

# WHEN PEACE MEANS WAR

*By John J. Mearsheimer and Stephen Van Evera*

**T**he Dayton settlement on Bosnia is an unfinished peace, hence a flawed peace. Major issues remain unsettled. The U.S. must send its promised peacekeeping contingent to Bosnia, but, unless it also moves to repair the Dayton accord, these defects will lead to new war, this time with American troops caught in the middle.

Two types of Bosnia peace-schemes—one infeasible, one workable—have long contended. One type offered unitary federal solutions that would maintain Bosnia as a single state where Serbs, Croats and Muslims would learn to live together. However, the triangle of deep hatreds unleashed since Yugoslavia's breakup has long made this solution implausible. Another type of plan proposed partitions dividing Bosnia into several states (usually three), each free to go its own way. The Bosnian Serb state then could (and surely would) join Serbia; the Bosnian Croat state could join Croatia; and a Muslim-majority rump state would remain independent.

Since before the war started in April 1992 the U.S. has favored a federal solution and opposed partition. Now we have belatedly seen the light and produced a partition settlement. This is good news, although the Clinton administration will not admit that its policy has changed. Announcing the accord, President Clinton asserted that "the peace plan agreed to would preserve Bosnia as a single state." Secretary of State Warren Christopher likewise maintained that "the agreement is a victory for all those who believe in a multiethnic democracy in Bosnia." Humpty Dumpty, they suggest, has been put back together again.

These are noble lies. The settlement is a veiled partition but a partition nevertheless. It effectively divides Bosnia into two separate states: a Serb Republic (Republika Srpska) and a Muslim-Croat Federation. They coexist under an impotent central government that barely deserves the name. The reality of partition is starkly evident in the settlement's military provisions. Both Republika Srpska and the Federation are allowed to maintain their own armies, and each army is forbidden from entering the other's territory. This means, in

effect, that each regional government can defy the central government's wishes at will. Most important, either can at any time declare and enforce its velvet divorce from the other and its simultaneous remarriage to a neighboring state. The Dayton accord even legitimates the first steps of this divorce-and-remarriage by allowing each entity to establish a "special relationship" with a neighboring state.

Dayton is the fourth Bosnia peace plan produced since 1992 and the culmination of a glacial process of U.S. acclimation to partition. The first was a prewar scheme agreed to in European Community-sponsored talks at Lisbon (February-March 1992). Although the plan spoke of national cantons within a Bosnian state, the federal structure was so weak that the proposal, enthusiastically endorsed by Radovan Karadzic, amounted to partition. Tragically, the Lisbon plan failed when Bosnian leader Alija Izetbegovic changed his mind and scuttled it. Although Warren Zimmermann, the American representative at the talks, now denies it, most reliable reports suggest that Izetbegovic acted with U.S. approval.

Next came the Vance-Owen plan (September 1992-May 1993). It proposed a unitary federal Bosnia divided along ethnic lines into ten semiautonomous cantons that would remain subordinate to a capable central government. The Bosnian Serbs predictably rejected it since it denied them their prime goal, national independence.

Vance-Owen was followed by a European proposal for veiled tripartite partition (July 1993-January 1994). Resembling the Lisbon plan, it envisioned three ethnic republics coexisting in a loose confederation under a powerless central government that could not prevent the inevitable final breakup. Still dreaming of a united Bosnia under their leadership, and again encouraged by the U.S., the Muslims rejected it in early 1994.

At this point the U.S. had torpedoed two peace plans while endorsing none. Exasperated, the Europeans demanded that the U.S. propose and support solutions of its own. This led to the so-called Contact Group plan of April 1994, which reached fruition at Dayton. It stemmed from two developments between February and April 1994. First, the Americans pushed the Croats and Muslims, then engaged in a bloody war, to stop fighting and form a federation. Second, the United

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States, Britain, France, Russia and Germany formed the five-power Contact Group, which then proposed a veiled bipartite partition of Bosnia between the Muslim-Croat Federation and the Serbs. It envisioned a 51-49 territorial division of Bosnia, with 51 percent allotted to the Muslim-Croat Federation and 49 percent to Republika Srpska. The Serbs would be allowed to remain outside the Federation and to run their own republic. At the time, Clinton administration officials hinted that the U.S. might tolerate secession by the Bosnian Serbs. The basic outline of the bipartite partition agreed to in Dayton was in place, although Serb acceptance had to await the sobering impact of battlefield defeats in the summer of 1995.

The Dayton accord embodies America's belated embrace of partition, but it does not carry partition's logic to its necessary conclusion, and therein lies its weakness. The Dayton agreement posits bipartite partition, but there are three competing parties in Bosnia. A plan that denies this reality suffers from the same comforting delusions that have prevented the West from securing a Bosnian peace for the past three years.

The main problem is that the Croatian-Muslim Federation is untenable. Like the Bosnian Serbs, the Bosnian Croats want out of Bosnia. They accepted the Muslim-Croat Federation as an expedient, but they chafe at membership in it, and they will surely move to destroy it someday soon. The U.S. should have anticipated this development by forging agreement on the partition of the Federation into Croat and Muslim states at Dayton. Instead, their inevitable divorce may well occur by war.

All evidence points to fierce Bosnian Croat resistance to political union with the Bosnian Muslims. The mayor of a Bosnian Croat town near Mostar recently warned that "if there were a referendum, the people would vote not 90 percent but 99 percent, not to be part of the Federation." Simple demographics fuel this Croat hostility. Muslims outnumber the Bosnian Croats by more than two to one and would, therefore, dominate Federation politics. This the highly nationalistic Croats will

never accept. Instead they will demand their own state or insist on joining a Greater Croatia.

Croat-Muslim relations were badly damaged by the brutal war they fought between April 1993 and February 1994. The U.S.-brokered peace that ended it is little more than a truce. Relations between the two sides remain venomous. Even as they struggled together against the Serbs, Muslim and Croat forces twice fell to fighting each other in southwestern Bosnia last summer. Croat-Muslim relations in Mostar tell the same story. That city was devastated by the Croat-Muslim war and left divided, with the Croats controlling the west-

ern half and the Muslims ruling in the east. The European Community then invested over \$200 million to rebuild and reunify Mostar. Yet the city remains divided, with no prospect of reconciliation in sight.

The Bosnian Croats can destroy the Federation at will. Their political organization, the Republic of Herzog-Bosna, already boasts all the trappings of a state. It has its own 50,000-man army. It delivers the mail, runs the schools and collects taxes. Most important, like the Republika Srpska, it has a powerful ally next door in the Republic of Croatia. It is already closely linked to its mother state: Bosnian Croats carry Croatian passports, use Croatian currency

and Croatian license plates, route their telephone calls through Croatia and vote in Croatian elections, as they did in Croatia's October 29, 1995, parliamentary elections.

Moreover, Croatia is a willing ally and partner in the Federation's destruction. Croatia's strongman, President Franjo Tudjman, has shown undisguised contempt for the Bosnian Muslims. Even as he paraded with Richard Holbrooke in Dayton, he was promoting a Croatian general, Tihomir Blaskic, charged recently by the international war crimes tribunal with anti-Muslim crimes against humanity. The tribunal alleged that during the 1993-1994 Muslim-Croat war Blaskic oversaw the systematic killing or expulsion of "almost the entire Muslim civilian population in the Lasva valley" in cen-

## The Dayton Agreement



- Proposed New Boundary
- Currently Under Bosnian/Croat Control
- Currently Under Serb Control

MAP BY JIM HOLLOWAY FOR THE NEW REPUBLIC



tral Bosnia—deeds that Tudjman apparently felt were no bar to advancement. Tudjman has also spoken openly of seizing Croatia's share of Bosnia and even of dividing it in two with Serbia.

If the Bosnian Croats oppose the Federation, why did they join it in the first place? In early 1994 the United States offered Tudjman blandishments that he could not refuse. In particular, the U.S. promised to help him regain the large chunks of Croatian territory (about one-third of that country) then controlled by rebel Croatian Serbs. Toward that end, the United States helped Croatia build a powerful army by turning a blind eye to weaponry flowing into Croatia in clear violation of the U.N. arms embargo. The United States also sent a team of retired U.S. army generals to Croatia to teach tactics and strategy to Croatia's new army. Other aid, still concealed, was probably sent as well.

The results of American assistance have been spectacular. In May of this year, the Croatian army recaptured Western Slavonia in two days. In August the entire Krajina region, a Serb-populated Croatian territory that easily threw off Croat rule in 1991, was reconquered in four days. And last month, faced with this Croat military juggernaut, Serbia's President Slobodan Milosevic agreed to give up Eastern Slavonia without a fight and transfer it back to Croatia in one to two years.

Thus the Muslim-Croat Federation paid handsome short-term dividends for the Croats. But Tudjman still has no long-term interest in making the Federation work. In fact, his main inducement to cooperate will vanish with his recovery of Eastern Slavonia, which is the last Croatian area still in Serb hands. Tudjman tipped his hand last May when he told a British parliamentarian that he envisioned a Bosnia eventually divided and conquered by Croatia and Serbia, a scheme he illustrated with a now-notorious sketch on a menu. His remarks echoed earlier reports that he and Milosevic had agreed to carve up Bosnia between them in March 1991, the same year in which the Croat leader told then U.S. Ambassador to Yugoslavia Warren Zimmermann that "Bosnia has never had any real existence," and "should be divided between Serbia and Croatia."

In short, the Muslim-Croat Federation is a virtual dead letter. When it collapses, there is bound to be renewed fighting between Croats and Muslims over disputed territory unless their divorce is carefully agreed to in advance. Renewed Croat-Muslim fighting could in turn cause a wider unraveling of the Dayton accord by triggering renewed Serb-Muslim and Serb-Croat fighting.

**T**he Bosnian Serbs remain especially bitter about three aspects of the Dayton accord: its award of Sarajevo and Gorazde to the Federation and the narrow width of the Posavina Corridor, the Serbs' territorial connector in northern Bosnia. The Belgrade Serbs would also like to renege on their promise to return Eastern Slavonia to Croatia and to claim it for Serbia instead. Fighting between Croats and Muslims would create a golden opportunity for Serbs to

gain these goals by force while Muslim and Croat forces tie each other down. And if the Serbs jump through this window of opportunity we will be back where we began, with a three-way war.

Alternately, renewed Croat-Muslim fighting could also end with a Serb-Croat conquest of Muslim lands and a two-way division of Bosnia between Belgrade and Zagreb, following the lines of their rumored 1991 agreement. Such an outcome would be quieter in the short run but would surely lead to guerrilla war, massive new flows of refugees and the cruel denial of Muslim national freedom.

**S**ome 60,000 NATO and non-NATO troops are slated for deployment to implement the Dayton plan shortly after its signing in Paris later this month. The United States will provide 20,000 soldiers for the implementation force, or IFOR, as it is called. These forces are assigned to patrol the roughly 550-mile border between the Federation and the Republika Srpska, to separate the two sides' forces and to oversee their deployment back to temporary barracks away from the front lines.

U.S. forces will face two problems. First, there is no secure peace in Bosnia for the IFOR peacekeepers to keep. Peacekeepers can bolster a stable peace accord, but they do little good before such an accord is in place. And because the Dayton agreement is incomplete, it may not prove stable. A worst-case scenario, and not an unlikely one, is that the shooting will start while IFOR is still deployed in Bosnia, and American soldiers will be caught in the crossfire, perhaps in the midst of a presidential campaign. The Clinton administration might then be forced to withdraw U.S. forces ignominiously, as it did after casualties in Somalia sparked an outcry at home. Even if IFOR is able to keep a lid on the fighting while it is deployed in Bosnia, the American effort will nevertheless be wasted if the fighting resumes later, as it almost certainly will unless the Croat-Muslim conflict is resolved.

The second problem is that U.S. forces will have two missions in Bosnia that work at cross-purposes: peacekeeping and arming the Muslims. The impact of the U.N. arms embargo has fallen unevenly on the three belligerents, hitting the Bosnian Muslims hardest. Today they are outgunned by both the Croats and the Serbs and cannot defend themselves. Thus, one reason IFOR is needed is to protect the Muslims from the Croats and the Serbs while the peace plan is implemented. The need to establish security for the Muslims will continue even after the agreement is implemented. Otherwise the Muslims' weakness will be a standing invitation to both the Croats and Serbs to return to war once IFOR leaves. Hence the U.S. will have to bolster the Bosnian Muslim army before it can leave Bosnia. The Muslim army should be strengthened to a point where it has a fair chance of defending successfully against a Croat or Serb attack. If the U.S. leaves without creating such a power balance it will leave behind a powder keg.

Arming the Muslims, however, clashes with the neu-

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## Beirut to Bosnia

If the U.S. contributes 20,000 troops, as planned, to a 60,000-strong NATO peacekeeping force in Bosnia, the result will be the latest example of what the Pentagon knows by the acronym OOTW: Operations Other Than War. Its success may depend on how well the Clinton administration has learned the lessons of previous attempts at OOTW: peacekeeping, peace-making and nation-building in Lebanon, Somalia and Haiti. In these three cases, the same pattern has been repeated: early success in achieving narrowly defined goals followed by catastrophe and withdrawal when "mission creep" led to ambitious attempts at reconstructing disordered states and societies.

The terrorist bombing of the U.S. Marine barracks in Lebanon on October 23, 1983, which killed 241 American soldiers, has overshadowed the fact that the initial intervention of the U.S. in Lebanon was a success. The purpose of that first mission—in which the U.S. joined France and Italy in a multinational force—was to impose peace among the warring factions in Lebanon in the aftermath of Israel's June 1982 invasion long enough to permit the troops from the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) to be evacuated. By early September 1982, this operation had been accomplished. On September 16, however, six days after the U.S. Marines had returned to their ships, Lebanese Christian militiamen began a three-day slaughter of 800 Palestinian refugees in the Sabra and Shatila refugee camps.

President Reagan then sent 1,200 marines back into Lebanon in late September 1982. Doing so was a disastrous mistake. The first intervention had followed a strict timetable (the administration promised the Marines would be withdrawn after thirty days), and the U.S., along with its allies, had not taken sides with one or another of the warring parties. The new mission in Lebanon was bound by neither of these constraints. There was no date for a pullout. Even worse, the Reagan administration committed the U.S. to the task of strengthening the government of President Amin Gemayel—a government that existed more in theory than in reality. According to Reagan, on May 17, 1983, the U.S. was now in Lebanon "to help the new gov-

ernment of Lebanon maintain order until it can organize its military and its police and assume control of its borders and its own internal security." As a result of mission creep, the U.S. committed itself to supporting a feeble government and joining as a combatant in the Lebanese civil war—ambitious tasks without the support of the American public. In February 1984, three months after the bombing of the Beirut Marine barracks, the U.S. began its ignominious pullout.

In December 1992, President Bush set in motion another misadventure in OOTW, this time in Somalia. The Clinton administration expanded a relatively successful humanitarian relief operation into a more ambitious nation-building effort—the familiar pattern of initial success in a strictly defined task followed by mission creep and disaster. In its attempt to help rebuild a Somali government, the Clinton administration abandoned neutrality and took sides in the struggle among rival Somali factions. After two dozen U.N. peacekeepers from Pakistan were killed by supporters of Mohammed Farah Aidid, the U.S. launched a manhunt for General Aidid, now identified as an evil "warlord." In a firefight between U.S. forces and Aidid's troops in October 1993, seventy-eight American soldiers were wounded and eighteen killed; the body of one was dragged triumphantly through the streets of Mogadishu, before a world watching on CNN. Once again, the U.S. had failed to force the reassembly of a broken society at gunpoint; once again, U.S. troops engaged in a humiliating retreat.

Compared to the debacles in Lebanon and Somalia, the U.S. intervention in Haiti at first appeared to be a success. Faced with the prospect of war with the United States, the military dictatorship of General Raoul Cedras abdicated and President Jean-Bertrand Aristide was restored to power in September 1994. The original all-U.S. contingent of 20,000 peacekeeping troops has been replaced by a U.N. peacekeeping force of 6,900 troops, including 2,300 American soldiers. Haiti appeared to be a model of peacekeeping that worked.

In the last month, however, the apparently successful settlement has begun to crumble. The United States announced that it would withhold a fraction of its aid to Haiti to punish the Aristide government for not moving more rapidly to privatize government-

controlled companies. Then, on November 7, Jean-Hubert Feuille, a cousin and close political ally of Aristide, was murdered by gunmen. At Feuille's funeral on November 11, Aristide uttered a fiery speech calling on supporters to disarm his enemies. The speech was followed by acts of arson, looting and murder of political opponents by some of Aristide's followers. Even worse, on Friday, November 24, Aristide alarmed the U.S. by raising the possibility that he would stay in power for three more years (he had promised to leave office on February 7 after a free election on December 17 in which he would not be a candidate). Whether an orderly and democratic transition will take place as planned, permitting the exit of U.S. along with U.N. troops from Haiti, remains to be seen.

The lessons of these adventures in OOTW for the U.S. in Bosnia are clear. The U.S. and its allies might succeed, as long as success is defined in the narrowest possible terms—the separation of hostile forces by neutral peacekeepers. If the U.S. tries to provide the muscle for a powerless central government with a complicated multiethnic constitution and little legitimacy among rival populations (as in Lebanon) or to take sides with one group rather than another in an attempt at "nation-building" by outsiders (as in Somalia), the NATO effort in Bosnia is likely to end in failure and humiliation. The U.S. must choose between enforcing a de facto partition of the defunct Bosnian state and a more ambitious attempt to reconstruct a federal Bosnia under a new central government with a complex and probably unworkable constitution.

Even a modest and successful peacekeeping effort in the Balkans may be prolonged indefinitely. The situation in Cyprus offers another striking parallel: just as Bosnian Croats and Bosnian Serbs are likely to seek annexation of their fragments of Bosnia by Croatia and Serbia, respectively, so Greek Cypriots have sought to join Greece, while Turkey has occupied and governed the Turkish section of the island. If the parallel holds in other respects, NATO forces, if sent into Bosnia, will not be disengaged soon. The U.N. peacekeeping force has been keeping Greek and Turkish Cypriots apart since March 1964.

MICHAEL LIND



tral stance that peacekeeping requires. Peacekeepers invite attack unless they act as honest brokers, showing no favoritism toward any faction. If the Americans are perceived as taking sides, which is sure to happen once we start arming and training the Muslim army, the Serbs and Croats are bound to consider the Americans as adversaries. U.S. peacekeepers patrolling the long Federation-Republika Srpska border will be inviting and easy targets for terrorist retribution.

**T**he U.S. never should have signed the Dayton agreement. It should, rather, have forged a tripartite partition of Bosnia, in expectation that the Croatian and Serbian republics would join a Greater Croatia and Greater Serbia, respectively. In an alternative—and better—agreement, the Muslim state would be given a viable national territory. Its borders would not be unduly long, would not include Muslim enclaves isolated in Serb or Croat territory, would be militarily defensible and would provide access to the sea. The Muslims would be promptly armed so that they could defend themselves without having to rely on American or NATO ground forces but not given enough offensive capability to lead them to try to take lost territory. While this arming went on, the Muslim state would be secured by a NATO promise to use massive NATO (largely U.S.) air power to assist Muslim forces if the need were to arise. Under such a scenario, the European NATO states and the U.S. would pursue a division of labor: Europe would assume all peacekeeping duties while the U.S. concentrated on arming and training the Muslim forces and on maintaining a ready sword in the air. No U.S. peacekeepers would go to Bosnia. Finally, a transfer of populations caught behind new national borders would be organized and subsidized by the major powers.

Important elements of this ideal strategy are no longer possible because the Clinton administration has committed the U.S. to the Dayton program—with its incomplete partition, its cross-purposes and its lack of provisions for population transfer. But the U.S. cannot now abandon Dayton without cutting an absurd appearance. So Dayton must go forward.

To have any chance of success, however, the Dayton plan must at least be repaired. In the first place, the partition of the Muslim-Croat Federation should be promptly arranged. The U.S. should oversee its details and apply whatever coercion the parties require. The U.S. now seems ready to manage the Serbian exit from Bosnia but remains strangely unaware that the Muslims and the Croats will inevitably part ways as well. Instead, the U.S. should develop a plan for managing the breakup of the doomed Muslim-Croat Federation with a minimum of bloodshed.

The U.S. should also accept the need to organize some further transfer of populations. The Dayton accord includes surreal language referring to the return of refugees to their homes, implying that Bosnia now might somehow return to the status quo ante. This would surely be desirable from a humanitarian and moral perspective. However, save for a handful of special cases, it is

not going to happen. Bosnia has witnessed mass murder and other unthinkable horrors. Rivers of blood have flowed. All three parties are uncontrite and deeply bitter. There can be no restoration of integrated life until a profound reconciliation takes place. This is decades away. Hence, most of the ethnic cleansing that occurred in this war is going to stand for now. In fact, even more transfers are needed. For example, many of Sarajevo's Serbs will want to leave once that city comes under full Muslim control. Most Serbs will also flee Eastern Slavonia if Milošević turns it over to the Croats. The U.S. should accept these sad facts and develop plans to ease the hardship that these migrations inflict on the displaced.

Finally, the United States should press forward with arming the Bosnian Muslims. The Serbs and Croats should be urged to publicly accept this arming program, to give U.S. peacekeepers exposed in Bosnia a measure of political cover. The U.S. goal should be to give the Muslims a strong self-defense capability, adequate to deter new Croat or Serb aggression. Even if Serb and Croat leaders publicly accepted U.S. military aid to Bosnia, however, this part of the accord could compromise U.S. neutrality, making peacekeeping efforts much harder.

If, however, the Dayton agreement falls apart—because, for instance, Bosnian Serbs sabotage it—the U.S. will not be sent back to square one, because the Clinton administration will have finally begun to do what it should have done long ago: arm the Bosnian Muslims. If the NATO force is not, in the end, sent, or is soon withdrawn, the U.S. would not face the present contradiction between neutral peacekeeping and armed support for one side. It could then try, without Dayton's restrictions, to build up a Bosnian state capable of defending itself. Furthermore, with the deal having fallen through, European opposition to arming the Bosnian Muslims would be weakened. Even if Dayton fails, therefore, good may come of it.

**P**eacemaking in Bosnia has been slow and difficult because the U.S. shrank from partition. It shrank from partition because partition is ugly. But in Bosnia, sadly, it is also the only feasible scheme for peace. This error reflects a general American tendency to underestimate the power and intractability of nationalism; it reflects, too, a dogmatic American faith that other multiethnic societies can harmonize themselves, that ethnic groups elsewhere can learn to live together as America's immigrants have. This faith finds expression in reflexive U.S. efforts to keep together all states that face communal civil wars, lately including Iraq, the USSR and Yugoslavia.

But U.S. policymakers must be willing at times to decide that some states cannot be sustained and should instead be disassembled. Only if we accept this reality honestly and promptly will we have a reasonable chance of managing their disassembly and keeping it relatively peaceful. Partition should remain a last resort, but, regrettably, we still live in a world where it is sometimes necessary. •

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