

The Bewildering War that Threatens to Turn Full-scale

by Benjamin Cohen

The civil war resulting from the break-up of Yugoslavia is threatening to enlarge into a full-scale war in Europe's most volatile region. The war may have already claimed 120,000 lives and has precipitated Europe's worst refugee crisis since World War Two. Gemini News Service analyses the factors behind conflict in Yugoslavia.

The Challenge for Bush

As the curtain falls on the Republican Convention in Houston, with George Bush renominated by the party for the second term, the real race begins for the incumbent President to reduce the wide gap in the opinion poll between himself and the Democratic challenger Bill Clinton. Bush is in an unenviable position which has shown little or no improvement by the kind of attacks, some undoubtedly in bad taste like describing the Governor of Arkansas as "womanizer and draft dodger", made against Clinton, nor, one should say, by the defensive position taken by the vice Presidential running mate Dan Quayle, a liability for the Republican ticket, that he would not repeat the mistakes during the campaign he had made in the last one in 1988.

Bush may just manage to demonstrate that Clinton is stoppable if only he can prove, as an unidentified Republican Senator said before the Convention, that "the country has a reason for voting him in for the second term." The consensus among experts is that he can earn such an approval from the dubious electorate not so much on his own record as for any blunder that may be committed by the Democratic candidate.

Judging by a comparison of the two platforms, it is hard to say where Clinton may commit that unlikely blunder or get on the wrong side of the undecided section of the US voters. The Democratic call for the "restructuring of the US military spending" to provide more funds for health, education and environment, has already come under the Republican attack with argument that it aims at producing a "free fall" on the defence budget. It is still far from clear how the electorate will react to the two positions. It will probably endorse a platform that takes the middle position, offering the best chance for the reduction of the budget deficit and a stronger financial commitment for environmental protection.

Unlike in 1988, the Republican Party may well face a tough test in establishing the credibility of the administration in the field of foreign affairs. It is no good for the party — or the President himself — to take credit for ending the superpower rivalry and thus, as they said in Houston, "making the world safer for humanity." The Democratic platform has no problem in taking such a claim into pieces, blaming the Republican government for its timidity, indecision and even double-talk in tackling the problems arising from the collapse of the Soviet Union. Under George Bush, the Democratic Party says, crises have been "managed", rather than prevented or resolved. Hence, the next administration may still have Saddam Hussein to deal with. It may also have Bosnia, the faltering reform programme in the republics of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) and the establishment of a mechanism for financial assistance to countries in Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union. Then, there will be a massive refugee problem in Europe, adding a new dimension to the crisis facing the Third World in general and parts of Asia and Africa in particular.

To suggest, at this stage, that Bill Clinton would be better able than George Bush to deal with these problems just because he has captured a part of the American imagination is absurd. No matter who wins the race on November 3, he must look at the scenario in a wider perspective, not merely in terms of the US leadership, but in the context of some kind of a global partnership. This has been seldom done by successive US Administrations. In some ways, the trend in Washington of looking at every problem through the US eyes is getting stronger day by day, in the process, creating other regional hegemonistic powers and alliances. Unless this process is reversed and nations in general and major powers in particular start sharing a new global vision for tomorrow, people in the outside world will continue to view the forthcoming US election with the cynicism that today dominates the thinking of the American electorate.

Close Those Gates at 10

Two angry letters have appeared in a leading vernacular national daily denouncing the closing of the gates of the residential halls of women students of the Dhaka University soon after dusk. These are public residences and public scrutiny is well in order.

The Universities are there — and we need many many more of them right now — to be the vanguard of our social and cultural progress where our intellectual and aesthetic and heritage-related capacities as a nation would always be in a ferment. And 'halls' — and not only the classroom — were supposed to do this job of fashioning raw youth into mature humanity wide awake of man's endeavours in every clime and throughout history to soar into knowledge and love, co-operation and accommodation leaving behind ignorance, pettiness and intolerance. And this applied specially to our residential-type 'Oxford of the East'.

The halls for women scholars never fitted into such ideas of our university. One expected that with the march of time towards a more equitable world — sex-wise, religion-wise material-living-wise, the women's halls would on their own move towards the condition of those boarded by male students. Reality has belied that expectation. An example of this is the closing time.

While either in the classroom or at the halls, the teachers, according to set traditions of university education, treat the students as gentlemen and almost as peers — all that the woman student gets from the teachers running her hall is a stern and Sanctimonious elder sister dead bent on guarding the morals of the young one. University students comprise ladies and gentlemen and no errant younger brother or sister. They must be respected in order that the teacher becomes respectable in return — and more because that respect is essential to enable the student to come into his or her own — which is about all there is to education. The closing times of the women's halls and hostels — and their anomalies — testify to the absence of that important element of respect for the young ones who need it more than the older ones.

This is enviable — the next-door neighbours Rokeya Hall and Shamsunnahar Hall always shut their doors half-an-hour before or after the other. Why shouldn't the closing times of all the women's halls of the university be brought in line with the far more practical-minded times of the women's hostels of the medical colleges and the engineering university which is 10 pm round the year? And in those hostels they are quite liberal even after 10 and the morals of their inmates have not been heard to have been compromised for that reason.

THE Balkans, traditionally Europe's most volatile region, is again facing the prospect of full-scale war, and Europe the worst refugee crisis since World War Two. Two million people have been driven from their homes.

The war in Croatia, which ended in a shaky ceasefire earlier this year, claimed 20,000 lives. Now, in neighbouring Bosnia-Herzegovina, up to 100,000 people may have been killed.

Uppermost in the minds of Western strategists is the thought that the war could spread. A complicated set of alliances has emerged, drawing in Greece and Serbia on one side, and Albania, Turkey, Bosnia and Croatia on the other. At stake is not just the control of the Balkan region, but the content of its political, economic and cultural identity.

Though Bosnia's leaders have issued strident calls for outside military intervention, they are faced with two main difficulties. The first is that while institutions like the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO), the Western European Union (WEU) and the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE) are following the direction of the conflict, they do not believe the war threatens Western interests.

The second is that the European public does not really understand the conflict, and is therefore bewildered by the images of human suffering bombarding television screens every night.

A proper understanding of the conflict and its implications for European security is essential if something is to be done. What is also essential is to realise that further manipulation of ex-Yugoslavia's complex ethnic mix will lead to more conflict — something which the European Community (EC) has so far failed to grasp.

The common view of the Yugoslav war is that it is the consequence of lifting the lid on decades of communist suppression of ethnic tensions. Such a view not only belies the true origins of the war, but obstructs the search for a solution based on democracy and coexistence.

It is certainly true that the experience of World War Two left bitter memories for Serbs and Croats. Hitler's 1941 invasion dealt the final blow to the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes created in 1918. Yugoslavia was partitioned among the Axis powers, with Croatia ending up as the biggest state, incorporating Bosnia-Herzegovina.

Some of the war's most horrific atrocities — against Serbs, Roma and Jews — were committed in Yugoslavia (ex-UN Secretary General Waldheim served there as a Wehrmacht officer). But the partisans under Josip Broz Tito, who were victorious in 1944, were drawn from all sections of the population.

Under Tito, Yugoslavia was distinguished by its break with Stalin in 1948 and by its concept of socialist self-management. Tito also headed, with Egypt's Nasser and India's Nehru, the Non-Aligned Movement.

The 1950s and 1960s were a boom period for Yugoslavia. But by the beginning of the 1970s, the fragile nature of the federation began to show.

The main reason for this was economic, although there

were sporadic outbreaks of Croatian nationalism (Tito himself was of mixed Croatian and Slovene origin). By the time of Tito's death in 1980, external debt was rising and the gap in wealth distribution between the north and south of the country was widening.

The failure of Prime Minister Ante Markovic's economic reforms, and the election of Slobodan Milosevic to the Serb presidency in 1987, signalled that the break-up of Yugoslavia was on the way.

Although Milosevic is known for launching the war against Croatia in 1991, his career as a Greater Serbian nationalist began earlier. In 1989, he embarked on a campaign of repression against the Albanian majority in Kosovo, a province in the south-west of

allowed the deployment of 14,000 UN peacekeeping troops in Croatia. But the war was far from over. EC recognition presented Bosnia-Herzegovina with an appalling dilemma: either to remain as part of rump Yugoslavia with Serbia and Montenegro, or go it alone. Either way, war was likely.

On January 15, the EC formally recognised Croatia and Slovenia under German pressure, even though its own Badinter Commission, which examined human and minority rights in the republics, concluded that Croatia had not met the necessary standards.

The report recommended recognition of the southern-most republic of Macedonia, but this has been consistently vetoed by Greece, which argues that the name "Macedonia" implies a territorial claim on its northern territories.

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Fighting began in April, in the wake of an independence referendum boycotted by many Serbs and international recognition of Bosnia's independence. Currently, around 80 per cent of Bosnia's territory is under Serbian control.

Bosnia is in many ways a microcosm of Yugoslavia, with Muslims (who are defined as a nationality) making up 43 per

cent of its population, Serbs 34 per cent and Croats 17 per cent.

The worst crimes of the war have been committed in Bosnia. The policy of "ethnic cleansing" — clearing non-Serbs from their homes, is reminiscent of World War Two. According to figures from the Bosnian Presidency in the capital Sarajevo, around 96,000 people have been placed in 57 makeshift concentration camps.

Bosnian President Alija Izetbegovic has pleaded with the West to send in troops. Many commentators have pointed out that if Serbia is not neutralized in Bosnia, fighting will erupt in Kosovo and Macedonia.

Should the West intervene? There is a definite reluctance to engage with a Serbian army which knows the terrain and possesses mobile weaponry in a country which, unlike Kuwait, has no vital resources. But moral questions have also been raised, principally the inadmissibility of taking territory by force. And, if the war does spread, the West will surely blame itself for not having reacted earlier.

The indications seem to be that Western leaders realise the dimensions of the problem but are still searching for a political solution. Their latest attempt is to reinvigorate the EC peace conference by holding a new round of talks in London on August 17. Among those invited are UN Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali and US Secretary of State James Baker. Bosnia's Foreign Minis-

ter Haris Stizdizic has already said that he is unwilling to enter into talks "while a gun is being held to our heads."

Bosnia's leadership is also deeply unhappy with EC plans to cantonise Bosnia along ethnic lines, arguing that this plays into the hands of Serb militants and makes a mockery of Bosnia's recognition as an independent state. The increased search for a political solution has allowed Serbia to explore ways through which it can save face, despite the UN sanctions.

Milan Panic, a US businessman who is now Prime Minister of the rump Yugoslavia, has tried to present a reasonable face, saying that he wants peace and discussing with British Prime Minister John Major the application of the "safe havens" idea, used for the Kurds after the Gulf war, to Bosnia.

If a real solution is to be found, a prerequisite is ending the fighting and ensuring that Serbia and Croatia cancel any territorial claims against Bosnia. More important is recognising Bosnia's nationalities. In this regard, an interesting proposal has come from Professor Zoran Pajic, of Sarajevo University, for a UN Trusteeship Authority along the same lines as the one in Cambodia.

The imperative in the West is for creative thinking. Without an imaginative approach, the danger of massive military intervention in the Balkans to stop a regional war will become a reality. Should that happen, communities will be driven further apart and fears that the West is just an international policeman will grow.

BENJAMIN COHEN, a journalist based at the Institute for War and Peace Reporting in London, is an editor of Yugo-Fax, a monthly briefing on the conflict in ex-Yugoslavia.

How Yugoslavia collapsed into war



Serbia. Milosevic's activities allowed Slovene and Croatian leaders — all former communists — to point to the Serbian threat in order to consolidate their power. In June 1991, Croatia and Slovenia seceded from the federation.

The war launched against Slovenia was swift and ended in a resounding defeat for the Yugoslav Federal Army (JNA). Slovenia was in any case seen as expendable, being ethnically homogeneous and outside the projections for Greater Serbia. Croatia, though, was an entirely different affair.

Under the ruling Croatian Democratic Union (HDZ), which came to power in April 1990, the 600,000 Serbs living in Croatia were put in an impossible position. Though there are moderates among them, the combination of Milosevic's war drive and Croatian President Franjo Tudjman's discriminatory measures meant that non-violent solutions were simply not given a chance.

As a result, militants like Milan Babic in Croatia's Serb enclaves proclaimed independence. The ensuing war led to the destruction of Croatia's economy — up to \$18 billion in direct damage — and of towns like Vukovar, Osijek and the historic port city of Dubrovnik.

Outside mediation was unsuccessful. The EC peace conference headed by British

Primetime Viewers Hooked on Cable TV

Liu Bo writes from Beijing

A latecomer in television, China now has 140 million TV sets and 700 million daily viewers

CHINA started rather late in television. But it has rapidly enjoyed the medium.

TV sets began to make their way in to ordinary Chinese homes only in the late 1970s and became popular in the 1980s. Today there are 140 million TV sets in China with about 700 million daily viewers.

Now it's not content just with ordinary TV but has found happiness in cable television as well.

Wang Xiaokang, 35, a recent visitor to Beijing, finds the capital attractive but its TV programmes "dull." She contrasts Hengyang, her hometown in central China's Hunan province, which has a cable TV station and eight regular channels (Beijing has only five regular channels).

In Hengyang, more than a fifth of the city's 150,000 homes is connected to the cable system. And subscribers to the Hengyang Community Antenna Television (CATV) are increasing by 1,500 each month.

Hengyang CATV is on the air 15 hours a day, broadcasting news, interviews, documentaries and entertainment programmes.

It is broadcast through one of Hengyang's nine channels

and relays the programmes of eight other TV stations in the country.

A survey shows that 80 per cent of cable TV subscribers virtually watch the cable station only. The director of Hengyang CATV, Zhang Peide, says flexible programming and the policy of the Ministry of Radio, Film and Television take the credit for such a high viewing rate.

The Hengyang cable station tailors its programming each day to serve the needs of different viewing groups. But from 9.15 pm through midnight, and on holidays through the next morning, the broadcast is for all, with foreign movies and Taiwan dramas as well as Chinese movies that have high-box-office records. Unlike ordinary channels, cable TV is allowed to devote half of its broadcasting time to imported films (ordinary channels are allowed no more than

20 per cent of airtime).

The initial investment from the Hengyang city government was only 30,000 yuan (US\$5,600). "We raised most of our funds from potential viewers," says Mr Zhang Peide. "Each subscriber paid 180 yuan for installations and a monthly service fee of five yuan."

Investment to date has reached 8 million yuan (US\$1.5 million), covering the purchase of a German-made transmitter, a Canadian-made amplifier and US-made cables, and the costs of installations and operation.

A dozen other cities now have cable TV — including Changsha in Hunan Province, Shaohi in neighbouring Hubei Province and Fuzhou and Foshan in coastal Fujian and Guangdong Province. These cities are all much smaller in size than Beijing. More than 9,000 large and

medium-size enterprises throughout the country have also equipped the homes of their employees with cable systems. These separate systems capture local TV signals, amplify them and send them to homes within their communities. Rather randomly, they broadcast movies or TV dramas of their own choice.

Beijing will soon have its own cable TV, with the installation of a 10-million-yuan (US\$1.89 million) cable station underway. Trial operation of the Beijing Cable TV is expected to start late this year.

Beijing's cable TV will be available in three channels — one for the broadcast of Chinese and foreign movies and TV dramas and two for general interest programmes. It will be the largest of China's existing cable stations.

The programmes of China's cable stations are mainly from programme exchanges with other TV stations and videotapes for open distribution in China. Some are imported or self-made.

The Ministry of Radio, Film and Television plans to set up in Beijing a 40-million-yuan (US\$7.5 million) cable programme centre, which is to be the leading programme supplier for Chinese cable stations. — *Depthnews Asia*

To the Editor...

Letters for publication in these columns should be addressed to the Editor and legibly written or typed with double space. For reasons of space, short letters are preferred, and all are subject to editing and cuts. Pseudonyms are accepted. However, all communications must bear the writer's real name, signature and address.

German dictionary

Sir, In the 17th July issue of your paper, there was an article, in the Weekend Magazine under the title "The Germans' Favourite Dictionary". During my long period of stay in the Federal Republic of Germany, I used to have a Duden as my regular companion.

This favourite dictionary of the Germans has witnessed the political history of Germany ever since 1880. The year 1880 saw the birth of this dictionary by a academician (probably a high school teacher) called Konrad Duden. Konrad Duden had in his mind the children in schools and other institutions, and also adults in higher seats of learning. This dictionary was also the need of the hour for the world of research in science and technology. Later this dictionary saw the First and Second World Wars and the birth of Socialism in Russia. After World War II, Germany was divided, even Duden began to occupy two places of publication — Leipzig and Mannheim. Leipzig, the city of Duden's

publication in East Germany, represented planned economy; Mannheim, the city of Duden's publication in West Germany (FRG), represented free-market economy.

Now after 40 years again there is one Duden for the whole of Germany (united Germany). Political changes have affected the vocabulary of this dictionary as well. The vocabulary of East and West Germany was different for about 40 years. Foreign words such as "computer" or "container" were used in both Germany. But words like Freiheit (freedom) and Demokratie (democracy) had different meanings in East and West Germany. Certain words like "handicap", "job", "story" and "team" began to be used in West Germany after the Second World War. Such foreign words were disliked by the East Germans. Again certain words were disliked by the Germans in the West. This discussion can be much longer.

Now we welcome this new Duden 1991 of united Germany. Hope this new dic-

tionary will remove hatred and bring about harmony in present Germany. The story of Duden could also be an exciting one for people learning German in Bangladesh. Hoping to have a look into this dictionary which will certainly reach our German Cultural Institute in Dhaka very soon. Or has it already arrived?

Mamun Haq
German Teacher
Dhaka University

Private forestry and other issues

Sir, For God's sake, will someone in the Ministry of Forestry and Environment give at least a reply to Mr S Sikander Ahmed's grievance that he has publicly and painfully projected so many times in the last two years (recent titled "Private Forestry" in The Daily Star" dated Aug 5)? It is a national shame that authorities do not have the decency to at least acknowledge, let alone solve, issues which are publicly put forward like this so many times over the years. Gruesome daylight public murders can be committed in this city to be investigated by Bangladesh Television's programme "Dristikon" but the authorities concerned can unabashedly refuse to give even an interview on the subject let alone solve the crime conclusively and apprehend the criminals.

Regarding Mr Sikander Ahmed's case, we are quite aware that the standard defence of the concerned officials will be that the bureaucratic snags are so complicated that no one man can solve his problems overnight and thus rid themselves of the responsibility invested on them with the money of the taxpayers.

May I point out to the concerned people that the day of the British Raj is now gone and it is now the duty of the officials to identify the issues and present them to the concerned ministers to be put forward to the elected representatives for enactment of necessary laws to make the life of the people easier. No issue can be so small that it cannot be scrutinised by the elected representatives of the people.

Mr Sikander Ahmed deserves a reply and so do we.

Syed M Quader
Mohammadpur, Dhaka

Open space in old Dhaka

Sir, It is heartening to learn that the government has been pleased to shift the Dhaka Central Jail from its congested site in Chawkbazar area of old Dhaka city to a new 100-acre beautiful site at Khashimpur under Gazipur District. In this connection, I would like to request the authorities concerned to preserve the pre-

sent site as an open green space for the benefit of the old city dwellers instead of converting it into a commercial place by selling the vacated lands in public auction as reported.

It is a standard norm that at least 10% of any city area or one acre per 20,000 population, whichever is more, should be kept reserved as open space in addition to another 10% as deferred land for future needs. But at present there is not a good park or an open green space worth mentioning left in the area. Moreover, the present Jail premises are connected with many past memories which the people of this country recall with great reverence. Hence, the present Jail area, if vacated, be preserved as a green open space in the old city.

F Ahmed
Free School Street, Dhaka

ABCS

Sir, The Government was pleased to give permission to form the Association of British Council Scholars (ABCS) with the aim to perpetuate links between Britain and Bangladesh which may be beneficial to the British Council (BC) and the Scholars. And with the hardwork of some highly dedicated persons, the ABCS has now become a well-established institution of more than five hundred BC Scholars.

Meanwhile, the ABCS is facing some problems on the way to gearing up its educational and cultural activities. It may be mentioned here that senior government officials including a number of Secretaries are associated with ABCS and rendering their valuable services toward realising the Association's objectives. However, from the side of the British authority, only two persons from the Training Wing of the British Council have been offering their utmost cooperation in materialising various programmes of ABCS. But it is a matter of regret that the ABCS is not getting adequate cooperation and support from other wings of the British Council and concerned British Agencies in Bangladesh. Since we have restricted our Association only to Britain-Bangladesh socio-cultural arena, we cannot therefore expect any active cooperation or support from other international agencies to run our activities. The ABCS is proud of having the British High Commissioner in Bangladesh and Director, British Council, Dhaka as its Patrons.

Hence, we sincerely hope that all the major British authorities and agencies in Bangladesh will extend their total support to help ABCS survive for a long time as a landmark of Britain-Bangladesh Friendship.

M. Zahidul Haque
Assistant Professor