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STATEMENT OF PRINCIPAL DEPUTY ASSISTANT SECRETARY OF STATE
JAMES F. DOBBINS
BEFORE THE
SENATE FOREIGN RELATIONS COMMITTEE
FEBRUARY 21, 1991

Mr. Chairman,

Yugoslavia is a land of many nationalities and ethnic minorities, none of which form a majority of the total population. Since almost the onset of its founding after the First World War, Yugoslav political life has been characterized by frequently differing conceptions among its ethnic groups as to how the state should be organized and governed. Partly as a result of these differences, parliamentary democracy broke down in the 1920s, communal violence between Serbs and Croats broke out in the 1930s and a bloody civil war developed in the midst of the Second World War, in which hundreds of thousands of Yugoslavs perished. After WWII, the country was restructured into a federation of "nations," organized into republics and provinces on the principle of "brotherhood and unity." A succession of constitutions, most recently in 1974, confirmed the Yugoslav state as a federation of "free and equal nations and nationalities." Owing to the history of the region generally, the territorial divisions between republics and provinces did not and could not correspond exactly with the ethnic makeup of the area, leaving significant minorities in most republics and provinces. In one republic, Bosnia-Hercegovina, no single ethnic group has a majority.

Until recently, the country was governed by a communist monopoly, though a unique variant of the socialist model. Although this arrangement suppressed nationalist conflicts and tensions, it did not eliminate them, and was not validated by the Yugoslav people in a democratic election or referendum.

Responding to the aspirations sweeping Central and Eastern Europe at the end of the 1980s, Yugoslavia embarked on a process of democratization which in 1990 led to multiparty elections in each of Yugoslavia's six republics. The voters in all these elections overwhelmingly supported political parties oriented towards nationalist, rather than all-Yugoslav, platforms and interests. The result was a re-emergence of debate over the political and governing structure of the Yugoslav state, reflecting differing conceptions of the locus of "sovereignty," and therefore the future structure and even

continued existence of the state. Some in Yugoslavia hold that in the Yugoslav context ultimate sovereignty rests with each "nation," others argue that sovereignty is reserved to the republics. Still others maintain that the federation exercises ultimate sovereignty.

A regrettable upsurge in harsh political rhetoric, threats, and fears between and among republics and ethnic groups, much of it focused on past grievances and resentments, has accompanied this debate. The political atmosphere has deteriorated to the point where some republic leaders believe that current tension could lead to secession, intervention by the military, changes in republic borders, civil war, or the dissolution of the country. The situation is complicated by wide differences over the pace and scope of economic reform and a budget crisis that has weakened efforts of the federal government under Prime Minister Markovic to cope with a deteriorating economy.

Faced with these multiple crises, the leaders of all the republics and the collective federal presidency (which represents the eight republics and provinces) agreed on

December 27, 1990 to begin discussions to seek agreement on new political and constitutional structures. Since then, these leaders have met four times, expressing very different ideas ranging from a more centralized federal system to a loose confederation of sovereign states. One republic, Slovenia, held a plebiscite last December in which over 90% of the population voted in favor of Slovenia's independence. Slovene representatives to the presidency sessions have indicated that if a confederal agreement satisfactory to Slovenes cannot be reached, Slovenia will negotiate its "disassociation" from the federation by mid-1991. Croatian leaders have expressed a preference for a confederal solution, but state they will leave Yugoslavia if such a solution cannot be achieved. Serbian and Montenegrin leaders support a federal system, but Serbian leaders say that if this cannot be agreed, they will seek territorial changes to include all Serbs in Yugoslavia in a single Serbian state. The leaders of Bosnia-Hercegovina and Macedonia indicate that they will make their own "sovereign" decisions and that they are open to discussing confederal arrangements, and prefer continued inclusion in some form of Yugoslav state.

U.S. Policy

American support for the unity, independence, and territorial integrity of Yugoslavia dates from the founding of this state, in which the United States had an important role. Ethnic and national conflict in the Balkans played a major role in precipitating the First World War. In the aftermath of that conflict a multi-ethnic Yugoslav state was created from territory formerly part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, Serbia, and Montenegro with a view toward establishing a viable, independent state which would meet the aspirations of the people of the region for self-determination, while preventing ethnic conflict from once again becoming a source of regional and global instability.

The United States has long had an interest in preventing foreign domination of the territory of Yugoslavia. U.S. support played a role in Yugoslav resistance to German occupation in World War II, and to Stalin's attempts after 1948 to bring the country under Soviet control.

United States policy toward Yugoslavia is founded on support for the interrelated objectives of unity, independence, territorial integrity, democracy, dialogue, human rights, and market reforms.

Let me explain these.

By unity, we mean the territorial integrity of Yugoslavia, within its present borders. We will not encourage or reward separatism or secession. It is, of course, up to the citizens of Yugoslavia themselves to decide the structure and political arrangements under which they wish to live. We firmly believe that Yugoslavia's external or internal borders should only be changed by peaceful means with the consent of all concerned. The U.S. will respect any framework--federal, confederal or whatever--on which the people of Yugoslavia peacefully and democratically decide.

By democracy, we mean that citizens of Yugoslavia should enjoy democratic rights and civil liberties, based on freely and fairly elected representatives. The United States is prepared to work throughout Yugoslavia to help build and strengthen democratic institutions, the rule of law, market reforms and respect for human rights.

By dialogue, we mean that disputes between republics, ethnic groups, or individuals should be resolved only through peaceful means. We call upon all parties in Yugoslavia to avoid violence, provocations or intimidation. We would strongly oppose the use of force to settle political differences, to change external or internal borders, or to impose a nondemocratic system in Yugoslavia or in any part the country.

By human rights, we mean the standards of behavior laid down in international commitments to which Yugoslavia is a party, including the Helsinki Final Act and subsequent CSCE documents. We attach particular importance to the provisions relating to the treatment of members of minorities and urge all citizens of Yugoslavia to address their mutual relations in a spirit of respect and tolerance. The United States does not favor or support any ethnic group in Yugoslavia over another. We firmly believe that respect for human rights, civil discourse, individual liberty and the rule of law provides a healthy basis for all the peoples of Yugoslavia to live

together without fear or repression. We particularly urge all leaders in Yugoslavia to refrain from exacerbating national tensions or fears. It is time for the people of Yugoslavia to look to the future, not to the past. We call upon the Yugoslav government, and the government of Serbia, to take clear and decisive steps to end the serious violations of human rights taking place in Kosovo described today by Assistant Secretary Schifter.

By market reforms, we mean that we support Yugoslavia's transition to a full market economy, open to private ownership and investment. Along with the IMF, World Bank, and G-24 countries, we have encouraged and supported the reform efforts undertaken by the Federal Executive Council and Prime Minister Markovic. To the extent possible, we will direct our bilateral assistance to those sectors and initiatives which hold the greatest promise of success.

Whether or not these five objectives are realized in Yugoslavia will be decided primarily by the people of Yugoslavia and their leaders at the republic and federal levels. The overriding factor in their ability to do so is the consolidation of peaceful, democratic dialogue as the mechanism for addressing their internal differences.

U.S. Diplomatic Efforts

The consolidation and preservation of peaceful democratic dialogue has therefore been the main thrust of our bilateral and multilateral diplomacy vis-a-vis Yugoslavia over the past six months.

On a bilateral level, we have been engaged in intensive discussions with Yugoslav leaders, including the members of the collective federal presidency and its current president, the Prime Minister, the Secretary of Defense, and the leaders of Yugoslav republics. Our purpose has been to underscore U.S. support for unity, democracy, and dialogue, and our strong

opposition to the use of force and the violation of CSCE human rights commitments. Our efforts include instructed demarches by Ambassador Zimmermann to the Yugoslav Defense Secretary and to President Jovic, in December and January, where we made strong statements of our opposition to the use of force at what appeared to be moments of particular danger to the process of dialogue within Yugoslavia.

We have encouraged congressional travel to Yugoslavia, both to give Congress first-hand knowledge of the situation there and to impress upon Yugoslav authorities the depth of congressional concern.

We have also made a series of public statements, both last fall and earlier this year, which have addressed our overall policy toward Yugoslavia, CSCE commitments to free and fair elections, and the danger of any use of force or intimidation. We believe these statements have had an impact on all of the parties in Yugoslavia concerned.

On a multilateral level, we took the lead in a coordinated move last August by 17 states, including the EC-12, to invoke the CSCE Human Dimension Mechanism with regard to human rights violations in Yugoslavia as a whole, and specifically in Kosovo. Since then we have engaged in frequent discussions and consultations with our allies, with the EC, and other CSCE members on all the elements of our policy approach. We have sought ways in which our European friends and we can best address the Yugoslav crisis. These consultations have made it evident to the people of Yugoslavia and to their leaders that on both sides of the Atlantic there is grave concern about the direction of events in Yugoslavia, especially the potential use of force to settle political disputes. Those consultations have also made it clear that the international community strongly hopes that the process of dialogue now underway between Yugoslav republics and federal authorities will result in a Yugoslavia which firmly adheres to CSCE principles and market reform.

In this regard, I would stress again that Yugoslavia's commitments under CSCE to respect human rights, fundamental freedoms, democracy and the rule of law apply to the entire country. We believe the fundamental CSCE tenet of peaceful resolution of conflict and the principle that borders are inviolable, and may be changed only by peaceful means with agreement of all the parties concerned, deserve application to Yugoslavia's situation. The CSCE process also offers a valuable forum for all European states to encourage a peaceful and democratic resolution of Yugoslavia's painful transition to democracy and free market economy.

Representatives of all the Yugoslav republics and provinces have begun a dialogue on their future political arrangements. As a longtime friend, the United States expresses its hope that this dialogue, conducted in a spirit of mutual respect and tolerance, will lead to a just, peaceful, and lasting agreement that serves the interests of all the people of Yugoslavia. We will continue to use our influence and urge others to use their influence toward this end.