

Battle in Bosnia — a war created by politicians

By Shin Yasui

Winter is coming to Bosnia-Herzegovina with a cold wind of betrayal and neglect. Hope in Bosnia is withering in the cold wind. And Bosnia is collapsing. The collapse of Bosnia is casting a doubt on the abilities of the United Nations, especially those of the United States and European nations.

Is Bosnia really in a quagmire? Yes, but it's a perceived quagmire. There have been peace negotiations outside of Bosnia-Herzegovina, but they haven't touched on the core of the Balkan crisis — avoiding "the" quagmire. If a peace agreement based on demands from aggressors were implemented, it would only prolong the conflict and deepen the hostilities among different nationalities. It would be a real quagmire, and certainly the United States troops would be confused with the question, "Whom should we defend?"

In the beginning, the war in Bosnia was neither ethnic nor religious. It was purely a political war, which was created and guided by people who wanted to preserve their own privilege and power. There would have been no place for politicians like Slobodan Milosevic if democratization had proceeded intact. Even the notion of Greater Serbia is utilized by Milosevic and his circles in Belgrade for their own cause. In Serbia, there are politicians like Vojislav Seselj and Zelko Raznjatovic (Arkan) who seized

the moment to gain power with help of the concept of Greater Serbia.

Milosevic knows why Tito could keep power so long — the military. Since the breakup of Yugoslavia, Milosevic gradually succeeded in placing the military under his control. The Yugoslavia People's Army, which once claimed to be fourth-largest army in Europe, succumbed to Milosevic and the Army of Serbia. Milosevic can use the army, the unions, parliament and television. He instigated the local Serbs in Bosnia with nationalist propaganda and armed them. Radvan Karadzic is merely a puppet, and anyone could replace his position if Karadzic sought an independent course.

Bosnia-Herzegovina, with dreadful memories of World War II, showed how marvelous a multiethnic society could be until the war began in 1992. Bosnia might have been an artificial creation for a buffer zone between Croatia and Serbia, but many Bosnians, especially in cities, developed a sense of tolerance and mutual trust regardless of the political maneuvering.

Inveterate hatred and ancient antagonism have been spoken by people who try to justify genocide in Bosnia. Serbian nationalists appealed to their own historical truth, and Croatian counterparts have their own version of the truth. It was Bosnia-Herzegovina that tried to escape from conflicts of "truth." The claim that Alija Izetbegovic wanted to create a pure Muslim state

is doubtful, and the Bosnian government was clearly committed to maintenance of a multinational state with a democratic constitution.

In Croatia, President Franjo Tudjman and the right wing HDZ (the Croatian Democratic Community) politicians, influenced by Herzegovinian lobby, have been supporting the partition of Bosnia. There are moderate politicians in the HDZ — liberals and military personnel who are opposed to Tudjman's policy toward Bosnia. Recently, especially after his re-election as head of the HDZ, Tudjman has pledged to take a more moderate course, though it's not clear how much influence he has even in his own party.

The Croatian government armed Bosnian Croats, and paramilitaries from Croatia and the Croat National Guard fought on the side of the HVO. Politicians from western Herzegovina try to achieve their goals at the cost of Bosnian Croats who live elsewhere in Bosnia. Bosnian Croats in central Bosnia have been forced to flee by the Muslim-led Bosnian Army. All three sides have been committing atrocities and brutality, though Muslims have suffered the most.

The Bosnian government didn't do the same thing as the Croatian and the Serbian governments did — that is, arming people before the possible explosion of hostilities. Without definite patronage from outside, Muslims believed it was necessary to seize strategic areas in central

Bosnia while the Bosnian government was being pressured to accept the partition plan proposed by Serbs and Croats this summer. Now it seems too late, and both Serbian and Croatian aggressors are on the verge of victory in Bosnia. Extremists have successfully replaced the political war with the ethnic war.

When I was in Croatia this summer, I visited several Croatian peace organizations that are committed to bringing a lasting peace to ex-Yugoslavia. Like in Croatia, there are many opposition groups and peace activists in Vojvodina, Serbia, Kosovo, Macedonia and Montenegro. It's important to maintain these organizations to create genuine democracy and civil society in ex-Yugoslavia. They need financial — as well as moral — support from outside countries.

Democracy in Bosnia-Herzegovina should be restored with pre-war borders because of the territory and the security that are provided by the United Nations. Let's throw away the "quagmire-phobia" and face the problem in earnest. Stephen W. Walker, one of three former foreign service officers who resigned over U.S. policy toward Bosnia, said, "The only thing that would prevent Bosnia's collapse would be an enormous, permanent, Berlin Airlift-like military and economic defense." It's not too late, and the United States can (and should) play a crucial role for justice and humanity.

It is also important to deal with the Balkan crisis as a whole.

Croatia wants to get back the territory that has been occupied by the Croatian Serbs. The issues of Kosovo and Macedonia must be focused because they may affect areas beyond the Balkan peninsula.

While many people have lost trust in different nationalities, there are still people who wish to live in a multinational society. Suppose democracy was replaced in Bosnia, Croatia and Serbia. It might take a long time to ease the tensions and heal the scars left in people's minds. Even so, the establishment or re-establishment of democracy in ex-Yugoslavia would be a significant step for the progress of their societies. However, as long as politicians like Milosevic, Karadzic, Tudjman and Mate Boban are in power, there won't be any peace in ex-Yugoslavia.

Shin Yasui is a pre-journalism student at the University.

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