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**U.S. Senate  
Republican Policy  
Committee**

Don Nickles, Chairman  
Rick Lawson, Staff Director

# Issue Alert

June 25, 1991  
4:00pm

## Yugoslavia: Will The "Balkan Tinderbox" Ignite?

### Noteworthy

- On June 25, 1991, Croatia, one of the six federal republics of Yugoslavia, declared itself a "sovereign and independent state." Croatia's ally, Slovenia, quickly followed suit. The federal parliament immediately urged the army "to undertake measures to prevent the division of Yugoslavia and changes in its borders." [*Associated Press*, 6/25/91 14:56 EDT]
- Slovenia and Croatia had been scheduled to secede by June 26 and June 30, respectively, unless agreement had been reached on a workable confederal arrangement with the other four republics. Their secession may result in a bloody civil war and the end of Yugoslavia, which since its creation in 1918 has been the most ethnically diverse country of Central Europe.
- On June 21, U.S. Secretary of State Baker had visited Belgrade in a last-ditch effort to head off "disintegration." "The situation is very serious," he warned. "We worry about history repeating itself," alluding to the Balkans' traditional role as Europe's "tinderbox," setting off larger conflicts. The 1914 assassination of the heir to the Austrian throne by a Serbian nationalist, which set off World War I, occurred in what is now Yugoslavia.
- Yugoslavia's possible disintegration is the result of traditional ethnic animosities, added to the problems caused by the four decades of communism. As tensions have increased in recent months, the federal government has ceased to function, and the economy is near collapse.
- The major rivalry is between the two largest groups, the Serbs and Croats. They disagree on the issue of borders owing to the presence of a large Serbian minority in Croatia. The Serbs have insisted that republic borders must be redrawn along ethnic lines in the event the Yugoslav federation were dissolved. The Croats and Slovenes insist on maintaining the current borders.
- A major roadblock to reaching a settlement is the fact that the largest of Yugoslavia's six republics, Serbia, still has a communist government. Its leader, Slobodan Milosevic, has exacerbated ethnic tension to maintain his own increasingly shaky hold on power.
- U.S./Soviet confrontation over Yugoslavia is unlikely. However, several neighboring countries, including Albania, Bulgaria, Greece, Hungary, and Romania, have interests that could involve them in the crisis.
- A detailed Republican Policy Committee analysis of the Yugoslav situation, and its possible ramifications, will be released shortly.

RSC SENT  
OUT

FOUGHT IT

DEAN TOOK BEATINGS  
RITTER ASKED

RITTER DENIES

~~EXPLAINS~~  
DISMAYED

BRISTON  
GODFREY JVC  
HIS

A) RSC NATASHA ASK HIM  
B) DEAN RITTER  
NATASHA

## Background

Modern Yugoslavia was created in 1918, as a result of World War I, when Slovenia and Croatia, formerly part of Austria, were united with already independent Serbia. But from the beginning, tensions arose between the Croats and Serbs, who, though closely related, profess different religions, write in different alphabets, and generally have a different cultural orientation. The Croats, in particular, objected to the Serbs' leading role in the new state. These tensions came to a head during World War II, when the fascist *Ustaša* [OO-stah-shah] party came to power in Croatia; allied with Nazi Germany, the *Ustaša* killed large numbers of Serbs, Jews, and Gypsies.

After World War II, Josip Broz Tito [YOE-seep BROZE TEE-toe], who had been a leader of the wartime resistance, established a communist dictatorship; the country was organized as a federation modeled on the Soviet Union. In 1948, Tito broke with Stalin and the Soviet bloc. He insisted on an "independent road to socialism" and received strong Western support; Yugoslavia is not a member of the Warsaw Pact. However, with Tito's death in 1980, suppressed ethnic tensions once again came to the fore, and federal governmental institutions became increasingly ineffective. In 1990 republic elections, Slovenia and Croatia elected democratic governments dedicated to national sovereignty; Serbia and Montenegro elected reform communists (renamed "socialists," led by strongman Slobodan Milosevic [SLOW-bo-dan mee-LOW-sheh-veech]) seeking to preserve the federation in its current form; and the other two republics, Bosnia-Herzegovina (with a mixed Muslim, Serbian, and Croatian population) and Macedonia, elected non-communists advocating a compromise acceptable to all six republics. (See map.)

Many observers blame Milosevic for the republics' inability to find a solution. Serbia's 1990 elections were widely regarded as unfair, and his hold on the republic has slipped in recent months. He has inflamed Serbian ethnic concerns to justify his hardline stand and his continuation in office. However, secession could have unpredictable consequences for Milosevic and could increase the likelihood of civil war.

## U.S. Policy: In Support of Yugoslav Unity

Based on Tito's perceived independence from the Soviets, the United States has long favored a policy that is based on preserving Yugoslavia's unity, independence, and territorial integrity within its current borders. In addition, the U.S. seeks to promote dialogue among the ethnic groups, respect for human rights, and market reforms of the economy. Secretary of State Baker reiterated this position in Belgrade, the Yugoslav capital, on June 21. He stated that neither the United States nor its European allies would recognize seceding republics, nor would they provide economic assistance. He also said the United States would welcome any restructured federation agreed to by the republics.

A longstanding U.S. concern is that a breakup of Yugoslavia would be exploited by the Soviets to assert their control. However, with the Soviets' own internal problems and the Warsaw Pact moribund, this now appears unlikely.

## Other Ramifications

The Yugoslav crisis has attracted the interest of a number of neighboring states, although their direct military involvement is not probable.

Hungary has tilted toward Croatia in its confrontation with Serbia, while Romania has supported Serbia. This alignment reflects the presence of Hungarian minorities both in Romania's Transylvania region and in Serbia's autonomous province of Vojvodina. In addition, Romania's reform communist government, led by Ion Iliescu [ee-ON ee-lee-ESS-koo], is similar to Serbia's.

Besides the Serb/Croat confrontation, Yugoslavia's other ethnic hot spot is Serbia's second autonomous province, Kosovo. The ancient heartland of the Serbian nation, Kosovo today has a 90 percent ethnic Albanian population which is demanding full republic status. The Serbs believe the Albanians' real goal is union with neighboring Albania. Serbian police have been cited for widespread human rights abuses in Kosovo.

Finally, at some future date, Yugoslavia's southernmost republic, Macedonia, could declare its independence. An independent Macedonia would lay claim to neighboring areas of Greece and Bulgaria, involving both of those states in the crisis.

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