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Crossfire

Civil War in Yugoslavia

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ANNOUNCER: From Washington, Crossfire. On the left, Mike Kinsley. On the right, Pat Buchanan. Tonight, Civil War in Yugoslavia. In the crossfire, former Secretary of State Alexander Haig. And in New York, David Aaron, former Deputy National Security Adviser.

MIKE KINSLEY: Good evening. Welcome to Crossfire. Airplanes bombed a European city today for the first time since World War II. The planes belonged to Yugoslavia, the target was Ljubljana, capital of the breakaway republic of Slovenia. With the collapse of the brief cease-fire over the weekend, it looks like full civil war between Yugoslav federal forces and the two breakaways, Slovenia and Croatia. The Bush administration has been strongly on the side of the central government, but today Secretary of State Baker issued a warning:

JAMES BAKER, Secretary of State: We laid down some very strong markers with the central government of Yugoslavia with respect to use of force. We think that they have gone beyond those markers and we have so expressed ourselves.

KINSLEY: Has war returned to Europe and is the United States on the wrong side? Pat?

PAT BUCHANAN: Secretary Haig, did Secretary of State Baker make a mistake when he went to Belgrade I guess about ten days ago and said under no circumstances would we recognize the independence of Slovenia and Croatia?

ALEXANDER HAIG, Former Secretary of State: I think so. I think in effect he gave a green light to the Serbian Marxist government to brutalize the little republic to their north in Slovenia and it's clear that the administration has been trying to back peddle ever since and that's good. I welcome that, but I think it was a dreadful mistake.

BUCHANAN: Why in heaven's name would the United States support a Marxist tinged or Marxist dominated central government against two small republics which are seeking the kind of independence, freedom and democracy to an extent that we enjoy ourselves?

Mr. HAIG: Well, Pat, it's a very delicate question of course and what we should have been doing is espousing a loose confederation, minority rights, rule of law and free markets, and let the people decide.

BUCHANAN: Well, why, Secretary Haig, did Mr. Bush clearly and Secretary Baker were clearly on the side of the central government? Territorial integrity was number one as of ten days or a week ago even though there's a shift right now.

Mr. HAIG: Well, I think there was an oversensitivity to historic precedence and the resurrection of 1914 has absolutely no place in modern post Marxist Europe. The other problem is the mirror image of what may occur in

the Soviet Union and we're on the wrong side of that issue if that's what's driving the administration's policy.

KINSLEY: David Aaron, make the case please for the—is there any case at all that can be made for the Bush-Baker policy of encouraging the maintenance of a united Yugoslavia?

DAVID AARON, Former Deputy National Security Adviser: Well, I think General Haig is correct when he points out that people are very nervous, not just the administration, but all the Europeans who of course have been plunged into two wars in this century starting with an assassination in Serbia of Archduke Ferdinand, and they're very nervous that the Balkans may once again become Balkanized because once the borders are redrawn and independence is declared, the problems don't end there. All those nationalities are mixed up, one with the other, the borders are never considered final and conflict continues. So, they have reasons to hope as General Haig has suggested that some kind of federation, some kind of confederation, some kind of Yugoslavia can still emerge here.

KINSLEY: General, there used to be a word called "Balkanization" and it referred to this very part of the world and it meant the break up of a region into tiny little warring countries. This was thought to be a very, very bad thing, Balkanization, something to be discouraged, led to World War I. Why is suddenly Balkanization considered to be a good thing?

Mr. HAIG: Right. You have to know what you're talking about when you speak Balkanization. Yugoslavia was somewhat of an anomaly in the first instance. The Croats and the Slovenes for example are remnants of the old Austria-Hungary empire oriented towards Europe, oriented towards democracy and all that we stand for. The other elements, especially Serbia, was oriented on the old Ottoman Empire, it's a residue of that. It is the only residual Marxist regime left that is healthy in Eastern Europe with one or two exceptions in Romania for example, but we should not be taking the position in my view which props up Marxist regimes against those are seeking self determination and democracy.

BUCHANAN: David Aaron, it seems to me that if you look at Europe today it is impossible to think that the United States could for any length of time support a central government, especially a Marxist one, crushing these kinds of independence movements with tanks. I mean, the administration talks about stability but isn't the kind of stability they're trying to maintain here really something that is disappearing rapidly and they're really not adjusting to what's coming in the future?

Mr. AARON: Yes, I agree with that. I think that the position that the administration has today is extremely unrealistic and the position that they had a few days ago was extremely counterproductive. I think Secretary Baker had an opportunity when he went to Yugoslavia to say, we're in favor of territorial integrity but only if there's massive reform, only if you can have a revision of your constitution as almost everyone in the country

would like to see. Right now the position is that they're in favor of independence if it's arrived at peacefully. Well, that's in effect saying I'm in favor of independence if the federal military. If the Serbian military agrees to go along with it. That's a back door endorsement of the central authority as it stands. So, I think they're still a long ways from having a coherent position. If they can get one, if they can come out of the closet and say, we want independence, then I think they could—

BUCHANAN: Let's take up Al Haig's point because it seems fundamental. Croatia and Slovenia, Western oriented, Catholic, associated with the Hapsburg empire. Serbia and points south: Eastern Orthodox, Muslim. I mean, as a practical matter, is it really possible to keep this old Yugoslavia together at all?

Mr. AARON: Well, I've been struck by the fact that the President of Slovenia has said that there is a possibility of still holding things together and he said that as recently as perhaps 12 or 24 hours ago. So, I think they understand that they might have some stake in not trying to go it alone or be a nation of two million people in the foothills of the Alps. That's a tough thing in the modern world. So, they may have a stake in hanging together but only if violence can stop, if the Serbian hegemony can be thwarted and if there can be major reform and we have to be on the side of that.

KINSLEY: Give us a little history lesson, Al. Here's a softball question for you. Where did Yugoslavia, this apparently completely unnatural country as you all seem to agree, where did it come from?

Mr. HAIG: Well, it came out of the First World War and the settlements following the First World War, the collapse of the Ottoman Empire and it was on the wrong side in that war and the antiquated confirmation in Austria-Hungarian empire; but it has held together—and this is an important point based on what was just said—it's held together not only under a very strong authoritarian Tito who rallied the independent spirit because he stood up against the Soviet Union and Moscow and Stalin but also because the economic imperative and that's probably why what David said is very, very valid. While they can have a loose confederation and a great degree of autonomy, their common interests are in economic cooperation and they're probably going to have to continue with some kind of cooperation.

BUCHANAN: Al Haig, right now, those republics, Slovenia and Croatia, are really the most productive in Yugoslavia and they feel they're being totally milked by the central government.

Mr. HAIG: Well, it's true and I'm not standing as an apologist for that central government. I think we took the wrong position and we also did it on the subterfuge that this would preserve the peace. The greatest danger to war in Europe today remains Marxism. Initially it was the—

BUCHANAN: Al Haig—

Mr. HAIG: —greatest danger because it was

imperialist—

BUCHANAN: Why have we helped—

Mr. HAIG: Wait a minute.

BUCHANAN: All right.

Mr. HAIG: Today it is the greatest danger because it's trying to preserve its decaying empire.

BUCHANAN: And, Al Haig, if you look at Belgrade you will find World Bank loans dumped in there, IMF loans dumped in there and direct U.S. loans to the central government even during the 1980's. Why were we doing that? I mean, we're never going to get that money back.

Mr. HAIG: At the time that the cold war was raging it made great sense to keep a Marxist family member standing up firmly and courageously against Moscow and that's why we supported Yugoslavia. That picture has changed and today the E.C.'s \$1 billion of credits have been put by the German government and some of the E.C. members on the line. They say, we're going to withdraw them if this invasion isn't withdrawn.

BUCHANAN: OK. When we come back, is the breakup of Yugoslavia into civil war a portent of things to come in the Soviet Union?

[Commercial break]

BUCHANAN: Welcome back. In a dramatic shift the United States said today it would recognize the independence of Slovenia and Croatia but only if done peacefully. However, tonight there are conflicting reports on whether a civil war can be averted in both Slovenia and Croatia and whether a coup d'etat may be in the works in Belgrade. Our guests are Alexander Haig, former Supreme Allied Commander in Europe and former Secretary of Defense. And David Aaron who's a former Deputy National Security Adviser to President Carter. David Aaron, is— did Secretary Baker when he was in Belgrade, and as Secretary Haig suggests may have given the green light to Yugoslavia, did he send a signal to the Soviet Union that we believe it's territorial integrity, too, is more important than the independence of the Baltic republics?

Mr. AARON: I certainly hope not because I think it's quite clear that for example Mr. Yeltsin who is the only elected leader in Russian history and by a sizable margin is very much on the side of the Baltics in deciding their own fate. He said he's in favor of union but if the Baltics decide on their own in their own democratic way that they don't wish to be a part of the Soviet Union, then he feels they have the right to go their own way; and I believe that's an encouraging sign and I would hope that Secretary Baker wasn't trying to undercut that position.

KINSLEY: General Haig, everyone's for self determination these days, it's very fashionable. It's a little bit easy, isn't it? Aren't there any limits to how small a little group of people are who have the right to split off into their own country? What about the particular problem in Yugoslavia that each of these breakaway republics has strong minorities, large minorities, I believe, of the groups from the other republics? And don't they lose out when—

Mr. HAIG: A very important aspect of this, Michael, and it's true for example in Croatia there are three to 400,000 avid Serbians some of whom have already left, some have threatened to fight if there's a breakaway. These are very complex issues but they are usually resolved in the self interest of the parties. It's our position to send a signal to Eastern Europe and above all to the Soviet Union that we stand on principle.

KINSLEY: Yeah, but just to play devil's advocate for a moment, historically when these countries do break up, A, there's a great deal of violence even though you say you want it to happen peacefully; and, B, even if it's done peacefully, tremendous refugee problems with people moving from the country where they thought they were in to the country they really want to be in and isn't sensible of Bush and Baker to say, look, if possible we would like to encourage these people not to do this, to keep together in the larger countries to avoid these problems?

Mr. HAIG: Of course, there's never a problem of this kind that isn't replete with contradictions. The simple facts are, however, where does this tension come from? It comes from the repression of legitimate aspirations by people with differing objectives and to claim that brutalizing those sentiments through a Marxist central government is the moral course to pursue or even the practical one— violence didn't come because we supported or didn't support the central government. The violence came from the fact that they have been repressed by that central government.

BUCHANAN: David Aaron, since you both seem to agree that Secretary Baker made a mistake and may have given a green light when he indicated territorial integrity was the be-all and end-all, should the United States step back here, let the Europeans handle it since the Germans have shown they can be pretty tough on it and they're much more supportive of Slovenia and Croatia being right next door than is the United States? Why not let the Europeans take the lead?

Mr. AARON: Well, I think in fact we are. You know, Hans Sidorigentar [sp?] was in Yugoslavia, he's now in southern Austria where he's a little safer and I think that the conference on security and cooperation in Europe is facing its first very serious test of whether it can in fact handle security problems of this nature in Europe and we should be supportive of that process as best we can but we can't duck the issue and I'm afraid that the current position which you described I think quite clearly at the beginning of this segment, that we're in favor of independence if it's arrived at peacefully is a waffle. It in effect says to the central military, we're in favor of independence if you go along with it and that's not in my judgment an adequate position.

BUCHANAN: What should the administration's position be and where do you think it's going to wind up?

Mr. AARON: I think the position should be that we are in favor of a reconstitution of Yugoslavia, a revision of the federal charter and if as a result of that process these

countries wish to be independent, then so be it; but we should be very clear that we— and I think Secretary Baker has said today that we think they've really stepped over the line as far as violence is concerned.

BUCHANAN: Do you agree with that? Is that where America's position should be and where do you think it will wind up?

Mr. HAIG: Well, in general I do agree with that. I think it's going to wind up very close to that because events are going to push it in that direction as they already are beginning to, but again I raise the specter of the impact that the position we have been in is making on those in the Soviet Union, the Yeltsins of this world, about what our attitude will be if indeed there is a popular elected consensus for certain republics, whether it be the Baltics or some of the other Asian republics to withdraw from the Soviet Union. That is their right and privilege to do and I think it's a very bad position for the United States to be in as an advocate for propping up Gorbachev or an advocate for propping up the central government.

BUCHANAN: Very quickly, do you think that Secretary Baker was attempting to signal to the Soviet Union that he believed territorial integrity was far more important than independence?

Mr. HAIG: I was very notoriously unsuccessful in getting inside of his brain for the years I worked with him and I certainly couldn't do it today.

KINSLEY: OK. Well, we can't get inside Baker's brain either. When we come back, we're going to talk about whether America is irrelevant to this whole problem and whether that's a good or a bad thing.

[Commercial break]

KINSLEY: David Aaron, you've been involved in the National Democratic Institute task force on democracy in Yugoslavia I believe. What are the chances if this Yugoslavia does break up into these little bitty countries that they will be democracies of the type we would be happy with?

Mr. AARON: I think it's going to be very, very difficult. I think that for example the leaders of Croatia, Slovenia, and Serbia have all now been elected in a popular election but they are by no means democrats. The press is muzzled. Freedoms are curtailed. You would not think you were in a democratic country if you went to those places so— and if they do become independent, if they continue to have border problems, the kind of ethnic problems, the refugee problems that you talked about earlier, that's only going to make it harder. So, I think that the prospects of democracy are not very good in Yugoslavia no matter which way we look at it but I think that they are likely to be worse if the turmoil continues, if the fragmentation continues and if the fighting continues.

BUCHANAN: Al, let me pick up on that. There are reports right now that the head of the military in Belgrade says they're going to move until they've crush the independence in Slovenia— the movement in Slovenia. What is your view about how this is going to

play out? Do you see a lot more bloodshed between Croatia and Slovenia and the army or do you think the Serbian dominated army will give those republics up or will they give up their independence?

Mr. HAIG: Well, it's very difficult to predict tonight. This is a highly emotional thing and blood has already been spilled. I would suggest that the Yugoslav army has been brutalized in its efforts in Slovenia and this is a very important point to that army so they're going to have to try to rectify it. That's added to the other affront.

BUCHANAN: The fact that they've been humiliated in Slovenia thus far?

Mr. HAIG: Absolutely. And they misread the resistance entirely and they've been embarrassed and humiliated. Their chief has been fired, but the thought of having this expand into Croatia and Slovenia simultaneously in a government that is shaky and has a great deal of resistance within its own confines in Serbia—

BUCHANAN: All right. Our American army's sitting there in Germany, not that far away in Bavaria. You don't see any circumstance, do you, where there could be any kind of American military intervention in that country?

Mr. HAIG: No, not at all. I think the best thing to do is to back up more vigorously than heretofore, what is a now a modified European position somewhat under German leadership and participate because we don't want to turn Europe over to Europeans. The world is becoming increasingly interdependent. We have a role to play.

KINSLEY: Let me ask you about that very point because as David Aaron was saying the Europeans really are—the Western Europeans, the Germans, to a lesser degree the French and the English, are really running this crisis from the Western point of view. It's sort of a first, it's sort of a continuation of the decline of American influence even at a moment when we sort of dominate the world in a way we've never done before. Is this— do you agree with that, A. and B, should we be happy about that, that they're growing up and taking over for themselves or should we be nervous about that?

Mr. HAIG: I would be nervous because even such a strange crisis as we had in the Falkland Islands in the earlier eighties, it was essential that we all sat down together, our European partners and the United States and worked out a common approach. That didn't happen on this occasion and I'm sorry to say we're paying the price for it.

BUCHANAN: David Aaron, do you see further bloodshed or do you think they can resolve this thing peacefully?

Mr. AARON: I'm afraid I see further bloodshed because I think it's not clear who is in charge in Yugoslavia. It's not clear that the civilians are in charge of the military and it's not clear that senior military are in fact in charge of their troops. So, I think there's going to be a lot of difficulty and I think that same problem may well exist in some of the republics as well.

KINSLEY: OK. Thanks a lot, David Aaron. Thank you, General A. Haig. Pat and I will be back in a moment.

[Commercial break]

KINSLEY: Pat, you're rooting for an independent Slovenia, an independent Croatia, democratic or not. You want an independent Punjab, of course an independent Palestine. For all I know you want an independent South Carolina, an independent McLean, Virginia. Let me ask you what I asked Haig. Is there any limit to how small a little country is entitled to its own independence?

BUCHANAN: You're exactly right. There are limits. All I suggest, Michael, is these movements are nationalist. We are in an age of nationalism. They're the strongest movements in the world. They can't be resisted with tanks and bloodshed. We can't support that. What we ought to be supporting is some sort of arrangement where they can have a measure of sovereignty and independence, all of them, including— go ahead.

KINSLEY: Sounds reasonable enough to me. From the left, I'm Mike Kinsley. Good night for Crossfire.

BUCHANAN: Including South Carolina. From the right, Pat Buchanan. Join us tomorrow night for another edition of Crossfire.

KINSLEY: OK. And now let's find out what's coming up on *PrimeNews*.

BERNARD SHAW, PrimeNews: Well, Michael, you know what the topic is, that bloodshed in Slovenia as the Yugoslav government tries to bring the breakaway republic back to the fold. Mistaken identity and charges of discrimination at an amusement park in the San Francisco Bay area, and Mount Rushmore at 50. Those stories and more ahead on *PrimeNews*.

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