

COPYRIGHT / USAGE

Material on this site may be quoted or reproduced for **personal and educational purposes** without prior permission, provided appropriate credit is given. Any commercial use of this material is prohibited without prior permission from The Special Collections Department - Langsdale Library, University of Baltimore. Commercial requests for use of the transcript or related documentation must be submitted in writing to the address below.

When crediting the use of portions from this site or materials within that are copyrighted by us please use the citation: *Used with permission of the University of Baltimore.*

If you have any requests or questions regarding the use of the transcript or supporting documents, please contact us:

Langsdale Library
Special Collections Department
1420 Maryland Avenue
Baltimore, MD 21201-5779
<http://archives.ubalt.edu>

CIVIL WAR IN YUGOSLAVIA:
THE U.S. RESPONSE

STATEMENT BY
CONGRESSWOMAN HELEN DELICH BENTLEY
BEFORE THE EUROPEAN SUBCOMMITTEE OF THE
SENATE FOREIGN RELATIONS COMMITTEE

FEBRUARY 21, 1991

Mr. Chairman

Serbian parent S. - before Yugoslavia

and Fellow members S.

7 times in
last 20 mos.
response

The title of this hearing -- Civil War in Yugoslavia -- U.S. View -- is interesting, but I must point out that no civil war has broken out yet and the title of today's proceedings might accomplish more if it were titled "Preventing Yugoslavia's Internal Strife -- An Accommodation Must Be Found." This body ^{should be} ~~must be~~ very careful not to take sides in a very volatile situation by being perceived as taking the part of any republic against another. And I also need to note that only three of the six republics are ^{listed to be} represented here.

We must remember that the best possible solution for the United States and indeed for all the peoples of Yugoslavia is the preservation of the territorial integrity of Yugoslavia. We should be helping them reach a solution of their very great problems, which go back many decades, in a peaceful and diplomatic way. We should be the peacebrokers because a United democratic Yugoslavia is vital in the best interest of not only its people, of Europe, but of our country as well. Yugoslavia must be looked at as an important element of the complex and often painful post-Communist restructuring in East/Central Europe. Any testimony which omits the historical/political legacy behind a particular problem, or conflict, is not helpful. In the complex, interlocking Yugoslav mosaic, no piece may be looked at in isolation from all the others. In the same way, once a piece is removed, the whole becomes distorted.

On two previous occasions when the United States was involved in world wars that engulfed South Slav lands, the one ethnic group that always fought on the same side with America was the Serbs. In World War I, the Serbs were joined by the Montenegrans. But none of the other ethnic groups forming Yugoslavia (which means South Slavs) was on the side of the Allies. To the contrary in World War II, the others formed an important segment of the Axis forces.

A great deal of the bitterness between the ethnic groups -- whether you count four or six or eight there today does not matter -- stems back to the holocaust and blood baths that took place from 1941 to 1945 and subsequently during the Communist domination of the entire country by Broz Marshal Tito. But Tito focused his hatred primarily on the Serbs because they had dared defy him during World War II under the leadership of General Draza Mihailovic, who posthumously was decorated with the Legion of Merit by President Harry Truman and which fact was hidden in the archives until recently. Mihailovic fought both the Communists and the Nazis.

I could go into much more detail, Mr. Chairman, and we will provide it for the record but I just mention the above so you have some knowledge of the history which reflects into today's difficulties in that country.

Another vital historical fact concerns Kosovo, a region inside the largest republic of Serbia. Kosovo where the battle for freedom of religion was fought by the Serbians in the fourteenth century -- 1389 to be exact -- is as sacred to the Serbians as Jerusalem is to the Jews, as Rome is to the Catholics, as Mecca is to the Moslems. For your information, Mr. Chairman, it was at the battle of Kosovo that the Ottoman Turks were stopped from taking over all of Europe and thus the Christian religion was allowed to continue to flourish in Europe.

Once again this area seems to be a battleground between the Muslims and the Christians -- the Orthodox -- since most of the Albanians living there today are Muslims and the Serbians are Serbian Orthodox. Up until World War II, the Serbs and Albanians lived peacefully together in Kosovo. Then because of the civil war which did rip Yugoslavia apart during World War II, many Serbians fled from their homes...and Tito did not allow them to return. After the war, Tito also forced ^{many} / remaining Serbians to leave Kosovo and encouraged Albanians from Albania, which had been part of the Axis, to settle there.

Let me step back in history one more time to note that prior to World War I, Serbia and Montenegro were the only two republics which were independent nations. Yugoslavia was created at the end of the First World War on the basis of President Wilson's "Fourteen Points," the blue print for settling the problem of self-determination of East and Central European nations. As an Allied victory in the Great War appeared increasingly imminent, some Croatian and Slovene politicians started lobbying hard -- through a South Slav Committee based in London -- to convince the government of Serbia that they should not be left to the tender mercies of their powerful and expansionist-minded neighbors. Both Croatia and Slovenia then were part of the Austro/Hungarian Empire. One might say that the creation of Yugoslavia in 1918 was, essentially, a way for Slovenia and Croatia to avoid being on the losing side at the end of the war. This fact was well recognized by a leading ^{Croatian} politician, Dr. Ante Trumbich, who declared:

"Serbia proved ready to sacrifice her state individuality in order that one common state of all Serbs, Croats and Slovenes be created. And so, she attains the absolute right to be called the Yugoslav Piedmont."

Yugoslavia and the USSR are sometimes described as similar. However, there is a major vital key difference between the two -- the constituent nations which formed Yugoslavia did so voluntarily -- albeit in order to defend their particular national interests. Freely elected Slovene and Croatian representatives went to Belgrade on December 1, 1918, to press for immediate unification with Serbia -- months before the victors converged at Versailles. The new state, far from being a "Versailles creation," offered Croatians and Slovenes an opportunity to preserve their territorial and linguistic integrity.

Last, but by no means least, the United States was among the first to recognize the new South Slav state, which -- in the considered opinion of the Wilson administration -- fully complied with his well-known democratic principles.

The other three republics which form Yugoslavia but which are not represented here today are Bosnia-Hercegovina, Macedonia and Montenegro. As I noted earlier, Mr. Chairman, Montenegro was an independent nation prior to World War I.

Even though it often is claimed that between the two world wars, Yugoslavia was dominated by Serbs, in 1939 Vlatko Machek, the undisputed leader of the Croat people in prewar Yugoslavia, signed a key agreement with the government in Belgrade, which began with a statement that "Yugoslavia is the best guarantee of the independence and progress of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes."

In March 1941, when it became apparent that liberty was about to be squashed in the balance of Europe, the Serbs took to the streets of BELGRADE in support of an anti-Nazi coup. ^{Winston} And/Churchill declared before the House of Commons that "Yugoslavia has found its soul." Hitler's subsequent rage resulted in the destruction of the country, which was divided among the victorious Axis and their satellites. Being on the Allied side cost Serbia yet another generation of its youth for the second time in twenty-five years.

The ensuing holocaust of Serbians, Jews, and Gypsies at the hands of the Ustashi is better related in two recent books published after the records of World War II were accidentally made public and written by an Englishman and an American who were stationed in Yugoslavia during the war and could not understand what was going on -- obviously because of the sabotage against the non-Communist Serbs.

-5-5

Unfortunately, the person who was part of that sabotage was the one who dominated Yugoslavia in the postwar period for 35 years. It was as a result of the Communist control and domination of Josip Broz Tito, ^{a Croat} that many of today's difficulties in Yugoslavia have arisen. He dominated and chose not to have a successor, but an eight-person ^{ruling body} ~~government~~ with a new president every year. When this decision was made, I told the then Ambassador from Yugoslavia to the United States that it was wrong and would result in chaos in the country. And it has because no one assumed any national responsibility until recently when Ante Markovic took over ^{as Prime Minister} and has tried to get the federal republic's economy straightened out. However, there still is a rotation among the eight-headed Presidency and there is a question as to who is in charge when.

Tito obviously did not want another person to emerge as a great leader of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia and, instead, chose to leave the multi-ethnic, multi-religious, multi-language, multi-nationality country in a state of turmoil.

And while Tito was in power, it must be pointed out that most of the persons now elected to head up each of the respective republics within Yugoslavia played an important role as a Communist leader or official under the Tito Communist regime, or subsequently as a Communist until the shackles of Communism began falling throughout Eastern Europe.

As I have personally observed in most East European countries (and republics), the dominant Communist party changed its name to socialist or added the area's name before the word democratic or provided some other nomenclature to pull away from the no-no word of communism. That is why I keep wondering why is ^{the} Serbian government today, elected in the same manner as the others in Yugoslavia, the only one still referred to as the communist-dominated

The multi-party elections were held in Serbia and Montenegro in December last year.

Several of us paid our own expenses to form an independent group of observers to check on the election which was the first time in Serbia's ^{recent} history that the voters were able to participate in an election that gave them choices spanning the entire ideological spectrum from left to right. There was a question raised about the persons being able to register at the polls on election day, but that was provided for under their election law. I can say that I worked prior to the election to open up television time to the opposition parties -- there were more than 30 -- although I did not agree with the one-and-half hour of free time given to one party each day as I felt that the one scheduled first would be forgotten by election day. There were similar disagreements over media time in other elections in other countries. I also worked with the opposition parties to provide for observers at all of the polls by members of the opposition parties.

Somehow, because the voters did not make a radical break from the past and re-elected a former Communist running under the label of socialist -- similar to what happened in other republics and in other east European countries -- the election was perceived as less than legitimate. Although many would have preferred a complete transfer of power, the significant fact is that the present government was elected by people who had a choice in an election that was as free as any in east Europe

Each

voter was given two ballots -- one to select the president and one to select the member of parliament to represent that voter. The president's ballot was put in one box and the parliament in another. An analysis of the election shows that Presidential candidate Slobodan Milosevic received 3,285,799 votes while the socialist candidates for parliament received 2,305,974. This means that Milosevic received almost a million more votes than the party candidates which apparently means that the people were voting for the man they felt would best protect their interests.

Of special note should be that 56 members of the 250 person Parliament are opposition candidates, and that at least 40 of the Socialist members of Parliament are persons who were picked up at random in villages by the party but who have never belonged to either the communist nor socialist parties before. Because there were no registered candidates in many of these areas, the leadership asked the priests and other persons in neighborhoods who might be a political candidate.

In addition, it is important to note that the Albanians in Kosovo decided to boycott the election altogether. If they had voted, they could have elected a bloc of 36 members of Parliament, which together with the opposition would have provided a very strong bloc in Parliament.

I believe it is important to emphasize that this ^{is} was the first time in 50 years there is an opposition in the Serbian parliament and is being led by a very able person., Dragoljub Micunovic.

When taking the entire tally into account for the parliament elections, socialist candidates received 45.84 percent compared with 54.16 per cent for all opposition candidates, which means that the opposition actually had 8.32 per cent more votes than the socialist party candidates for Parliament. The final results may not be quite as we like, but they now have a foothold in government and have had the experience of running election campaigns. With the additional experience of governing, they will be able to build up their strength in the next election.

It also is important to note that six members of the new Serbian cabinet are persons who have never been members of the Communist Party. While the new Minister for Trade and Tourism is Tefik Lugici, an Albanian.

And I am told by persons from the opposition that there would have been more such persons in the new Cabinet, but several declined the responsibility when offered to them.

--9--
-9-

Mr. Chairman, even against that backdrop, I am the first to admit that many problems remain in that Republic. Many members of Congress have legitimate concerns in the area of human rights and it would be a mistake to pretend they do not exist. But human rights issues do not exist in a vacuum. Too many people have been willing to vilify the Serbs in Serbia while ignoring equally serious human rights violations that plague all of the republics of Yugoslavia -- including against the Serbs elsewhere. For governments to be democratic as we all know them, the government must follow the democratic criteria and show respect for individuals. Unfortunately, not a single one of the Yugoslavian republics has a clean slate in this regard.

To pick and choose in legislative enactments the ones which the Congress will address not only is counterproductive but, in effect, nullifies any meaningful role the United States might have to play as a positive influence in Yugoslav affairs. We must treat each republic equally and Yugoslavia as one basic unit where the rights of each and every citizen is respected. This will ensure that every nationality in Yugoslavia is respected and treated equally no matter where they live.

Much has been said about human rights violations -- some real and some alleged -- in the Serbian province of Kosovo. And yet, quite properly, we are reluctant to use similar terms of reference when discussing other separatist movements in Europe (the IRA in Ulster, Basques in Spain, Corsicans in France, German-speaking natives of South Tyrol in Italy). Despite many denials, it finally is out -- namely that the Albanian "intifada" in Kosovo is a separatist movement, plain and simple, which seeks to detach Kosovo from Serbia and Yugoslavia.

As David Binder wrote in the New York Times on February 8, 1991, "

"Albanian advocates here dream of an ethnic Albanian republic in Kosovo that could one day unite with Albania. They say they dare not express this longing in public for fear of angering the leadership of Serbia."

No country in history voluntarily has ever surrendered its territory to satisfy separatist demands of an ethnic minority. In 1938 Western powers coerced Czechoslovakia to surrender Sudettenland to Hitler, following months of agitation by the German minority there. Ten years later, those regions were reintegrated into Czechoslovakia, and Sudetten Germans were expelled.

Let us imagine for a moment what would we say if additional millions of Mexicans were to settle in Texas, or Cubans in southern Florida, and proceeded to demand an ethnic 51st Latino state to be created in those areas where they have a majority. Also let us imagine how we would react if they openly planned on secession of that future state from the Union, and its merger with a foreign country! And finally, let us imagine how would we react to any foreign legislature which had the audacity to condemn us if we took decisive steps to prevent such an outcome. That is precisely how the Serbs feel today.

Before jumping to any conclusions, we need further to ask ourselves the following: Do we need to destroy relations between the United States and another sovereign nation for the benefit of an ethnic minority in one province of that nation? And, further, can we understand Kosovo without looking at its history, at the cradle of the Serbian medieval state, and the way its indigenous Serbian population -- settled there continuously for over one thousand years -- has been halved since the beginning of this century? Can we close our eyes to the way Serbian families were forced out under pressure from an expanding Albanian minority?

Mr. Chairman, you need to know that the Bishop of Kosovo, Bishop Pavle, the newly elected Patriarch of the Serbian Orthodox Church and regarded by many as a "living saint" was himself abused by the Albanians in Kosovo. In addition two nuns of his Diocese were raped along with a visiting Roman Catholic nun.

It is not in the interest of the U.S. to be swayed by temporary sympathies we may feel for individual political leaders in Yugoslavia. Leaders come and go; nations are there to stay.

Finally, let us remember that no discussion of human rights in Yugoslavia can be complete without a comprehensive look at the situation of Serbs in Croatia. During World War II hundreds of thousands of Serbs and Jews in the Nazi puppet-state of Croatia were brutally massacred by the notorious Croatian Fascists, the Ustashi. This fact is well documented even by contemporary German and Italian sources. However, Croatia is ruled today by people who not only deny that the genocide had taken place, but who also readily admit that this so-called state - in the words of Croatia's present president - "reflected the centuries-old aspirations of the Croatian people".

This statement is an insult not only to the Serbian victims of the Ustashi, but also to the many Croats who refuse to be held hostage to chauvinist paranoia. The Serbs don't want revanchism, they only want to ensure that history does not repeat itself. Imagine for a moment how the Jewish community in Germany would feel if a government came to power in Bonn which flatly denied that the Holocaust had taken place, and which believed that the Third Reich reflected the true aspirations of the German people!

Human rights of Serbs in Croatia are systematically abused by the authorities in Zagreb, but their plight was not mentioned in the latest State Department report on human rights situation in Yugoslavia. When challenged about this, a prominent US diplomat somewhat lamely replied that "no Serbs had been killed in Croatia since Tadjman took power". This is indeed a remarkable statement! Let us recall that no Jew was killed in Nazi Germany until the Kristalnacht either. Was that a proof that no human rights were violated in the Reich in Hitler's first four years in power?

The plight of Croatia's Serbian minority is but one aspect of the complex situation in Yugoslavia, a country which needs to be understood by America, helped by America, but not interfered in - from here or anywhere else

United States' Long Term Interests and Yugoslavia.

To conclude, Mr. Chairman, I would like to pause a little and consider the problem from a wider perspective.

The events that are nowadays occurring in Eastern Europe, the Soviet Union and the Middle East are indeed fateful for many years to come, not only for the countries in these regions, but for the rest of the world as well. Eastern European countries are going through a very serious economic crisis while their political transition from communism to democracy has not yet been ^{completely} achieved. The Soviet Union is going through horrendous economic difficulties compounded by a political disintegration and rising intestinal nationalistic conflicts - and Yugoslavia is going through similar although somewhat different problems. On the other hand, our young men are poised in the sands and before the beaches of the Persian Gulf, in a terrible danger on the eve of a major military effort to push back the invasion of a cruel dictator. In these regions, ranging from the Arctic Circle to the southern tip of the Saudi Arabia, the world is in turmoil.

What should be the policy of the United States and what should be the effort of this Committee under these circumstances as regards Yugoslavia? Should we let ourselves being swayed by lobbying and pressures from various nationalistic special interests into supporting this and that national group, or this and that republic, at the expense of that little stable fabric that exists in this unfortunate country? Should we permit that our discussions contribute further to raising a pitch of chauvinistic fervor of

national groups, be it Slovenian, Croat, Serbian, Albanian or any other? Would this lead to any constructive results? Should this Committee take its collective fiddle and start playing while the world is burning? I wonder...

The major effort of our government in Eastern Europe was to provide a careful assistance to the process of democratization in this region, but without an attempt to interfere into these countries settling of their own internal political and national problems. I believe that this is a good policy and that a long term interest of the United States is to help achieve a stability of the region with a quiet support of these countries efforts in economic reform that would permit them eventually to become full partners in the Western free market economy. Such policy should be continued with regard to Yugoslavia. Over a number of years the United States have established substantial interests in that country which has advanced much further than other parts of Eastern Europe on the path of the market economy. Most of these ^{interests} ~~investments~~, financial or otherwise, based on ^a state to state relationship would be lost with the disintegration of the country.

Our efforts should continue to be a friendly persuasion of political forces in the various republic of Yugoslavia that maintenance of that state is still the best guaranty for the prosperity and stability of all. We should have patience in permitting the working out of the democratization process which has made great strides in all republics ^{over the last year}. It is still not perfect, but so it is in most Eastern European countries, and one should give ^{it} ~~it~~ time. But one thing we should not do. We should not let our strategic

policy towards this part of the world be affected by our like, or dislike, for the or that political leader or for this or that political party. Political leaders and political parties come and go but our long term geopolitical interests remain.

For us this would be the only way to maintain any stability in this part of Europe. The alternative would be a break-up of the country into a number of mini-states perennially squabbling over their borders, which could never be equitably set because of a severe intermixing of the population in the central part of the country. Such squabbling mini-states would only wet hegemonistic appetites in that part of Europe and generate a serious long-term instability of the region.

Economic conditions in Yugoslavia today are no different than economic conditions all of east Europe and the world. However, one thing for certain divisiveness is not the solution. The solution will come from a unified and collective effort.

