

YUGOSLAVIA: A DIVIDED LAND

On June 28, 1914, a young Bosnian Serb student, inspired by a Slavic nationalist movement, assassinated Archduke Franz Ferdinand the heir to the Austro-Hungarian throne, in Sarajevo. In retaliation, exactly one month later, on July 28, 1914, the Austro-Hungarian Empire declared war on the Kingdom of Serbia, which supported the Slavic nationalist movement.

The movement sought to unify the Slavic people settled in a part of southeastern Europe known as the Balkans, with the ultimate goal of creating what came to be known as the country of Yugoslavia, translated as “South Slavic Land.” The country would eventually emerge, but not before a bloody war that would exact a devastating human toll, dismantle the reigning political order, and rearrange the map of Europe for decades to come.

With Germany on its side, the Austro-Hungarian Empire’s declaration of war against Serbia prompted a split in European alliances. The global conflict that followed became known as World War I and lasted from July 28, 1914, until November 11, 1918. The Central Powers, which eventually saw the Ottoman Empire and Bulgaria join forces with Austria-Hungary and Germany, faced off against the Allied Powers, led primarily by the United Kingdom, United States (which first entered the war in 1917), Russia (who left the war in 1917 following the Bolshevik Revolution), France, and Italy. Known first idealistically and later sarcastically as the “war to end all wars,” World War I would lead directly to the deaths of some 21.5 million people, more than half of them civilians.

A Kingdom on Edge

World War I would also spell the end of the Austro-Hungarian and Ottoman Empires. Although the latter



Map of countries in 2022 that were in the former Yugoslavia. The U.S. and 97 UN member nations recognize Kosovo as a sovereign state. Serbia, however, does not.

had already left the Balkans, its imprint remained through the presence of a Muslim minority, made up largely of people whose ancestors converted to Islam during the Ottoman reign. At the end of the 20th century, that minority would play an important role in the Balkans, where Serbian Orthodox and Catholics make up the majority population.

As the Balkans emerged from World War I, its people coalesced into the new state of Yugoslavia, bringing together multiple ethnic groups — including Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes.

Despite the efforts of its rulers, the new kingdom struggled to maintain unity. King Alexander I, the

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Josip Broz Tito speaking in Belgrade during a general election campaign in 1953. Tito had been prime minister of Yugoslavia since 1944 and became president, as well, in 1953. He remained president until his death in 1980.

second of Yugoslavia's monarchs, went so far as to ban ethnic nationalist parties, such as the Slavic group that was behind the assassination of the Archduke, redrawing provincial boundaries and replacing the constitution with a new one. He was attempting to consolidate power and, with it, a centralized government that could rise above its constituents' ethnic and religious divisions. Alexander's assassination in 1934, carried out with the support of a Croatian fascist group, would foreshadow more divisions, however, as the world's powers once again vied for influence in the Balkans.

World War II and Its Aftermath

Reeling from the devastation of World War I, Germany, Italy, and Russia (which became part of the Soviet Union following the Bolshevik Revolution) spawned authoritarian regimes, the first two being fascist and the third being communist. By the 1930s, these regimes were already hurtling toward a confrontation that, in its human toll alone, would eclipse that of World War I.

With their sights again set on the Balkans, Hitler's fascist Nazi party in Germany and Mussolini's fascists in Italy sought to undo the post-World War I treaties that had established a unified Yugoslavia. At the same

time, Stalin, who had led a brutal "purge" of opponents in the Soviet Union, viewed Yugoslavia — with its shared Slavic roots — as an important ally of the Soviet Union in Europe. Stalin initially sought to avoid war with Germany and even entered into an alliance with it to invade Poland and divide its territory between them. But Germany's invasion of the Soviet Union forced him to join the Allied powers, led by the United States and Great Britain.

By then, the Axis powers in Europe, led by Germany and Italy, had already invaded Yugoslavia, dividing it up and giving rise to a communist resistance movement in Yugoslavia known as the Partisans. Allied with Stalin, the Partisans, under the leadership of

Marshal Tito, eventually expelled the Axis powers from Yugoslavia. In the process, over one million people perished in that region alone, adding to World War II's estimated worldwide death toll of over 70 million people, including in the Pacific theatre of the war.

Although Tito emerged as an authoritarian ruler in post-war Yugoslavia, his communist government held together Yugoslavia's many ethnic groups in a federation of six republics for more than three decades. Following his death in 1980 and as the Soviet Union began its decline, the ruling Communist Party of Yugoslavia also grew weaker, leaving room for several nationalist movements to gain a stronghold in national politics. It was this rise in nationalist sentiment that led to increasing ethnic tensions in the country — tensions that eventually boiled over in the then Yugoslavian republic of Bosnia and Herzegovina.

A Country Divided

As the central government in Yugoslavia's capital, Belgrade, weakened, the republics of Slovenia and Croatia first broke away, successively declaring independence in 1991. By 1992, Bosnia and Herzegovina did the same, but the consequences for that republic's sizable ethnic minorities were very different.

KEY TERMS

authoritarian (adj.) – believing in or relating to unquestioning obedience to a ruler, such as a dictator.

communism (n.) – an economic system in which property is owned by the community or the state and not by individuals.

ethnic cleansing (n.) – the systematic attempt to eliminate an ethnic or religious group from a geographic area by forced deportation or mass killing.

jurisdiction (n.) – the authority or power of a court to hear and decide cases.

nationalism (n.) – the belief that a nation's own interests are more important than international concerns; advocacy for national independence.

referendum (n.) – a public policy decision made by a vote of the people directly, rather than by a legislature.



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The office tower of a daily newspaper in Bosnia after being struck by Bosnian Serb artillery during the Siege of Sarajevo, which began in 1992. The siege lasted until 1996.

Bosnia's Muslims and primarily Catholic Croats — who together accounted for about two-thirds of Bosnia and Herzegovina's population — voted overwhelmingly to break away from Yugoslavia. Bosnia's primarily Eastern Orthodox Christian Serb minority, however, boycotted the independence referendum. In armed conflicts that were to follow, the Muslims and Croats would forge an on-again, off-again alliance to repel Bosnian Serb forces.

Backed by the largely Serbian ranks of Yugoslavia's now dissolved military, Bosnian Serbs sought to establish an independent Serbian republic in Bosnia and Herzegovina. In this conflict, the term "ethnic cleansing" first became widely used. The term referred to a deliberate policy of forced displacement and mass executions led by the Bosnian Serb General Ratko Mladic.

Beginning in 1992, General Mladic led a four-year siege of the Bosnian capital, Sarajevo, and oversaw the massacre of an estimated 8,000 unarmed Muslim men and boys at Srebrenica. He did so with the backing of Serbia's president, Slobodan Milosevic. That official support left no doubt that Serb nationalists viewed Bosnian independence, unlike that of Slovenia and Croatia, as an existential threat.

The massacre echoed a centuries-old rivalry between Islam and Christianity in Europe, beginning with the Crusades in the Middle Ages and, in the Balkans, tracing back to the Ottoman Empire. The United States initially viewed the devastating war in Bosnia and Herzegovina as too complex to warrant any substantial military intervention. In the foreword to his wide-ranging survey of the region, *Balkan Ghosts*, Robert Kaplan notes that then-U.S. president Bill Clinton decided against unilateral military intervention after reading about the complicated history of ethnic tensions there.

Instead, airstrikes against Serb forces were eventually led by the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, or NATO. The strikes were the first in that organization's history. Although the United States is only one member of NATO, it is the largest, and its participation in the attacks served to ratchet up pressure on the Serbs, forcing them to the negotiating table.

By the time the U.S. gathered the warring parties to negotiate a peace deal, the death toll had reached an estimated 100,000 people, with an additional approximately 2,000,000 displaced. In November 1995, a peace agreement, reached at Wright Patterson Air Force Base outside Dayton, Ohio, put an end to the three-and-a-half-year Bosnian war. Known as the Dayton Accords, the agreement was signed in Paris, France on December 14, 1995, and established the new country of Bosnia and Herzegovina, which is now one of four independent countries in the territory of the former Yugoslavia.

Kosovo

America's involvement in the Bosnian war, although under the auspices of NATO, would foreshadow its intervention to help end a similar conflict with the breakaway Yugoslav republic of Kosovo beginning in 1996. America's air war against Milosevic led to deep tensions with Russia, and then with China after an accidental 1999 U.S. bombing of the Chinese embassy in Belgrade.

Although Serb forces pulled out of Kosovo later that year more than 13,000 civilians were reportedly killed and nearly 1.5 million Kosovar Albanians, also Muslim, were displaced from their homes. At the same time, the NATO bombing campaign killed more than 700 Serbian civilians and caused massive destruction to infrastructure like roads and bridges.



Slobodan Milosevic (third from left), then-president of Serbia, pictured here with leaders from Bosnia and Herzegovina and Croatia initialing the Dayton Accords at a U.S. Air Force base outside Dayton, Ohio, in 1995.

Implications for World Order

Following the war in Kosovo, Milosevic became the first European head of state to be prosecuted for genocide and war crimes. In the first attempt since the Nuremberg trials following the end of World War II to prosecute such crimes, the International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia (ICTY) was established in The Hague, capital of The Netherlands, on May 25, 1993. The ICTY convicted Mladic, the Bosnian Serb general, of war crimes, crimes against humanity, and genocide.

The ICTY's mandate lasted from 1993 to 2017 and was a landmark in international law. It was the first international court specifically established by United Nations Security Council (UNSC) to try international crimes, and other tribunals would follow. In 1994, the UNSC established the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda, which eventually convicted 85 people for crimes of genocide in the mass murder of over 800,000 people in the country of Rwanda.

Other devastating conflicts in the world — in Iraq, Syria, Yemen, and elsewhere — have led to mass deaths and refugee crises, but they have not led to tribunals like the ICTY. The international community did, however, form a permanent court in the wake of the Yugoslav wars intended to handle war crimes and crimes against humanity. Established in 2002, the International Criminal Court (ICC) has jurisdiction over

ICC CASE STUDY: UKRAINE 2022

On March 2, 2022, ICC Prosecutor Karim Khan announced that the ICC was launching an investigation into senior Russian officials for possible war crimes and crimes against humanity during Russia's invasion of Ukraine, which began in late February 2022. By April 2022, over four million people fled Ukraine as refugees. Ukraine, like Russia, is not a state party to the ICC, having never ratified the treaty. But 39 nations referred the case to the ICC out of humanitarian concern for the situation.

its member states. It also has jurisdiction over cases referred to it by the UNSC.

The ICC has managed only a handful of high-profile convictions. In the eyes of many human rights activists, the ICC is not as active as it should be and is hamstrung by politics. Others believe that the ICC has, like the United Nations Human Rights Council, become too beholden to anti-Western biases. As of this publication, 123 nations are members of the ICC ("state parties" to the ICC), but many nations have yet to join. China has not signed on to the international treaty that established the ICC, and the United States and Russia have not ratified the treaty.

WRITING & DISCUSSION

1. Explain how nationalism led to the formation and ultimate end of Yugoslavia. Cite at least three facts from the article as evidence in your explanation.
2. Do you think the United States should have been more involved or less involved in the war in the former Yugoslavia? Why?
3. Compare the ICC to the ICTY. In what ways are their jurisdictions different? Which model of tribunal do you think is more effective for prosecuting war crimes and crimes against humanity?

Author: Samer Badawi

ACTIVITY:

Should the United States Ratify the ICC?

In 2000, President Bill Clinton signed the Rome Statute, which is the treaty that established the ICC. However, he did not submit it to the Senate to be ratified. He was concerned about "politicized prosecutions" and a need for "greater precision in the definitions of crimes." He recommended that the next U.S. president, George W. Bush, do the same. The U.S. has never ratified the treaty and is not a member of the ICC.

Form small groups of four students each. Your group's task is to deliberate on the following questions:

1. *Should the U.S. ratify the Rome Statute and join the ICC today? Why or why not?*
2. To deliberate is to discuss the question, consider multiple points of view, and decide as a group what the answers to the questions ought to be.
3. Use the example of the war in Yugoslavia and any other examples from the article in your deliberation.
4. If you think you need more information before deciding, that is fine. In your deliberation, be specific about what kind of information you think you would need to know before deciding.
5. Choose a spokesperson who is ready to share your group's answers to the questions with the rest of the class.

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Standards Addressed

Yugoslavia: A Divided Land

California History Social Science Standard 10.7: Students analyze the rise of totalitarian governments after World War I.

California History Social Science Standard 10.9: Students analyze the international developments in the post-World War II world.

California History-Social Science Framework: Chapter 15, p. 374: Global movements of refugees and global economic forces also challenge the stability achieved by the European Union.

California History-Social Science Framework: Chapter 17, p. 453: Students should also examine international efforts to protect human rights (e.g., the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, jurisdiction of the World Court and International Criminal Court) and current relevant issues such as protection of civilian populations during wartime, oppression of minority groups, and forced removal or genocide.

National World History Standard 43: Understands how post-World War II reconstruction occurred, new international power relations took shape, and colonial empires broke up. High School Benchmark 1: Understands political shifts in Europe and Asia following World War II

Common Core State Standards: SL.9-10.1, SL.9-10.3, RH.9-10.1, RH.9-10.2, RH.9-10.10, WHST.9-10.10.

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California History Social Science Standard 8.12: Students analyze the transformation of the American economy and the changing social and political conditions in the United States in response to the Industrial Revolution. (6) Discuss child labor, working conditions, and laissez-faire policies toward big business and examine the labor movement, including its leaders (e.g., Samuel Gompers), its demand for collective bargaining and its strikes and protests over labor conditions.

California History Social Science Standard 11.2: *Students analyze the relationship among the rise of industrialization, large-scale rural-to-urban migration, and massive immigration from Southern and Eastern Europe.* (1) Know the effects of industrialization on living and working conditions. . . .

California History Social Science Standard 11.5: *Students analyze the major political, social, economic, technological, and cultural developments of the 1920s.* (4) Analyze the passage of the Nineteenth Amendment and the changing role of women in society.

California History-Social Science Framework: Chapter 16, p. 391: Students consider this question as they learn about the movements of the 1920s: Why were the 1920s filled with political, social, and economic extremes?

National U.S. History Standard 20: Understands how Progressives and others addressed problems of industrial capitalism, urbanization, and political corruption.

Common Core State Standards: SL.11-12.1, SL.11-12.3, RH.11-12.1, RH.11-12.2, RH.11-12.10, WHST.11-12.10.

What Is Seditious Conspiracy?

California History-Social Science Framework: 12.5: Students summarize landmark U.S. Supreme Court interpretations of the Constitution and its amendments. (1) Understand the changing interpretations of the Bill of Rights over time, including interpretations of the basic freedoms (religion, speech, press, petition, and assembly) articulated in the First Amendment and the due process and equal-protection-of-the-law clauses of the Fourteenth Amendment.

California History-Social Science Framework: 12.10: Students formulate questions about and defend their analyses of tensions within our constitutional democracy and the importance of maintaining a balance between the following concepts: majority rule and individual rights; liberty and equality; state and national authority in a federal system; civil disobedience and the rule of law; freedom of the press and the right to a fair trial; the relationship of religion and government.

California History-Social Science Framework: Chapter 17, p. 451: [Students] can also explore the importance of the rule of law and the unique role of an independent judiciary in a democracy

National Civics Standard 18 : Understands the role and importance of law in the American constitutional system and issues regarding the judicial protection of individual rights. High School Benchmark 1: Understands how the rule of law makes possible a system of ordered liberty that protects the basic rights of citizens.

Common Core State Standards: SL.11-12.1, SL.11-12.3, RH.11-12.1, RH.11-12.3, WHST.11-12.10.

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