IMUN 2025 Research Report

Historical Security Council Issue #2: The question of Bosnia and Herzegovina. July 1994.

The Bosnian War (1992–95) was an ethnically driven conflict in Bosnia and Herzegovina, a former Yugoslav republic inhabited by Bosniaks (Bosnian Muslims), Serbs, and Croats. In 1992, after Bosnia and Herzegovina declared independence, Bosnian Serb paramilitary forces began attacking Sarajevo. The war involved harsh fighting among the three groups and the Yugoslav army. A process of ethnic cleansing began, with Bosniaks being pursued by Serbs, and with Croats being both victims and perpetrators. (Lampe). In 1994, the UN's peacekeeping missions were not achieving the desired results, and, for the first time, military intervention from NATO was requested (Resolution 941).

During the 1980s, the rapid deterioration of Yugoslavia's economy triggered widespread public dissatisfaction with the existing political structure. This unrest was intensified by the strategic use of nationalist rhetoric by political elites, which contributed to the fragmentation of Yugoslav politics. Bosnia and Herzegovina held elections in December 1990, resulting in the formation of a tripartite coalition government reflecting the country's main ethnic constituencies. (Lampe)

In 1991, Serb-majority areas within Bosnia and Herzegovina declared themselves "Serb Autonomous Regions." They withdrew from the Bosnian assembly, establishing a parallel "Serb National Assembly" in Banja Luka, amid growing evidence that the Yugoslav People's Army was covertly supplying arms to Bosnian Serb forces from Serbia. With war escalating in Croatia and the disintegration of Yugoslavia underway, Bosnia's strategic position became increasingly precarious. In November 1991, two Croat-dominated regions within Bosnia were declared, echoing the earlier Serb enclaves. (Lampe; "Bosnian War")

Following the European Community's recognition of Croatian and Slovenian independence in December 1991, Bosnia and Herzegovina was encouraged to seek recognition as well. A referendum on independence was held from February 29 to March 1, 1992. Although voting was obstructed in Serb-controlled areas, nearly two-thirds of the electorate participated, with the vast majority supporting independence. (Lampe)

Efforts by European Community negotiators in early 1992 to help restructure Bosnia and Herzegovina into ethnic "cantons" failed, as each of the three major ethnic groups rejected the proposed plans. Following international recognition of Bosnian independence by the United States and the European Community on April 7, Bosnian Serb paramilitaries launched attacks on Sarajevo, soon joined by artillery strikes from Yugoslav army units. Throughout April, towns in eastern Bosnia with significant Bosniak populations—such as Zvornik, Foča, and Višegrad—were assaulted by combined forces of Serb paramilitaries and the Yugoslav army. These offensives led to the mass expulsion of Bosniaks, marking the onset of what became widely known as an ethnic

cleansing in Bosnia. Within six weeks, a coordinated campaign by Serb forces secured control of approximately two-thirds of the country (Lucic; Lampe)

Throughout 1993, the situation in Bosnia and Herzegovina deteriorated significantly, with all parties in the conflict being implicated in systematic human rights violations. This included forced displacement, extrajudicial executions, detention in camps, and siege tactics aimed at expelling rival ethnic populations. Serbian forces continued large-scale expulsions of non-Serbs from areas under their control—particularly in Banja Luka, Bijeljina, and Bosanski Šamac—where civilians were subjected to forced labor and house arrest. Thousands were detained in camps under inhumane conditions, while Serb forces frequently blocked humanitarian convoys from reaching besieged Bosniak enclaves in eastern Bosnia. Simultaneously, Bosnian Croat forces began widespread arrests and expulsions of Bosniak civilians, notably in the Mostar area. Detained individuals were subjected to beatings, malnutrition, and forced labor in camps such as Dretelj and Gabela. Humanitarian aid deliveries to Bosniak-controlled zones, including Mostar, were impeded, and relief convoys were attacked near Travnik. Bosniak forces also committed serious human rights violations, including summary executions and abuse of prisoners in locations such as Trusina, Doljani, and Konjic. Aid to injured Croats in Nova Bila was blocked. Armed clashes between Bosniak and Croat forces intensified throughout the year, with both sides engaging in reciprocal ethnic expulsions. One of the most egregious incidents occurred on April 16, when Croat forces massacred over eighty-nine civilians in the village of Ahmići. (“Human Rights”).

According to Amnesty Report from May 1994, refugees reported abuses such as torture, ill-treatment, rape, deliberate and arbitrary killings and detention of civilians, beatings, knife attacks, and bombing or shooting people in their homes. Many Muslims, Croats, and Roma left the country, and many more failed to escape ("Bosnia-Herzegovina: 'You"). The Bosnian conflict, characterized by waves of brutal ethnic cleansing, left tens of thousands dead, and displaced more than 2,2 million people, over half of its 1991 population of 4.4 million (Toal and Dahlman)

Concerned with international peace and the defense of human rights, the United Nations was able to define safe havens and offer some protection, namely in Srebrenica and Zepa. However, in other areas, the United Nations Protection Force (UNPROFOR) was unable to do more than observe, as the local authorities did not respect the UN’s agreements ("REPORT OF THE SECRETARY-GENERAL").

At the request of the United Nations, NATO provided close air support to UNPROFOR on the ground and carried out airstrikes to protect UN-designated safe havens. Airstrikes were conducted against targets such as tanks, ammunition depots, and air defence radars. After the United Nations authorised the enforcement of a no-fly zone over Bosnia and Herzegovina, NATO began Operation Deny Flight in April 1993. On 28 February 1994, four warplanes violating the no-fly zone were shot down by NATO aircraft in the Alliance's first military engagement (“Peace Support”)

As of July 1994, the conflicting ethnic groups continue the ethnic cleansing with disregard for the UN and NATO's attempts to end the conflict, and NATO continues to enforce a no-fly zone and conduct airstrikes over Bosnia, and the UNPROFOR remains as observers.

Focus of debate:

The debate should focus on formulating a resolution to the Bosnia and Herzegovina conflict that ensures internal political stability without overlooking the broader Balkan region and its complex geopolitical implications. Delegates must address the immediate cessation of hostilities and outline steps for a comprehensive peace agreement that respects the sovereignty and territorial integrity of the involved nations (Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, and Serbia) and halts the violence stemming from ethnic and religious tensions. Therefore, the debate should consider the significant human and economic costs of the conflict, as well as the ethnic and religious tensions, and the implications these have for human rights and international law. Furthermore, despite the proposed peacekeeping interventions yielding minimal results, measures involving external military intervention must be carefully considered. Finally, delegates should ensure that their attitudes and the information they rely on reflect what was publicly accessible as of March 31, 1994, maintaining historical accuracy and context in their deliberations.

Relevant resolutions and documents:

UNSC Resolution 908

- Resolution that was adopted on March 31, 1994, by the Security Council, which decides that Member States, acting nationally or through regional organizations or arrangements, may take, under the authority of the Security Council and subject to close coordination with the Secretary-General and UNPROFOR, all necessary measures to extend close air support to the territory of the Republic of Croatia,

UNSC Resolution 913

- Resolution that was adopted on April 22, 1994, by the Security Council focused on the safe areas, demanding an end to provocations and the release of detained UN personnel.

UNSC Resolution 941

- Resolution that was adopted on September 23, 1994, by the Security Council, this resolution determines that the situation in the Republic of Bosnia and Herzegovina continues to constitute a threat to international peace and security, reiterating its

determination to ensure the security of UNPROFOR and its freedom of movement for all its missions, and, to these ends, acting under Chapter VII of the Charter of the United Nations requests military intervention from member states.

Security Council Report: S/1994/555

- May 9, 1994 Report: Highlights of the conflict and NATO´s role and intervention.

Map of the Balkan Region

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