Spirit of Bosnia / Duh Bosne

An International, Interdisciplinary, Bilingual, Online Journal
Međunarodni, interdisciplinarni, dvojezični, online časopis

Separating History from Myth: An Interview (II)

Ivo Banac

LIFSCHULTZ: While we are on the subject of multinational states, would you elaborate a little on your argument in The National Question in Yugoslavia that democracy and Yugoslav "unitarism" were incompatible phenomena. In other multinational states such as Pakistan and India, for example, precisely the opposite position has been argued. Thus Pakistan's disintegration in 1971 has primarily been seen as a consequence of the extinction of democracy under an increasingly authoritarian state. Can any broad conceptual propositions or conclusions be made regarding multinational states and democratic structures?

BANAC: My argument is not that multinational states and democratic systems are necessarily at odds in all instances. What I have said is that this was the case in the Yugoslav experience. The reason has to do with the nature of the south Slavic national ideologies, specifically the Serbian national ideology. One way to illustrate this is to consider how Yugoslavia was viewed conceptually by the different constituent nationalities. For example, I think that for the Serbs – especially Serbs from Serbia – the entire territory of Yugoslavia was seen as something which was theirs. For a Serb, being in Slovenia or Macedonia was not a qualitatively different experience from being in central Serbia. This was exactly not the way the non-Serbian national groups viewed the country. A Croat or a Slovene who, temporarily, by way of business or otherwise, was in central Serbia knew that he was in a different area that was not the same as his home ground. The possessive nature of Serbian national ideology has on occasion expressed itself through the ideology of Yugoslavism. It matters very little what the effluvia are if the content is possession. This was unique and prevented any sort of democratic agreement from the very beginning.

I would argue that the first Yugoslav state failed, not in 1941 when it disintegrated, but in 1921 with the adoption of the centralist constitution. And it went from bad to worse. In 1929 there was the introduction of the royal dictatorship when King Aleksandar tried to do by force that which he had failed to do through the pseudo-parliamentary system of the 1920s. This led to tremendous dislocations and, basically, to the failure of Yugoslavism as any sort of integrative ideology.

The Communists tried to resuscitate this ideology in the guise of a Soviet-style federation, and they had some success with it. But they were more successful when they argued for the clear identity of all the constituent parts – a key element of their

program during the war. They did not win the war under the banner of Yugoslav unitarism; they won under the banner of the national liberation of Slovenia, Croatia, Serbia, Macedonia, and so on. But then, of course, they went through many new phases in the definition of that particular concept, and the particularly negative phase coincided with one of the more open periods of the postwar Yugoslav socialism. In the 1950s, when Tito argued for integration of all these different identities within a supranational Yugoslav identity, he provoked tremendous opposition among the communists of Slovenia, Croatia, and so, who saw this as an opening for the revival of Serbian hegemony. This conflict came to a head in 1962-63 with Tito's change of position. He abandoned the idea of Yugoslav integration, becoming increasingly aware of the harm this would do to the unity of Yugoslavia. He then tried to give greater rein to the genuinely federalist tendencies inside the Party and the state.

LIFSCHULTZ: So in 1962 he essentially reversed himself?

BANAC: Yes, Tito reversed himself. He adopted the position of Edvard Kardelj, who was the number two man in the Yugoslav leadership in the postwar period. Kardelj was always extremely critical of Yugoslav unitarism; in this instance, he became the winner in an intraparty dispute. A footnote, however, should be introduced here: everything was happening within an essentially dictatorial structure; what was different after the war was the fact that a minority party was the dominant, the only, political organization on the scene and, therefore, all the debates about the nature of the Yugoslav political system and Yugoslavia's federal form of organization took place principally within the legal ten percent of the whole political structure. It was not terribly representative. I stress this because there is a notion that nationalism revived after the collapse of communism. This is not accurate. The reality was that since nationalism was repressed, or, more exactly, the politics of identity were repressed, during the Communist period, all issues dealing with such matters were debated inside the Party. By the 1970s, sections of the Party itself had become exponents of the specific national interests. The Communist Party itself became federalized – and its federalization meant the end of its effective unity and the beginning of the crisis that led to the downfall of the second Yugoslav state. With the introduction of multiparty democracy, the entire structure withered away.

Now, it is true the Slobodan Milošević, and the Serbian party leadership even before Milošević, accelerated the demise enormously. They made reform extremely difficult. I would say they made it impossible. It is very likely, however, that the end would have come anyway. The key point was 1971 when Tito, for pragmatic reasons, shut the door to national communist policies that were being championed by the League of Communists of Croatia. At that stage Tito was supported by the Belgrade "partiocracy" for reasons that had less to do with pragmatism than with questions of supremacy and caste interests.

The movement of 1971 resembled structurally the Dubček movement in Czechoslovakia where the reform effort was attacked as politically suspect and made to appear illegitimate. And with that, you had the end of a possibility of reform of the Yugoslav federation. Although, in the Constitution of 1974, Tito formally incorporated many ideas of the Croat reform movement, these ideas were not adopted on a democratic basis. Tito imposed the constitutional structure from above. The unity of

the country was entirely dependent on the domination of the Party which was itself increasingly fragmented. It lasted as long as Tito was on the scene. As soon as he was gone, the whole house began to crumble and Milošević pulled it down.

ALI: What was the alternative program advanced by the Croat Communists in 1971? What did they want and what difference would the adoption of their proposals have made?

BANAC: The Croat Communists were essentially in favor of a confederation. First, on the economic plane, they proposed a system of what they called "clean accounts." They argued that the industrialized republics such as Croatia were at a disadvantage within the federal system. There are counter-arguments to this view, but the Croatian leadership wanted to make these issues the subject of an open political debate. They proposed that the question be discussed freely with a sense of give-and-take. This was new. On the cultural level this meant a legitimation of national cultures and the clear recognition of the existence of such cultures as an alternative to the dominant cultural paradigm of Yugoslav unitarism. With respect to political democracy, the Croats were advocating the opening of the media to voices of opposition. As was the case in Czechoslovakia, the proposed changes were all admittedly within a Communist structure. In fact, these developments really did lead to a period of considerable free speech and relatively free political expression.

ALI: In other words, what you had was what is sometimes referred to as the "Croatian Spring," similar in some respects to earlier developments in Prague? But why was Tito determined to oppose these developments?

BANAC: Yes, the term "Croatian Spring" is frequently used. Of course, there are many differences in the developments in Prague and those in Yugoslavia – and, again, these center on the national question. I believe Tito opposed these developments because he considered them to be premature and subversive of his own aims of restructuring the federation. One of his close associates once put it to me in the following way. He said here was someone (Tito) waiting in an ambush to shoot the dangerous unitarist bear, when, all of a sudden, someone else started jumping in front of him and prevented him from carrying out his operation the way he intended. Perhaps, this explanation is too simple. In my own view I think that Tito, who was a master of political balance, came under tremendous pressure in 1971 to stop the Croatian movement from accomplishing its political aims.

LIFSCHULTZ: Where was the pressure coming from?

BANAC: There was pressure from Serbia but also from abroad. There were, in this case, tremendous pressures bearing down on Tito from the West. Nixon was not terribly happy with these new developments in Yugoslavia. He viewed them as possibly weakening a strongly established Western front in Yugoslavia. There were threats from Brezhnev as well. On several occasions during that year Tito cited Brezhnev's warnings. The Soviets had said that if the Yugoslav leadership could not keep order in their own house, the Soviets would be only too happy to perform the job on the basis of Soviet "fraternal assistance".

ALI: You are saying that both the Soviet Union and the United States had an interest in maintaining the status quo in Yugoslavia?

BANAC: Yes, but for different reasons. The special status of Yugoslavia was part of the Cold War system.

ALI: However, Tito in 1974 essentially adopted – from the top down – many of the proposals of Croatia's Communist leadership as part of his own program.

BANAC: This was never admitted. The Milošević camp frequently uses this as a polemical weapon against Tito. But, it is true that many of the ideas the Croatian leadership advanced in 1971 were incorporated into the 1974 Constitution. Nevertheless, this was done under a slightly different guise. The distinctions are perhaps somewhat esoteric. What constitutes sovereignty? In 1971 sovereignty for the Croat leadership was essentially "national." In the 1974 Constitution sovereignty was defined within the nomenclature of "self-management." In other words, the question was not addressed in terms of the sovereignty of national republics within Yugoslavia but of socialist entities operating in a framework of self-management.

ALI: Jelena Lovrić […] tells us that shortly after the purge of the Croatian liberals in the Party in 1971, Tito had also moved against the Serb liberals. These Serbs, in Lovrić 's view, were seeking to separate Serbia from its total identification with Yugoslavia. In other words, Serbia, in its self-perception, was entirely synonymous with Yugoslavia and saw itself as its principal, if not sole, defender and guardian. People like Latinka Perović, for instance, sought to alter Serbia's view of its position and its role in Yugoslavia. In their view, it was more important for Serbia – a republic with vast backward areas in its hinterland – to focus on its own development and modernization. Would you agree with Lovrić ?

BANAC: I think that she is absolutely right. Although this is probably going to sound somewhat exaggerated, I would argue that in the history of Serbia, starting with the period of the uprisings early in the nineteenth century and continuing to the present, the most outstanding political leadership Serbia ever had was precisely that of Marko Nikezić and Latinka Perovic in the late 1960s and early 1970s. Because they wanted to emancipate Serbia from the federation – which was very unusual – they entered into conflict with Tito. And the conflict arose because they were perceived by Tito as fighting against his predominance – his extra-systemic role within Yugoslavia. This certainly contributed to their downfall. In addition, when Tito removed the Croatian leadership, he upset the political balance in the country very dangerously. He had to rebalance it somehow. So in 1972 he struck against the Serbian liberals. And he also struck against liberals in a number of other republics. This "rebalancing" had extremely deleterious effects. It was after this that the political leadership in Serbia fell into very bad hands. Although, by comparison, the new leaders were infinitely better than Milošević who later succeeded them, they nevertheless constituted an opposition of sorts against Tito which became evident even in his lifetime. The first attacks against the Constitution of 1974 emerged precisely from this quarter at the end of the 1970s.

LIFSCHULTZ: There are different views, among the contributors to this volume and

others, regarding European and American policies toward Yugoslavia in the last days of its existence. Some like Mark Thompson argue that the delay in recognizing Slovenia and Croatia, and then Bosnia-Hercegovina, only laid the groundwork for greater violence on the part of Serbia. Thompson insists that the ineptness of European diplomacy in 1990-91 virtually abetted the "Greater Serbia" camp. Mihailo Crnobrnja has argued that the West's failure to support Marković's attempt to negotiate a new federal arrangement left the field open to Milošević and his supporters. John Newhouse in The New Yorker of June 28, 1993, has argued that American assurances to Milošević in 1991 that the United States supported a united Yugoslavia led Milošević under the pretext of Yugoslav federalism to carve out the boundaries of a "Greater Serbia" in Croatia and Bosnia.

How do you analyze European and American diplomacy in the 1988-92 period? Was the dissolution of Yugoslavia inevitable? Would it have occurred regardless of European or American policies? And, if so, would other policies on the part of the international community have led to a less brutal form of dissolution? Or, was all of this irrelevant in the end to the internal dynamic of the expansionist project of a "Greater Serbia"?

BANAC: In my view American policy was the most important factor. The Europeans were not really involved in the Yugoslav crisis until the spring of 1991. The essential point to understand is what the principal contours of American policy were in this period. The dominant note was the belief that Yugoslavia was capable of surviving as a unitarist state. This view misunderstood fundamentally the nature of the deep cleavages in the country and the stage of disintegration that had already been reached. By 1991 such a position was not a plausible one.

I agree with Newhouse's argument. By stressing the unity of the country in the way the United States did at that juncture, it effectively helped Milošević. This was precisely the argument he used to put pressure on all the forces that were opposed to him in the various republics. Perhaps the most negative moment was in June 1991 when Secretary of State Baker visited Belgrade. Baker delivered exactly the wrong signal at the wrong time to Milošević and the Yugoslav People's Army. By declaring itself in favor of Yugoslav unity at precisely the moment Milošević was preparing to undertake military action on behalf of his "Greater Serbia" project, the United States essentially encouraged him.

Why did the United States act in this way? There are several possibly explanations. Clearly, the disintegration of the Soviet Union was an obsession of American policy at this stage. American diplomats judged both situations as analogous and concluded that the break-up of Yugoslavia would be extremely dangerous and destabilizing. The difference, of course, was that in Yugoslavia the Americans were encouraging precisely the figure who more than any other was himself responsible for the political agenda that would finally destroy Yugoslavia. As the political sponsor of a resurgent and aggressive Serbian nationalism, Milošević had made co-existence impossible for others. After the Soviet Union disintegrated in the summer of 1991, the analogy continued. The obsession now became the question of maintaining Russia, and, specifically, the Yeltsin regime. And, in the former Yugoslavia, Serbia, like Russia in the Soviet Union, was seen as the principal successor state.

There is another reason why the United States was deeply committed to the maintenance of Yugoslavia. This commitment had everything to do with the role of Yugoslavia in the Cold War, but nothing to do with the notion that Yugoslavia was a democratic alternative to the Soviet Union. Yugoslavia was viewed as an acceptable alternative to the Communist regimes of Eastern Europe because it existed as a power that was not subservient to the Soviet Union. This is what Tito symbolized for the West. The enormous amount of economic aid and political support that successive American administrations committed to Yugoslavia became second nature to the American political establishment. It simply could not conceive of this area without the sort of state structure that Tito had maintained so successfully for so long. This underlying attitude encouraged Milošević along his own path. When the United States did not react to the mini-war in Slovenia, this opened the gates for Milošević's war in Croatia. The crisis grew during the summer of 1991 and was transformed into open war in the fall of 1991.

LIFSCHULTZ: So, in your view, the Americans could have stopped events from taking the turn that they did?

BANAC: Absolutely. I think that they could have stopped it anywhere along the line. I'm not saying that nothing was done. There are indications that by the spring of 1991 Washington had acted to prevent a total military takeover in Belgrade. This happened, probably in January 1991, during extremely dramatic negotiations between Tudjman and the military leadership in Belgrade. Perhaps the United States also intervened on another occasion in the spring of 1991. But all these actions were within the framework of Yugoslavia. In Washington it was simply inconceivable to image that Yugoslavia had been shattered, and irreparably so. But I think that the real test of American and European inaction came in the fall of 1991 during the bombardment of Vukovar, Dubrovnik, and many other places in Croatia. At that point, a clear message could have been delivered to Belgrade to stop these attacks. This was not done, thereby opening the way to the German initiative in favor of the recognition of Slovenia and Croatia. For this the Germans have been called to considerable account. From my point of view, not only was that the right thing to do under the circumstances, but the demoralization in Belgrade that took place after the recognition shows how much more effective such a move could have been had it come even earlier.

LIFSCHULTZ: You are saying that the German initiative to recognize Slovenia and Croatia came only after the bombardment of Croatian cities. Would the Germans not have acted regardless of Belgrade's aggression?

BANAC: I do not think so. The German recognition of the independence of these republics at this stage was more a knee-jerk response; the bombing precipitated considerable activity on the part of the Germans, which, of course, would have been far more effective had it come earlier. Again, the whole Western alliance was still operating under the unspoken idea that Yugoslavia could be preserved. I cannot see how this was realistic, considering the nature of the events. How could one imagine that after Vukovar – after many, many other things had happened – that this country could be held together?

ALI: During this period wasn't Izetbegović of Bosnia-Hercegovina trying to persuade Germany and the Europeans not to be hasty with their recognition of Croatia and Slovenia, but to hold off so that some arrangement could be worked out for a final resolution of the Yugoslav crisis? Apparently, the Bosnians were worried that they would be left to the tender mercies of the Milošević regime should Slovenia and Croatia abandon the federation and to preempt exactly this, Izetbegović and Gligorov, the leader of Macedonia, had drawn up certain proposals for the restructuring of Yugoslavia?

BANAC: Both Bosnia and Macedonia were in an extremely precarious position. On the territory of both Bosnia-Hercegovina and Macedonia, there were very heavy concentrations of the Yugoslav People's Army. In Bosnia, especially, there had already been a very heavy mobilization of the Serbs, and this was extremely serious because the Serbs constitute one-third of the Bosnian population (they are not very significant in Macedonia). Both Izetbegović and Gligorov tried to find some sort of a third way between Milošević and the already self-proclaimed independent republics of Slovenia and Croatia. This was unrealistic: their position was absolutely hopeless at this point. I must say that both of them did not try to complicate matters for Slovenia and Croatia, as is sometimes claimed. Their hands, especially Izetbegović's, were tied.

At this point precautionary, or preemptive, measures, especially in Bosnia-Hercegovina, were crucial, but these were not taken. If at this stage, contingents of United Nations troops – or, perhaps, troops from that Sleeping Beauty, the European Union – had been introduced into Bosnia, it is possible that many of the things that happened later on would never have occurred. We are talking about the summer and especially the fall of 1991. Remember, one of the problems for Izetbegović was precisely that the citizens of Bosnia-Hercegovina, which had now become a sovereign republic after having proclaimed itself sovereign in the fall of 1991, were being recruited into the Yugoslav People's Army in order to fight in Croatia and he was telling them: "Do not go. This is not our war." That was a significant challenge to the Yugoslav People's Army given the army's overwhelming presence in the republic. All the same, he really had less and less maneuverability.

LIFSCHULTZ: Was there anyone in the West who saw the necessity for such preemptive or protective action in Bosnia at the time?

BANAC: Not really. No, this is quite remarkable, isn't it?

ALI: Would you say that, in France and Britain, considerations of their historic alliance with Serbia were operating at some level which led them to balk continually at any decisive international action against Serb aggression? I recall listening with some fascination to a British member of parliament on television referring to the Serbs as "our allies" while arguing against any intervention against Serbia.

BANAC: It is difficult to believe that these could be political considerations at the end of the twentieth century, but there is probably something to it. I think this has not so much to do with Serbia as it has with fears of the future role of a united Germany. Historical memory in Western Europe is not as insignificant as many Euro politicians pretend, and a united Germany did change the political landscape of Europe.

Moreover the cost of uniting Germany has created a number of difficulties for Western European economies. So I think that the problem of Germany was then transferred to the Balkan situation, and in a curious way. European actions or decisions were less a response to the question of what path to find for the successor states of Yugoslavia and more a part of the political fencing that went on between the Germans and their Western allies. Perhaps these divisions would have come over other issues, but they came precisely over the issue of Yugoslavia, and demonstrated amply, in 1991-92 – the year of European unity – the extent to which Europe was not really united and not really a political entity.

LIFSCHULTZ: So the fencing that occurred was, in part, determined by the fear that the German initiative toward the recognition of Slovenia and Croatia in 1991 heralded the extension of German hegemony in the Balkans. Are you saying that this was a fear that, for instance, worried France?

BANAC: I am being extremely cautious because, of course, they knew better than that. Germany was playing a very limited game, and after it pushed for the recognition of Slovenia and Croatia it basically pulled back, and since that time has really done extremely little. There are many extenuating circumstances, of course. Germany is a diplomatic and an economic power but it is not a military power. It is restrained also by the memories of the Hitler period. But, all the same, I think that many of these issues that go back to the First World War do have a certain resonance on the West European scene, where Serbia is a recognizable entity and many of the other South Slavic republics are not. Now, of course, the Belgrade regime – I think not as successfully as it hoped – tried to capitalize on these feelings, and in its very crude propaganda it was essentially saying to London and to Paris that they were abandoning an ally to an increasingly aggressive Germany, which, I think, is easier to believe in Belgrade than in Paris or London. After all, there are certain restraints that the Alliance imposes on all of its partners. Nevertheless, to a very large extent, the disputes over what course to take in the Balkans destabilized Western Europe and are an opening to a dangerous process that is probably going to widen as, not just the Balkan, but the international crisis sharpens.

ALI: Let us turn again, then, to the subject of Bosnia-Hercegovina. If it did not exist, you said, it would have to be created. Well, since it does exist, the question becomes how can it be saved from extinction? How can it be defended? In this context, perhaps we can discuss the policies the international community has pursued in seeking to secure peace in Bosnia-Hercegovina. How do you assess their actions and their thinking?

BANAC: There has been a contradiction in the behavior of the international community. First, before the Bosnian government declared independence a set of rules and criteria were established as the basis on which Bosnia-Hercegovina would receive international recognition as an independent state. It met these criteria. The international community then abandoned this policy by treating the government of Bosnia–Hercegovina–at this point, still multinational –as if it were merely one of several contending factions.

This was an extremely interesting sleight of hand, a device that took the international

community off the hook. The correct and logical thing was for the international community, having once recognized Bosnia and its territorial integrity, to have then intervened on behalf of a very weak and essentially unarmed state that was suddenly faced with the most brutal forms of aggression. When it became independent, Bosnia had on its territory all of the units of the Yugoslav People's Army withdrawn from Slovenia and Croatia and the military units which were already there. Bosnia had been one of the centers of Yugoslavia's military industry and there had always been a large garrison of its military there during the Cold War. Thus, when independence came, Bosnia was especially vulnerable to attack if these units were deployed against it.

The only solution ever was to suppress and then to defeat aggression. This could only have been done with a significant investment of military power, but no one wanted to do what was required. So all sorts of excuses were found, including the ones we have talked about. It is an "ethnic war"; these are "eternal problems" which cannot be solved; and more recently the so-called "Russian problem" where Bosnia could not be permitted to "undermine" Yeltsin–and on and on.

There is always some reason not to do the only logical thing, which is to intervene. In the process this could not have been done without a cost to international organizations, all of which, to a very large extent, have already been badly compromised in Bosnia. The United Nations has seriously compromised its integrity and its mission; the European Community, obviously NATO, and, of course, the United States, all of them appeared to be paper tigers. Utterly toothless, they followed up each phase of Serbian aggression with continuing expressions of joy at any minimal sign of "good will" on the part of the Serbian leadership. For example, when Karadzic signed the Vance-Owen proposals in Athens in May 1993, this was accepted as a significant advance, but for those who could see, it was clear that before pen was put to paper it amounted to nothing. Nevertheless, the Europeans and the Americans heaved a great sigh of relief as if things were suddenly going to improve. It was not clear why. Meanwhile, Bosnia has had to pay a tremendous price for promises which were not kept and actions which were not taken. At the moment the full dimensions and price of this tragedy cannot be counted.

ALI: When you call for international action, what precise form of intervention are you calling for?

BANAC: First, I think the Bosnian state must be permitted to arm itself. The notion that one is neutral by preventing Bosnians from arming themselves is political dishonesty. In fact, one is acting on the side of the aggressor by preventing the lifting of the arms embargo. This is the first and most essential action the international community must take. There is a great deal of evidence that not only Bosnian Muslims but other Bosnians, including many Croats and Serbs, were ready to fight for Bosnia against the aggressors. But this resolve to mount a multinational defense was essentially undercut by the international community. The Bosnians could not fight with slingshots; they had to be armed with the requisite weapons, for they were up against an extremely well-armed and relatively well-trained army.

LIFSCHULTZ: Are you saying essentially that if the United Nations, the European Community, and the United States had not wanted to get "off the hook" and find any

excuse to compromise with Serbia, they would have lifted the arms embargo right from the start?

BANAC: Yes, and we can speculate on why they refused to lift the arms embargo. The refusal represented in part an element of wishful thinking by the Western powers, and in part the belief that the entire matter was not very dangerous. They chose to believe, therefore, that Milošević – as awful as he was, and as deeply implicated as he was in the bloodiest of crimes, since 1945 – could not create the conditions for a major international conflagration. I can only say that their analysis really demonstrates a failure of imagination.

Perhaps, Milošević cannot trigger a Third World War, and perhaps this is impossible in a post-Cold War situation, but what Milošević has done, and with greater effectiveness than many realize, is to demonstrate that there are no real restrictions on aggressive behavior. This will simply give carte blanche to Miloševićes everywhere, of whom there are and will be quite a few.

LIFSCHULTZ: The principal ––in fact, the only ––solution the international community has insisted on has been the Vance-Owen plan. David Owen called it "the only game in town." Critics have argued that the plan was deeply flawed. While it required a Serbian withdrawal from some territory, it still validated the seizure of significant areas by the Karadzic-Mladić forces. The plan was built on the notion of partition along the lines of ethnicity which the government of Bosnia has consistently opposed on the grounds that it wants to maintain a multinational state. Kemal Kurspahić, the editor of Sarajevo's Oslobodjenje, refers to it as an "apartheid" solution. What do you feel were its fundamental flaws? Or, could it have been a basis for peace?

BANAC: It was a seriously flawed plan and some of the flaws were mentioned in your question. The Vance-Owens plan divided Bosnia-Hercegovina on the basis of national cantons where it would be difficult, if not impossible, to guarantee the rights of minority groups, and it would ultimately lead to a partition of the country. The plan presupposed that the Mladić-Karadzić's forces would withdraw into those areas which the plan had reserved for the Bosnia Serbs. But who was going to compel them to do that? Let us, for argument sake, say that this were to happen in one way or another. Who was going to protect the democratic liberties of, say, Muslims in Banja Luka? Who was going to make certain that people who had been driven out of Bileća would be able to return to their homes? The Vance-Owen proposals put forward an extremely complicated set of requirements with absolutely no means of implementation. In reality, they were proposing a "solution" on the lines of the division of Cyprus which is a permanent partition with no means of ever unifying the parts. The Vance-Owen plan was basically a placebo meant both for the Bosnians and for the international community, and nothing more. In the real world, it would be more difficult to enforce the Vance-Owen plan than to mount military operations against the aggressor.

In backing the plan, though, the West had decided to do the very minimum, that is, to make a show of protecting the Bosnian Muslim community, if necessary through the sort of policies that were attempted on behalf of the Kurds in Iraq by the creation of inviolate zones, perhaps protected by UN or NATO forces. As for the rest of Bosnia-Hercegovina, the thinking is that different parts of it will simply gravitate to the

centers of national attraction – Serbia and Croatia. And this has been the unarticulated aspect of the Vance-Owen plan. The Washington agreement of May 1993 (between the United States, Britain, France, Spain, and Russia) on the creation of six Muslim "safe havens" merely takes this to the final logical conclusion. The "safe havens" are no longer Muslim cantons but reservations for the maintenance of a moribund Muslim people. The plan for the partitioning of Bosnia-Hercegovina put forward by Milošević and Tudjman in June – backed once again by David Owen – follows on the heels of the Vance-Owen plan and the Washington agreement legitimizing Serbian and Croatian victories in Bosnia-Hercegovina.

LIFSCHULTZ: In other words, the apparent flaws in the proposed solutions are not flaws at all but logical elements of what the West sees as a realistic settlement of the conflict? Of course, it would be a settlement that destroys Bosnia as an independent state.

BANAC: The Vance-Owens plan as it was publicized was not going to accomplish the purpose that was ascribed to it. It simply postponed any sort of resolution of the Bosnian question, perhaps in the fond hope that somehow from somewhere other forces would stitch together what was unstitched by the Vance-Owen plan. The backers of the Plan have always been vague because they have no real answers to these questions. Instead, they talk in terms of "economic forces" or "political forces" or, perhaps, "common interests" against some as yet undefined "third outside element" which might undo what their plan has sought to do.

LIFSCHULTZ: What is the alternative? Is the full arming of the Bosnian government the only means to equalize or more than equalize the military balance? Are you saying that a well-farmed Bosnian government could re-establish control over the areas now held by Serbia and Croatia and then grant rights of equal citizenship to all? Is this the only alternative scenario?

BANAC: I can think of nothing else. Of course, along with military assistance there would also have to be a mechanism to verify the good intentions of the Bosnian government. Because of the horrors that are happening inside Bosnia-Hercegovina, there is considerable bitterness which could lead perhaps to a repetition of some of the most damaging aspects of Serbian aggression. A mechanism needs to be established to prevent this. In my view the most effective measure would be the apprehension of war criminals whose identities are quite well known. This would deter vigilante efforts. However, it is rather difficult to establish a genuine mechanism when one is negotiating with people like Karadzić, Mladić, and Milošević.

LIFSCHULTZ: Zoran Pajić and Anthony Borden have advocated a revival of the trusteeship system under UN auspices for Bosnia. Is this really a way forward?

BANAC: I have many reservations about revitalizing the UN trusteeship system in this situation. It was used principally in parts of the colonial world and has ceased to function with the independence of most of the trusteeships. I have reservations also because I doubt a trusteeship of Bosnia would be carried out in an appropriate manner given the policies of the leading members of the Security Council. Could one, for instance, really expect the Russians to contribute to the growth of consociational

democracy in Bosnia-Hercegovina? However, if the alternative is the dissolution of Bosnia-Hercegovina, I am perfectly willing to take the risk.

ALI: How would this work?

BANAC: Frankly, I have difficulty visualizing how this would operate. It would effectively mean the lessening of the sovereignty of an elected government which is a member state of the United Nations. This is unprecedented. At best we could view a trusteeship as an effort to provide a service in revitalizing the political system of Bosnia-Hercegovina which has been sundered by war. It would be an extremely complicated task and inferior to assisting the government of Bosnia militarily in securing its authority over its sovereign territory. Our dilemma in discussing all these possibilities is the fact that during the past year many of the sinews which held this country together have disappeared. One always faces the question as to what extent we are dealing with moribund entity. And I hope against hope that it has not come to that.

ALI: In order for the UN to take over trusteeship power in Bosnia and provide in some form the type of "service" which you have proposed, it is clear that the war would first have to stop. In order to repair, rebuild, and restore the sinews which once held Bosnian society together, there would have to be peace. The Serb war machine would have to be dismantled, perhaps all parties will need to be disarmed. This would have to be the precondition for any trusteeship to have any hope of reconstructing and rebuilding a state. So we are back to square one: how to stop the war? how to convince the Serbs––and, now, the Croats as well––that Bosnia is indivisible?

BANAC: You have answered your own question. Without international military support in defense of Bosnia-Hercegovina there can be nothing. This seems plain to everybody except the Western diplomats.

Editors' Note: This interview first appeared in Why Bosnia? Writings on the Balkan War, edited by Rabia Ali and Lawrence Lifschultz (Stony Creek, Conn: Pamphleteer's Press, 1993). We thank Ivo Banac for permission to re-publish this timely text. The first part appeared in previous issue and the third part will appear in our forthcoming issue in January 2011.

The preceding text is copyright of the author and/or translator and is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivs 3.0 Unported License.