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8-24-93

Bosnia: Abandonment Again

The current negotiations in Geneva to carve Bosnia into "ethnic states" for Serbs, Croats and Muslims are a ruse, disguising the real goal of Serbs and Croats: to extinguish Bosnia as a state and to kill or drive into exile all of its Muslim inhabitants.

America's abandonment of Bosnia's Muslims to the destruction programmed for them is as complete and as cynical an abandonment as that of the Jews in World War II. The notion that the United States and its allies are helpless to do anything about this human and political disaster is a palpable lie. It is as believable as the argument that European countries and America could do nothing to help the Jews in the 1930s, even while they were turning away from their shores shiploads of Jewish refugees from Nazi Germany.

To be sure, intervention in the Balkan tragedy is not cost-free. But the notion that putting a stop to so horrendous a human tragedy and to the profound damage to the international order that is now occurring in Bosnia is not worth *some* cost is probably in itself the most pernicious long-range consequence of this administration's distressing handling of the crisis in the Balkans.

It is only one of many myths about the Balkans—a myth used by this administration to justify its inaction—that the regular Serb militias are ferocious warriors who would exact a terrible toll on American forces. But from all accounts by those who have observed them, the Serb militias are comprised of criminals whose "heroism" expresses itself in the cowardly mass rape of women and young girls and the massacre of defenseless civilians.

It was clear to everyone that when, for but a brief moment, President Clinton sounded serious about taking even very limited military action, the brave Serbian warriors were suddenly sobered, and their leaders, Radovan Karadzic and Slobodan Milosevic, quickly turned reasonable and statesmanlike, offering to stop their human turkey shoot. When President Clinton backed off and made it clear that no American military forces would be committed, however, the unrestrained carnage and "ethnic cleansing" resumed.

Another such myth, also encouraged by this administration, is that the ethnic hatreds in the Balkans are unique, and so deeply entrenched as to defy international intervention. In fact, as William Pfaff (in the Summer 1993 issue of *Foreign Affairs*) and others have noted, the ethnic hatreds in Bosnia are no different in kind from those anywhere else in the world, nor do they go back further into antiquity.

The worst of the Balkan hatreds is between the Serbs and the Croats, mostly due to the unrestrained Croatian massacres of Serbs during World War II. And yet, the Serbs and the Croats are now collaborating in the final chapter of the genocide of Bosnia's Muslims.

Perhaps the real shameful truth is that the West is indifferent to the fate of Bosnia's Muslims, at least in part, for the same reason it was indifferent to the fate of the Jews in the 1930s. There was something in Hitler's hatred of the Jews that resonated in residual antisemitism in Western culture. Similarly, there is something in the Serbian and Croatian demonization of Bosnia's Muslims—the fear of "a Muslim state in the heart of Europe"—that finds an echo in lingering Western prejudice.

However we rationalize our indifference to what is happening in the Balkans, its consequences will surely haunt us in the days and years to come. For what is at stake in Bosnia is not only indescribable human suffering but the idea of the universality of the civilized norms that are the foundation of our freedom and democracy. In Bosnia, on the threshold of an unfolding new world order, we have been offered the opportunity to reaffirm that fundamental truth, and we have failed the test.

Some will read this concern for Bosnia's Muslims as just another example of misguided Jewish altruism, so characteristic of a certain brand of Jewish liberalism. But altruism is not what is at stake here. Patrick Glynn, in the lead article in the current issue of *Commentary* magazine (hardly the voice of Jewish liberalism) makes the point that in the Balkans, "the voices of the rational and the tolerant—for example, officials of the secular-minded Bosnian government—have been drowned out by the guns of ethnic fanatics. Efforts to secure democracy on the basis of rational Western principles have been crushed by the bloodthirsty exponents of 'ethnic cleansing.'"

These "new barbarians," says Glynn, are the vanguard of a remythologization of and reversion to ethnic particularism. We are in a period characterized by a diminished appeal of reason to the human imagination. Those who believe Jews will fare well in a world of renewed ethnic zealotry would do well to ponder Glynn's warning of a world in which "tyrants motivated by nothing more complicated than primitive ethnic fanaticism are allowed to get away with mass murder."

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