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Yugoslavia: End of a Nation-building Experiment [REDACTED]

Summary

Yugoslavia's federation is disintegrating into a loose confederation of republics or "alliance of sovereign states," but the process is unguided and could be interrupted or even derailed by serious ethnic violence. In the worse case, ethnic strife could escalate into communal conflict or even civil war. Western democracies will have to contend with prolonged instability in Yugoslavia, which will hamper efforts to forge a stable post-Cold War architecture in Europe.

Discussion

Yugoslavia, as we know it, is coming apart. Centrifugal forces are building to overwhelm efforts by Premier Ante Markovic and others to hold the federation together. Ethnic conflicts are worsening in the permissive atmosphere of democratization. The EC is a growing magnet for Yugoslavia's republics--especially historically Western-oriented Slovenia and Croatia--and Soviet withdrawal from Eastern Europe has removed the last security rationale for unity. Under the Yugoslav constitution, the

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country's republics hold dominant power in virtually all spheres but the military--which is unlikely to act by itself to reverse the advanced deterioration of central authority. [REDACTED]

"Yugoslavia" No Longer a Priority

"Yugoslavia" has always been a notional concept, forcibly binding together peoples divided by language, culture, and religion and united by little more than geography. A combination of factors is now convincing Yugoslavia's main players-- particularly Slovenia and Croatia, but also increasingly Serbia-- that there is no economic, ideological, or security rationale that justifies the economic sacrifices and political compromises required to hold together the "land of the south Slavs."

- Yugoslavia has failed to deliver European levels of prosperity; the EC and unified European market are acting as an increasingly powerful magnet to the Yugoslav republics. Slovenia has gone so far as to open a de facto embassy in Brussels, and Croatian leaders openly advertise their hopes for association with the EC.
- The Communist ideology that Tito used--along with political repression into the mid-1960s--to support his version of pan-Yugoslavism has lost its credibility and undercut one of the few elements of cohesion. The republic Communist parties themselves have become in many cases separatist and nationalist in hopes of surviving politically.
- Forty-five years of Communist rule have not ended the bitter hatreds between Yugoslavia's ethnic groups; democratization is allowing tensions suppressed under Communism to resurface with a vengeance. Croatia and Bosnia-Herzegovina, for example, in the past month have witnessed their first serious ethnic clashes since 1945.
- With the Soviet withdrawal from Eastern Europe, the last credible external threat to Yugoslavia is gone. [REDACTED]

Slovenia and Croatia: Democracy and the West

Most of the republics are finding their domestic interests increasingly in conflict with those of the federation. Slovenia and Croatia see a host of reasons for parting ways with Yugoslavia. Above all, they want to regain what they see as their historical place in Western Europe. They realize that no country with a record of persistent human rights violations will be accepted as a partner by the West, and are convinced that the federation cannot restrain Serbia's ironfisted policies against ethnic Albanians in Kosovo. [REDACTED]

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Political differences have added to their resolve. Both republics are ruled by non-Communist governments while the federation--above all the army--is still in the hands of old party men. Croatian leaders especially appear convinced that some federal authorities are conniving with Serbia to overthrow them. These suspicions were reinforced when Yugoslav President Jovic (a Serb) and army elements showed sympathy for armed Serb nationalists who defied a Croatian ban to hold a referendum on autonomy in August. [REDACTED]

Serbia: Kosovo Ueber Alles

The leaders of Serbia, the most populous and historically dominant republic and the traditional champion of the federation, apparently have concluded that pursuing their aims in Kosovo may not be compatible with the preservation of Yugoslavia. Regaining "control" over Kosovo from the province's Albanian majority is the most salient political question in the minds of most Serbs, who exhibit a growing ethnic hysteria. They now believe they cannot count on the federation to back their hardline policies because of opposition from Slovenia and Croatia (as well as the West). [REDACTED]

The republic's Communist boss, Slobodan Milosevic, and his allies (who have relabeled themselves Socialists) see identification with Serbian nationalism as the best way to retain power against the anti-Communist tide. They have pursued uncompromising nationalist policies in Kosovo--including taking basic political rights from the Albanians--to establish their credentials. There is little prospect this will change. Serbian opposition parties are, if anything, more rabidly nationalistic on the Kosovo question than Milosevic. Some of them urge mass expulsions of Albanians. [REDACTED]

The Others: Sovereignty as Defense

Defenseless Macedonia and multi-ethnic Bosnia-Herzegovina see themselves as potential prey for the more aggressive republics. Macedonians fear being dismembered by Serbia, Bulgaria, Greece, and Albania, all of which have historical claims on their territory. The ruling Communist party says it would accept a confederation if other republics so desired, and the two largest opposition parties--the nationalist Movement of Pan-Macedonian Action (MAAK) and the Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organization (VMRO)--advocate a Macedonia with its own army and foreign policy. [REDACTED]

In Bosnia, the ruling Communists say the republic must be treated as a sovereign state to prevent a bloodbath among its competing Serb, Croat, and Moslem ethnic groups. It may already be too late as new ethnic Serb and Croat political parties show growing sympathy for "mother republics." [REDACTED]

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Tiny Montenegro represents a special case. Montenegrins are ethnic Serbs, but with a centuries-old identity as a separate state, and they now are bitterly divided over their relationship with Serbia. A "white" faction advocates joining Serbia and a "green" faction champions a sovereign Montenegro, preferably within a Yugoslav state. [REDACTED]

Architecture of Dissolution

The big three republics--Serbia, Croatia, and Slovenia--are taking concrete steps toward ending the old federal order.

- Slovenia has declared itself sovereign, and this month plans to annul federal laws it sees as in conflict with its own. It is drafting a new constitution that will create an independent Slovenia if agreement on a confederation is not reached. In some ways, it is already behaving like a sovereign state--it has announced that it will keep all Slovene military draftees at home after November, and has begun opening de facto diplomatic missions abroad.
- Croatia also has declared itself sovereign and is preparing a new constitution. So far, republic president Franjo Tudjman has taken a more gradual approach than the Slovenes in defying federal authority, but [REDACTED] Croatian attitudes are radicalizing in the wake of the disturbances involving Croatia's Serb minority.
- Serbia is in the last stages of adopting a new constitution, which could serve as the basis of an independent state. The president, for example, will have the power to declare war. [REDACTED]

Slovenia and Croatia are taking the initiative in crafting the confederation they insist is the only alternative to independence. They are drafting a joint "proposal for confederation" that they say they will present soon to the other regions. Based on public statements by their political leaders, we believe the document will propose a "Yugoslav Community" customs union; monetary union with the right to withdrawal; independent republic foreign policies with some coordination at the confederal level; and republic armies united in a voluntary alliance. [REDACTED]

Will Yugoslavia Go With a Whimper...

We believe that the disintegrative forces in Yugoslavia are irreversible, but that several factors could slow the process:

- Inertia has always been a powerful force in Yugoslav affairs.

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- All of the republics get economic benefits from the union that will prove hard to give up abruptly. The developed republics of Slovenia and Croatia gain markets for some goods not competitive abroad and domestic sources of raw materials and electricity. The lesser-developed regions can buy industrial goods without spending scarce foreign exchange.
- Most people genuinely realize that a sudden breakup would increase the danger of civil conflict and fear a bloodbath.
- Federal leaders, particularly the collective presidency and Premier Markovic, appear inclined to try to negotiate a new order rather than draw lines in the dirt. After many dire warnings, for example, the federal government appears to have accepted Slovenia's stand on draftees serving at home and Federal President Jovic has proposed a nation-wide referendum this year to decide between Federation and Confederation.
- Western admonitions against secession appear to have made Slovenian and Croatian leaders somewhat more cautious. Leaders in both republics have dropped secessionist rhetoric in their talks with Western officials, and both have started extensive bilateral diplomatic contacts with Western governments--presumably to assure prior Western backing for any steps toward secession. [REDACTED]

Given these political circumstances, the Slovenian and Croatian proposal for confederation will likely become the basis for negotiations. Two relatively benign outcomes are possible, although neither appears to have the capacity to resuscitate the Yugoslav state:

- The republics continue to usurp more power from the center as talks drag on.
- Most or all of the republics agree to a confederation, presumably one that will look more like an alliance of states than a country. [REDACTED]

In either scenario, the Yugoslavs almost certainly would face repeated confrontations and mini-crises over various ethnic or economic issues. The process would be messy and under constant threat of breakdown. In fact, we believe neither can lead to a stable compromise. Either system would likely break up completely once the members felt that ties had unraveled to the point of no return. [REDACTED]

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...Or With a Bang?

We judge, however, that the chances of a more explosive outcome are high. With ethnic passions rising, we see several flashpoints that could explode within the next several months:

- Any Croatian attempt to punish its rebellious Serbs or to disarm the Serb population could lead to fighting and provoke an intervention by Serbia.
- Ethnically-mixed Bosnia has already seen minor ethnic violence in recent weeks and has much tinder for more serious trouble. Elections scheduled for November will pit Moslem, Serb, and Croat parties against each other and raise the prospect of fighting that could draw in Serbia and Croatia, as well as involving Moslems.
- Increased violence in Kosovo could further polarize relations among the republics. Slovenia and Croatia could use massive Serbian repression as a pretext for secession. Serbia itself could precipitate a breakup of Yugoslavia if denied support in its "holy war." [REDACTED]

Any violent breakup would probably provoke a last ditch effort by the army to reassert control. We believe such an effort ultimately would split the army on ethnic lines, even if discipline initially held in some units and permitted the army to assert its authority temporarily. The army is split between an officer corps dominated by ethnic Serbs and draftees who reflect the country's demographic breakdown--roughly one third Serb. There are no "reliable" Serb units--until such time as draftees serve in their home republics, all army units will be ethnically mixed. [REDACTED]

Implications for the US

Yugoslavia will present the United States and Western Europe with serious challenges over the coming months--especially in the area of human rights. Yet US interlocutors at the federal level, such as Markovic, will have little or no influence over events in the strife torn republics--especially in the Serbian province of Kosovo. [REDACTED]

In a worse case, US security interests could be caught up in the collapse of the Yugoslav state. Inter-ethnic violence on a large scale could breed terrorism at home and abroad and threaten US citizens in Yugoslavia directly. More broadly, Yugoslavia's breakup could produce a new clash of international territorial

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claims and counterclaims in the Balkans and to the creation of an area of major instability in the borderlands of Europe. At a minimum, unrest in Yugoslavia would hamper US and Western efforts to build a stable post-Cold War order in Europe. [REDACTED]

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