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THE CONTINUING CRISIS IN THE BALKANS
THE HONORABLE HELEN DELICH BENTLEY
APRIL 8, 1992

Mr. Speaker:

Earlier today, my esteemed colleague from Michigan, Mr. Broomfield, asserted that the United States should send aid and technical assistance to the recently recognized breakaway Yugoslav republics.

That aid is needed, I concur, but not in the form that Mr. Broomfield advocated.

The situation in the Balkans is still very tense. According to news reports today, fighting continues unabated, as it has since Sunday. Reuters correspondent Nikola Antonov reports:

"Recognition of Bosnia's independence from Yugoslavia by the European Community and the United States on Tuesday has done little to end fighting between minority Serbs who opposed the split and Moslems and Croats who supported it."

"Artillery, mortar and machinegun fire rattled through the city throughout the night, despite repeated calls for a ceasefire by Bosnia's leaders."

"Sarajevo radio said more than 30 people had been killed in the capital alone since Sunday in the republic's worst crisis since World War Two. Dozens more have been wounded."

Yes, the Yugoslav republics -- all of them -- need aid, Mr. Speaker. They need aid to stop the current unrest. They, however, do not need military aid. This would just increase the fighting. They need the aid of a competent mediation panel to work out their differences.

Had the E.C. and the U.N. and the U.S. stopped to think about it, surely they would have realized that in a situation as tense as Bosnia, where fully a third of the people do not support the status quo, that some form of serious mediation is required. But instead, the E.C. decided to go ahead with with recognition of Bosnia, even though they have scheduled a meeting on the 11th of April with the leaders of the various ethnic groups in Bosnia to resolve their differences.

The current Croat-Moslem partnership in Bosnia is a marriage of convenience, there historically having been no love lost between those two groups, and without an acceptable mediation of the concerns of all three ethnic groups in Bosnia, a repetition of the interethnic violence that plagued this region during the Second World War is inevitable.

But now, the EC, and more importantly, the U.S., have given two of the groups the upper hand -- the Croats and the Moslems -- and have left the third -- the Serbs, the only group that openly supported the allies in both World Wars -- even more scared than before.

And the fighting has spilled over from the Serb-Croat civil war.

Last week, Croatian neo-Nazi extremists seized the ethnic Serbian town of Kupres in northern Bosnia. These extremists, members of Dobroslav Paraga's HOS, came from the republic of Croatia. Even President Tudjman of Croatia acknowledged this, although he also says he has no control over these forces.

According to Reuters, "Kupres was the biggest town seized by Croat militias during several days of fighting over independence in which dozens of people have been killed. It is the key town in an area which contains several federal military installations."

Surely, if the Croats were in search of a peaceful solution to the strife in Bosnia, they would not have even attempted to seize the town.

This fact also is belied by the alleged slaughter of at least 12 ethnic Serbs in the town of Sijekovic in northern Bosnia by Croat and Moslem gunmen at the end of March.

Mr. Speaker, there are many facets to the current situation in the Balkans, and they cannot be hidden under simple buzzwords or catch all phrases: Why do you call Moslems or Croats "freedom fighters" when they are involved in the actions which I described above? Why do you call the Yugoslav army "Serb-led" when the prestigious Financial Times recently published that the JNA and the Republic of Croatia entered into a joint manufacturing venture to produce T-84 tanks?

Mr. Speaker, there are many sides and many ways to view the current strife in Yugoslavia. It is imperative that the U.S. not become blinded in its Yugoslav policy. The U.S. must see the big picture for what it is. This Congress must not lose sight of the fact that Germany has, by its recognition of Croatia, once again supported the aspirations of its Nazi ally from the Second World War. Is it too much to ask that the United States, the U.K., and France at least accord fairness to the minority Serbs in Croatia and Bosnia-Herzegovina, their allies from both World Wars, and not limit its views to those of the EC, the UN, or any other single proponent involved in the current strife.

The U.S. should not provide aid to the breakaway Yugoslav republics, Mr. Speaker, as Mr. Broomfield advocates. Instead, let the U.S. take the forefront in mediating the current crisis, and provide for the concerns of all people involved, including the minority Serbs, and not just one group or the other. That is the kind of aid that the Yugoslav republics and the Balkans need right now. These ancient and deep-seated ethnic animosities will not just go away. So let us attempt to resolve the current situation, not just ignore it or condone unfairness.

The world has recognized that there is a serious problem in the Balkans. Without proper mediation, a repeat of the ethnic strife that characterized that area during the Second World War is inevitable.