

Fateful Misinterpretation

"America and Bosnia" by Robert W. Tucker and David C. Hendrickson, in the *National Interest* (Fall 1993), 1112 16th St. N.W., Ste. 540, Washington, D.C. 20036.

Does the United States have a stake in the Balkans? It does, insist Tucker, author of *The Nuclear Debate* (1985), and Hendrickson, a political scientist at Colorado College, but it is not based on the abstract principles most advocates of intervention have cited: repelling aggression, preserving recognized borders, and maintaining "world order." The "great interest" is "order and stability in post-Cold War Europe." But from the beginning, they argue, Washington—and most Americans—misperceived both the stakes and the situation in Bosnia.

The common view is that the war is a case of illegal aggression by one state, Serbia, against another, Bosnia. It rests, the authors say, mainly on the fact that the Yugoslav republic of Bosnia and Herzegovina gained recognition as an independent state from the European Community and the United States in early April 1992. Thus, the support given by the rump Yugoslavia (Serbia and Montenegro) to the armed Serbs of Bosnia has been seen as illegal. In fact, the authors say, the circumstances of Bosnia's independence were themselves "highly questionable."

The February 29–March 1, 1992, referendum in which a majority of the Bosnians who cast ballots voted to secede from Yugoslavia (but which the ethnic Serbs in Bosnia boycotted) was a violation of the 1974 Yugoslav Constitution, Tucker and Hendrickson assert. That document required the mutual agreement of Yugoslavia's republics to any secession, which Bosnia did not obtain. As a result, the authors conclude, the international recognition of Bosnia's independence was itself a violation of international law.

"The true cause of the war," Tucker and Hendrickson maintain, "was the structure of reciprocal fears" within Bosnia. The Bosnian Muslims feared that they would suffer oppression in a Serbian-dominated Yugoslavia; the Bosnian Serbs (31 percent of the population) feared oppression in an independent Bosnia dominated by Muslims (44 percent).

The event that triggered the war, the authors write, was the repudiation by Bosnia's Muslim

president, Alija Izetbegovic, of a draft constitutional agreement, worked out in February 1992. Bosnia would have been divided into Muslim, Serb, and Croat areas. The United States, however, apparently advised Izetbegovic to reject the accord.

Partition is the only basis for a workable settlement, the authors believe. But the United States, laboring under the illusion that repelling "Serb aggression" and protecting the sanctity of Bosnia's borders were the imperatives, long opposed all such proposals. In August, the Clinton administration apparently shifted, urging Izetbegovic to endorse a plan for partition. Whether this betokens a new American understanding of the situation in Bosnia, however, is unclear.

Adieu to the West

"The Collapse of 'The West'" by Owen Harries, in *Foreign Affairs* (Sept.–Oct. 1993), 58 E. 68th St., New York, N.Y. 10021.

The West is being summoned to guarantee the peace in Eastern Europe and the Balkans. But there is a fundamental problem, asserts Harries, editor of the *National Interest*, with the premise that "the West" still exists as a political and military entity.

The Western countries, to be sure, do share a common history and culture, as well as political values. But until the Cold War provided a great common danger, Harris says, that shared heritage was not enough to create a united West. Indeed, "fratricidal warfare might well be offered as one of the distinguishing characteristics of Western civilization of the past."

Americans traditionally have had "a moralistic distaste for European power politics," Harries observes, and with the demise of the Soviet Union, many now feel that it is time to turn to domestic matters. Many Europeans, meanwhile, have long viewed the United States as "unsophisticated" in international affairs, and once the Soviet threat was gone, many of them began dreaming of a United Europe "that would supplant the United States as the dominant economic—and ultimately political—force in the world." Europe's self-confidence has been hurt by its economic woes and its disunity in foreign affairs—but only temporarily, Harries believes.

With the disappearance of the common en-