
crease took place during the 1970s, when 55 ethnic groups were involved in serious clashes, up from 39 during the preceding decade. During the 1980s, the total was 62; in 1993–94, it was only eight higher.

Of the 50 “serious” ethnic conflicts in the world today, more than half began before 1987. These Cold War-vintage conflicts are also the more deadly ones, resulting, on average, in 111,000 deaths and 408,000 refugees. The 23 conflicts begun since 1987, in contrast, have produced many fewer deaths (43,000 on average) but many more refugees (684,000).

The end of the Cold War did intensify a few rivalries, notably in Afghanistan and Angola, where the superpowers’ disengagement gave impetus to existing tensions or allowed old ones to resurface. But most other Third World ethnic conflicts are in “the weak and economically stagnant states of Africa south of the Sahara.”

Twenty new states have come into being since the Cold War ended, and others have been experimenting with democratic institutions. “Much of the upsurge in communal conflict,” Gurr says, “has occurred precisely in these states, and as a direct consequence of the fact that institutional change has opened up opportunities by which communal groups can more openly pursue their objectives.” Six of the recent conflicts erupted in the Soviet and Yugoslav successor states.

Indeed, the sense of alarm about the supposed explosion of “tribal” conflict in recent years, Gurr believes, is partly a result of “the fact that some of the new conflicts have erupted on Western Europe’s doorstep.”

Head in the Sand?

“Bosnia and the West: A Study in Failure” by Noel Malcolm, in *The National Interest* (Spring 1995), 1112
16th St. N.W., Ste. 540, Washington, D.C. 20036.

For all of the West’s diplomatic efforts to halt the destruction of Bosnia, argues Malcolm, a London political columnist and author of

Bosnia: A Short History (1994), Western statesmen have failed to understand what the war there is about.

“Although commentators and analysts had been accurately charting the political strategy of the Serbian communist leader, Slobodan Milosevic, since 1988—the takeover of the political machinery in Montenegro and the Vojvodina, the illegal suppression of local government in Kosovo in 1989, the mobilization of nationalist feeling in Serbian public opinion, the slow-moving constitutional coup against the federal presidency, the Serbian economic blockade against Croatia and Slovenia in late 1990, the theft by Serbia that year of billions of dinars from the federal budget . . . and the incitement and arming of Serb minorities in Croatia and Bosnia during 1990 and 1991—it was as if the Western governments could see no pattern in these events whatsoever,” Malcolm writes. “When Croatia and Slovenia, losing patience with Milosevic’s attempts to manipulate the federal Yugoslav system, voted for independence, the West reacted with incomprehension.”

After the breakup of the Yugoslav Federation, Western policymakers comforted themselves with the thought that it had been inevitable, either because of the collapse of Soviet communism or because of “ancient ethnic hatreds” in Yugoslav history. The first theory was implausible, Malcolm says, as Yugoslavia since 1948 had been less under Moscow’s control than any other country in Eastern Europe. The second theory was simply wrong. The few examples of wars and massacres that were offered in its support, he says, “were from the 20th century, or at most the late 19th, [and] arose mainly from the most untypical episodes in Balkan history, conflicts introduced or exacerbated by forces (such as the Axis invasion) from outside Yugoslavia itself. For most of the rest of the history of those lands, there are no records of Croats killing Serbs because they were Serbs, or vice versa.”

The theory of “ancient ethnic hatreds” nevertheless became popular, Malcolm says. It was convenient to Western political leaders, for it made all sides to the conflict



The Western arms embargo has forced Bosnian government forces to rely on weapons such as those produced in this small-arms factory in Sarajevo. But the Bosnians have held off the better-equipped Serb forces.

equal. "At a stroke, attacker and defender were reduced to the same status. The fact that the defender in this war was not just an ethnic group but a democratically-elected government, containing Muslims, Croats, and Serbs, was an unfortunate detail which most Western policymakers tended to elide."

Instead of viewing the Bosnian war as an enterprise undertaken "by a set of people with political aims," Western leaders saw it as "an outbreak of an undifferentiated thing called 'violence,' which had just sprung up, as a symptom of Bosnia's general malaise. . . . Lacking a political understanding of the origins and nature of the war, the West responded to it not with politics but with therapy." Seeking to reduce the violence, the West imposed an arms embargo—denying the Bosnian government the weapons it needed to defend itself. Despite the Serbs' military superiority, Malcolm points out, "the Bosnian government forces have man-

aged to hold the front lines static for more than two years"—evidence of their higher motivation and morale.

Only military force will bring the Bosnian war to an end, Malcolm says. "With a minimal Western military action in October 1991, at the time of the bombardment of Dubrovnik, it might have been possible to check the Serbs' ambitions and make them seriously reconsider their plans for Bosnia. Again, with a proper guarantee to protect the Bosnian state in April 1992, backed up with an immediate response from the air, it might have been possible to stop the war in Bosnia within its first week." Since then, Western leaders have erred in assuming that stopping the Serbs would require massive NATO forces. The Bosnian government never even asked for Western soldiers. Those who are there should be withdrawn, and the arms embargo should be lifted, Malcolm argues. It is in the West's long-term interest "to see that the Greater Serbian experiment fails."