

WARRING WITHOUT BORDERS

Twice was enough

German leaders view Yugoslavia through the prism of past wars

BY JOSEF JOFFE
in Munich

WHEN THE most recent Balkan war broke out in 1991, it looked like a replay of the First World War. Germany and Austria lined up behind the former Hapsburg possessions of Croatia and Slovenia, pushing for speedy recognition of these two break-away republics.

The Western powers, those who had fought Berlin and Vienna in two world wars, seemed to line up behind Serbia. The United States, Britain and France opposed the break up of Yugoslavia and therefore sought to prevent independence for Croatia and Slovenia.

This Western strategy clearly favored Serbia, insofar as Serbia now claimed to uphold the tradition of a unitary Yugoslav state. Indeed, Serbia was always indistinguishable from Yugoslavia: Serbia ran the state, the army and the bureaucracy—which was the key reason for the revolt by the republics.

There was also sheer sentiment and historical memory at work. "I have not forgotten the historic ties between France and Serbia and the solidarity that bound them together in two world wars," proclaimed French President Francois Mitterand in 1992.

Was history repeating itself? Was the past so powerful that it would shape the present and future? It certainly looked that way, though it was hard to believe that democratic Germany would support Croatia just because Croatian fascists had been allied to Hitler during World War II.

What is much more plausible is that Bonn and Vienna were motivated by cultural affinities. After all, Croatia and Slovenia were Catholic rather than Orthodox, used Latin rather than Cyrillic script and were part of the German-speaking realm for centuries. Thus, there was a natural sympathy at



Adaptation of the film poster "Gone with the Wind" by Trio Design in Sarajevo.

work that made Germany and Austria support the cause of the break-away republics.

However, this historical-cultural argument begins to pale when we look at the second phase of the war—the Serbian attack against the Muslims of Bosnia-Herzegovina that began in the spring of 1992. Suddenly the German arm-twisting for speedy recognition of Croatia and Slovenia the previous year was ancient history. Now, with the Bosnian capital squarely in Serbian gunshots, *everyone* found themselves on the same side: against the Serbs and for the Muslims.

Overnight, historical memories and cultural affinities were shouldered aside by this moral imperative. The US, Britain, France and Germany were now all lined up on the side of the Muslim victims. But an important dividing line between Germany and the others remained. Britain and France have committed troops to support United Nations peace-keeping efforts, and the United States has used sporadic force against the Serbs. The Germans have been willing to do neither.

The rationale offered by the Germans for keeping their armed forces out of the conflict was history and their constitution. History, as Chancellor Helmut Kohl has claimed repeatedly, forbids German troops to tread in any place the Nazi armies had conquered,

least of all the Balkans. The Wehrmacht occupied Yugoslavia from 1941-45, waging a bitter war against the so-called Partisans and the civilian population.

In addition, the German government has routinely claimed for years that self-restraint is enshrined in the constitution. According to this interpretation, German troops could only be used for the defense of Germany or another member of NATO. Whether this is true or not is now up to the Constitutional Court to decide. A permissive ruling is expected, meaning that it would be perfectly constitutional for Bonn to furnish troops for peace-keeping missions and collective defense outside the NATO perimeter.

Even if this ruling is handed down, however, it is virtually certain that Germany will not intervene in this Balkan conflict, given the historical constraints Kohl keeps emphasizing. As a result, German influence will remain limited—it can, at best, vote in favor of military action through the NATO Council, but the dirty work will have to be done by other NATO countries.

Another constraint for Germany is Russia. Moscow has played a very du-

bious role in this conflict, and it is unclear whether Russia acted as a mediator between Serbs and Muslims or as a tacit ally of the Serbs.

The bombing run by American planes in April was strongly condemned by Russian President Boris Yeltsin, but he did not make it clear whether Russia rejects the use of force under any circumstances—it may be that Russian complaints are merely stratagems to force US acknowledgment of Russia as an indispensable partner. Regardless of which is true, Bonn's sensitivity towards Moscow makes it likely it will counsel caution when NATO considers military action.

But should history be a factor in tackling this conflict? Is 1994 in some way like 1914? The answer, for all the great powers in the region, is "yes". None of them has forgotten the First World War, a war that was triggered by a Bosnian Serb, Gavrilo Princip, when he murdered the Austrian crown prince in the summer of 1914. It was a war that nobody wanted, a war into which nations slid rather than rushed, a war that started because of seemingly minor national conflicts in the Balkans.

That was a powerful lesson. It still preoccupies European leaders 80 years later. For the West to act, it will take the leadership of the US. Given the zig-zag course taken by President Bill Clinton's administration, it is unlikely the US will provide this leadership.

Furthermore, pure morality is not enough to galvanize nations to risk their young in far-off wars. The sober bottom line is that the Europeans will not act without the Americans, and the Americans will not act without a clear European consensus. It is for this reason that the war in Bosnia will be fought until the participants are too exhausted to do anything but negotiate. ♦

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Fire brigade without hoses

In an effort to keep the peace in Bosnia, 35 nations have contributed 34,555 people to UN peacekeeping operations

Argentina	888	Indonesia	25	Portugal	62
Bangladesh	76	Ireland	28	Russian	
Belgium	1,048	Jordan	3,186	Federation	1,381
Brazil	33	Kenya	1,026	Slovak Republic	583
Canada	2,006	Malaysia	1,512	Spain	1,371
Colombia	25	Nepal	955	Sweden	1,105
Czech Republic	935	Netherlands	2,202	Switzerland	15
Denmark	1,331	New Zealand	9	Tunisia	10
Egypt	451	Nigeria	47	Ukraine	1,021
Finland	284	Norway	656	United Kingdom	3,461
France	6,928	Pakistan	30	United States	800
Ghana	22	Poland	1,036	Venezuela	7

As of 30 April 1994, including civil police, military observers and troops

SOURCE: UN