

FOCUS

As we see the tragedy of Bosnia unfolding before our eyes we repeatedly ask ourselves the unanswerable question: Who will fight to save the Muslim nation-state of Bosnia? The United Nations has clearly proved impotent to secure the boundaries of Bosnia. The phrase, the Eunuch of East River, used by Kazi Fazlur Rahman in his column, was thus most appropriate if a bit unfair. It is apparent that in the post Cold War era, unless the United States (US) commits itself to a course of action driven by its own national interest, where it prefers to use the United Nations as its handmaiden, the UN is incapable of resolving any serious security crisis.

To blame the UN on the occasion of its 50th anniversary for its failure to keep the peace is thus technically correct but somewhat misses the point that its effectiveness has always been derived from the backing of the Great Powers, now reduced to one. From the Korean War to Iraq and Somalia, a UN military presence was unwritten by the US willingness to put its troops in harms way. Once they decided to withdraw, as in Somalia, or refused to risk their ground forces, as in Bosnia, that decision of a US President immediately delimited the role of the UN as a peacekeeper.

The operative question is thus not over the impotence of the UN but the self-denial of the United States and its NATO European allies who alone, amongst all countries, have some capacity to influence US actions. The Europeans have clearly decided a long while back that they will not fight a war to defend Bosnia's sovereignty. Most of the European NATO powers always had serious misgivings over the fragmentation of the former Yugoslavia, fearing that it could unleash chaos in Middle Europe or, as it was once known, the Balkans, from where the very term Balkanisation or break-up of nation states, originated. For those who remember their European history, Balkanisation is what followed in the wake of the erosion of the authority of the Hapsburg and Ottoman empires, prior to World War I.

The series of unstable nation states which emerged out of or sought to break away from the body politic of these decaying empires served to catalyse the First World War. After all it was the assassination of the Arch-Duke of Austria in Sarajevo, by a Serbian Nationalist, which triggered off the First World War.

Yugoslavia was a state created by the great powers at the Versailles peace talks after the First World War. It was hoped to stabilise the Balkans by bringing together the group of nationalities, till then held captive within bigger Empires, who now aspired to a statehood they never had. To preside over the disintegration of this same state of Yugoslavia, created by a League of Nations' mandate in order to keep the peace in the Balkans is thus quite ironic. The break-up of Yugoslavia again in some measure has historical antecedents. Slovenia, Croatia and Serbia were in fact integral parts of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, whilst Bosnia, Macedonia and Montenegro were under the hegemony of the Ottoman Empire. The new Yugoslavia is thus reconstituting itself into the same nation states which the Versailles Peace Treaty sought to avoid for fear of its destabilising consequences.

The one country which always had an interest in a weak Middle Europe was Germany who always saw the Balkan as its own sphere of influence and was willing to fight a World War to preserve its hegemony in the region when it was threatened by the forces of Serbian nationalism seeking to break away from the hegemony of the Hapsburg Empire, Germany's chief ally in Europe before the First World War. Whilst Germany accepted the formal dismemberment of the Austro-Hungarian empire at Versailles, they did so as a defeated party and hardly of their free choice. It was not surprising that one of the first initiatives of a revived and rearmament Nazi Germany, in the 1930s, was to sponsor Fascist groups in Slovenia and Croatia to break away from Yugoslavia. When this strategy failed, Hitler invaded

BOSNIA

Who will Fight to Save it?

by Rehman Sobhan

Yugoslavia. It is thus significant that it was again a reunited Germany which became the main sponsor of the breakaway states of Slovenia and Croatia from the body of Yugoslavia. This break-up was strongly resisted by its European allies who only recognised the independence of these two states as a result of quite strong pressure from Germany. The resultant short war, triggered by attempts by the Serbian-led regime in Belgrade to frustrate the break-up of Yugoslavia, already gave an indication of the shape of things to come. The subsequent war fought by the Serbian Croats to establish a separate state, fully backed by

predominantly Muslim state, an independent Bosnian was likely to be as unwelcome to the rest of Europe, already obsessed by the rise of Muslim fundamentalism around the world. Europeans feared that a separate state in Bosnia, would have to assert its Muslim identity to justify their statehood, since Bosnian Muslims are in fact ethnic Serbs who converted to Islam during the period of Ottoman rule. The initial European response was thus to look away from the emerging crisis and to quietly persuade the Bosnian Muslims to remain in alliance with Yugoslavia. When this phase of quiet diplomacy failed and war broke out, leading to heavy loss of terri-

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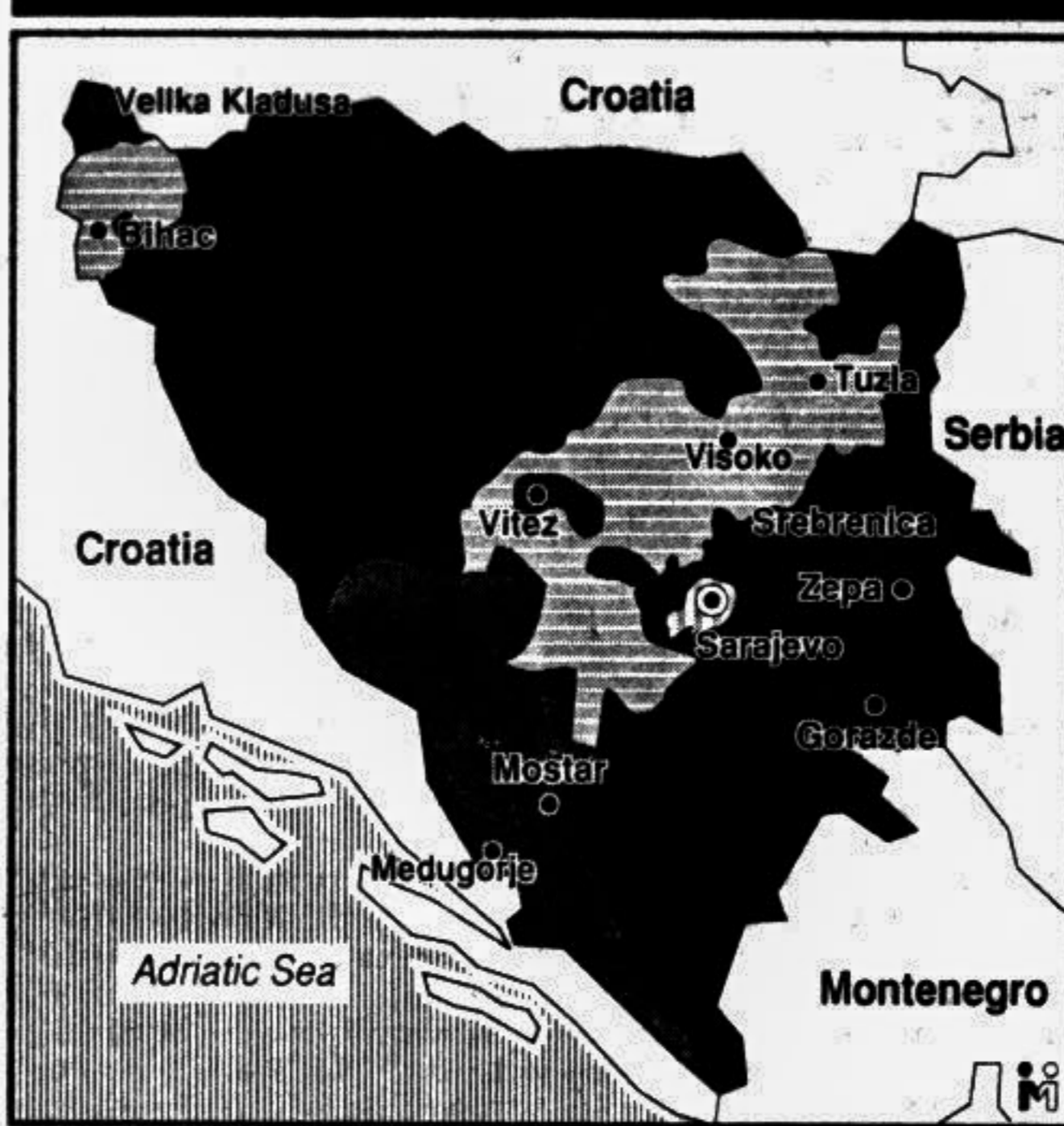
Belgrade, was unusually bitter. At that time when Bosnia had not decided to secede but was contemplating of doing so, the European press was full of dark forebodings of a civil war in Bosnia which would be far more ferocious than what had been witnessed in Croatia.

Thus when the Bosnian Muslims decided to vote for nationhood this act had no powerful sponsors as in case of Slovenia and Croatia. Indeed it was far from welcome in most of Europe and even the US administration was voicing concern about the break-up of Yugoslavia. The Muslims, in any case, account for only 43% of the population of Bosnia so that an independent Bosnian state was at best going to be a weak Muslim country in the middle of Christian Europe. Its emergence was in any case likely to be resisted by their Serb minority but, as a

tory by the Muslims, the European peace-keeping initiative, in Bosnian, led by Lord Owen of the UK and Thorvald Stoltenberg, the former Foreign Minister of Norway, sought to persuade the Bosnian Muslims to accept a rather unfavourable partition of the country. It was the disagreement over the terms of the partition that has kept the war going on for so long. It is thus apparent, from the historical record that whilst the European press and parliament are today decrying Serbian atrocities in Bosnian, they cannot absolve their leaders from this crisis, nor can they see themselves as intervening to preserve the entity of a sovereign Muslim Bosnia, which they never wanted now or even as far back as 1919.

It now appears that the Bosnian Serbs will carry through their own partition

Bosnia



Legend: Muslim (black), Serb (white), Croat (grey), UN controlled (hatched)

of Bosnia by force of arms by eliminating all the Muslim enclaves in the areas conquered by them during the war over the last 2 years. They will then declare a unilateral ceasefire to proclaim a separate Serbistan in Bosnia, as a prelude to their merger into greater Serbia now known as Yugoslavia.

There is now a belated attempt to redress this fait accompli of the partition of Bosnia, brought about, first by European diplomacy and then by Serbian arms, by seeking to arm the Bosnian Muslims so as to restore some balance in their military capability. But is a resumption of arms shipments to Bosnia likely to save the Bosnian Muslims? This seems unlikely unless the European powers are willing to commit arms and troops to preserve Muslim Bosnia. So far, any attempt to arm the Bosnians has been

strongly opposed by the European powers who were furious at the vote by the US Senate to lift the arms embargo. If the fighting now escalates, let alone commit troops, it is more than likely that the Europeans will in fact withdraw even their peace keeping forces from Bosnia, leaving the Serbs and Bosnian Muslims to fight the war to the finish. The only danger is that this war may not stop in Bosnia but may be re-opened in Croatia as well, so that a full scale, old style, Balkan war could be in the offing, with the UN and NATO as spectators rather than peacekeepers.

The recent vote of the US Congress to lift the inequitable UN arms embargo on Bosnia, is thus likely to contribute little to the survival of Bosnia. It is a case of too little, too late. Indeed their is every likelihood that this vote was really the outcome of Republican Party's one-upmanship to corner Clinton. After all, George Bush did little during his Presidency to support the Bosnians and was indeed not at all enthusiastic about the break-up of Yugoslavia. Nor is Bob Dole any more likely than Clinton to support any form of US ground intervention to preserve Muslim Bosnia. Indeed in Bosnia, US policy appears to be driven by a wider agenda which extends beyond Bosnia.

I am no authority on Bosnia and can only cite here

the views of a Russian expert on security issues, whom I met in a number of conferences over the last year. He told me that Boris Yeltsin, the President of Russia, was reported to have warned President Clinton that any direct intervention by the United States in support of the Bosnian Muslim's would jeopardize Yeltsin's own political survival within Russia. Apparently, within the Russian army, there is a strong feeling of Pan-Slav solidarity with the Bosnian Serbs. The Russians and Serbs share a Slavic ethnicity. The Russian army has therefore reportedly advised Yeltsin that any overt escalation of US/European military support for the Bosnians would provoke a move from the Russian army to not only escalate the flow of arms to the Serbs but that the prospect of volunteers from the Russian army, appearing to fight beside their Serb 'brothers' cannot be ruled out. If Yeltsin were to resist this attempt to contain such manifestations of Serbian solidarity from within the Russian army, the security of his tenure as President of Russia could be under threat.

I have no way of confirming the validity of this thesis advanced by this Russian expert. I did however raise this thesis of US-Russian collusion over Bosnia, with a person of some international eminence, who has been involved in the Bosnia crisis. He confirmed that there is, in all likelihood, some understanding between Clinton and Yeltsin that the US will not raise the level of its involvement in Bosnia and thus there was no real possibility of US ground troops being committed there to contain Serbian advances. Some air activity may be in order. But this, it is already established, had not and will not deter the Bosnian Serbs from achieving their strategic objectives in Bosnia. It is this knowledge, communicated to the Bosnian Serb leadership from the Russians via Belgrade, that whatever happens they will not face a shooting war with NATO ground forces, which has really sustained the intransigence of the Bosnian Serb leadership.

In making the above observations, I claim no originality but merely share with my readers information that has been passed on to me by those who know more on the subject than I do. Such information may indeed be quite incorrect, for which I take no responsibility. All I can do is to point out that the above argument is quite consistent with what has actually happened in Bosnia over the last year where both the US and the Europeans have expressed strong moral indignation at Serb atrocities but have not lifted a little finger to stop it.

So this leaves the Muslim Ummah, to demonstrate their solidarity with the Bosnian Muslims by sending arms and perhaps even troops to preserve the integrity of Bosnia. In fact it is well known throughout Europe that Iran has for some time been shipping arms to the Bosnian Muslims and that small contingents of Mujahideen, probably alumni from the Afghan resistance, have been fighting in Bosnia alongside the Muslims. But how far is the Ummah willing to go in their act of solidarity with the Bosnian Muslims? If they step up arms flow to Bosnia they must know that for every one weapon which goes to the Muslims, five weapons will come in from Belgrade, if not directly from Russia, and will do so much more easily and quickly. Thus arms supplies to the Bosnian Muslims may not be enough to save them from military defeat, unless backed by ground troops. But if the Muslim countries send troops as volunteers to fight for the Muslims they must be ready to fight not just Bosnian Serbs but also Yugoslav Serbs and even Russians. This will mean getting into a major European war. Are the Malaysians, Pakistani, Bangladeshi, Egyptian, Saudi or even the Turkish army Chiefs of Staff ready for this, or more to the point, will their governments be ready for this? Passing resolutions at Geneva is one thing; sending several battalions of combat troops to face the risk of being killed in combat in Bosnia is another matter. Let the next OIC summit discuss this prospect with some candour. But to merely send an occasional shipment of arms to the Bosnian Muslims and to hope that this will transform them into a victorious army may be wishful thinking unless it is to be matched by rather more active solidarity.

As things stand now, the Bosnian Muslims are in danger of becoming one of the casualties of a history which goes back nearly a century. They may end up with a small *Bosnianistan*, less than half the size of their original boundaries within the former Yugoslavia, with minimal economic viability. They may thus move into nationhood with a sense of betrayal by the Big Powers, their European neighbours and eventually by their fellow Muslims whose rhetoric may turn out to be far removed from their deeds. The fate of the Bosnian Muslims will thereby hang heavily on the conscience not just of the US and European powers who betrayed them but even the Muslim Ummah, who gave strong voice in their support but could not go all the way to save their fellow Muslims from meeting their tragic fate.

Srilanka: Waging War for Peace

A political package for the north is in the offing as the anti-LTTE offensive is halted by the army's losses in the battlefield

Nirupama Subramanian writes from Colombo

It took nine eventful months for President Chandrika Kumaratunge to travel the road from an all-out peace with the LTTE to an all-out war against it. Having exhausted all avenues for a peaceful solution, the People's Alliance Government shed its dovish image as it launched Operation Leap Forward. Colombo's most ambitious military offensive against the Tigers so far. And although by July end the military operation had ground to a halt, the Kumaratunge Government had come round to what the hawks had been saying all along: that the LTTE could never be a party to lasting peace in the island.

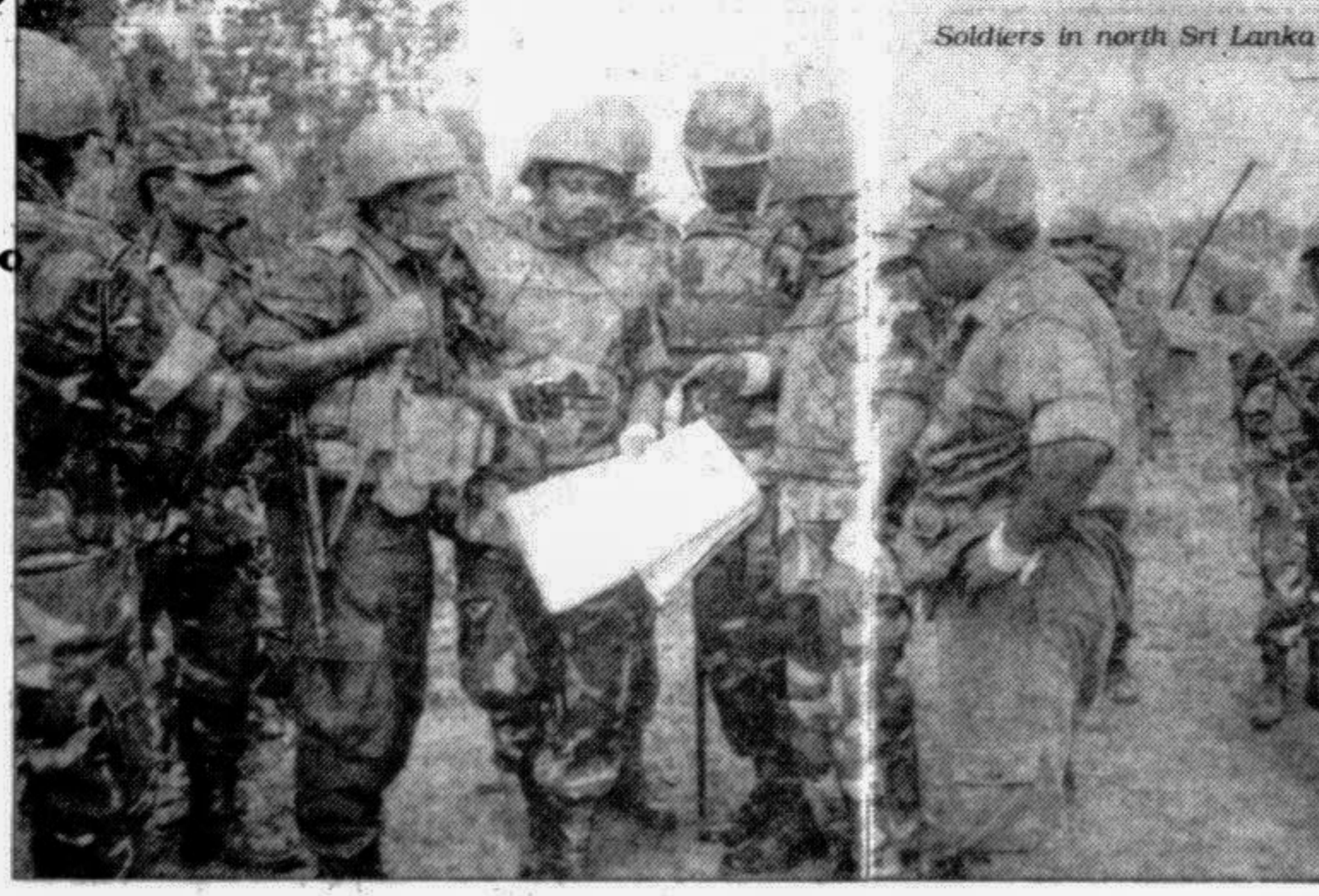
Over the next several weeks, Kumaratunge's leadership will be put through the paces as her Government lays out its package for the devolution of power to the Tamil people. Colombo had declared at the outset of the military offensive that this battle, unlike the previous ones, would create a climate for a fair settlement. Morally obliged to make good her promise of a political package, Kumaratunge now risks incurring the wrath of the Sinhala nationalists who inevitably will accuse the Government of pussyfooting.

Actually, it was precisely for making the passage of the plan smoother that the Kumaratunge Government plunged into battle. But three weeks into the offensive, Colombo realised that defeating LTTE supremo Velupillai Prabhakaran's forces is easier said than done. The operation attempted too

much too soon. Government troops were unable to retain the territories they had captured, losing 33 soldiers and reporting another 17 missing as the LTTE responded with its own counter-operation, Tiger Leap. The death of 121 Tamil civilians in an attack on a church in which villagers had taken shelter demonstrated the risks of taking on the Tigers in their home turf. For the Government, the good news was that this was the first time the Tigers had suffered such heavy casualties—80 of them were killed in the skirmishes.

Launched on July 9, the operation saw 10,000 soldiers fan out from the Palali camp — one of the five army bases in the Jaffna peninsula — to the south and south-west. Encountering no resistance from the Tigers, they easily recaptured 78 sq km of LTTE-administered territory, establishing after seven years control over the Ponnalai causeway linking the naval base at Karainagar with the mainland.

The triumph, of course, was short-lived. Just when the battle for Jaffna city seemed imminent, the army stopped the operation, saying that this was to consolidate its position by means of a 'mobile defence system'. The Tigers, who had until then maintained a low profile, struck back, first bringing down a Pucara light strike jet and, then, sinking the 2,600-tonne Edithara — the navy's largest transport ship — at the Kankesanthurai port. Two days later, the Tigers de-



Soldiers in north Sri Lanka

clared that they had reclaimed all the areas that the army had overrun.

Military analysts say there is ample evidence to prove that the army was indeed unable to hold on to the territory. For instance, had its south-west march along the coast been successful, the army should have been able to secure a land supply route from Karainagar causeway to Palali. "It is quite clear from this that the troops had to withdraw to their original positions," says Harry Goonetilleke, former chief of the Sri Lankan Air Force.

Though Leap Forward has failed to achieve the stated military objectives, it has certainly helped the Government change the common Sinhalese impression that the state was content to be a mere spectator in a deadly game where the Tigers were scoring one victory after another. As a Colombo-based diplomat says: "At least the Government demonstrated that it was willing to take on the Tigers militarily."

Initially, the military operation succeeded in silencing Kumaratunge's critics in the United Nationalist Party (UNP)-led opposition. But as it becomes clear that bringing the Tigers to heel isn't going to be easy, UNP leaders have upped the ante. "The war effort is not enough. It should be do or die," says Susil Moonesinghe, vice-president of the UNP.

Undeterred by the growing scepticism about the preparedness of the armed forces, the Government continues to stick to its guns.

The operation, Foreign Minister Lakshman Kadirgamar told INDIA TODAY, will continue "till the northern peninsula is free from Tiger control". The army, though, is unlikely to take on the LTTE immediately in Jaffna city, considering the high population density. Says Goonetilleke: "Before they even think of moving into Jaffna city, the soldiers have to be trained in street fighting."



Morally obliged to make good her promise of a package, Kumaratunge now risks incurring the wrath of the Sinhalese.

All eyes are now on the political package that the Kumaratunge Government has pledged to unveil. Thrashed out by the Government with the Tamil and Muslim parties, it comprises constitutional reforms as well as a peace plan for the strife-torn north and east. The Government envisages a federal model of devolution but will

probably stop short of naming it for fear of arousing the passion of Sinhala chauvinists who interpret the word 'federal' as 'separate'.

But the package can hardly be a magic solution to Sri Lanka's festering ethnic problems. One big unresolved question is the unit of devolution. The Tamil parties want a merger of the north. But if the Government concedes their demand, Sinhalese nationalists are bound to accuse it of handing over two-thirds of the country to the Tamils. Says Moonesinghe: "The package must be acceptable to all Sinhalese." Another thorny issue involves the Muslims, who mainly inhabit the east. Their representatives have been unable to come to an agreement with the Tamil parties on the control of 'non-contiguous' Muslim-dominated areas in the east.

Assuming the Kumaratunge Government can cross all these hurdles, the question that will still remain is: Can the package be implemented in the north while the Tigers are still in control? Highly unlikely. Given the options she has, Kumaratunge may have to wage war if she is to wage peace — that is, attempt a relaunch of Leap Forward to regain the Government's control over Jaffna after going to the people with the peace plan. Either way, the chances of an early peace returning to the blood-drenched island appear slim as ever.

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US: Back to the Present

Isolationists are on the rampage in the Republican-led US legislature. Jim Lobe of Inter Press Service traces the history of isolationism in the United States.

WASHINGTON — Former President Herbert Hoover and former Senator Henry Cabot Lodge would feel quite at home in today's Republican-led US Congress.

Aside from the more informal manners and less flowery speech of Republicans today, the two icons of 20th century isolationism would surely be nodding approvingly at their descendants' efforts to tear apart the multilateral fabric that has tied Washington to much of the rest of the world for the past 50 years.

Lodge was the great Republican leader of the Senate who in 1919 defeated President Woodrow Wilson's hopes of bringing the United States into the League of Nations. "The United States is the world's best hope, but if you fetter her in the interests and quarrels of other nations... you will destroy her power for good and endanger her very existence," he told the Senate in August of that year.

Lodge especially objected to the idea that US troops serve under a League mandate. "It must be made perfectly clear," he said, "that no American soldiers can ever be engaged in war or ordered anywhere except by the constitutional authorities of the United States."

It was a powerful speech, and helped usher in a 22-year period during which US firms grew to span the globe, even as Washington itself did everything it could to avoid political conflicts far from its borders. The isolationist era ended only when Japan attacked Hawaii in December 1941, more than two years after Asia and Europe became engulfed in war.

Hoover, who presided over the first four years of the Great Depression, was a pillar of isolationism. After World War II, he worried that Washington was becoming too closely allied with Western Europe and Japan.

Instead, he called for the government to "arm our air and naval forces to the teeth" to protect "this Western Hemisphere Gibraltar of Western Civilization".

Washington, Hoover said, should "continue aid to the hungry of the world" but avoid political commitments outside the Americas. As for the new United Nations, "we have witnessed the sabotage of its primary purpose of preserving peace. It has been... a forum for continuous smear on our honour, our ideals, and our purposes."

These sentiments are now close to the foreign policy of the Republican-led Congress. And they are propelling the United States rapidly into its isolationist past — or as Harvard historian Arthur Schlesinger Jr recently titled a *Foreign Affairs* quarterly article, "Back to the Womb".

Based on George Washington's warning to "steer clear of permanent alliances" and Thomas Jefferson's admonition to avoid "entangling alliances", isolationism guided the country for its first 150 years. It was only the real and imagined perils of Soviet Communism that prevented its reassertion after World War II, says Schlesinger.

But now that the Soviet Union has collapsed, isolationism is back in force. In just the last six months, Republicans have launched and passed initiatives to drastically cut US contributions to UN peacekeeping opera-

tions and to prevent US soldiers from participating in them.

The House of Representatives is even now on the verge of eliminating US contributions to all but a handful of UN specialised agencies — notably those led by US citizens. It also wants to slash contributions to multilateral development banks, which provide loans to the world's poorest countries, to a fraction of what former President George Bush pledged in the early 1990s.

Because Washington is the largest donor to these agencies and banks, its cuts could be matched by other donors. In that case, the entire multilateral structure built up during the post-World War II era could end up a mere shadow of its Cold War glory — if it survives at all. But there's more. The House votes this month on a 1996 foreign aid budget that would reduce overall development aid by about 50 per cent. Under a seven-year budget resolution that Republicans in both houses will pass after the July 4 recess, development aid could be phased out altogether, along with US contributions to multilateral banks and most UN agencies.

While slashing money for aid and diplomacy, Republicans are also following Hoover's advice to "arm to the teeth". The US\$258 billion Pentagon budget, will be increased next year. And if Republicans get their way, by the year 2002, military spending will be more than 50 times greater than the foreign aid budget, compared to only 20 times today.

Echoing Hoover and the "Fortress America" campaigners of the 1930s, much of that defence money will be spent on weapons designed to shield the United States from foreign aggressors or to strike back at them with devastating force.



Anti-Colombo rally in Madras