

Media Disinformation on the War in Yugoslavia: The Dayton Peace Accords Revisited

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Global Research, September 07, 2005

7 September 2005

Region: [Europe](#)

Theme: [US NATO War Agenda](#)

In-depth Report: [THE BALKANS](#)

November 21st of this year will be the 10th anniversary of the signing of the Dayton Peace Accords which ended the war in Bosnia, one of 6 republics of Yugoslavia. That U.S.- brokered agreement has been praised because it stopped the killing in Bosnia. While that is true, less well known but vastly more important, is the fact that the U.S. was mainly responsible for starting that war. This connection is somewhat analogous to destroying Iraq and then seeking praise for plans to rebuild it. For that reason Dayton may want to reassess its link to the Dayton Peace Accords.

Some supporters of the Accords maintain that the war was due to ethnic differences between the Serbs, Croats and Muslims in Bosnia. There has indeed been animosity between these groups for many years. But during the 45 years since the end of World War II, until Yugoslavia started to disintegrate in 1990, the various groups were able to live peacefully together. So why did Yugoslavia fall apart, and in particular, what caused the war in Bosnia? That is the question that the rest of this article will address. The secondary roles of other national and international entities will also be mentioned to a lesser extent.

The U.S. subverted the sovereignty of Yugoslavia primarily by using economic muscle and arm-twisting and by direct political and military machinations. Meddling by the U.S. in Yugoslavia led to 20,000 to 60,000 deaths in Bosnia,¹ hundreds of thousands of wounded, millions of refugees and the other horrors and destruction that war brings.

Edicts against Yugoslavia and Bosnia

It is not necessary to resort to any conspiracy theory to show why Yugoslavia dissolved like cream in coffee. All that is needed, as a start, is to refer to public statements, especially when discussing the economic pressures that were foisted on Yugoslavia.

For two decades prior to 1980 Yugoslavia was prospering with its annual GDP growth averaging 6.1 percent. Medical care was free, the literacy rate was about 91 percent and life expectancy was 72 years.² In some ways life may have been better in Yugoslavia than in the U.S.

Then things started to fall apart in 1980 when Yugoslavia began to get into debt to international creditors shortly after the death of its leader, Marshall Tito. Whether the new leaders agreed to these loans due to bribes, threats or some other reasons is not known. To repay these debts Yugoslavia had to agree to debt restructuring agreements with the International Monetary Fund (IMF) which increased its foreign debt even more.³ Throughout the 1980s, the IMF prescribed further doses of its bitter economic medicine periodically.

Industrial production declined to a negative 10 percent growth rate by 1990.⁴ State revenues that should have gone as transfer payments to the republics and provinces went instead to service the debts of the Yugoslav Federation. The republics were mostly on their own.

The Reagan administration's war on the poor was underway here at home at that time and it was decided to direct this campaign against human welfare also toward communist countries. In 1984 it specifically targeted the Yugoslav economy in a secret memo, NSDD 133, which advocated expanded efforts to promote a "quiet revolution to overthrow Communist governments and parties" while reintegrating the countries of Eastern Europe into a market-oriented economy."⁵ Thus began Reagan's secret plan for interventions to overthrow Communist states. This illustrates that the demise of communism was probably due to some extent to Western connivance and militarism.

In 1989 Ante Markovic, prime minister of Yugoslavia, in order to pay off the loans, launched a program of privatizing or shutting down state industry, cutting back on social programs and subsidies and freezing wages. These are the same types of actions that have been taken by the IMF and the World Bank against other nations in the last two or three decades as a part of the "developed" nations international war on the poor. The standard of living declined 18.1 percent between January and October 1990. This downturn raised unemployment to 20 percent and thus increased tensions between the republics. Markovic, visiting Washington, told President George H. Bush that rising tensions among nationalities would be a consequence of his austerity/privatization plan.⁶

Then the U.S. came down like a sledgehammer again on Yugoslavia when on November 5, 1990 Congress passed the 1991 Foreign Operations Appropriations Law 101-513. A section of this law, without previous warning, cut off all aid, credits and loans from the U.S. to Yugoslavia within 6 months. Also, the law demanded separate elections in each of the republics that made up Yugoslavia, requiring State Department approval of election procedures and results before aid to the separate republics would be resumed. In February 1991 the Council of Europe also demanded that Yugoslavia hold multi-party elections or face an economic blockade.⁷

Three weeks after the U.S. Congress passed this dictatorial law a CIA report leaked to the media predicted that Yugoslavia would disintegrate into civil war, possibly within the next year and thus essentially agreeing with the warning made earlier by Markovic.⁸ By 1991, the new government had acquired a debt of \$31 billion. Unemployment was over a million and inflation was 200 percent.⁹

The Yugoslav federal government was unable to pay the enormous interest on its foreign debt or even to arrange the purchase of raw materials for its industry. Credit collapsed and recriminations broke out on all sides. At this time there was no civil war or any secession yet. By 1992 Serbs, wherever they lived in Yugoslavia, had become demonized by the international community because of their alleged human rights abuses. The European Community (EC) in 1991 threatened a withdrawal of \$1 billion in scheduled aid and a cut off of economic relations with Yugoslavia if it did not accept mediation for peaceful purposes. This meant that Yugoslavia was not being allowed the option of military force to maintain its national cohesion, a prerogative that virtually no other country would willingly relinquish.¹⁰

Delirious with power, since the U.S. was now the only remaining superpower, the Pentagon in 1992 proclaimed its imperial hegemony over the world in its "Defense Planning Guide."

According to the New York Times of May 8 1992, this document asserts that the only possible course for the U.S. to pursue is complete world domination, and it adds that no other country has the right to aspire to the role of leadership, even as a regional power.¹¹

On May 30, 1992 the UN Security Council, in its not infrequent role as a puppet of the U.S., voted to impose a sanctions blockade on the remainder of the Yugoslav Federation – Serbia and Montenegro – even though the World Court ruled that the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia was not the aggressor in the conflict in Bosnia. The purpose of the sanctions was to prevent the movement of arms from Serbia to Serbs in Bosnia.¹² Also among the restrictions ordered by UN Resolution 757 was an international ban on all exports to and imports from Yugoslavia, an international ban on all foreign investment and commercial contacts with Yugoslavia and a freeze by all countries of Yugoslavia's assets.¹³

On the same day that the blockade was imposed President George H. Bush declared a national state of emergency, saying that “the grave events in Serbia and Montenegro constitute an unusual and extraordinary threat to the national security, economy and foreign policy of the U.S.”¹⁴ A gross exaggeration indeed, considering the relative economic and military might of the two nations. The search for a pretext to intervene was obvious.

One effect of the sanctions was that state companies could no longer be competitive on the world market, and therefore multinational corporations could buy them at low prices. Less than a month after the UN resolution was passed hundreds of thousands of workers had their wages reduced or received no wages.¹⁵ The U.S. Sixth Fleet enforced the blockade starting in 1992 and by 1996 74,000 ships had been halted.¹⁶ On June 25, 1991 Slovenia and Croatia declared their independence from Yugoslavia and by mid-1992 Yugoslavia was reduced to Serbia and Montenegro

By October 1993 medical care had deteriorated and the effects were devastating. 90 percent of the country's domestic drug production stopped. A six-year-old boy had leukemia but free medicines were no longer available. The first of 8 necessary treatments cost \$812, more than twice the combined monthly salaries of his parents. Hospitals had to give unscreened blood transfusions. Medications for psychiatric patients ran out.

The average daily intake of calories had fallen by 28 percent compared to 1990 and 1.5 million people were classified as undernourished. The death rate in the capital, Belgrade, increased from 79 to 977 per 100,000 in the same period.¹⁷ Two months later over 60 percent of the country's work force was unemployed and the average monthly income had dropped from \$500 to \$15.¹⁸

In September 1994, the UN blockade – which had previously covered Serbia and Montenegro – was extended to cover only that part of Bosnia under Bosnian Serb control. According to the UN High Commissioner on Refugees, Yugoslavia in 1994 had over 3.7 million refugees, the largest refugee population in the world. 44 percent were Muslim, 36 percent were Serbs and 20 percent were Croats.¹⁹

U.S. Intervention in Bosnia

The first indication that U.S. policy would soon be implemented by concrete military intervention in Bosnia was when George Kenney of the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace and Michael J. Dugan, a retired AF general and former Air Force Chief of Staff, outlined a blueprint in 1992 for what they called “Operation Balkan Storm.” They said

“a win in the Balkans would establish U.S. leadership in the post-Cold War world in a way that operation Desert Storm never could.”²⁰

Outside military intervention in Bosnia started in 1992 when NATO, a surrogate of the U.S., sent a group of about 100 personnel to Bosnia where they established a military headquarters at Kiseljak, close to Sarajevo. A NATO diplomat at the time said in the Intelligence Digest of October 16, 1992 that this operation was “a very cautious first step and we are definitely not making much noise about it. But it could be the start of something bigger..You could argue that NATO now has a foot in the door.”²¹

According to Warren Zimmerman, the U.S. ambassador to Yugoslavia during the Reagan and Bush administrations, NATO domination of Bosnia was essential. At stake, he said in 1995, is NATO’s capability of “expanding” into Eastern Europe. If a NATO occupation of Bosnia fails, according to Zimmerman, “not only will NATO’s expansion look ludicrous but serious roles for NATO anywhere else will be hard to imagine.”²²

The U.S. also offered advice to the Bosnian military. On April 30, 1994 the Washington Post reported that General John Shalikashvili, chair of the U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff, had gone to Sarajevo to meet with Bosnian military leaders. Ret. U.S. Army Gen. Williams E. Odom, a long time Pentagon insider, was the head of the U.S. government’s biggest spy agency – the ultra-secret National Security Agency during the Reagan Administration. In an opinion-page piece in the New York Times in 1995, Odom indicated that the occupation of Bosnia was part of a plan for military and political domination of Europe and the former Soviet Union through NATO.²³

The Bosnian Army was also being helped by other U.S. military advisors, including Gen. John Sewall and Gen. John Galvin, the former NATO Supreme Commander, according to Foreign Affairs of September, October 1995. The entire Bosnian army wore U.S. military uniforms provided by U.S. military contractors.²⁴

A UN Security Council Resolution adopted on September 25, 1991 imposed a complete embargo on deliveries of weapons and military equipment to all parts of the former Yugoslavia.²⁵ This was an attempt to prevent a bonfire from becoming a forest fire. But since the U.S. wanted the Serbs to lose, it decided in November 1994 to pour gasoline on the fire by unilaterally ending its support of the UN Security Council’s arms embargo.²⁶

The New York Times of June 24, 1994 described the new supplies, including heavy weapons, flooding into Bosnia since the U.S. organized the Croatian-Bosnian alliance.”²⁷ General Charles Boyd said that the arms embargo for the region was almost nonexistent and that the U.S. insures a regular flow of arms to the Bosnian Army.²⁸ The Pentagon sent in Special Forces to train the Bosnian military. Also, the U.S. actively participated in the war during 1992-95 as the guiding component of NATO, increasingly using air power against Bosnian and Croatian Serbs as well as against anti-Izetbegovic Muslim forces.

Complex War in Bosnia

The war in Bosnia was complex. There were several opposing Muslim groups and the U.S. chose to support the faction led by Aleja Izetbegovic. Mainly it was the Croats and Muslims, supported by the U.S., against the Serbs. But at times the fight was between Croats and Muslims.

The Bosnian War was even more complicated than that. The most popular Muslim leader was Fikret Abdic who opposed the breakup of Yugoslavia. Izetbegovic, supported by the U.S., forced Abdic out of the Bosnian Government. In the spring of 1995 he was sent into exile. He then led an army allied with the Bosnian Serbs and they opposed the Izetbegovic forces.²⁹ Ret. U.S. Air Force General Charles G. Boyd, deputy commander in chief of the U.S. European Command from 1992 to 1995 wrote in Foreign Affairs magazine in 1995 that Abdic's government in Bihac was "one of the few examples of successful multi-ethnic cooperation in the Balkans" Abdic was a member of the Bosnian collective presidency, He outpolled Izetbegovic in national elections and had been expelled from the government when Sarajevo (Izetbegovic's headquarters) rejected an internationally brokered peace agreement."³⁰

The elected Bosnian Muslim government in Tuzla in 1994 claimed that the U.S. supervised rewrite of the Bosnian constitution gave power only to the right wing forces of Izetbegovic's Party for Democratic Action and Franjo Tudjman's Democratic Union. A Bosnian Muslim group in the northwest Bihac area led by Abdic in 1994 declared its autonomy from the U.S.-backed government based in Sarajevo. In retaliation, the Izetbegovic government launched a military attack against these Muslim forces that wanted peace with their Serbian and Croatian neighbors. The U.S organized this attack on an elected Muslim Bosnian government. As reported in November 1994 in Britain in such newspapers as the Guardian, the Observer and the Independent, as well as in newspapers in France and Germany, six U.S. generals took part in planning the offensive in June of that year, an attack that violated the cease-fire.

The Izetbegovic government's U.S.- backed offensive in 1994 was at first successful in the Bihac region. But the Bosnian Serbs, in alliance with Serbs in Croatia and Bosnian Muslim forces led by Abdic, reorganized and began a counterattack. U.S. bombers under NATO command then came to Izetbegovic's defense.³¹

In April 1994 the Washington Post cited two senior UN officials, a general and a civilian, who blamed the U.S. "for the continuation of the war in Bosnia, because it has given the Muslim-led Bosnian government the false impression that Washington's military support was on the way."³²

Demonization of the Serbs

The U.S. opposed the Serbs in Bosnia who became known as fascists and supported the Croats and the Muslims. A considerable portion of world public opinion believed the accusations that the Serbs had committed human rights violations in Bosnia's civil war. Serbs were charged with operating concentration camps similar to those of the Germans in WWII, engaging in mass rapes of Muslim women, violating "safe areas" during the war, deliberately attacking civilians in Sarajevo and conducting mass murder in Srebrenica. Some have claimed that similar charges against Muslims and Croats have been ignored by the world community, but that subject will not be addressed to any great degree here. So, in general, only charges against the Serbs will be examined below.

Concentration camps

Remember how a public relations firm incited a furor in 1991 in the U.S. by fabricating a story about Iraqi soldiers killing babies in 1991? According to the story they killed newborns by pulling the plugs on incubators in Kuwaiti hospitals. Something similar happened in

Bosnia. In 1993 a representative of a public relations firm was interviewed on French TV. He bragged about his service to governments in Croatia, Bosnia and Kosovo and how he used a file of 200 key people to create public opinion. "Speed is vital. it is the first assertion that really counts. All denials are entirely ineffective." He said that after Newsday in June 1992 came out with an article on Serb camps. ".We outwitted three big Jewish organizations. In August, we suggested that they publish an advertisement in the New York Times and organize demonstrations outside the UN."

"When the Jewish organizations entered the game on the side of the [Muslim] Bosnians, we could promptly equate the Serbs with the Nazis in the public mind. Almost immediately there was a clear change of language in the press, with the use of words with high emotional content such as "ethnic cleansing", "concentration camps" etc., which evoke images of Nazi Germany and the gas chambers of Auschwitz."33

Rape

The Serbs also were accused of systematic rape as a part of an organized Serb governmental policy. In 1992 and 1993 three news reports claimed that members of the Bosnian Serb army raped 20,000 to 100,000 Muslim women. Ms. magazine ran a story that accused Bosnian Serb forces of raping in order to produce pornographic films. But according to findings by Helsinki Watch and Human Rights Watch no such films were ever found.34

In January 1993 a report authorized by the European Community estimated that 20,000 Muslim women had been raped as part of a Serb strategy of conquest, but a dissenting member of the investigative team said that the estimate of 20,000 victims was based on actual interviews with only four victims - two women and two men. The report had been based on information from the Croatian Ministry of Health. 35

Among other reports, Newsweek reported on up to 50,000 women having been raped in Bosnia. A contributor to the article said that figure was an extrapolation on interviews with 28 women - multiplying each rape by a factor that takes into account historical underreporting of rape.36

Rape in war is not uncommon and charges of it are a part of war propaganda, and the potential for it exists in most armies. Determining the accuracy of reports is not always easy.

Safe Areas

Serbs were condemned for violations of "safe areas" which were six Bosnian government towns surrounded by Serb held territory. They were, in reality, staging areas for U.S. backed Bosnian army offensives against the Bosnian Serb forces. UN Secretary General Boutros Boutros-Ghali confirmed this in a report to the UN Security Council on May 30, 1995 in which he said that "The Bosnian Serb Forces reaction to offensives launched by the [U.S. backed Bosnian] government arms from safe areas have generally been to respond against military targets within those areas."37

Sarajevo

In 1992 in Sarajevo, Bosnia an explosion occurred killing 14 people who were in a food line. Several weeks later an investigation showed the impossibility of a mortar shell causing such an explosion.38

On Feb 5, 1994 an open-air market in Sarajevo was attacked and 68 people died. It was called a Serb atrocity. A UN analysis of the crater showed, however that the Izetbegovic forces were responsible for the explosion. Later, the UN released a crater analysis of another shell that exploded and found the same result.

The following year there was another market place explosion in Sarajevo that killed 37 people. This was the pretext for 4,000 U.S.- NATO air sorties to be carried out. David Binder in the New York Times quotes four different military sources disputing the immediate UN report that blamed the Bosnian Serbs for the explosion. A Russian artillery officer went on tv in Sarajevo and said that the probability of hitting a street less than thirty feet wide from Serb artillery positions one to two miles away was one in one million.

A Canadian specialist told Binder that the fuse of the mortar shell recovered from the marketplace crater "had not come from a mortar tube at all." Two anonymous U.S. officials said that based on the trajectory, the shallowness of the crater, and the absence of any high-pitched whistle, the shell was either fired from very close range or dropped from a nearby roof into the crowd.³⁹

In the winter of 1993-94, Croat forces shelled the Bosnian city of Mostar far more heavily than the capital Sarajevo was shelled by the Serbs, but the latter received much more publicity.⁴⁰

Srebrenica

A slaughter of 8,000 Bosnian Muslims by Bosnian Serbs was alleged to have occurred between July 14 and July 17, 1995 in or near the town of Srebrenica. On November 5, 2003 the Bosnian Serb government, while not stating the number who died, admitted responsibility for this massacre.

Skepticism about that admission is well warranted, however since that government is subject to great pressure from the U.S. installed colonial administration over Bosnia. Milosevic in his current war crimes trial is being accused of being responsible for this slaughter, sometimes referred to as genocide.^{41,42} However, Milosevic was the leader of the Yugoslavian government and not the Bosnian Serbs.

Krajina

Serbs were also the victims of a mass killing. In early August 1995 in Croatia, the Croats caused between 200,000 and 700,000 new refugees, virtually the entire population of Krajina, by expelling Serbs from Croatia. The toll of civilian dead and missing among Serbs in Krajina was over 2,500.⁴³ Warren Christopher, Secretary of State, said that the crushing military offensive was "to our advantage." The preparation of the Croatian forces for the onslaught was a classic CIA operation according to the London Independent.^{43a} The London Times said the region was teeming with former U.S. generals.^{43b}

The Clinton administration's support for the invasion was an important factor in creating this nightmare. The previous month, Warren Christopher and German Foreign Minister Klaus Kinkel met with Croatian diplomat Miomir Zuzul in London. During this meeting, Christopher gave his approval for Croatian military action against Serbs in Bosnia and Krajina. Two days later, the U.S. ambassador to Croatia, Peter Galbraith, also approved Croatia's invasion plan. Stipe Mesic, a prominent Croatian politician, stated that Croatian President Franjo Tudjman

“received the go-ahead from the U.S. Croatian assembly deputy Mate Mestrovic also claimed that the “United States gave us the green light to do whatever had to be done.”⁴⁴

CIA intervention

Five British papers in 1994 were quoted as showing U.S. involvement in Bosnia including that of the CIA. Media in France, Germany and Italy also carried exposes of large scale CIA involvement in the widening war in Bosnia. Coverage included information on tactical operation, sharing satellite information and controlling local air traffic. Units of both the Croatian and Bosnian armies were reportedly trained in the U.S. and within that region. U.S. forces based in Bosnia provided assistance in building airstrips and organizing large weapons shipments through Croatia to the Bosnian forces.⁴⁵

Earlier Peace Plans Proposed

Prior to the Dayton Peace Accords the U.S. refused to accept two peace plans which were reportedly very similar to the one adopted at Dayton. Many lives would have been saved if one of these plans had been adopted.

On March 18-19, 1992 in an attempt to prevent civil war in Bosnia, the Cutileiro Plan was signed by Izetbegovic, but almost immediately he reversed himself and rejected it after the U.S. sabotaged the plan by saying that it was prepared to recognize Bosnia as an independent country. On March 22nd the civil war widened to Bosnia. On April 6, 1992 the U.S. and the European Community recognized the Izetbegovic government as the legitimate government of Bosnia. A civil war lasting three years followed.⁴⁶

The second plan was the Vance-Owen plan signed in May 1993. Owen has publicly stated that Washington undermined the agreement after it was negotiated.⁴⁷ In this context it is helpful to recall the words of the U.S. Pentagon’s Defense Planning Guide mentioned earlier: “We must seek to prevent the emergence of European-only security arrangements which would undermine NATO.”

Dayton Peace Accords

Prior to the signing of the accords, in August and September 1995 NATO launched a massive air war against the positions of the Bosnian Serbs who, for the first time in the war, suffered major defeats and territorial losses.⁴⁸ The accords were signed in late November 1995. The major outcome was that Bosnia was divided into two parts, one Muslim-Croatian and the other Serbian.

Almost immediately after the signing Presidential Determination 96-7 was signed by President Clinton, suspending the sanctions enacted earlier by the U.S. Treasury. However Yugoslav assets “previously blocked remain blocked.” The national “emergency” declared in Executive Order 12808, it said, shall remain in effect.” Even though the U.S. got the agreement it wanted it still kept one foot on its prostrate victim’s neck. The Bosnian government estimated that reconstruction costs would reach \$47 billion and it is inconceivable that it can raise that sum in the foreseeable future.⁴⁹

Democracy

Besides the claim that the Dayton Peace Accords stopped the killing, it is also maintained that it lays out a path to democracy in Bosnia. This is not the reality of the situation.

Actually, Bosnia is subservient under a colonial arrangement, since a High Representative has full executive powers in all civilian affairs. The IMF is empowered to appoint and run the Bosnian Central Bank in this artificially fabricated state. The European Bank for Reconstruction and Development directs the restructuring of the public sector and it sells off assets of the state and society. Newsweek accurately described the Dayton Accords as “less a peace agreement than a declaration of surrender” and that U.S. – led NATO forces “will have nearly colonial powers.”⁵⁰

In 1998 NATO intervened in municipal elections and threatened to destroy any radio or television station or newspaper that criticizes NATO’s presence in Bosnia. NATO commanders have overruled decisions by Serbia’s High Court and have overturned the very parliament whose election they presided over. General Wesley Clark announced that NATO troops would use lethal force against Serbians who throw stones at the occupying troops.⁵¹

Carlos Westendorp, former High Representative, exercised his powers in 1999 by removing from office Nicolas Poplasen, the newly elected president from the Republika Srpska. Poplasen’s support for the absorption by Serbia of this Serbian part of Bosnia placed him in Westendorp’s crosshairs. “Westendorp once told a Bosnian periodical that if Bosnia’s elected officials cannot “agree about some decisions, for example the passports, the license plates, the flags. I will stop this process of indefinite discussions.”⁵²

David Chandler, author of “Bosnia: Faking Democracy After Dayton,” on October 20, 2004 wrote that “the international powers of the administration, under the Office of the High Representative, have been vastly increased. As far the engagement of the people of Bosnia or the elected representatives is concerned, little has changed in the ten years since the Dayton agreement was signed. The Bosnian public has been excluded from the transition process.”⁵³

Conclusions

Our government has engaged in so many wars in the last 10 years it is hard for Americans to devote enough time to understanding what caused all of them. Hopefully, this account, while it does not cover all the factors pertaining to the disintegration of Yugoslavia, will partially fill that gap. The pattern used to destabilize Yugoslavia has been used before and will be used again unless we learn about the various ways we are sucked into supporting wars.

The war in Bosnia is yet another example of the futility of war as a way of solving problems. Additionally, it illustrates how conflict and war escalate and that there is a need for peaceful ways to solve disagreements. This war also shows how the sources of conflict are often simmering and escalating out of public view long before they erupt onto public consciousness. This is particularly true in view of the expanding imperialist reach of our corporate-controlled government.

While no American blood was spilled during the Bosnian War, the degradation and trauma heaped upon the people of Bosnia and Yugoslavia should be remembered, especially the next the time someone asks, after a new terrorist attack against us, “Why do they hate us?”

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primarily on ending the occupation of Iraq.

Notes

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