

The conflict that could've been averted

By Marcus Papadopoulos

The trial of Radovan Karadzic in The Hague, which has been stalled by the former Bosnian Serb leader's refusal to show up in court, is likely to be used by the West to justify NATO's current policy of "humanitarian intervention."

At a time when the NATO-led operation in Afghanistan is becoming increasingly unpopular in countries which have committed troops to this theatre of war, Western officials are likely to propagate the generally accepted notion - created by Western governments to cover up the real, geo-political motives for their involvement in the Yugoslav civil war - that it was NATO intervention which ended the Bosnian war and put an end to Karadzic's "genocidal policies."

However, as the case of Iraq has shown, the West has no compunction in fabricating a story for its own self-gain.

The Yugoslav civil war was a conflict which could have been averted had it not been for the actions of the US, German and certain other European governments who, according to Lord Peter Carrington, chairman of the Geneva-based conference on Yugoslavia, "made it sure there was going to be a conflict" in that region.

Following the collapse of the Eastern Bloc in 1989, Germany viewed the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia as standing in the way of the establishment of free-market economies across the whole of the Balkans and eastern Europe.

The German government encouraged feelings of nationalist secession within multi-ethnic Yugoslavia, principally in Slovenia and Croatia, with the assistance of Ustashe exiles, second world war-era Croatian fascists.

It should be noted that the nazi-installed Ustasha government which ran the Independent State of Croatia during the second world war was responsible for the genocide of hundreds of thousands of Serbs, with many having been exterminated at the Jasenovac concentration camp.

Croatia's declaration of independence in 1991 under President Franjo Tudjman, a Holocaust denier, was recognised by Germany despite warnings that such a recognition would result in an eruption of fighting between Croats and Croatia's Serbian minority, which constituted 12 per cent of the country's total population.

This war, referred to by then UN envoy Cyrus Vance, as "Genscher's war" - after Germany's foreign minister Hans-Dietrich Genscher who had pushed for German recognition of Croatian independence - laid the ground for the war in Bosnia.

The prevailing view in the West is that the Bosnian war was ignited by the Serbs who were intent on achieving a "Greater Serbia."

Western governments, assisted by journalists ignorant of Yugoslavia's complex history and by public relations firms, demonised the Serbs and thereby helped stifle debate on alternative causes and events of the Bosnian war.

As Lewis MacKenzie, the former UN protection force general in former Yugoslavia and commander of the Sarajevo sector, has said: "Those of us who served as UN commanders in Bosnia realised the majority of the media reports were biased, to say the least. Whenever we tried to set the record straight we were - and continue to be - accused of being 'Serbian agents'."

Bosnia's Serb community, which constituted a third of the region's population at the beginning of 1992, first settled on these lands in the seventh century.

Bitter experiences of foreign occupation, especially Ottoman and nazi, shaped the national psyche of Bosnian Serbs.

The Serb population of Bosnia incurred significant demographic losses during the second world war as a result of the mass murder and expulsion of its people by German and Bosnian-Muslim forces. The latter was spearheaded by the 13th Volunteer Mountain Division of the Waffen-SS (Handschar) and the Young Muslims, an Islamist organisation.

Memories of the second world war were ingrained in the minds of the Bosnian Serb community's leaders and people, leading up to the outbreak of the war in Bosnia in 1992.

Following the Bosnian presidential election in November 1990, which resulted in Alija Izetbegovic coming to power, tension in Bosnia between the three main ethnic groups increased.

President Izetbegovic began visiting Muslim countries, such as Iran and Saudi Arabia, and acted as if he had a mandate on behalf of all the ethnic groups back home.

But there was logic to Izetbegovic's behaviour. It is indisputable that he was an Islamist, having been a member of the Young Muslims and having published a book entitled the Islamic Declaration in which he called for a "political revolution" in Bosnia: "Our objective is the Islamisation of Muslims ..."

"There can be no peace or harmony between the 'Islamic religion' and non-Islamic social and political institutions."

The US quickly came to perceive the prospect of an independent Bosnia as yielding geopolitical benefits for US power.

Supporting the emergence of such a country would allow Washington to counter any future Russian influence in the region - Russia is historically an ally of the Serbs.

When president Izetbegovic unilaterally declared Bosnia's independence in March 1992, with prior assurances of US support by then US ambassador to Belgrade Warren Zimmerman, the Bosnian Serb leadership declared the Serbian Republic of Bosnia-Herzegovina with Radovan Karadzic as its elected head.

It should be borne in mind that in late 1991, the Bosnian Serbs had voted overwhelmingly in a referendum to stay within Yugoslavia.

Karadzic's decision was the only option available to defend centuries old Serbian territory.

Far from being the fault of the Bosnian Serbs, the war which engulfed Bosnia was the responsibility firstly of the US, in encouraging and then recognising Bosnian independence, and secondly, of Izetbegovic, who knew that war would follow a declaration of independence by Bosnia.

As the Bosniac leader said in 1991: "I would sacrifice peace for a sovereign Bosnia-Herzegovina, but for that peace in Bosnia-Herzegovina I would not sacrifice sovereignty."

The West's involvement in the break-up of Yugoslavia will not be heard in a court which is US-financed.

Indeed, the international criminal tribunal for the former Yugoslavia is simply a tentacle of Washington and NATO, which exists only to punish anyone who stands in the way of Western geopolitical objectives.

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