims should be asked to cede their Gorazde enclave in eastern Bosnia to the Serbs; the Serbs and Croats should be asked to cede large sections of western Bosnia to the Muslims.

The United States must equip and train the Bosnian Muslim army to defend the new state; America should also oversee the transfer of minorities trapped by partition

boundaries. A registry should record abandoned property, to allow compensation for losses. Economic aid should be offered to help those transferred to start new lives.

The partition of Bosnia would have been easier before the Dayton agreement, which solidified and legitimized the existing boundaries, but it remains feasible today. It requires a made-in-Washington plan that uses both carrots and sticks. (Among the sticks must be a threat to arm the opponents of any who reject the plan.) With these inducements, all three groups will accept an American version of a breakup that most Bosnians desire in principle.

Bosnia will be divided one way or another. Only the final cost, in lives and property, remains in doubt. The cost largely depends on whether the United States finally stops chasing the chimera of Bosnian unity and instead leads the process of partition. □

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John J. Mearsheimer and Stephen Van Evera teach political science at the University of Chicago and the Massachusetts Institute of Technology respectively.