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# The international dimension of the escalating crisis in Yugoslavia

## Yugoslav Successor States



*Map 1* Yugoslav successor states

## Cold War predictability

The Soviet Union's decision to end its overlordship of a string of states on its western borders brought an effective end to the Cold War. It had found the burden of maintaining a sprawling informal empire stretching from the north German plains to the Khyber Pass in Afghanistan beyond its means. During the 1980s, 30,000 Soviet troops had lost their lives in a vain attempt to implant the communist system in the tribal and emphatically Islamic society of Afghanistan. The ruinously expensive nuclear arms race proved even more destructive to the Soviet system.

The unravelling of that system in the late 1980s came as a tremendous surprise in the West. It is hard now to recall that in 1975, Helmut Sonnenfeldt, Henry Kissinger's senior aide, had proposed that not only should the West refrain from destabilising the communist world but that 'it ought actively to promote the preservation of the Soviet order' (Almond 1994:38).

The idea that the Cold War ensured a certain predictability in international relations, and that it was not worth pursuing it single-mindedly, could not be expressed too vocally. Nevertheless, the Sonnenfeldt doctrine of wishing to maintain borders and forms of authority in Eastern Europe originating from tyranny and the use of force after the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact of 1939 suited the mindset of not a few leaders in NATO countries.

Britain's Margaret Thatcher and her American political soulmate Ronald Reagan were unabashed Cold Warriors. But many of their colleagues in allied countries lacked their ideological fervour and welcomed the continuity and stability which the Cold War provided in domestic politics. It made the business of politics easier in important respects. Faced with an external threat on the scale of the Soviet one, electorates were usually moderate and predictable in their behaviour. Poorly performing or downright corrupt ruling parties (as in Italy) were not punished as severely as they might have been had the need for national solidarity in the face of an external danger been less pressing. Alternative political voices, such as separatist, communist or radical right-wing ones, found it difficult to challenge the forces of moderation occupying the political foreground. Certain recurring issues dominated politics: the need to promote welfarist policies within a mainly, but not wholly, free enterprise system, and to find the revenue to provide a strong defensive capability in order to repel threats from the East. The Soviet danger also provided much of the momentum behind the need to press ahead with the strengthening of the European Community (EC) and perhaps even create an eventual federation of politically free European states.

Only in Spain's Basque region and in Britain's ethnically divided province of Northern Ireland were West European governments confronted with serious internal unrest. Generally, the political agenda did not vary enormously from country to country. Some electorates showed more enthusiasm for privatisation than others or gave more priority to maintaining high employment rather than controlling inflation. But the domestic challenges confronting West European leaders were manageable ones compared with those in the period between the two world wars and earlier ones in the long era of gradual democratisation from 1848 onwards. The mainly technocratic challenges of West European governance in the last decades of the Cold War produced not a few grey and unimaginative politicians. They were at their element in EC summits, agreeing to price

mechanisms and the pace and extent of the next round of economic convergence. But, in most cases, they had never been tested by having to respond to the disintegration of state boundaries or the sudden rise of politicians prepared to use mass violence as a routine way of securing their political objectives.

With few exceptions West European democracies which had possessed col onial empires in the third world had preferred to decolonise as rapidly as possible rather than defy local demands for independence. This experience predisposed major states against intervening directly in Yugoslavia's internal conflicts; Britain's experience in India and Palestine also made partition as a means of separating conflicting groups appear superficially very attractive. There was little imperial nostalgia, given the increasing absorption with questions of European integration as well as domestic preoccupations.

There had also been little active solidarity with East European nations which tried to break out of the Soviet orbit. George Schöpflin is not the only informed commentator who argues that, over Hungary in 1956 and Czechoslovakia in 1968, the West 'did not do enough' and effectively 'gave the Soviet Union a free hand' (Schöpflin 1990:15). There were still lingering memories in the political class about how Western Europe had been destabilised after the First World War owing to the upheavals in the eastern part of the continent. At least the triumph of communism in much of Central Europe and the Balkans had prevented a recurrence of the nationalist disputes which, in the popular imagination, had greatly contributed to the eruption of the Second World War. Soviet occupation of Eastern Europe and the creation of regimes which lacked popular legitimacy could not be condoned, nor was it, despite Sonnenfeldt's indiscretion in 1975. Nevertheless, there was a tendency to view the subjugation of Eastern Europe as a permanent state of affairs. No innovative thinking had been devoted to devising strategies suitable for a *post-communist* Eastern Europe. It would soon turn out that tihere was no enthusiasm, or ready agreement, for upgrading security institutions developed primarily for Cold War purposes. Nor, after the euphoria of the Berlin Wall's demolition in November 1989, was there a 'generosity moment' when Western Europe showed itself ready to make even small sacrifices so that the East could start to share a few of its material gains.

Edward Mortimer complained in 1992:

> no West European has the authority to demand the sacrifices required from domestic vested interests, notably the farmers and other producer lobbies, which oppose the opening up of the West European market to the most competitive East European products: coal, steel, textiles, and food.[1]

A European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD) had been set up in 1991 to channel economic funds to the East in order to strengthen the democratic process and promote a competitive economy (Hyde-Price 1996:195). But its first head, Jacques Attali, was complaining by September 1992 that:

> The treatment the European Community has reserved for those nations of central and eastern Europe that have been most successful in their emancipation from communism, appears designed to keep them at arms length from Western markets. Rather than being treated as new member-

states of Europe, they are regarded as potential economic rivals to rich Western Europe. Why else should the EC, in the association agreements with Poland, Hungary and Czechoslovakia, have insisted on trade restrictions in areas like agriculture, textiles, coal and steel—the very areas that promise the east its highest earnings in scarce foreign exchange?

It is not the small shrinking economies sheltered under newly born democratic structures in the East who are seeking protection against powerful Western interests. Rather the West is seeking protection against them![2]

It would be the French President, François Mitterand, the chief sponsor of the EBRD, who turned out to be most unwilling to allow the EC to waive tariffs on imports from the East that amounted to less than 1 per cent of EC output in these areas (Bideleux, and Jeffries 1998:621).

In 1993, the Czech President, Vaclav Havel, would warn that 'Twice in this century Europe has paid a terrible price for the narrow-mindedness and lack of vision of its democracies… Democratic Europe cannot afford a third failure' (Havel 1994:42–3).

### Introspection of the victors

As Eastern Europe was affected by economic depression and, in places, inter-ethnic tension, the malaise in its western half was seen as extending beyond the absence of innovative statesmen. Stjepan Mestrović, a US-based sociologist of Croatian descent, has argued that a culture of narcissism (first referred to by the philosopher Christopher Lasch in 1979) accounted for the narrow self-interest of the West towards the problems of Eastern Europe (Mestrović 1994:75). He and others have also drawn attention to the advance of post-modern thought, which prefers to substitute competing narratives for fact or objective truth. This theory, critical of the Enlightenment and 'modernist' projects ranging from democratic capitalism to communism, had become sufficiently influential in the USA, Australia and parts of Western Europe to have given its name to 'the post-modern age'. Violence in a collapsing Yugoslavia in the early 1990s, directed mainly at unarmed civilians, would be subjected to 'the impulses of the post-modern age: disbelief, deconstruction, questioning, and ambivalence' (Cushman and Mestrović 1996:12).

At the end of the Cold War, Francis Fukuyama published an influential work, at variance with post-modernist assumptions, which took its inspiration from the Enlightenment faith in progress which had previously shaped much of Western thought (Fukuyama 1992:12). He argued that one universal history now operated in a world in which a social system based on liberal democracy and the capitalist free market was unassailable. The Western idea 'had become universal: liberal democratic institutions provided the norm for states everywhere' (Gray 1998:151). By 1992, when the scale of state-sponsored violence was casting a deep shadow over Fukuyama's 'New World Order', his response was to emphasise 'the need to insulate Yugoslavia from larger questions of American security'. (Fukuyama 1992:274).

No innovative thinking had occurred about Yugoslavia as conflict between the leadership in Belgrade and mainly non-Serbian republics and provinces had intensified from the mid-1980s. The preservation of a united Yugoslavia was seen as crucial for a post-Cold War Europe. The rise of a communist nationalism under Slobodan Milošević did not sound alarm bells, nor did his crack-down in Kosovo, nor did the willingness of most of the army leadership to support his bid to reconstruct the federation around Serbia. Yugoslav studies was a poor relation of Soviet studies, into which enormous funds were channelled during the Cold War.[3] An entire discipline called Sovietology, or *Kremlinology,* emerged but no *Yugoslavology* accompanied it (Conversi 1998:8). In the West, most academic writing on Yugoslavia was by international relations specialists. They often emphasised international causes as leading to a break-up of the country and as dangers to peace and security (Conversi 1998:8). Susan Woodward, the author of perhaps the most influential and widely reviewed academic study of the Yugoslav crisis during the first half of the 1990s, has argued that pressure from international capitalist bodies on Yugoslavia to transform itself into a pluralist democracy and free market economy contributed in no small measure to the crisis that overtook the federation at the end of the 1980s (Woodward 1995). Internal factors were neglected which greatly helped Milošević. In their published statements, diplomats and policy-makers expressed concern about Slovene and Croatian separatism, but there was little understanding that 'under Milošević's stewardship, the Serbs…were the key secessionists' (Silber and Little 1996:xxiv).

At least for the duration of the Persian Gulf crisis (1990–1), Western leaders had the excuse of being preoccupied by a major threat to stability in the Middle East. Iraq's invasion of Kuwait in August 1990 detonated a crisis which culminated in the sending of an expeditionary force, mainly consisting of US and British troops, which drove Saddam Hussein forces back to Iraqi territory in February 1991. The victory was an impressive display of Western military might. But the conflict, and its build-up, revealed strains and uncertainties which would influence the Western response to the fast-escalating Yugoslav crisis. Disputes had flared up between the British, French and Germans, and between some of them and the USA, about the nature of their contribution to 'Operation Desert Storm' (Woodward 1996a:165). More significant was the uncertainty in Washington about what to do next after Iraq's defeat. President George Bush decided not to move on to Baghdad and remove Saddam Hussein. Saddam's apparatus of repression was left largely intact along with his ability to manufacture chemical and biological weapons that, in some eyes, posed as grave a threat to Western security as the Soviet nuclear arsenal had done. Reluctance to precipitate the collapse of multi-ethnic Iraq along with pessimism about the ability to replace Saddam Hussein with a viable successor regime were seen as reasons for American hesitation (Almond 1994:37). However loathsome Saddam appeared to be, he was regarded as a figure representative of his people. James Baker, the US Secretary of State during the crisis, showed little enthusiasm for American-directed democracy-building in a society that seemed to be natural terrain for dictators and fanatics of different stripes. He would display similar pessimism towards Yugoslavia.

Unlike in Western Europe, the crisis does not appear to have caught Washington unawares. In November 1990 the *New York Times* had reported that 'US intelligence is predicting that Federated Yugoslavia will break apart, most probably in the next 18

months, and that civil-war in that multi-national Balkan country is highly likely'.[4] David Gompert, a junior member of the Bush administration, argued subsequently that his superiors concluded it was not in the interests of the United States to intervene decisively in this particular crisis because 'no vital interests' were at stake (Gompert 1996:140). Interviewed in 2000 after the US *did* intervene in Kosovo, James Baker showed that his views about the US role in the western Balkans had not changed. He openly doubted that there would ever be a peaceful multi-ethnic society in Bosnia or Kosovo, and stated that 'there is no overriding national interest, as far as America is concerned, with our intervention there [Kosovo]':

> I don't know what the solution will be. The people in the region have been fighting each other for many, many, many hundreds of years. It may be that partition is the only solution. But we're certainly not successful in establishing multi-ethnic democracies.[5]

The admission that the USA was not very good at promoting multi-ethnic democracies in a world where less than twenty states were ethnically homo geneous does not suggest that the US foreign policy chief at the end of the Cold War enjoyed confidence in the durability of a widespread democratic world order. His tone suggests that this devout Christian churchgoer viewed the politics of Yugoslavia as simply beyond redemption.

## The Balkans viewed through a Soviet prism

For Washington, Yugoslavia remained a sideshow during the last months and years of its existence. Once the Gulf War was over, the Bush administration concentrated on preserving the Soviet Union in the face of strong support for separatism in the Baltic states and the Caucasus. Max Jacobson, a former Finnish Foreign Minister, commented that 'in the dying days of the Soviet empire, President George Bush and the Western leaders preferred stability—helping Mikhail Gorbachev to stay in power—to encouraging East Europeans to seek their freedom'.[6] Bush's preservationist instincts were fully articulated at a speech in Kiev delivered on 1 August 1991. Discussing the strained relationship between Moscow and independence-seeking Soviet republics, he expressed his hope that 'the republics will combine greater autonomy with greater voluntary interaction—political, social, cultural and economic—rather than pursuing the hopeless course of isolation' (Halverson 1996:5).

The US administration was persuaded that such a policy would be undermined if it didn't also maintain its commitment to preserving the Yugoslav federation irrespective of which forces were promoting its break-up. The parallels between Yugoslavia and the Soviet Union were seen as very close. They were the only two communist federations in existence, but whereas Gorbachev was a genuine Soviet non-nationalist perplexed by the rise of nationalist tensions, his Belgrade counterpart Milošević was proving a genius at fomenting them.

The Bush line was supported in Europe. When a Soviet crackdown occurred in Lithuania in January 1991, Giulio Andreotti, the Italian Prime Minister, assured the Kremlin that Italy accepted its action (Almond 1994:46). In October 1990, the European

Council's heads of government summit in Rome, which Andreotti presided over, expressed commitment for 'the preservation of the unity and territorial integrity of Yugoslavia' (Almond 1994:44). There appeared to be no readiness on the part of the leaders of the Atlantic democracies to ask whether unity and democracy were compatible in Yugoslavia or whether insistence on unity, almost at all costs, was simply playing into the hands of deeply authoritarian politicians relying on armed might to prevail.

France's President Mitterand showed how willing he was to condone an illegal power-grab if it could halt the disintegration of the Soviet bloc, after the briefly successful coup attempt of 20 August 1991. In an interview on French television shortly after the news broke, he declined to condemn it, describing the putschists as 'the new Soviet leaders' and saying they would be judged 'on their actions'. According to Radio Free Europe, Mitterand's statements were 'generally interpreted as a sign that he was tacitly supporting the plotters'.[7]

The failed Soviet coup occurred several weeks into the Yugoslav war. The extent of the West's hostility to border changes, as shown by Mitterand's behaviour at this time, as well as by the statements of other senior Western leaders in the previous years, was bound to have been reassuring to Milošević and his generals. The British Prime Minister, John Major, told the House of Commons after the Bosnian war had started that 'The biggest single cause of what happened in Bosnia is the collapse of the Soviet Union and the disappearance of the discipline that that exerted over ancient hatreds in the former Yugoslavia…' (Almond 1994:43).[8] He did not to explain how the Soviet Union had managed to restrain these hatreds, nor has he ever explained how the Soviets could have continued to exercise a restraining role if their state had survived, presumably under the hardliners whose power-grab failed in August 1991.

Milošević benefited from the fact that the West usually adopted a very cautious approach to the idea of altering borders. Indeed the international community has usually been deeply hostile to secessionist efforts and boundary changes. Only at rare moments has the right of small countries in Europe to independence and self-determination had influential champions. Alain Finkelkraut, one of the few French intellectuals publicly to champion the Croatian cause in 1991, has pointed to the disdain in which small countries were held by authoritarian ideologists and totalitarian regimes. He has quoted Friedrich Engels in support of this view: 'I am authoritarian enough to consider the very existence, right in the middle of Europe, of such small primitive peoples to be anachronistic.' In the same vein, he quotes from the wartime journal of the French extreme right-winger, Pierre Drieu la Rochelle, dated 15 May 1940: 'No more Holland. The number of small obsolete countries is shrinking in Europe' (Finkelkraut 1999:xxvii).

Henry Kissinger's preference for 'a world run by a very few all-powerful states' was widely shared (Almond 1994:39). Edward Heath, the Prime Minister who took Britain into the EEC in 1973, recalls Kissinger saying to him:

> Why do I have to go round to all these different capitals [e.g. Paris and London]? I just go to Moscow and I settle the whole thing with one chap. When I come here [to Western Europe], I have to traipse around every little capital.
>
> (Almond 1994:39)

The lofty and disdainful attitude of the leaders of NATO countries to the Baltic states' bid to restore their independence showed that small countries were viewed as being guilty of sowing disorder in newly liberated Europe (Finkelkraut 1999:72). From a distance, the demands of the Balts or the Armenians and Georgians appeared as provocative as the unruly and sometimes violent separatism of the Basque and Lombard militants which periodically disturbed the calm of Spain and Italy. David Owen, the EU negotiator in Bosnia, would echo these views when complaining about the Kosovar Albanian's insistence on independence: 'It's like talking to Scottish nationalists. These are not people you can do business with' (Doder and Branson 1999:240).

Leaving aside the centralising instincts of some West European leaders, the West was constrained by the conflicting principles underlying European security. The 1975 Helsinki Final Act, signed by all European countries except Albania and which gave rise to the permanent Conference on Security and Cooperation in Eastern Europe (CSCE), highlighted the lack of international rigour concerning the practical meaning of self-determination all too clearly (Woodward 1995:165; Silber and Little 1996:161). It laid down that 'inter national borders should not be altered through the use of force and that any alteration should be voluntary' (Steinberg 1994:254). But an accord meant to be the bedrock of European stability (and its successor the Paris Charter of 1990) proved to be wanting when Serbia was unwilling to agree constitutional changes in Yugoslavia that would allow two of its constituent members, Slovenia and Croatia, to secede. The Yugoslav crisis exposed 'the tensions between stability based on existing borders and non-interference in internal affairs, on the one hand, and the broad commitment to self-determination on the other' (Steinberg 1994:269).

Preceding their declarations of independence in June 1991, the only state prepared to act as a strong advocate of the Slovene and Croatian cause was Austria. It was handicapped by its non-membership of the EC and NATO, and also by the fact that, as an empire decades previously, it had possessed much of what later became Yugoslavia. Alois Mock, the Foreign Minister in Vienna, consistently tried to raise awareness of the impending explosion a few hours' drive south of his capital, but he was disregarded in other Western capitals.

At the start of the 1990s, the Iron Curtain appeared to be being replaced by 'an indifference curtain'. Central European states had to be kept at arms' length because of their capacity to disrupt Western markets. But the Balkan lands were seen as dangerous because of primitive attitudes and behaviour patterns. Sir Peter Hall, British ambassador to Belgrade at the start of the conflict, told John Major: 'Prime Minister' the first thing you have to know about these people is that they like going around cutting each other's heads off' (Seldon and Baston 1997:556). The view that desperate or criminally minded leaders simply reflected the outlook of the populations they ruled soon became an article of faith for leading Western statesmen. Henry Kissinger, writing in 1999, would declare:

> Ethnic conflict has been endemic in the Balkans for centuries. Waves of conflict have concealed divisions between ethnic groups and religions… Through the centuries these conflicts have been fought with unparalleled ferocity because none of the populations has any experience with—and essentially no belief in—Western concepts of toleration… Milošević is less the cause of the conflict in Kosovo than the expression of it.[9]

Until events such as the siege of Sarajevo and concentration camps in Bosnia horrified Western public opinion, the aggression begun in Slovenia and Croatia failed to rouse civil society in countries such as Britain and France. Alain Finkelkraut has contrasted the outrage in France which greeted the declaration of martial law in Poland in 1981 with the low-key response to the far more violent state-sponsored actions in Croatia:

> In the days following 13 December 1981, all our intellectuals had denounced at once the coup d'etat in Poland and the complacency or temporising of French politicians. Let's remember the unanimously indignant reaction to the declaration made by Claude Cheysson, then Minister of Foreign Affairs, 'Of course, we shall do nothing'. During the years that followed, we spared no support for the Polish struggle for their freedom. Had Slovenia and Croatia benefited today from the same fervour that just recently supported Poland, I would probably not have given this cause so much of my time and energy. The aggression had to reach Bosnia-Herzegovina for us to see a little sympathy towards the victims. But neither the war imposed on Croatia, the razed villages, and cities, the occupation of a third of its territory, nor the displacement of populations, not one of those atrocious facts shocked anyone who had been moved to act because of the state of siege imposed upon Poland.
>
> (Finkelkraut 1999:13)

## Anglo American complacency

Given the pronouncements of Western ambassadors, there is little sign that Foreign Ministers in Western Europe were being kept informed about the rapidity with which the situation was deteriorating in Yugoslavia during the last years of its existence. In his memoirs, John Major wrote: 'The conflict in Bosnia …took us almost unawares… Its roots were bewildering' (Major 1999:532). If British Embassy staff had been encouraged to circulate beyond the Yugoslav capital on a regular basis, high-level ignorance about the worst conflict to erupt in Europe since 1945 might have been dented. As it was, even the undiluted chauvinist views appearing on Serbian television news and in much of the print media do not appear to have rung alarm bells.[10] The tendency of British ambassadors in Yugoslavia to rely on information from Belgrade sources normally representing a Serbian viewpoint has prompted one retired head of the British Foreign Office, Sir Reginald Hibbert, to write a pamphlet entitled 'Why are British ambassadors at Belgrade pro-Serb?' A successor as Foreign Office head, Sir John Coles, has suggested that the lack of strategic thinking in the Foreign Office can partly account for the British *débâcle* over Bosnia:

> We were trying to do too much of everything—and the casualty was policy. I believe that if we had more time and better mechanisms for strategic thinking, policy would have been better conceived. We would

have addressed the fundamental issues arising from the disintegration of Yugoslavia more effectively.

(Coles 2000:205)

Cutbacks in departments such as the East Adriatic one (covering Yugoslavia) also meant that Britain had fewer diplomats permanently on the ground in the early 1990s than twenty years previously (Coles 2000:147). The lack of high-grade information from well-informed diplomats provided opportunities for informants with an engaged viewpoint to try to shape the perceptions of policy-makers. A pro-Serb outlook was already to be found in MI6, the foreign intelligence service and the Conservative Party. In the mid—1990s, alarmed at the amount of sympathy for the Bosnian cause among the British public, MI6 tried to alter perceptions by planting articles in the British press by agents writing under pseudonyms.[11] Beforehand, the well known consultancy firm run by Westminster lobbyist Ian Greer had obtained £96,250 from a Serbian source in Belgrade at the highest level. Parties and receptions were held at Westminster at which supporters of the Serbian political cause were able to mingle with MPs from all parties (Hodge 1999:11–12). The authors of an exposé on how lobbyists such as Greer trafficked influences and favours during the Major premiership have argued that he was being paid to reinforce latent sympathy for the Serbian cause (Leigh and Vulliamy 1997:110).[12] Certainly, Milošević would not have been the only head of an authoritarian regime to try to shape the Western democratic process to his own liking; the inability of shrinking party memberships to provide the financial support that major parties required for their election campaigns opened up a space which enabled regimes such as the one in Peking to fund top political contenders in countries such as the USA.

Belgrade-based Serbs were not the only protagonists in the Yugoslav conflict who would try to mobilise support in Western countries in order to win the ear of policy-makers unsure of how to respond to the Balkan conflict. But, as the war was incubating, they may have enjoyed a crucial advantage in Britain due to the initial weakness of alternative viewpoints. Until after fighting erupted in Slovenia, John Major was still prepared to say that 'the first prize is to hold together the Federation in Yugoslavia' (Silber and Little 1996:175). On 27 June 1991, Mark Lennox-Boyd, the British Foreign Office minister with responsibility for the Balkans, told the House of Commons that though 'the government would deplore the use of force… I must add however that the Yugoslav federal army might have under the constitution a role in restoring order' (Almond 1994:13). Such a statement was made when there was already abundant evidence that the Yugoslav federal army (JNA) had evolved from a multi-national force to a Serbian army under Milošević's direct control (Mesić 2001:7). In August 1990, it had aligned itself openly with hardline Serbs in the Knin area of Croatia by blocking access to the region by Croatian police instructed to re-establish Zagreb's control over it (Bennett 1995:131). In November 1990 the JNA's senior leaders came together with unrepentant civilian communists to form the League of Communists—Movement for Yugoslavia, a sign that the political views of the upper echelons of the army reflected many of those held by Milošević and his supporters (Bennett 1995:133).

The tendency to view Slovenia and Croatia as the chief instigators of the instability allowed optimistic views about the constructive role of the army to linger on long after

any supporting evidence had effectively vanished. As late as 31 December 1990, Gianni de Michaelis, the Italian Foreign Minister, bluntly warned the leaders of both republics that only a 'united' Yugoslavia could hope to enter a forthcoming 'united Europe' (Almond 1994:46). In May 1991, with the crisis much further advanced, the US government spoke in a similar vein. The State Department issued a statement at the end of the month opposing any move to turn republican frontiers into international boundaries, supporting the 'territorial integrity of Yugoslavia within its present borders', and declaring that 'the US shall not encourage or reward secession' (Almond 1994:40). There is no evidence of any concern on the part of the USA or its allies about how such emphatically pro-Yugoslav statements would be interpreted in Belgrade as Milošević was effectively goading his opponents to declare independence (Bennett 1995:14).

## Blaming the Germans

Germany was the European power which had the longest land frontier with the former communist Eastern bloc, and it appeared to be most vulnerable to upheavals on the other side of the former iron curtain. But it endorsed the position of its NATO partners on the Yugoslav crisis throughout the first half of 1991 and beyond. However, the sudden unification of West and East Germany, accompanied within a year by the collapse of the communist DDR regime in October 1989, was unsetding above all to Bonn's Western allies. Mitterand feared the emergence of a central Europe *(Mitteleuropa)* under German tutelage and was persuaded that the break-up of Yugoslavia was a crucial step in that direction (Tardy 1999:119–20). Gorbachev's Russia appeared to have less concern about a supposed German domination of Central Europe than allies such as Britain or France. Both their leaders opposed early unification. They were faced with the sudden realisation that, in terms of land mass (349,520 sq km) and inhabitants (90,767,591), Germany was now the dominant member of the EC (Conversi 1998:38). The fact that German unification was accomplished unilaterally without a formal treaty with the Second World War Allied powers which had vanquished Nazidom bred resentment.[13] Nicholas Ridley, a senior British government minister, had to resign in 1990 for publicly declaring his belief that Germany planned to 'take over Europe' (Conversi 1998:26). In the past, Britain and France had been able to use psychological pressure (such as thinly veiled warnings about Germany's Nazi past) to prevent Bonn from taking a separate position on security issues (Conversi 1998:50). It was noted that German leaders spoke about 'the victory of the principle of self-determination of peoples as an act of democratic will' (Woodward 1995:153). A unification movement which had resulted in most Germans uniting in one state might have given encouragement to those Serbs who were pressing for a re-ordered Yugoslavia which placed all Serbs in the same territorial entity. Instead, Belgrade began to argue that Germany was throwing its weight behind the secession of north Yugoslav republics in order to expand its influence south-eastwards, something that had become an article of faith for Milošević by 1993 (Cohen 1993:283).

Milošević had very good cause to promote the idea that the impetus for the break-up of Yugoslavia was coming from beyond its borders, since this drew attention away from his own actions. Austria and the Vatican were also frequently added as accomplices in a Catholic conspiracy to suborn Yugoslavia (Woodward 1996a:163). But whereas Austria

had been engaged in a fruitless awareness-raising effort which had more in common with conflict prevention than conspiracy, Germany had stayed fully in line with its Western partners. Hans-Dietrich Genscher, the Foreign Minister, spoke against a Yugoslav break-up five days before the outbreak of fighting in Slovenia (Simms 2001:18). As the crisis escalated, Germany supported each EC communiqué and, as late as 4 September 1991, Chancellor Helmut Kohl called publicly for the preservation of Yugoslavia (Almond 1994:51). Except perhaps Italy, Germany had more to fear from the unravelling of a state less than half a day's drive from the city of Munich. It would be German public opinion, shocked by the atrocities that unfolded in the second half of 1991, which pressed for a change of policy towards Yugoslavia, favouring self-determination for republics which wished to escape from Serbian aggression.

A poll conducted across Western Europe in December 1991 showed that by then public opinion in Britain and France was overwhelmingly in favour of self-determination (Kumar 1997:176, n. 41). It seemed difficult to avoid the culpability of well-placed Serbs for the unravelling of the federation. But, looking into the future, several West European officials chose to echo the Belgrade line that Yugoslavia had been destroyed by hostile external actions: for example, Roland Dumas, the French Foreign Minister, on 19 June 1993, said that 'the responsibility of Germany and the Vatican in the acceleration of the crisis are overwhelming ones'.[14]

Many Western commentators, and even some politicians entrusted with peace missions, sought to understand what was happening in Yugoslavia by seeking an explanation in the Second World War. Sir Bernard Braine MP, the longest-serving member of the British House of Commons in 1992, believed it significant that:

> during the two world wars, the Serbs were our gallant allies from the beginning… We cannot be unsympathetic to the Serbs. We must remember that Croats in Nazi uniform massacred vast numbers of Serbs. The memory of that is still vivid in Serbian minds.[15]

In the same vein, Tony Benn, the leader of the left wing of the British Labour Party, complained in 1995 that 'the Croatians who fought on the Nazi side' had been invited to the celebrations in London commemorating the end of the Second World War.[16] Not unnaturally, Serbian military officers pressed home claims that Serbia and Britain had been allies in the last major European conflict. Lieutenant Colonel Jonathan Riley, the commanding officer of the Royal Welch Fusiliers based at Gorazde when it was a Bosnian 'safe area' under siege from the Serbs, described his impressions of these men in a revealing diary entry: 'I felt them easy to talk to, and most Serb officers are patriotic men of honour, very much aware of the military traditions of two world wars fought in alliance with us' (Riley 1995:14).

## The Croatian crisis

Franjo Tudjman, Croatia's President, whom Benn was seeking to exclude from the London ceremony, had actually fought with Tito's Partisans in the Second World War and would attain the rank of general in the JNA. Far more Croats had fought with the

Partisans than identified with the movement which had carried out bloody pogroms against Croatia's Serbs, the Ustasa of Ante Pavelić, whom the Nazi Germans installed as Croatia's leader from 1941 to 1945. But Tudjman had become a dissident by the late 1960s because of what he saw as 'anti-Croat bias in official pronouncements about World War IF (Cviic 1993:373). After the suppression of the 1971 'Croatian Spring', in which liberals and technocrats had pressed for more autonomy from Belgrade, politics increasingly revolved around the assertion of national rights. A contrast could be made with Slovenia, where early democratic initiatives in favour of greater Slovene autonomy were combined with 'non-national ones stemming from concerns with the environment, anti-militarism, sexual freedom and other expressions of civic politics' (Cviic 1993:373).

Nationalist feeling in Croatia had been stoked by a barrage of anti-Croatian sentiment emanating from the Serbian media in Belgrade. Tudjman's Croatian Democratic Union (HDZ) duly won the two-round election held in Croatia in April–May 1990, even though it was only ahead of the reform communists, renamed the Party of Democratic Change (SDP), by 300,000 votes. A shrewder leader with a longer-term perspective would have cultivated the Serbs who made up 12 per cent of Croatia's population. But 67-year-old Tudjman was a man in a hurry, embittered by his treatment under the communist regime and obsessive about the need to paint the Croatian past in the most favourable possible light.

The vast majority of Croatia's Serbs lived in the cities and appeared well integrated into Croatian society. There were concentrated Serbian populations only in two parts of Croatia: Eastern Slavonia, next door to Serbia's Voivodina province, and southern and central Dalmatia. It was the Dalmatian Serbs living in and around the town of Knin who would become a serious thorn in Tudjman's side. In this upland and mainly barren region, 77 per cent of the population were Serbs, but they comprised only 15 per cent of Croatia's Serbian population (Bennett 1995:134–5). As he took up the trappings of power, Tudjman probably found it hard to imagine how they could be an obstacle in his path. But while willing to license nationalism in his own state, he was only dimly aware that others in Serbia might be prepared to unleash nationalist passions there, initially mainly at Croatia's expense. He underestimated the ingenuity of Serbia's President Milošević in this respect and was outmanoeuvred by him as the conflict between the two main South Slav components in Yugoslavia escalated in 1990–1.

In 1989 cultural associations formed to assert Serbian rights staged rallies in Croatia of the kind which had enabled Milošević's allies to take over in Montenegro, Voivodina and Kosovo. But the turnout among Croatian Serbs had been very meagre (Bennett 1995:125). A pragmatic leader newly installed in office and facing a daunting task of building up a viable Croatian state even in peacetime conditions might have chosen to conciliate the Croatian Serbs and give them a strong incentive to remain moderate. In the late 1930s an alliance of Croatian nationalists and the Serbian minority, who are known as *precani* Serbs, had been formed to press for autonomy in monarchist and heavily centralised Yugoslavia. But Tudjman showed no such restraint, perhaps under the influence of Croatian émigrés who had financed his election campaign and whose ardent nationalism was shaped less by love of country than by hatred of Serbs. Upon being installed as President, Tudjman quickly set to work to produce a draft constitution. Ready in June 1990, it defined Croatia as the state of the Croatian nation. The Serbs who, under the 1974 constitution, had been a constituent nation of Croatia, were dropped, and they

found themselves treated as a minority on a par with the Hungarians, who made up less than 1 per cent of the population (Silber and Little 1996:103). Even more provocative was the decision to make the HDZ party flag the new official flag of Croatia. It was based on the distinctive red and white chessboard, and all socialist insignia were removed from it. The similarity of the flag to that used by the wartime Ustasas was a propaganda gift to opponents of Croatian independence, and the clamour failed to abate even when it was modified months later in favour of another traditional Croatian design (Bennett 1995:141).

These insensitive actions provoked a robust response from Serbian radicals. Their vehicle was the Serbian Democratic Party (SDS), formed in Knin on 17 February 1990 (Silber and Little 1996:101). It won only a handful of seats in the Croatian Assembly elections held in the spring. Most Serbs opted for the ex-communist SDP. But it soon benefited from the clamour over the adoption of national insignia suspiciously close to that used by wartime Croatian fascists. At a time when Serbian policemen were being dismissed across Croatia, the force in Knin refused to don new uniforms with this insignia.[17] In May 1990, a delegation sent by Tudjman to win over the Knin police was run out of town. The political initiative increasingly lay with Milan Babić, a local dentist and president of Knin municipal council, who squeezed out the SDS's founder, Jovan Rasković, whose goal in founding the party had been cultural autonomy, not political secession (Silber and Little 1996:107). In an increasingly feverish atmosphere in an area which had witnessed bloody attacks on Serbs in the early 1940s, and with the propaganda barrage from Belgrade able at last to seize upon concrete evidence of Zagreb's ill-intent towards dangerously exposed Serbs, the Serb revolt mounted by Babić gained steady momentum. He used strong-arm tactics in those mainly Serb parts of Dalmatia that backed the SDP and were unenthusiastic about the prospect of secession. Separated from Serbia proper by Bosnia-Herzegovina, the Serbs in the Knin area were bound economically and through transportation links to the rest of Croatia. In Korenica, for instance, the governing SDP had hopes of developing the tourism potential of the spectacularly beautiful Plitvice National Park on its doorstep. But the politics of symbolism increasingly swept aside rational economic calculations, and Babić used armed intimidation to drive these moderate Serbs from office (Silber and Little 1996:104).

By August 1990, a full-scale rebellion against Zagreb rule was in progress. When Tudjman sent armed police to bring Knin to heel, they were intercepted by the JNA, an unmistakable sign of the backing Babić's secessionist movement enjoyed in Belgrade (Bennett 1995:131). The JNA's head, General Velijko Kadijević, refused to lift the barricades and road blocks being mounted by armed Serbs. He exclaimed: 'Do you really want the Serbs to say that the JNA is against them' (Tus 2001:42). In September 1990, Babić was installed as head of the SDS at Milošević's instigation. On 28 February 1991, a Serb National Council of Serb Autonomous Regions of Krajina issued a 'Declaration' on 'Separation from Croatia'. The Serbian media had begun referring to the areas around Knin as 'the Krajina' in 1989. The name derived from the military frontier created by the Hapsburgs to defend their frontier in the seventeenth century (Allcock *et al.* 1998:148). By the time war broke out in the summer of 1991, the Krajina Serbs were well armed, the Serbian Interior Ministry having supplied them with weapons acquired from the army (Bennett 1995:136).

The politics of symbolism, increasingly based on avenging past wrongs, had been allowed to flourish thanks to the political ascendancy in Belgrade and Zagreb of radical nationalists or opportunists such as Milošević, prepared to license nationalism for his power-conserving ends. The international community was oblivious to the dangerous passions that were being stoked up. Much later, Western officials would be able correctly to gauge their impact. Peter Galbraith, the US ambassador from 1993 to 1996, has recognised the appeal of the view that guilt for past crimes carried out by extremists in the name of an entire people is both hereditary and collective. He points to the failure of crimes carried out between 1941 and 1945 to be properly investigated:

> Tito came to power, killed as many Ustashe as he wanted to, the door was closed and everyone got on with their lives; but a line was not drawn beneath the crimes that had been committed, which allowed the Serbs, instead of saying that Ante Pavelić was responsible, to say: 'The Croats are responsible'.[18]

Tudjman, who wrote several historical works dealing with recent Croatian history before coming to power, did an immense service to radical Serbian nationalism by revising downwards the numbers killed by the Ustasa in the Second World War (Bennett 1995:129). These writings started to appear as contacts with Croatian émigrés, many of whom looked with favour on the Ustasa, were being solidified. Perhaps the least controversial findings on this sensitive topic were produced in the 1980s in separate research by two men, Bogoljub Kocović, an émigré Serb, and Vlasimir Zerjavić, a Croat:

> Both of their investigations were based not on body counts or survivors, recollections but on computer analysis of census returns and demographic indices. According to Kocović, whose figures are marginally higher than those of Zerjavić, a total of about 1,014,000, or 5.4% of Yugoslavia's population, died during or in the immediate aftermath of the Second World War on all sides. According to their figures, in absolute terms, Serbs were the biggest losers, with 487,000 dead.
>
> (Bennett 1999)

## Barriers to understanding

The most authoritative claim that, in many ways, the unfolding Yugoslav conflict was a re-run of the Second World War was made at the end of December 1991 by France's President Mitterand. Invited to clarify France's position on the war then raging in Croatia, he told journalists on the *Frankfurter Allgemeine zeitung*.

> You ask me who is the aggressor and who is the victim? I am incapable of telling you. What I know is that for a long time Serbia and Croatia have been the scene of many such dramas, especially during World War II, when large numbers of Serbs were killed in Croatian concentration camps. As you know, Croatia was allied with Nazi Germany, but Serbia wasn't.

> After Tito's death, the latent conflict between Serbs and Croatians was bound to erupt. And this is what happened.
>
> (Tardy 1999:118; Finkelkraut 1999:80)

The philosopher Alain Finkelkraut slammed Mitterand for espousing 'point by point the racial and misleading propaganda of the Serb aggressor' (Finkelkraut 1999:80). It is true that the existence of a wartime puppet state in Serbia, where resistance to the Nazis was conspicuous by its absence, is usually overlooked by those who wish to obtain a frame of reference from the Second World War. But the willingness of statesmen and military peacemakers, as well as many journalists, to invoke such explanations, however simplistic, shows their powerful appeal in adjacent Western countries, where political elites struggled to make sense of an otherwise perplexing conflict.

Politicians of the left and the right were prepared to accept historical images emanating from Belgrade because they blended in with their own preconceptions. But it was mainly politicians and activists on the European Left who were prepared to endorse official Yugoslav perspectives, largely because of the nature of the social system there. George Schöpflin has written that 'many in the West regarded verbal commitment to socialism in Eastern Europe as real. This was even more true of the Yugoslav variety' (Schöpflin 1990:3–4).

In similar vein, Alain Finkelkraut has written:

> On the Left Yugoslavia benefited for a long time from a positive image because of the challenge it had given Stalin, because of its worker management and its place in the movement of non-aligned nations. The Yugoslav experience allowed all those disappointed with the Soviets not to abandon hope in the revolution.
>
> (Finkelkraut 1999:20)

The reconstruction of Yugoslavia after 1945 inspired many on the inter national left. Four hundred and fifty Britons were among a worldwide group of communist volunteers who helped construct the Sarajevo-Samac youth railway in the late 1940s (Thompson 1992:118–19). There was an understandable tendency for some of them to argue, even after Yugoslavia had been transformed into a personal despotism, that the country embodied some of the best hopes and ideals of socialism. In France, the idea of workers' self-management acquired enormous appeal on the Left, and in 1970, Michel Rocard, a future French Prime Minister, provided a preface for a book on the subject, one that was forgotten when the socialists came to power in 1981 (Gard 2000:30). Left-wing intellectuals in France were unwilling to abandon the idea of Yugoslavia even as the JNA was pounding cities like Dubrovnik and Vukovar. In November 1991, a manifesto calling for 'new forms of association among peoples compelled by force of circumstances to live together' was issued, and among its signatories were Bernard-Henri Levy, Claudio Magris and Jorge Semprun.[19] Jean-Pierre Chevenement, a leading left-winger, declared in September that 'peace is unimaginable if the renovation of the idea of Yugoslavia, even in a very flexible form, is abandoned… France…is now in a position to act efficiently in constructing a third Yugoslavia' (Finkelkraut 1999:107).

The Praxis school of intellectuals in Yugoslavia, which interpreted Marxism in a radical way, enjoyed strong links with Marxist publications and intellectual circles in Western Europe and North America. Several members of the school became committed nationalists in the late 1980s and sought to transmit their interpretation of events to their Western contacts. Mihailo Marković, a leading Praxis philosopher, became Vice-President and chief ideologist of Milošević's party, arguing in 1994 that 'it is necessary to reintegrate territory of the former Yugoslavia wherever Serbs constitute a majority of the population'.[20]

Left-wing thinkers who made common cause with Milošević drew on anti-imperialist themes and rhetoric from Yugoslavia's era of non-alignment, which the regime adapted to new circumstances. The imperialists placed in the dock were no longer the superpowers but Germany and Austria, intent perhaps on carving up the Balkans between them. Slovenia was depicted as a stooge of Germany, a strange role for a country which directly suffered more from Nazi Germany than perhaps any other part of Yugoslavia. Many Slovenes were sent to concentration camps, and 60,000 were packed into freight cars and dumped in Serbia, their homes and farms handed over to German colonists imported from elsewhere (Wolff 1974:204). Memory of such experiences helped to ensure resistance to granting the dwindling number of Germans in Slovenia minority status even after independence (Reindl 2002).

Latent sympathy existed for Serbia in Western Europe because of the inter-pretations given to recent historical events that were invoked in the early stages of the Yugoslav conflict. In France, a pro-Serbian outlook was found among soldiers, diplomats, and anti-European strands of opinion (communists, Chevenemenists, certain Gaullists) (Gard 2000:34–5). In Britain, a succession of diplomatic envoys to Belgrade would advise John Major that, without a strong Serbia, there would be no peace in the Balkans (Sharp 1996:8). Milošević consulted the Soviet military to see what the likely Western response would be if a massive attack was launched on the secessionist republics. General Kadijević, the Defence Minister, was despatched to Moscow in March 1991 for a briefing. According to Borislav Jović, a Milošević supporter and Vice-President of Yugoslavia, he was given details of a Soviet intelligence report which 'showed that the Yugoslav army was safe to ignore Western warnings'.[21]

Perceptions among French diplomats and military officers that 'Bonn wished to carve out a zone of influence in the north of the Balkans' justified support for Serbia, and there were British counterparts who shared similar views, though perhaps in not as great numbers (Gard 2000:33). Milošević was well able to appeal to the latent nationalism to be found among West European leaders and to exploit rivalries between them, which, by necessity, had to be restrained during the Cold War. He sought to mix nationalist utterances with calls to Yugoslavs that they overcome 'their unfounded, irrational and primitive…fear of exploitation' by foreign capital, which would have been reassuring for Western diplomats (Cohen 1993:56). Even as the bloody deeds he ordered became impossible to ignore, he emerges as a plausible and even engaging figure from the memoirs of the Western envoys who dealt with him. Well-travelled, fluent in English, and relishing a Western lifestyle of whisky, cigars and American middle-brow music, he did not, on the surface, appear to be an ogre. He was certainly more personable than the obsessive and cranky Tudjman. It scarcely dawned on Western leaders that a communist

banker with legal training could deliberately set in train a range of conflicts in his own country in order to further interests that were essentially personal ones.

Writing in 1993, when much of the damage had already been done, the Polish journalist and former dissident, Adam Michnik, acknowledged Milošević's success:

> He correctly recognised the weakness of the democratic world; its inability to take risks, its failure to recognise the seriousness of the threat; and lastly, its cowardly egoism have created a situation in which fanatical nationalism and cynicism seem to be triumphing. What is more Milošević has infected others in the Balkans with his idea of an ethnic state.[22]

The American commentator William Pfaff drew even more sombre conclusions about the failure of the democracies to respond quickly and effectively to the threat posed by Milošević:

> In the 1930s there certainly was no popular clamor for the democracies to block Hitler from remilitarizing the Rhineland, or annexing Austria, or partitioning Czechoslovakia. Chamberlain and Daladier were the popular politicians, calm and reasonable men who refused o take risks over distant issues and improbable dangers. The public turned to Churchill and De Gaulle only after all the combinations of appeasement (and collaboration) had been tried and had failed…
>
> Democracies, as a general rule, are incapable of dealing with long-term threats requiring the sacrifice of lives, or even the serious risk of lost lives, even when a reasoned case can be made that this will save lives in the longer term.
>
> They can mobilise sacrifices only in war itself, or in exceptional circumstances of perceived imminent threat, as during the cold war. American and European opinion supported the Gulf intervention because the threat to Western oil seemed palpable, but popular support for that war was also understood by the Western governments to be extremely fragile.
>
> The fact is that democracies compete badly with despotisms. Democracies don't like sacrifices, or the politicians who demand them. Democracies are no good at looking after their security interests when a gun is not pointed at their heads. Democracies don't like to listen to bad news. Democracies don't want to think about bad possibilities in the future. Democracies don't want their comfort or profits interfered with. Democracies may or may not win out in the long-term. It is entirely possible that until now they have merely been lucky.
>
> (Pfaff 1993)

### Wishful thinking in the face of catastrophe

The US government had been informed by the CIA eighteen months before hostilities that war in Yugoslavia was on the cards. But neither the USA nor the European Community intervened with incentives or threats to restrain those elements, primarily the leaderships in Serbia and Croatia, who were behaving with increasingly intransigence. The fact that the JNA was particularly interested in discovering likely Western responses to hardline actions it was actively planning suggests that the army leadership would have heeded a more organised and coherent response to what was effectively an elite-led crisis. There is no indication that governments were receiving advice from their policy advisers urging innovative thinking designed to safeguard human rights or promote leaderships with an alternative outlook to those of ethnic hardliners.

Only in May 1991 did the worsening crisis in Yugoslavia obtain a commen surate response from the EC. Clashes resulting in the killing of a number of Croatian policemen were followed on 15 May by Serbia's decision to obstruct the regular annual rotation of the post of Federal President, which was to go to the Croatian representative, Stjepan Mesić. Five days later, in a referendum with an 84.94 per cent turnout, 93.24 per cent of Croatian voters gave their backing to 'a sovereign and independent state'. The arrival, on 29 May, of the EC President, Jacques Delors, was very much a last-ditch effort to stave off the Slovenian, and now Croatian, declarations of independence being put into effect (Kumar 1997:46).[23] Delors promised to request $4.5 billion for Yugoslavia in return for economic reforms aimed at turning it into a free market, and political reforms aimed at maintaining territorial unity (Woodward 1995:160; Kumar 1997:175, n. 27).

What was lacking was a declaration to the people from the EC head setting out the alternatives Yugoslavia had between finding a materially secure future in the EC and descending into bitter ethnic strife at undreamt-of cost. An appeal directed particularly at the young, who were less affected by past nationalist quarrels, might have produced a surprising amount of solidarity transcending the republics; they, after all, would have been expected to do the fighting in any war. But appeals above the heads of politicians designed to prevent conflict were not made by European leaders. Perhaps for politicians usually grappling with technocratic issues, it would have been difficult to know what to include in them. Even champions of a European civil society such as the British academic, Mary Kaldor, head of the anti-nuclear European Nuclear Disarmament (END) movement, could only see the negative side as Yugoslavia teetered on the brink of collapse: 'Like all of Eastern Europe, Yugoslavia is a patchwork of tribes…and all of Yugoslavia has experienced a long bitter and bloody history of conflict between different cultural, religious, linguistic, or ethnic groups'.[24]

Later, as head of the Helsinki Citizen Assembly, Kaldor would seek to establish a bridge between civil society in east and west, but the verdict of a Yugoslav author referring to the disowning of groups committed to peaceful resolution of problems in the initial phase of the war is not unreasonable: 'Groups and individuals who, at great risk to themselves, worked for minority rights and tried to find forms of multi-cultural existence amid the chaos of war, received precious little international attention, and were domestically subdued and perceived as traitors' (Udovicki 1997:302).

The unlikelihood of the Atlantic democracies taking the Yugoslav crisis seriously enough to try to block conflict there had been clear from November 1990, when NATO and the CSCE both agreed to refrain from taking preventative action there (Woodward 1996a:164). Subsequently, the USA and its European allies had been at loggerheads about the shape of an institutional framework for closer European defence cooperation: should it come under NATO or be a prerogative of the new European Union, soon to replace the EC.[25] In the wake of the Cold War, the US administration viewed Yugoslavia as a European problem. However, there were still upwards of 15,000 US troops stationed in Germany to provide stability. James Schlesinger, a US Defense Secretary in the Reagan administration, noted in late 1991 that 'the US decision to defer the handling of the break-up of Yugoslavia to the Europeans was a political decision that conflicted with our stated rationale for a military presence' (Franklin Lyttle 1992:313–4, n. 43).

The USA was aware of an impending crisis but, according to Warren Zimmerman, its ambassador in Belgrade, no considerations were given to using force to stop a JNA/Serbian attack on Slovenia or Croatia (Conversi 1998:44). Secretary of State Baker, at the behest of his aides, stopped in Belgrade on 21 June 1991 (Woodward 1995:161). He held eleven meetings with republican Presidents and members of the federal government, to each of whom he repeated that the USA opposed the break-up of Yugoslavia but also the use of force to hold it together (Cohen 1998:144). The USA was signalling its indifference to the problems of a state which it had taken very seriously indeed at earlier times. Baker summed up the official stance by saying that 'the USA has no dog in this fight'. According to Richard Perle, who had served in the Reagan administration as an Assistant Secretary of State, this was 'one of the most appalling statements made from someone who claims to be a leader' (Simms 2001:339). Baker's own predecessor as Secretary of State, George Shultz, was in no doubt that 'It could have been stopped at the beginning when the Serbs attacked Croatia in 1991'.[26]

Baker's policy of non-intervention suited Milošević and the JNA, for whom external interference would have been a seriously complicating factor, probably upsetting their military plans. One further effort to save Yugoslavia had occurred in early June 1991, when the leaders of Bosnia and Macedonia, Alija Izetbegović and Kiro Gligorov, had prepared a loose 'Community of Yugoslav Peoples', very much a confederal scheme with only economic and some foreign and defence instruments remaining at the centre (Kumar 1997:175, n. 28). Milošević gave it only conditional approval, but it was approved by Tudjman and also by the Slovenian President, Milan Kucan. But Kucan's endorsement has been viewed as disingenuous: months earlier the Slovenes had given up on the idea of being part of Yugoslavia and were preparing to declare independence on 26 June (Kumar 1997:175, n. 28).

## Conclusion

The West was caught unawares by the Yugoslav conflict. The nature of the crisis was simply beyond the understanding of many policy practitioners, who were unfamiliar with ethnic disputes unless they were on the peripheries of their own territories or else raged beyond Europe. It would take some time for the West to become familiar with the readiness of ex-communist leaders to acquire a new clean identity by recycling

thernselves as defenders of nationalist values apparently threatened by a range of internal or external enemies. There was little realisation that much of the impetus for secession in Yugoslavia was coming from the centre in order to facilitate the rearrangement of Yugoslavia's boundaries to enable most Serbs to gather in one state.

The noisy cries for self-determination from Slovenia and Croatia were familiar to, and largely unwelcome for, European leaders who had many reasons for being nervous about sanctioning boundary changes in Europe, and who preferred to deal with one state rather than a lot of smaller entities.

The same went for the USA, which was aware of the magnitude of the Yugoslav crisis earlier than its allies but just as pessimistic about intervening to try to halt the slide to outright war. The Bush administration had shown its unwillingness to intervene in the internal affairs of a strategically placed state when it left Saddam Hussein in power in Iraq after the Gulf War. Deterred by the prospect of establishing a workable democratic system in multi-ethnic Iraq, it was likely to be even more daunted by using its status as the undisputed global superpower to preserve peace in Yugoslavia despite its past strategic significance.

The USA and most of its European allies also wished to discourage nationalism in the Soviet Union for fear that it would derail Gorbachev's reform efforts and enable Cold Warriors to replace him in the Kremlin. Yugoslav events in 1990–1 were seen very much through a Soviet prism. Milošević, however rough his methods could be, was seen as a figure capable of promoting continuity along the lines mapped out by Tito, while tilting policy more in favour of the Serbian majority. There was no realisation that on the very westernmost fringes of what had been the Soviet bloc, *nomenklatura* forces, mostly imbued with the need to defend their collective and individual privileges, would be capable of consolidating their position while Moscow adopted a Western trajectory; nor that the triumph of communists promoting nationalism as a survival strategy would soon prove very troubling for Western security interests.

Tudjman was seen as a disagreeable throwback to the 1930s, which in many ways he was. The looming Serbian-Croatian confrontation was depicted in terms of a re-run of Second World War rivalries, and, once it escalated, as a reversal to 'ancient ethnic hatreds' apparently endemic in the region Yugoslavia belonged to. The preference for such analogies betrayed an unwillingness to view the conflict in terms of present-day realities, and also an ignorance of the fast-evolving situation on the ground among Western diplomats and policy advisers who usually reflected a Belgrade view of events.

There were diplomats and officers who saw a strong Serbia as necessary for regional stability, while 'anti-imperialists' on the Left were ready to endorse Milošević's Serbia because it was apparently one of the few remaining outposts of socialism left in a world in which imperialism had won key engagements. When war erupted in July 1991, there is little evidence to suggest that Milošević was troubled by the reaction of the West, given the mediocre approach of policy-makers and advisers to the crisis as it had steadily escalated in previous years.