

NATO and the Destruction of Yugoslavia: Where it All Went Wrong and Lessons Were Never Learnt

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On November 9, it is 25 years the Berlin Wall came down. Seventeen months later, Yugoslavia's dissolution began and various concepts and policies were introduced that fundamentally changed international politics ever since – more so than the fall of the Wall.

These features can be seen in the conflict (mis)management in later conflicts.

By now we should have accumulated enough evidence of how effective the various "treatments" of the "patient" called Yugoslavia were. To put it crudely: A unique country was destroyed – yes from the inside too, but that doesn't reduce the responsibility of the West/NATO in its role as "peacemaker".

Today, Croatia is ethnically much more clean; Kosovo remains a failed state; the constituencies of the Dayton Accords for Bosnia (1995) still won't live together as one state, as elections have just shown us. Macedonia's problems have only deepened. The split between Serbia and Montenegro was enigmatic. Today's Slovenia is the only unit that can be said to be in a better situation now than when part of Yugoslavia.

It is high time we get a critical discussion going of what the international so-called community chose to actually do – no matter the stated intentions – to help bring about peace in former Yugoslavia.

All of it must be re-assessed and lessons must be learned for governments to introduce a little modesty and recognise that they are not born peacemakers but rather war makers. And we need such a debate to go down another road than the one we took since 1999.

TFF maintains that the crisis in and around Yugoslavia is much more significant for international affairs than hitherto assumed because e.g.:

- The international so-called community's *attempt at being self-appointed conflict analysers and peacemakers with no prior education or training* right after being Cold War warriors led to miserable results on the ground.
- Closely related: the amateurish *idea that conflicts could be understood and treated as two parties, one good and one bad*. The bad guys were the Serbs, of course, and Slobodan Milosevic became the new "Hitler of Europe" after the West had used him as an ally.
- During this crisis *Russia was sidetracked and humiliated*. But in the Soviet Union era no one would have dared touch the Yugoslav space. Now the West could do what it wanted and

Russia could do nothing to oppose it.

- *Violent humanitarian intervention* was introduced and persuaded many, like Vaclav Havel, peace and green movements as well as human rights advocates, that military intervention was OK if only the stated intentions sounded good. We know now it isn't.

- *The UN's Agenda for Peace's concept of peace enforcement* lead to the absurdity of bombing in Bosnia where UN peacekeepers were on the ground.

- *International law was ignored or twisted* to fit purposes such as recognising Slovenia and Croatia and to bomb to create a new independent Kosovo/a without any UN mandate.

- *Bombing to create a new state for Western strategic purposes* and to get new bases (Bondsteel) in Kosovo was an innovation. That's the main reason the West lacks every credibility when it teaches Russia or anybody else what international law is. The annexation of Crimea was at least not done by violence but by a helter-skelter referendum.

- More generally – *creating new states out of existing ones* has not been possible without bloodshed, with a few exceptions such Norway from Sweden 1905, Singapore from Malaysia in 1965 (after only 2 years) and the splitting up of Czechoslovakia. Anyhow it was done in Yugoslavia with highly predictable bloody results. No government listened to expert warnings.

- *The undermining of the UN and all it stands for by NATO countries* in particular started in Yugoslavia: unclear mandates, huge mandates with no proportional resources, abrogation of missions when they were about to succeed (such as UNTAES in Eastern Slavonia and UNPREDEP in Macedonia) and asking the UN to protect six safe zones in Bosnia (one being Srebrenica) and giving it 1200 instead of the required 33.000 peacekeepers. In addition, at the time of that massacre, the UN was fundamentally broke.

- *Unequal attention to human rights*. The human and minority rights of Serbs – who were minorities in most other republics-becoming-new-states and in total made up 42% of the population – were never respected on par with those of others.

- *Sanctions* – the "soft" instrument that's been used with so counterproductive effects in many other places – made most people dependent on a mafia-smuggling economy and destroyed Macedonia's economy. Why? Because Macedonia was supposed to not trade with Serbia, its largest market, without receiving compensation from those who installed sanctions.

- The parties' massive, systematic *use of propaganda through marketing corporations, paid lies, planted stories* – with media generally unaware of this manipulation and not developing a filter against it. Admittedly, Yugoslavia was an extremely difficult conflict; however it is difficult to understand that media understood less and less of it over time.

- Keeping a conflict violent for much longer than it otherwise would by *pumping in weapons to all sides* (in spite of a weapons embargo). The West presented itself as a peacemaker, arranged negotiations, humanitarian aid etc with one hand and prolonged the war through arms deliveries and training programs with the other.

- It was in Yugoslavia that *the EU's largest foreign policy blunder* took place: The unified

Germany's first big step was to get the EU on board splitting up Yugoslavia and recognise Slovenia and Croatia – the latter's Pavelic regime a World War II Nazi ally – as independent states and thereby making the war in Bosnia unavoidable.

- The introduction of a *special politicised courts for special wars*: Rwanda and Yugoslavia, the latter in the Hague Tribunal.

- *Destruction of diversity*. The destruction of a unique country and the beginning of the destruction of the position of *neutrality* and non-alignment (Sweden, Austria and Finland) that reduced diversity in the world and opened the way for NATO expansion right up to Russia's borders later.

- Yugoslavia should also be remembered for *one good thing: that nonviolence is always stronger in the long run*. It was not the diplomatic isolation, not the 10 years of sanctions, not marginalization and not 78 days of merciless bombings that brought the fall of Slobodan Milosevic. It was the nonviolent mass protests of the October 5, 2000.

In short – Western hubris combined with ignorant, non-professional conflict-management – or perhaps deliberate and cynical destruction – of one of the world's most interesting and diverse societies. True, the various groups in former Yugoslavia started it all themselves but the helpers who came in stage gave little help and made everything worse than a divorce needed to have been.

Two of the main reasons the West is declining relative to the rest of the world is its inability *to recognise* its mistakes and crimes and *to learn* from them. If you are number one in a system you usually teach others lessons, you don't learn. If you are number 2 or 25, there is always somebody higher up to learn from.

Unless we learn from Yugoslavia, we'll see more Western decline.

The arguments above are embedded in the [TFF blog on Yugoslavia – What Should Have Been Done](#). It is unique for its conflict analysis against the main stream at the time, for its generally quite precise predictions (can be tested today) and its alternative peace proposals – and for being based on over 70 missions, 3000+ interviews on all sides and all levels and containing the equivalent of 2000+ A4 pages – written by three leading peace and conflict researchers who have not changed a word in the original manuscripts.

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