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Decision on the Balkans

1. Short Summary of the Bosnian Crisis

Beginning several months later than fighting in the republics of Slovenia and Croatia, the Bosnian civil war was the most brutal chapter in the break-up of Yugoslavia. On February 29, 1992, the multiethnic republic of Bosnia and Herzegovina, where Catholic Croats, Orthodox Serbs, and Muslim Slavs lived side by side, passed a referendum for independence – but not all Bosnian Serbs agreed. Under the pretence of protecting the Serb minority in Bosnia, Serbian leaders like Slobodan Milosevic (1941- 2006) channelled arms and military support to them. In spring 1992, for example, the federal army (JNA), dominated by Serbs, shelled Croats and Muslims in Sarajevo, the Bosnian capital. Foreign governments responded with sanctions (not always tightly enforced) to keep fuel and weapons from Serbia, which had (in April 1992) joined the republic of Montenegro in a newer, smaller Yugoslavia. Bosnian Serb paramilitary troops carried out deadly campaigns of "ethnic cleansing," massacring members of other ethnic groups or expelling them from their homes to create exclusively Serb areas. Attacks on civilians and international relief workers disrupted supplies of food and other necessities just when such aid was most crucial: in what became the worst refugee crisis in Europe since World War II, millions of Bosnians (and Croats) had been driven from their homes by July 1992. Alarmed by ethnic cleansing and other human rights abuses (which Croats and Muslims also engaged in, though to a lesser extent than did the Serbs), the United Nations resolved to punish such war crimes.

2. The Role of the United Nations

The failure of the UN to stop the killing in Bosnia seriously compromised its credibility as it neared its 50th anniversary in 1995. The UN already had UNPROFOR (United Nations Protection Force) troops in Sarajevo at the outset of war, since it was their base of operation for the UN mission in Croatia. The UN hoped that their presence would discourage the spread of the conflict from Croatia to Bosnia. But when Sarajevo came under attack by Serb artillery in April 1992, the UN forces pulled out to avoid casualties, leaving behind only a small and lightly armed contingent of peacekeepers to discourage attacks by Serbian nationalists, but there was no peace to keep. As the situation deteriorated, creating a humanitarian nightmare, the UN struck a deal with the Serbs to control the Sarajevo airport. In reality, the Serbs only allowed the UN to use the airport under de facto Serb control. During the next three years the airport was the scene of hundreds of casualties. UN humanitarian flights were repeatedly fired upon and Bosnian civilians were killed by sniper fire as they attempted to escape across the runway. All aid flights and personnel transports had to be approved by Serb liaison officers stationed at the airport. In one of the most flagrant failures of the UN to provide protection, the Bosnian Deputy Prime Minister was shot point-blank by Serb nationalists in 1992 while driving in a UN armoured personnel carrier at the airport.

UN personnel were well aware of massive violations of human rights and humanitarian law committed by the Bosnian Serb nationalists, yet did little. The world learned of the atrocities through the courageous efforts of print and TV journalists who visited Serb-run camps and reported on appalling conditions and treatment of Croat and Muslim detainees. Wrenching scenes were broadcast around the world showing hundreds of emaciated men and women behind barbed wire, their eyes hollow from hunger and despair. Although they never succeeded in protecting civilians from attack, the UN eventually took seriously its obligation to investigate war crimes, genocide, and crimes against humanity in the former Yugoslavia.

3. Timeline

3.1 Important Landmarks

January 1974: The new Constitution of Yugoslavia strengthens the Republics

December 1987: Slobodan Milosevic becomes the president of Yugoslav Republic Serbia

June 1989: 600th anniversary of Kosovo Polje → Milosevic holds a nationalistic speech and mentions a "future quarrel" that could be violent

3.2 The Year 1990 – Beginning of the Yugoslav Break-Up and the Upcoming Crises

- 21.1.1990: Last convention of the Yugoslav communist party – the Slovenian members are leaving the party after all suggestions for a looser federation of Yugoslav states are denied.
- 22.4.1990: Free elections in Slovenia → the liberal party coalition wins.
- 23.4.1990: Elections in Croatia → the nationalistic party HDZ wins. Franjo Tudjman becomes president.
- 2.7.1990: Kosovo-Albanians announce the Republic Kosovo.
- 5.7.1990: Serbia resolves the Kosovo parliament and takes over the administration under force.
- 25.7.1990: The Serbs in the province Krajina are founding a national council and declare “Sovereignty and Autonomy of the Serbian people in Croatia”.
- 25.7.1990: The Serbs in Krajina build barricades and plunder the weapon arsenal of the Croatian police.
- 7.9.1990: The Kosovo Albanians pass the constitution of the Republic Kosovo in the underground.
- 25.9.1990: The new constitution of Serbia annuls the autonomy of the provinces Vovodina and Kosovo.
- 16.11.1990: Free elections in Bosnia → the three parties of the 3 national ethnics are winning according to their percentage.
- 9.12.1990: Free elections in Serbia → 2/3 majority for the socialist party under Milosevic.
- 22.12.1990: The constitution of Croatia recognizes the minority status of the Serbs → they are no longer citizens.
- 23.12.1990: Referendum in Slovenia → 88% for independence.

3.3 1991 – The War in Croatia

- 9.1.1991: The president of Yugoslavia directs the disarmament of paramilitary forces, after the Croats continued to arm themselves via the Hungarian boarder → The outbreak of a civil war in Croatia is prevented.
- 20.2.1991: The Slovenian parliament requests a common disintegration of Yugoslavia.
- 9.3.1991: Mass demonstration of the opposition in Belgrade → resolved by the police under force.
- 12.3.1991: Unordinary meeting of the national presidency to debate over the security situation regarding a possible mobilisation of the federal army (JNA) and declaration upon state of emergency → There is no agreement - it fails because of the Bosnian representative (Serbian ethnic origin).
- 11.4.1991: The presidents of the six republics are debating about the current crises. Slovenians president Kucan requests again the disintegration of Yugoslavia in six sovereign states. After they can join a loose organization.
- 2.5.1991: The war in Croatia breaks out.
- 10.5.1991: The Yugoslav government declares with consent the disarmament of the armed forces by the military.
- 12.5.1991: The Serbs in Krajina claim their unification to Serbia and Montenegro.
- 14.5.1991: Mesic announces to change Yugoslavia in a loose connection of states.
- 15.5.1991: Yugoslavia has no formal Head of State and Head of Military after the Serbian boycott of the appointment of the Croat Mesic.

18.5.1991: Croatia threatens to leave Yugoslavia if they will not elect Mesic as president.

21.5.1991: Mesic declares himself as president.

14.6.1991: Milosevic and Tudjman discuss the separation of Bosnia in relation to ethnical criteria.

16.6.1991: Belgrade prohibits the import of Slovenian goods.

25.6.1991: Croatia and Slovenia declare their independence → Belgrade does not accept it. Fights between the JNA and Slovenian paramilitary troops without permission. Slovenian troops also shoot unarmed JNA soldiers. A delegation from the European Community (EC) reaches a cease-fire and a delay of the process of the Slovenian independence procedure for three months.

28.6.1991: The JNA occupies the Slovenian borders. Belgrade demands for new negotiations.

1.7.1991: The Conference of Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) claims to stop the fighting immediately → The army retreats.

3.7.1991: Yugoslavia accepts the delegation of OSCE-Observers.

5.7.1991: EC weapon embargo against Yugoslavia.

7.7.1991: An EC-Delegation passes a resolution together with the Yugoslav government and the state presidency concerning the control of the questioned borders and the beginning of negotiations of all aspects of the future of Yugoslavia until 1.8.1991 → The resolutions are doubted because of different interpretations and new combats.

17.7.1991: The JNA intervenes in battles between Croats and Serbs.

18.7.1991: Slovenians block barracks of the JNA and cut the energy and telephone lines.

19.7.1991: The state presidency decides upon the withdrawal of the federal army from Slovenia.

23.7.1991: 23 000 Serbs escape from Croatian villages.

8.1.1991: Tank offensive of the JNA against Croatia.

2.8.1991: Croats plunder weapon depots of the JNA.

6.8.1991: EC commission debates on possible economic sanctions → The German foreign minister Genscher brings the recognition of Slovenia and Croatia on the floor causing a controversial debate.

12.8.1991: High representatives of the Republics Serbia and Montenegro and Bosnia propose a federation of equal republics and people → Yugoslavia should be preserved as a whole state.

19.8.1991: Units of the JNA separate Croatian and Serbian troops.

27.8.1991: The EC member states demand to stop the armed battles in Croatia within five days otherwise sanctions will come into power.

29.8.1991: The war reaches its first high point → heavy battles upon Vukovar - the JNA fights on the side of the Croatian Serbs.

4.9.1991: The OSCE wants to stop all deliveries of weapons to Yugoslavia.

7.9.1991: The Hague: Starting of the peace conference (with the Yugoslav federal government and all presidents of the republics, Chairman: Lord Carrington) → The armed battles between the Croatian National Garde and the JNA continue. Public vote in Macedonia: 72% vote for independence, if Slovenia and Croatia split from Yugoslavia.

10.9.1991: The JNA does not support anymore Serbian paramilitary troops.

11.9.1991: First tensions between Serbs and Croats in Bosnia.

14.9.1991: Because of the pressure from Mesic → the JNA moves back to their bases. But the battles between paramilitary troops continue.

21.9.1991: First call to the UNSC (United Nations Security Council).

September 1991: Referendum in Bosnia → the Serbs declare their independence in several settlements.

25.9.1991: The UNSC passes resolution 713 → embargo on weapons and military equipment.

30.9.1991: Offensive by the JNA against Croatian cities on the Adriatic coast.

3.10.1991: The state presidency of Yugoslavia fully supports the strategy of the federal army concerning Croatia.

4.10.1991: "Revolution" in Belgrade → the eight-headed state presidency will pass resolutions in future by the majority of all attending members, instead of all members. The JNA marine blockades Croatian harbours and the Croats as counter strike barracks of the JNA.

7.10.1991: Appointment of Cyrus Vance as the UN ambassador for Yugoslavia → Zagreb and Belgrade discuss a mobilisation of their national armies.

21.10.1991: Jews are leaving Croatia after anti-Semitic riots.

28.10.1991: Dubrovnik denies its capitulation. Reproach on the JNA not only to act for the protection of the Serbian minority.

8.11.1991: The foreign ministers of the EC declare economic sanctions against Yugoslavia.

14.11.1991: Agreement between Lord Carrington and the Yugoslav minister of defence on an UN peacekeeping operation.

15.11.1991: Serbs and Croats request UN peacekeeping troops.

17.11.1991: The Macedonian parliament passes a new constitution containing their independence.

18.11.1991: The JNA and Serbian paramilitary troops conquer Vukovar → 70 000 Croats become refugees. The Western European Union (WEU) decides to send warships to the Adriatic coast.

21.11.1991: Serbs accuse Croatian paramilitary troops of killing of 41 children → Croatia denies and calls for an international investigation.

24.11.1991: The UNSC passes resolution 721 → Demanding of the cease fire between the conflict parties in order to implement peacekeeping troops.

29.11.1991: The German chancellor Kohl calls for the recognition of Croatia and Slovenia → not on the agenda of the EC summit.

3.12.1991: Suspension of the EC sanctions against Croatia, Slovenia and Macedonia.

5.12.1991: The Austrian parliament calls their government to recognize the independence of Slovenia and Croatia → Kohl promises the presidents of Slovenia and Croatia to recognize them until the end of 1991.

6.12.1991 The Croats recall Mesic → he is no longer president of Yugoslavia.

7.12.1991: The EC commission declares in a report that the federal republic of Yugoslavia is in a phase of disintegration → It is now up to the republics to find a solution for its unity.

15.12.1991: The UNSC passes resolution 724 → to delegate a small group of monitors to Yugoslavia.

19.12.1991: The cabinet of the German government agrees on the recognition of the Yugoslav republics. Diplomatic relations with the republics should begin on 15.1.1992.

20.12.1991: The prime minister of Yugoslavia resigns after 80% of the budget will be used to finance the military.

22.12.1991: Increase of ethnic tensions in Bosnia.

3.4 1992 - Total Break out of the Bosnian War

2.1.1992: The UN special representative Vance together with the leadership of Belgrade and Zagreb agree upon a cease-fire.

3.1.1992: Meeting of Serbian groups about a new state → which should be the juridical successor of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia.

8.1.1992: A delegation of 50 military observers of the UN arrives in Yugoslavia to monitor the ceasefire. A helicopter of the EC got shot by the JNA → General Zvonko gets suspended.

9.1.1992: Milosevic declares the war as over.

15.1.1992: Recognition of Slovenia and Croatia through the EC, but not of Bosnia and Macedonia, because of some "still open questions".

16.1.1992: the representative of Serbia declares in the state presidency territorial claims of Serbian settlements in Croatia.

21.1.1992: The UNSC decides to deploy 11 500 soldiers, policemen and civilians in various crises zones.

25.1.1992: Blasting of the train bridge between Tuzla and Belgrade.

4.2.1992: Serbian troops build barricades in Mostar.

21.2.1992: Lisboa: Moslems, Croats and Serbs agree on a "kantonalisation" of Bosnia (2 weeks later Izetbegovic takes it back).

29.2.1992: Referendum in Bosnia → 99% for independence, boycott by the Bosnian Serbs.

1.3.1992: Referendum in Montenegro → 95% vote for staying within Yugoslavia. First dead people in Sarajevo → at a Serbian wedding a priest and standard-bearer got killed by Moslems. Serbs build barricades in Sarajevo as well.

3.3.1992: The citizens of Sarajevo ask Karadzic and Izetbegovic for a common meeting.

10.3.1992: The first contingent of peacekeeping troops arrive in Croatia.

13.3.1992: Bosnian Serbs refuse the EC plan (split from Yugoslavia, federalisation) → the Serbs call for 3 independent states.

19.3.1992: Agreement in Bosnia → Common state of three nations.

28.3.1992: The Bosnian Serbs pass – as they were supposed to – a constitution → Moslems and Croats dissociate.

5.4.1992: Peace demonstrations in Sarajevo → 6 people got killed by Serbian snipers.

6.4.1992: EC recognition of Bosnia. The USA recognizes Bosnia, Croatia and Slovenia. The Serbian Democratic party in Bosnia declares an independent Serbian Republic of Bosnia Herzegovina → the hostility in Bosnia begins.

7.4.1992: The UNSC increases its peacekeeping troops from 11 500 to 14 000.

10.4.1992: The Bosnian Serbs conquer Zvornik.

18.4.1992: Izetbegovic asks Turkey for support.

27.4.1992: The parliament in Belgrade proclaims a new federal republic of Yugoslavia which claims it right to become a member of international organizations.

30.4.1992: Bosnia becomes the 52nd member of the OSCE → The decision upon the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia is laid off.

2..5.1992: The JNA takes Izetbegovic as hostage.

3.5.1992: The JNA lets Izetbegovic free, as the counter-move the JNA troops, who were blocked in its barracks in Sarajevo, are allowed to leave → the soldiers got attacked by Moslems → 400 dead.

5.5.1992: The state presidency of Belgrade hands over the military commando to local commanders. The JNA gets renamed in Serbian Army of the Republic Bosnia.

6.5.1992: Under the chairmanship of Lord Carrington a new round of the peace conference starts → he states that all conflict parties are responsible for the escalation.

10.5.1992: Izetbegovic asks the UNO for military support after 1300 civilians got killed within a month.

11.5.1992: The EC foreign ministers deciding upon sanctions against Serbia → and recall their ambassadors from Belgrade.

13.5.1992: The OSCE wants the exclusion of rest-Yugoslavia → all EC observers are leaving Bosnia.

15.5.1992: Withdrawal of the UN headquarters in Sarajevo → heavy battles are breaking out.

22.5.1992: The UN General Assembly decides the admission of Bosnia, Croatia and Slovenia as member states.

27.5.1992: Explosion with 27 dead people in Sarajevo. The commander of the UN troops MacKencie assumes Moslems as perpetrator → he got fired.

29.5.1992: Artillery attacks on Sarajevo. Massacre caused by grenades, Bosnian Serbs get shot while leaving their military bases – as agreed upon → heaviest fighting and until now.

30.5.1992: The UNSC decides upon → total embargo against Serbia and Montenegro (economic, weapon, suspension of civil flights, exclusion from sport events) as reaction of the massacre in Sarajevo. The UNSC declares Serbia as responsible for the continuing of the armed conflict → the Serbian president declares his republic has no control over the Serbian irregular combat units in Bosnia.

4.6.1992: NATO and WEU debate upon air strikes against Serbian military camps in Bosnia.

8.6.1992: The UNSC authorizes the Secretary General to increase the protection forces for Yugoslavia with 1100. The resolution urges the conflict parties to ensure the delivery of humanitarian goods and suggests a protection zone for the airport of Sarajevo.

27.6.1992: The EC threatens with military intervention in order to transport humanitarian goods to Sarajevo.

28.6.1992: The French president Mitterand travels to Sarajevo and stops the debate over a military intervention.

2.7.1992: US warships send to the Adriatic coast.

3.7.1992: The Croats declare a Croatian community in the province of Herceg-Bosna with Mostar as the capital (no Croatian majority in Mostar).

7.7.1992: The OSCE passes a decision to suspend the delegation of Yugoslavia for 100 days from all meetings.

10.7.1992: The WEU decides to send several warships and investigation planes to monitor the UN embargo.

13.7.1992: The UNSC authorizes the SC to send 1600 additional Blue helmets and civil personnel to Sarajevo → The Bosnian Serbs start a great offensive: Gorazde gets attacked and Mostar re-conquered.

14.7.1992: The American Serb Milan Panic becomes Prime Minister of Yugoslavia and wants to create peace within 100 days.

18.7.1992: Thousands of Bosnian refugees are blocked at the Croatian-Slovenian boarder, 2 days later they get accepted in Austria, Germany and Italy.

24.7.1992: New bloodshed through Bosnian Serbs in Sarajevo.

1.8.1992: Two children get shot while their evacuation → several NGOs ignored the UN warnings.

6.8.1992: Bosnian refugees report about Serbian concentration camps, torture etc. 130 000 are estimated to be detained in 96 camps → the Serbs accuse the Moslems of killing 6000 Serbs.

7.8.1992: The UNSC authorizes the UN personnel to control immigration and costume service at the borders of the protection zones.

10.8.1992: The Bosnian foreign minister Silajdzic calls in Islamabad Moslem organisations for support.

13.8.1992: The UNSC calls upon the UN member states to insure independent or within the framework of regional alliances the delivery of humanitarian goods → the press writes that it allows the use of force.

14.8.1992: The OSCE declares its will to take part in military operations under the auspices of the UN.

18.8.1992: The Serbian Air Force throws napalm bombs on Jajce and Gorazde according to Bosnian radio reports.

21.8.1992: The Croatian radio station claims again that the Serbian Air Force uses napalm and splitter bombs around Gorazde.

25.8.1992 Lord Carrington resigns. Successor: David Owen.

31.8.1992: Combatants from Turkey, Algeria, United Arab Emirates and Sudan supporting their religious brothers in Bosnia.

2.9.1992: The NATO supports the UN to secure humanitarian aid and to control heavy arms in the battle zones.

5.9.1992: Italian transport aircraft gets shot.

6.9.1992: The negotiators of the UN (Vance) and the EC (Owen) urge the Serbian troops to give their heavy arms under international control, as agreed in former resolutions.

10.9.1992: Moslem units kill two French Blue helmets soldiers.

22.9.1992: Rest-Yugoslavia gets expelled from the UN General Assembly.

5.10.1992: Lord Owen recommends air strikes → after the drama of the Moslim enclaves in east Bosnia.

6.10.1992: For the first time in history the UNSC prevails an inquiry of war crimes and genocide.

7.10.1992: Bosnian Serbs conquer Brosanski Brod.

12.10.1992: Moslems and Croats threat with poison-gas counter strikes.

31.10.1992: Jajice falls in Bosnian Serbian hands → thousands refuge into the mountains.

10.11.1992: The UNSC adopts a new resolution to send 75 monitors to observe the restrictions on military flights.

16.11.1992: → The UNSC meets again