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**PREVENTING THE INTERNATIONALIZATION  
OF THE YUGOSLAV WAR**

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## 1. Introduction

The three-way war in Bosnia-Herzegovina is the most crucial security problem for the Balkan region at the moment. At the same time, war in Croatia is not quite over, and it threatens to rekindle on a major scale at any time. As of the Spring of 1993, wide-ranging arguments are being considered in the West on what could and should be done, if anything, to stop this conflict. An even more horrifying prospect, however, is that this war might expand beyond the borders of currently belligerent states and, for the first time, also beyond those of the former Yugoslavia.

This paper argues that it is in the Western security interest to do its utmost to prevent this possibility from becoming a reality; it will explain why time and resources should be devoted to this end immediately; and it will propose a military option that should serve this purpose. It by no means argues that the military instrument should be the only, or even the main, instrument to employ toward the goal of preventing the spread of the Bosnian war. But it does hold that it is the one that could and should be used most quickly and effectively to achieve limited but essential aims.

There are at least four reasons why the expansion of the Bosnian war beyond the current geographical area would pose a far greater risk to Western security than the current Bosnian war. First, should the war spread beyond the territory of the ex-Yugoslavia, the danger of its further conflagration would be immediate, it would be unpredictable and it may not be controllable.

Second, any such spread would most likely involve NATO allies (Greece and Turkey) against one another, and it would thus constitute a possibly fatal blow to the organization at a time when it is struggling to find a new identity and adjust to the new post Cold War risks and challenges.

Third, a wider war might contribute to break the fragile solidarity between the West and Russia, help to strengthen the forces of restoration in that country, and perhaps go as far as priming a re-start of some kind of Cold War-type hostile East-West relationship.

Finally, a wider international Balkan war would doubtlessly fuel the nationalist virus elsewhere in Europe: the problem would no longer just concern the ex-Yugoslavs, who according to some simplistic press assessments "just hate each other", but it would be far wider. The spread of the war would definitively break the taboo against war in Europe, and put an end to post World War II era of peace in the continent. It might be argued that this era has ended already, as war has already broken out. But while a resolution of the Yugoslav war within the borders of the former Yugoslavia might make for an incidental episode, dramatic as it may be, a wider war

would carry the pan-continental implications that, luckily, have not developed so far.

In short, a wider Balkan war would mean a return to a multilateral and unstable balance of power, to something close to what Thomas Hobbes referred to as the "state of nature", a state of affairs that increasingly appeals to nationalists in both East and West but in which life tends to be "nasty, brutish and short".

For all these reasons, to take early measures to prevent this possible conflagration is of the utmost urgency. It is perhaps even more urgent than stopping war in Bosnia itself, though the two are obviously connected. It is a matter of the highest priority for the West as a whole as well as for the states of the region concerned.

## **2. How the war could spread beyond the former Yugoslavia**

Given the unpredictable nature of the current situation in the former Yugoslavia, any hypothesis with respect to its development must be cautious. However, several scenarios can be hypothesized in which the current war might expand. The most widely considered is that the Serbian-Montenegrin federation will consider it necessary to use force in Kosovo, perhaps as a result of violent unrest there. Alternatively, armed repression could serve as a tool to vindicate the Belgrade government vis-a-vis its own people in the face of defeat or compromise in Bosnia.

Either of these scenarios could easily draw in the Republic of Albania and the Albanians living in Macedonia. There is a virtually unanimous consensus in Albania that government, people and armed forces would not stand by if Albanians in Kosovo are massacred the way the Bosnian Muslims are. The realization that Tirana's rather destitute armed forces would not be able to do much is not as important as the fact that they will be sucked in the war.

A corollary of this scenario is that from Kosovo the war could speedily move on to Macedonia. At that point, the involvement of Greece, Turkey and Bulgaria would probably be only a matter of time, and, for that matter, not too much time. In conclusion, the possibility of war in Kosovo clearly represents the most imminent danger in the near future of the post-Yugoslav succession of crises.

## **3. An option to prevent the spread of the war**

An appropriate way to try to help prevent the above scenario, and to contain damage should it nonetheless occur, would be to deploy international military forces preventively in the region concerned before further hostilities start. These should be not just observers or limited contingents with solely humanitarian tasks, but full-fledged combined-arms combat formations able to perform at least a true interposition mission, and preferably some interdiction and ground support as well.

It would be ideal to deploy these forces first of all in the Kosovo itself. This could be done by asking the Serbs to withdraw and the Kosovars to disarm, and it could serve the interests of both parties: the Serbs would see their formal sovereignty in Kosovo reconfirmed by the international community, and the Kosovars would be

protected from further repression. Realistically, however, this option is unlikely to become a workable one for now, and as long as the war in Bosnia goes on. Maybe, in a few months, it could be negotiated with Belgrade against a (perhaps partial and gradual) lifting of the sanctions and in the context of a solution to the Bosnian war.

But other options are available immediately. One would be to deploy forces preventively in Albania and Macedonia, that is to say, in the regions immediately adjacent to the most critical current crisis point. The United Nations Security Council, or the CSCE, should provide the necessary legitimacy through appropriate resolutions. Because this plan would not require any action which would be directly hostile toward Serbia, Russian consent in the Security Council should not be difficult to obtain, particularly after president Yeltsin's victory in the referendum of 25 April.

NATO would then be asked to provide the required command structures, airlift, logistics and intelligence, and some, though not necessarily all, combat troops. The amount of the latter could total some perhaps up to 50,000 in each of the two sectors. However, there could be considerably less at the start of the operation, with reinforcement options gradually readied by participating states at home for later deployment.

This force would be tasked with the following missions: First, it should establish a military presence near the next potential crisis area, in order to deter Serbian military action in Kosovo. Given the propensity displayed by the Belgrade leaders for rational and calculated risk-taking, it is probable that they would do their utmost to avoid coming to direct military contact with NATO-led forces. Besides, the mere presence of such formations in the two areas proposed would send a strong signal of political resoluteness that president Milosevic would find hard to ignore.

Second, these forces would prevent a war in Kosovo, should it break out, from spreading outside of Kosovo. They would have, quite simply, to make sure that Serbian formations would in no way be able to cross the Kosovo-Albanian and the Serbian-Macedonian borders. It is for this particular purpose that NATO military sources at SHAPE have suggested to the author that the level of approximately 50,000 troops might be appropriate.

Third, the force would prevent intervention into Kosovo by forces and peoples stationed in neighbouring countries, especially Albania but also Albanians in Macedonia. It would also serve to achieve a greater degree of territorial control in order to repress smuggling toward Serbia of arms and other embargoed items. In their newly acquired political liveliness, Albanians in Albania might disagree about many policies of the new democratic government, but about one thing there is virtual unanimity in the country: the Republic of Albania will not stand by and watch if Serbia escalates the repression in Kosovo to higher level of violence than have already been achieved. The Albanian armed forces are obsolete and to a large degree lack both maintenance and spare parts, and would pose no match for the Serbian army. But this does not seem to be a factor in the calculations of the government (or the opposition) in Tirana.

Fourth, this same firmer territorial control in Macedonia would provide a guarantee that the controversies surrounding that country's entrance in the

international community would not result in open conflict, in the state itself or with its neighbours. Despicable as it might be, a conflict in Kosovo would still be a lesser evil if compared to a full-fledged international war in Macedonia. First of all, this would be the case from the point of view of the Macedonians themselves. But it would be true also for Western Europeans, given the high likelihood that Greece and Turkey (as well as Bulgaria) might be sucked into that conflict as well.

Fifth, should the development of extreme circumstances so warrant, the presence of this force would provide NATO with a firm base in case a more massive employment of forces in Bosnia, or against Serbia proper, should be decided upon. After the beginning of the NATO enforcement of the *no-fly-zone* over Bosnia, the near term developments of Western involvement in that war can not be easily predicted. Further escalation against Serbia, or against Serbian forces in Bosnia itself, can not be ruled out, and in fact seems to become more likely. Should this option be pursued by NATO, a strong base in Albania and in Macedonia would be a clear military asset.

Finally, in a more general sense, the proposed deployment would have an additional advantage for NATO itself. It would prove the point that NATO is just as needed, and perhaps even more needed, now than during the Cold War. Thus, it would provide a powerful *raison d'etre* and prevent a dangerous renationalization of security policies in the West.

#### 4. Objections

The plan presented above is admittedly an ambitious one, and several objections could be moved against it. This section will analyze these objections one at the time, and rebut each in turn. First, it might be argued that preventive deployments *around* Kosovo could encourage the Serbs to start "ethnic cleansing" *in* Kosovo itself. They would know that NATO troops would prevent their crossing the border into either Albania or Macedonia, but might assume that NATO would not interfere in the "internal affairs" of Serbia itself. The *cordon sanitaire* might effectively seal off Kosovo and thereby make it safe for genocide.

In reality, Belgrade would face a high degree of uncertainty about what the contingent in Albania and Macedonia would or would not do, and under what circumstances. No formal or informal guarantee should be provided by NATO to the effect that the force would *not* intervene in the Kosovo itself, should its participant members so choose and the United Nations so authorize. Even a slight chance of having to face a Western led coalition should make the Serbs cautious, all the more so because they would know that no one would question Serbian authority in Kosovo as long as a repression does *not* take place. On the contrary, a continued Western military absence from the region might encourage Serbian boldness in Kosovo, where a repression or ethnic cleansing might be seen as an easy asset in the Great Serbian demagoguery of Mr. Milosevic.

Another objection is that the proposed deployment could result in intense corps-to-corps combat, which would produce high casualty levels and therefore

would be unacceptable for all Western defense establishments—not to speak of public opinions. However, NATO would not seek ground combat in area it wants to protect, and in fact it would avoid it. It would, on the contrary, exploit superior technology, and first of all air-power, to weaken the capability of Serbia to wage effective ground war.

Third, it might be objected that an operation that were massive enough to be effective would cost too much. However, whatever the parameters one chooses to adopt, these costs are likely to be manageable. They would amount to only a small fraction of the costs of the Gulf war of 1990-1991. In the table below, a few hypotheses are put forward that should provide a range of possible deployment patterns. All these figures can be argued with, but the total estimates should provide a rough idea of the costs involved.

In any case, the costs of inaction, in case of an internationalization of a Kossovian war would be far greater, no matter what the assumptions. A wider war in Europe could be far more costly to the West than Iraq's invasion of Kuwait.

Costs of various hypotheses of preventive deployments, US dollars			
Soldiers	daily per soldier	total per month	total per year (Mill.)
50,000	100	150,000,000	1,800
50,000	200	300,000,000	3,600
75,000	150	337,500,000	4,050
100,000	100	300,000,000	3,600
100,000	200	600,000,000	7,200
Author's estimates.			

Of course, actual costs would depend on how long the force would have to remain in place. It might be expected that it would be needed for perhaps a year or so at least, and probably a smaller contingent might have to remain deployed for much longer, well after the negotiation of a final settlement, though probably at a lower state of readiness. Finally, costs could be defrayed in part with the help of states not directly participating in the military effort, such as Japan, Saudi Arabia and NATO states not directly contributing troops—more likely than not this would be the case for Germany.

A final objections to the proposed plan is that Albania and Macedonia would not accept it. Surely, negotiations with those two countries would have to be undertaken, but there is good reason to believe that they might be positively and swiftly resolved. Albania wants to join NATO. While this goal is unrealistic in the

short term, the proposed plan would be an example of concrete cooperation, and would build-up Albanian credit in case NATO is enlarged in the future. The government of Tirana seems to be well-disposed toward virtually any proposal coming from Brussels.

As for Macedonia, it would have much to gain and little to lose from a strengthening of the UN-mandated contingent already on its territory. There is no conceivable scenario in which an expanded war would be in Macedonia's interest. At a moment when it is still struggling to gain admittance into the international community, acceptance of the proposed plan would be an important step toward the completion of the process of international recognition. Moreover, hosting NATO-led formations would be a boon to the international standing of the country and of its leadership.