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IDENTITY IN PROTRACTED SOCIAL CONFLICTS

*Faith and Loathing in Sarajevo*

By

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In Global Security & Emergency Management

Submitted to the

Department of Sociology, Anthropology, Criminal Justice

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## Abstract

Bosnia is a peculiar state. This peculiarity stems from its ethnic and religious heterogeneity that has, in the past, created a multicultural and remarkably tolerant society. This was exemplified by the city of Sarajevo, which showed off its multiculturalism and its supposedly inclusive social structure to the world during the 1984 Winter Olympics. Ten years later, however, the tolerance and inclusiveness of Sarajevo was under siege by the Yugoslav military (JNA) and paramilitaries associated with the Serbian Democratic Party (SDS). The Yugoslav Wars of Succession (1991-2002) tends to be categorized as an ethnic conflict stemming from primordial, or ancient, hatreds. This interpretation seems myopic. This author will attempt to challenge or confirm the salience of ethno-religious identity in the Bosnian theater of the Yugoslav Wars of Succession using the works of Edward Azar and Protracted Social Conflict Theory (PSCT). Additionally, Ted Gurr's Minorities at Risk database provides a methodology to make broader assertions regarding conflict based on empirical and observable data associated with past conflicts. This methodology will be applied to use lessons learned from Bosnia that could be transferred to a potential peace process in Syria.

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## Introduction

Bosnia is a peculiar state. This peculiarity stems from its ethnic and religious heterogeneity, that has, in the past, created a multicultural and remarkably tolerant society. This was exemplified by the city of Sarajevo, which showed off its multiculturalism and its supposedly inclusive social structure to the world during the 1984 Winter Olympics. Ten years later, however, the tolerance and inclusiveness of Sarajevo was under siege by the Yugoslav military (JNA) and paramilitaries associated with the Serbian Democratic Party (SDS). Sarajevo became emblematic of something much greater than the dissolution of Yugoslavia; it was an attack on the very principles Yugoslavia was founded on, “brotherhood and unity,” the motto of Josip Broz Tito’s Communist Partisans. The Yugoslav Wars of Succession (1991-2002) tends to be categorized as an ethnic conflict stemming from primordial, or ancient, hatreds. This interpretation seems myopic. This author will attempt to challenge or confirm the salience of ethno-religious identity in the Bosnian theater of the Yugoslav Wars of Succession using the works of Edward Azar and Protracted Social Conflict Theory (PSCT). Additionally, Ted Gurr’s Minorities at Risk database provides a methodology to make broader assertions regarding conflict based on empirical and observable data associated with past conflicts. This methodology will be applied to use lessons learned from Bosnia that could be transferred to a potential peace process in Syria.

There is a strong correlation between ethnicity and religion in Bosnia among its constituent “nations:” Serb, Croat, and Bosniak. The Croat population is primarily Catholic, Serbs generally Orthodox, and Bosniaks were almost exclusively Muslim. Bosniaks had a slight demographic majority in Bosnia, at 44% of the population (Serbs 32%, Croats 17%, Yugoslavs 7%). This was not nearly enough of a demographic majority to placate any related anxieties that

may exist among the Serbo-Croat population of Bosnia. It was ultimately the Christian institutions associated with the Serbs and Croats of Bosnia, however, that played a major role in inflaming tensions between the three national communities.

The rhetoric of church and political leaders associated with Croats and Serbs in Bosnia helped to create an existential scenario for their communities. They feared that, if Bosnia were to become independent, it would become an Islamic state that persecutes Christians with impunity. This was catastrophic for the relationship between Bosniaks, Croats, and Serbs; Bosnia became emblematic of the demographic anxieties relevant to each ethno-religious community. The Serb Orthodoxy framed the Bosniak community as a continuation of the Islamic rule of the Ottoman Empire and drew parallels between Croat nationalism and the Croatian fascist Ustaše, the independent Croatian state during World War II that persecuted Serbs. The Catholic community viewed both the Orthodoxy and Muslim communities as “representative of the barbaric, despotic Orient” (Glenny 2012 : 637) and felt a desire to “Europeanize” both communities (Goody 2004 : 128). The Muslim community took a primarily reactionary stance, feeling an existential threat from the two other ethno-religious communities, and championed the “homogenization of ethno-religious identity” (Sandal & Fox 2013 : 70).

All of these perspectives were seemingly validated by history; each ethno-religious community could point to events within their existence that legitimized a narrative of victimhood and confirmed to their communities that they faced a demographic threat from the others. These anxieties were exacerbated by the looming dissolution of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (SFRY) where each ethno-religious community sought to maximize its geopolitical gains in a post-SFRY world; this could only be achieved at the expense of the other ethno-religious communities. Unfortunately, Bosnian opštine (municipal governments) were organized

in a manner where no ethno-religious community could claim a wide swath of territory as its own without infringing upon one of the other communities. Additionally, Bosniak Muslims recognized that their communities were mostly packed into larger cities (specifically Sarajevo and Mostar) which would leave them with the least amount of land despite having the largest population in Bosnia; partition of Bosnia, thus, became anathema to the Bosniak political agenda.

The Dayton Peace Accords (DPA) effectively ended the fighting on the ground in Bosnia. The DPA divided the state of Bosnia & Herzegovina (BiH) into two sub-states (still contained within the state of BiH): the Federation of Bosnia & Herzegovina (FBiH; inhabited primarily by Croats and Muslims) and the Republika Srpska (RS; inhabited almost exclusively by Serbs). I will use Edward Azar's PSCT to analyze the situation described above, compare and contrast pre- and post-DPA Bosnia, and view the conflict through multiple lenses to allow a better understand of why Bosnians were compelled into violence and how to prevent or manage similar conflicts in the future. I believe this research is very relevant in our post-9/11 world where United States foreign policy has had a strong focus on religiously motivated extremism and violence. I believe the Bosnian War offers a nuanced perspective of why individuals may be compelled into religiously motivated extremism that focuses on economic, social, and political reasons as opposed to an exclusively religious perspective.

## **Roman Catholic Church**

The foundations of the Roman Catholic Church go back two millennia to the believed crucifixion and resurrection of the figure known as Jesus Christ. Initially seen as a dissident offshoot of Judaism, the Catholic faith was co-opted by Emperor Constantine of the Roman

Empire and Rome was established as the stronghold of the Catholic faith and the home of the Pope, the spiritual leader of the Catholic community. Catholicism and its various Protestant sects outside of the authority of the Pope have traditionally found their home in Western and Central Europe. The Holy Roman Empire, much of whose territory also coincided with the Habsburg (Austrian) Empire, was an exclusively Catholic empire that stretched across Central and Eastern Europe. This included the area now known as Croatia, an area in Eastern Europe inhabited primarily by Slavic people. The Slavs in Croatia, due to the influence from both the Holy Roman and Habsburg Empires, developed a distinct identity as a result. This stands in stark contrast with the Slavs of Serbia, who developed their own sense of political and religious autonomy that was totally separate from the Catholic domination in the Habsburg territories. The differences among these communities persist to this day in the divergences between their written language – while both Serb and Croat communities speak the same variant of South Slavic, Serbs write in Cyrillic while Croats use the Latin alphabet. Bosnia holds an interesting position, having been under the influence of both Ottoman and Habsburg Empires at different points in its existence, creating a synthesis of the East-West dichotomy. The Habsburg influence, following their occupation of Bosnia in 1878 and the eventual annexation in 1908, created enough of a Catholic legacy in Bosnia to establish Catholicism as one of the three primary faiths within the region.

The Second World War led to a further increase in Catholic influence within Bosnia. The Yugoslav Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes (the original attempt at a Yugoslav state) was dissolved in 1941 following the Axis invasion of Yugoslavia. The German and Italian militaries divided the region into spheres of influence and empowered the Croatian fascist organization, *Nezavisna Država Hrvatska* (NDH). The NDH, colloquially referred to as the Ustaše (the Croatian Revolutionary Movement), carried out a brutal, genocidal campaign against Serbs,



Jews, and Roma within the territory of Croatia and western Bosnia & Herzegovina. This affected the demographics of affected areas and strained relationships between Orthodox and Catholic for decades to follow. The relationship between the NDH and the Roman Catholic Church became one of the major points of contention that initiated the Yugoslav Wars of Succession – any expression of Croat nationalism or Catholic solidarity was interpreted as an extension of the Ustaše.

### **The Serbian Orthodox Church**

The Orthodox faith developed as a response to the East-West Schism within the Roman Catholic Church. A dispute regarding the primacy of Rome and Byzantium, the two primary Christian authorities, was the foremost reason for this divide, but further acts of violence, specifically the Sack of Constantinople in 1204, divided the Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox sects. The Serb sect of the Orthodox faith was founded in 1219 by St. Sava, the Patriarch of Peć. The recognition of the Patriarchate of Peć by the Byzantine Patriarch, Manuel I of Constantinople, marked the beginning of both political and religious autonomy for the Serbian people (Parry 2007: 128). Their autonomy was, however, short-lived. Nomadic Turks, who would later become the Ottoman Empire, had their own interest in possessing Constantinople. Kosovo, a province within the Serb Patriarchate, stood in their way. Prince Lazar of the Serb Patriarchate led a defense of Kosovo Polje (the Field of Blackbirds), but was ultimately out-manned and handily defeated. The Battle of Kosovo Polje, in 1389, still bears a scar on the psyche of the Serb Orthodoxy due to the almost four centuries of Ottoman political and economic domination that would follow. (Ramet 2002: 100-101) This was not the only location where the Serb Orthodox community was defeated by the Ottoman army, but Kosovo held the Patriarchate of Peć and the remains of St. Sava, both of which were desecrated during

the Ottoman occupation in the 16th century. Thus, the memory of Kosovo has lingered with the Serb Orthodox community and has been used at various points to rally members of the Orthodoxy against those who were seen as Muslim occupiers (Ramet 2002: 101).

## **Islam**

Prior to the dissolution of the SFRY, Bosnia had been renowned for its multiculturalism and legacy of tolerance between its ethno-religious communities. Muslims, however, were given privilege under the Ottoman *millet* system which divided the Abrahamic faith communities (Muslim, Christian, and Jewish) into specific religious enclaves. *Millet* is the Turkish word for nation, which gives insight into the Ottoman perspective on faith – that each individual faith constituted its own national community. The Muslim privilege under the *millet* system came from the Ottoman Empire’s self-perception of a caliphate; the Sultan (the Ottoman leader) was a caliph who was supposed to be the spiritual leader for Muslims worldwide. Owning land, bearing arms, and the right to wear a turban were the privileges that separated Muslims from non-Muslims under the *millet* system, which helps to explain why Orthodox and Catholic communities in 20th century Bosnia tended to view Islamic leadership through a contentious perspective (Glenny 2012: 70-73). Additionally, it is believed that the Bosnians who converted to Islam following the Ottoman occupation did so more out of convenience than conviction. Bosnia, in the 14th century, was primarily Bogomil Christian - a dissident offshoot that was considered heretical and persecuted by most other Christians. This gives some insight as to why the Bogomil community was willing to accept Islam and the power and privilege associated with it. This was invoked during the Yugoslav Wars of Succession - that Bosniak Muslims had “sold out” their Slavic brothers and were *really* Serbs or Croats.

While the Ottoman Empire was in decline during the 19th century, reform driven by Western nation-state principles were considered, but ultimately were incompatible with the *millet* system. Bosnia & Herzegovina, as an Ottoman province, was home to a very strong synthesis of ethno-religious and class identities. There were certainly Muslim peasants in Bosnia, but for the most part the Bosnian peasantry was Christian and land was owned by absentee Muslim landlords who generally lived in Istanbul or Sarajevo. This legacy persists to this day and was one of the major Serbo-Croat criticisms directed towards Bosniak Muslims; that they were generally wealthy, out of touch, and Bosnian multiculturalism was a myth perpetuated to defend Islamic hegemony.

## **Literature Review**

Theories seeking to explain conflict have been malleable and subject to the political climate of the world at that given moment. During the Cold War, the Classical Realist paradigm dominated international and security studies discourse. Viewed in the context of an ideological struggle between two global superpowers, it makes sense that international politics was constructed as a zero-sum game. Through this paradigm, any interpreted gain by another state is interpreted as a loss for one's own state. Classical Realism presupposes that resources are inherently scarce and that the primary objective of the state, in the international realm, is to secure as many of these resources as possible for itself and its people. Classical Realism can be applied to a situation where there is a clearly defined winner and loser – there is no such thing as a mutually beneficial agreement and compromise is irrelevant to the Classical Realist (Snow 2004 : 26-27).

Classical Realism as a theoretical perspective has, however, declined since the end of the Cold War. This was inevitable; the fundamental rules of global politics had changed seemingly

overnight. Discourse within conflict studies shifted its focus from the nation-state to an identity driven approach. This was driven by the inability of Cold War principles to explain conflicts that erupted in Somalia, Rwanda, and Yugoslavia. These were civil conflicts, fought domestically between inhabitants of the same political nation, but different ethnic groups. This was antithetical to Classical Realism, which focuses on the nation-state as the only important actor within the international scene. Events in the aforementioned countries needed a new theoretical lens to offer appropriate explanations. Social Identity Theory became an alternative method of explaining these civil conflicts fought between members of the same state.

Social Identity Theory was originally theorized by Henri Tajfel. Tajfel believed “that collective phenomena such as inter-group violence cannot be reduced to the individual’s drives, instincts, or personality traits, but must be understood as resulting from the individual’s membership in social groups” (Demmers 2012 : 40). Tajfel was essentially arguing for a collectivist approach to conflict, that as primarily socially motivated creatures, human beings are more concerned with belonging and security than pursuing their own interests. As a result, conflict, through Tajfel’s theory, can be thought of as a clash between groups of similarly identified individuals whose primary motive is their shared identity. However, identity is not just what an individual decides that they are, but also what they are not.

The social identity concept tells us about the categorical characteristics - such as nationality, gender, religion, ethnicity – that locate people in social space. A person has a certain social identity if (s)he shares certain characteristics with others. Social identities are relational in the sense that they are limited: we are what we are not. (Demmers 2012 : 21)

Essentially, identity is a twofold – for example, because one identifies as a Serb, he can no longer be a Croat. His Serbness stands in direct opposition to another individual’s Croatness due to the distinctness of the identity. Framing identities in opposition like this is useful when discussing ethnic conflict.

There are two primary perspectives regarding how identity is formed – the primordialist and the constructivist. The primordialist believes that identity, specifically ethnic identity, is a naturally occurring phenomenon. It presupposes that ethnic identity is intrinsic to human nature, not a socially constructed phenomenon, like the constructivist would argue. The primordialist perspective, among the academic community, is almost universally accepted to not be true. However, regardless of the academic consensus, conflicts are still fought and blood is spilled over the belief in an intrinsic, primordial ethnic identity and this requires an explanation. James Fearon and David Laitin remarked how “People often believe, mistakenly, that certain social categories are natural, inevitable, and unchanging facts about the social world. They believe that particular social categories are fixed by human nature rather than by social convention and practice” (Fearon and Laitin 2000 : 848). Additionally, conflict itself can act as a tool to enforce identity in cases where “high levels of groupness are often the result and not the cause of violent conflict” (Demmers 23 : 2012). This is a process known as reification, when a “putative” identity is turned into something hard, unchangeable, and absolute. Reification is the crux of the constructivist perspective, which believes that ethnic identities are not natural phenomena, but that they are socially constructed to serve various purposes.

Constructivism is a perspective that presupposes that identity is entirely constructed. This phenomenon was described by Michael Moerman, when studying the Lue ethnic group, when he concluded that one could identify as Lue “by virtue of belonging and calling himself Lue and of acting in ways that validate his Lueness” (Moerman 1965 : 1219). This perspective, thus, views the ethnic group is a socially imagined phenomenon, one that only exists by virtue of the communal belief that it exists. This is expanded upon with the work of Fredrik Barth. Barth

focuses on the role of communication and mobility in the formation of identity. Barth claims that:

categorical ethnic distinctions do not depend on an absence of mobility, contact and information, but do entail social processes of exclusion and incorporation whereby discrete categories are maintained despite changing participation and membership in the course of individual life histories (Barth 1969 : 9).

Essentially, Barth proposes that cultural and ethnic distinctions are formed through a process of interacting with individuals who identify with different cultural and ethnic groups. Their communication and proximity can act as a catalyst for reification.

The role of identity in conflict can be interpreted in two ways, from a top-bottom and a bottom-up approach. Both of these approaches deal with how ethnically identified groups begin to mobilize in a conflict. The top-bottom approach focuses on the role of cynical elites in inflaming angry and frustrated masses into mobilization by employing ethnic and nationalist driven rhetoric. Fearon and Laitin discuss this idea when they claim that “elites foment ethnic violence to build support; this process has the effect of constructing more antagonistic identities, which favours more violence” (Fearon & Laitin 2000 : 853). This perspective argues that reification is only partially a product of lived experiences, but that these lived experiences will be exploited by cynical politics. This perspective raises an important question – what kind of society would contain conditions favorable for this occurring?

It is generally believed that democratic, high capacity governments have no need for this kind of ethnic and nationalist pandering; the potential for ethnic pandering to turn into ethnic conflict is too high for stable governments to bother with these methods. However, when “confronted with systemic transformations beyond their control – such as market liberalization or economic recession – [elites] try to divert political debate away from the root of the problem toward other issues, defined in terms of culture or identity, that appeal to the public in non-

economic terms” (Demmers 2012 : 29). Essentially, pandering to an ethnic or nationalist dimension, “playing the ethnic card,” can serve as a convenient distraction for governments facing other serious concerns. Individuals and governments who employ this strategy are referred to as “ethnic entrepreneurs,” and their role in how ethnic groups become mobilized is contested. The oppositional perspective to this is that “civilians cannot be treated as passive, manipulated, or invisible actors; indeed, they often manipulate central actors to settle their own conflicts” (Kalyvas 2003 : 481).

This is the bottom-up approach - that it is not the cynical elites manipulating the frustrated masses, but that leaders respond to varying degrees of identity in an appropriate manner. For example, an elected official in a state where there is a strong pride in the local ethnic identity would have to respond in a manner that was appropriate to his electorate – this perspective indicates that the actions of leaders are nothing more than a reflection of the individuals who elected them. This is, theoretically, how a democratic republic should operate. However, this approach leads to another question – why *do* people follow ethnic entrepreneurs?

The short answer, according to Kalyvas, is that they do not; “‘people’ are rational actors who pursue their own interests. That is, all within the limits of what is strategically possible” (Demmers 2012 : 30). This is a very economic and individualist way of describing conflict - that individuals will only participate if it serves their own interests. This flies in the face of Tajfel’s Social Identity Theory, which promotes people’s desire to belong as more of a motivating factor than a personal agenda. Theorists such as Kalyvas, however, value the agency of the individual over the ethnic collective in the context of an ethnic conflict. This is a process known as disaggregation. Disaggregation stresses that conflict does not occur uniformly over time and space, but affects different neighborhoods, villages, and people at varying degrees and at

different times (King 2004 : 431 – 434). Disaggregation is useful when attempting to look past ethnic identity and see what might motivate an individual to participate in an ethnic conflict. These reasons are often not as related to the sense of belonging that Tajfel believed, but rather a rational decision made by an individual who is seeking to maximize their own personal benefits.

Edward Azar and Ted Gurr use identity as a foundation in their multi-causal approaches describing conflict. Azar focuses specifically on relative deprivation on the basis of identity – when one identity group feels excluded in comparison to the benefits received by another identity group. Azar’s theoretical approach is referred to as Protracted Social Conflict Theory (PSCT), and is the theoretical crux of this analysis.

Protracted social conflicts occur when communities are deprived of satisfaction of their basic needs on the basis of their communal identity. However, the deprivation is the result of a complex causal chain involving the role of the state and the pattern of international linkages. Furthermore, initial conditions (colonial legacy, domestic historical setting, and the multicomunal nature of the society) play important roles in shaping the genesis of protracted social conflict. (Azar 1990 : 12)

In his conflict map , Azar lists a series of preconditions that can be indicative of a protracted social conflict. A protracted social conflict is different from traditional conflict in that it does not have to be violent. However, a protracted social conflict can lead to a violent conflict, if certain conditions and factors are present. The core of this theory is relative deprivation, that certain identity groups feel deprived of resources solely on the basis of their identity. It is a “relative” deprivation because this dichotomy can only exist when one identity group is receiving benefits based solely on their group affiliation.

Azar also touches on self-reinforcing aspects of protracted social conflict. Specifically, this can relate to a historic legacy of disagreement within a multi-communal society, or it can also refer to limitations relevant to how identity groups communicate with each other. If communication methods between two identity groups are fundamentally flawed, there is a high



potential for conflict to linger until it becomes violent. This is relevant in the Bosnian context. The Kingdom of Yugoslavia (1918-1941) was marred with disagreement between the Croat and Serb factions of their government over the preferred method of governance: centralism or federalism. This fundamental disagreement over how to govern would be part of the “historic legacy” that Azar refers to.

Ted Gurr, along with Azar, is the other theorist that is very relevant to the deconstruction of conflict in this paper. Gurr’s approach is much different than Azar. Gurr relies on an empirical approach grounded in inductive reasoning. This is referred to as the “large-N” approach, a reference to its origin in statistics. Gurr, who is responsible for the creation of the Minorities at Risk database, uses empirical observations of conflict to determine factors relevant to the conflict in question. These conditions are then applied more broadly, used in a way that can be helpful in predicting when minority ethnic groups are more likely to rebel or when they are at risk. There are, however, limitations to this form of analysis. Unlike Azar, who focuses on a multi-causal chain of how various inputs and outputs are linked, Gurr seeks to make broad assertions based on past examples of conflict and what was observed in those scenarios. This is a sometimes problematic approach.

The problem with large-N analyses such as Gurr’s is that they make empirical generalizations rather than providing analytical concepts. They examine how output variables (violent conflict) co-vary with input variables (e.g. ethnic fragmentation, poverty, political instability), without saying much about the complex causal chains between the inputs and the outputs. (Demmers 2012 : 87)

While Gurr’s approach can be useful in predicting future events, it does not offer much in terms of explanation. However, both his and Azar’s approach are useful because they offer different perspectives. Azar seeks to explain, and Gurr seeks to predict.

## **Theoretical Applications/Discussion**

Classical Realism presupposes that the international community is anarchic, resources are inherently scarce, and interprets politics through the lens of a zero-sum game (Snow 2004: 26). This is remarkably applicable in the world of faith, where there is a (generally Western, but still applicable for the purposes of this discussion) assumption that individuals will only subscribe to one set of beliefs. Thus, any demographic gains by one religious community, through the Classical Realist lens, would be interpreted as a loss for every other religious community within that geopolitical sphere. The perceived demographic threat was a persistently relevant factor for both political and faith community leaders in Bosnia during the dissolution of the SFRY. “Demographic threat,” in the context of Bosnia, was a euphemistic way of suggesting that a growing Muslim population was a threat to both Catholic and Orthodox communities. This attitude was effectively summarized by Croat president, Franjo Tuđman, in a conversation he had with American Ambassador Warren Zimmermann on January 14, 1992:

The Muslims want to establish an Islamic fundamentalist state. They plan to do this by flooding Bosnia with 500,000 Turks. Izetbegović [the Bosnian president] has also launched a demographic threat. He has a secret policy to reward large families so that in a few years the Muslims will be a majority in Bosnia [at the time they were 44 percent]. The influence of an Islamic Bosnia will then spread through the Sandžak and Kosovo to Turkey and to Libya. Izetbegović is just a fundamentalist front man for Turkey; together they are conspiring to create a Greater Bosnia. Catholics and Orthodox alike will be eradicated....if we abandon the Croats in Bosnia to such a fate, they will turn on us. Some will become terrorists, and they won't spare Zagreb in their acts of revenge (Toal & Dahlman 2011: 103).

Bosniak Muslims were in the unfortunate position of being caught between a geopolitical conquest of Bosnia by both Serb and Croat ethno-religious communities. They faced a strong attitude of prejudice and were labeled either as “Turks” or as former Slavs who sold out their ancestors to gain favor within the Ottoman Empire. Both Serb and Croat communities occasionally even claimed the Muslims as their own, a problematic viewpoint that tends to strip the Bosniak Muslim community of their own agency and have a Serbo-Croat demographic

fantasy projected upon them.

The zero sum game involved with faith in Bosnia created a security dilemma for all ethno-religious communities involved. With the dissolution of the SFRY looming during the 1980s, nationalist politicians were motivated by their constituencies to secure the largest possible geopolitical space for their own ethno-religious community. Tuđman, Serb president Slobodan Milošević, and Bosnian Serb leader Radovan Karadžić employed alarmist political discourse regarding the “demographic threats” within their regions of interest. Alarmist political discourse coupled with consistent saber-rattling from Tuđman, Milošević, and Karadžić provoked an equal response from the Bosniak Muslim community. Alija Izetbegović, the Bosniak Muslim president of Bosnia, pragmatically avoided this saber-rattling out of fear that his Muslim community would genuinely be annihilated by either Serb or Croat aggression. However, weapons and logistical support from the Islamic Republic of Iran and Hezbollah inevitably came to aid the Bosniak Muslims against any potential acts of aggression from Catholic or Orthodox communities, confirming the worst fears of the Serbo-Croat anti-Muslim prejudice (Bardos 2013).

This scenario is the embodiment of the security dilemma. The security dilemma, a product of the Classical Realist paradigm, describes a scenario where a build-up of one nation, or community's, defenses is seen as a provocation by other states, or communities, to also enhance their defenses, bracing for a potential attack. This could create an arms race, but there is also a high potential for such a situation to spiral out of control. The buildup of weapons, logistical support, and saber-rattling among Serbo-Croat nationalists inspired an equal response from the Muslims of Bosnia. This wasn't interpreted by Serbo-Croat leaders as a response, but as a provocation and a confirmation of their prejudices. Thus, both Orthodox and Catholic

communities found their justification for the eventual ethnic cleansing of the Muslims of Bosnia.

The Classical Realist paradigm is useful to a certain extent when examining the Bosnian War. The violence from 1992-95 was essentially geopolitical in nature, a conquest over the same geographic space by Orthodox, Catholic, and Muslim communities. The relevant anxiety here is that only one of these groups can maintain a demographic majority in Bosnia, thus creating a zero-sum game. The DPA were a useful solution to Serb communities because it gave them exactly what they wanted: a geopolitical space for Serbs to be separate from Croats and Muslims. The DPA separated the state of Bosnia & Herzegovina into two sub-states: Republika Srpska (RS) and the Federation of Bosnia & Herzegovina (FBiH). It is important to note that RS and FBiH are contained within the same state, Bosnia & Herzegovina, and all three groups take part in a parliament that rotates power based on ethno-religious lines. The DPA were successful in challenging the prevailing presumptions of Classical Realism – that compromise and bargaining are not irrelevant and can be a useful way to end violent confrontation.

While the DPA were successful in ending the violent conflict of the Bosnian War, it did little to tackle the root causes of why the conflict erupted in the first place. This is where Azar's writing on protracted social conflicts becomes relevant. Through the PSCT perspective, the conflict in Bosnia did not begin in 1992. Ethno-religious tension in Bosnia had been simmering since the death of Josip Broz Tito, former SFRY leader, in 1980. Additionally, in the years 1988-89, the balance of power in the SFRY was thrown off greatly. The SFRY contained eight republics that, theoretically, had an equal vote in all political decisions made at the federal level. These republics were: Serbia, Croatia, Slovenia, Bosnia & Herzegovina, Macedonia, Montenegro, Kosovo, and Vojvodina. Serb loyalists were installed in the presidencies of Montenegro, Kosovo, and Vojvodina, giving the Serb Orthodox ethno-religious community 4/8

votes at the federal level. The Croat and Slovene republics were irate and, at the 14th Extraordinary Congress of the League of Communists, their delegates walked out of the meeting. Serbs were empowered even further within the remaining republics of SFRY. The Orthodox community now had a stranglehold on the political process and also the military (JNA), which was staffed primarily by Serbs (Ramet 2002 : 41-45). Bosniaks and Bosnian Croats felt a sense of relative deprivation within the context of Bosnia. They felt that, within the current arrangement, there was no prospect for their communities to have any sway in the political process that was subject to the agenda of the primarily Serb military. Because of this, they sought independence. However, Bosnian Serbs were unsure of how they would be treated in an independent Bosnia. Who would protect them from being relatively deprived of political and military power in a new, independent Bosnia? This is a rhetorical question, but also a relevant anxiety to the Bosnian Serb community in the build-up to violence.

The anxieties felt by all three ethno-religious communities were grounded in a similar principle: fear - “fear is the one element that is the most fundamental to these dynamics of polarization and implosion” (Demmers 2012 : 83). If fear is the driving force of a protracted social conflict, then what were ethno-religious communities in Bosnia so afraid of?

As was discussed in the introduction, all three of these ethno-religious communities could point to moments in their history that seemingly validated a narrative of victimhood. These narratives were mythologized to the point where they become primordial almost – while academics understand identity to be socially constructed, citizens living in Bosnia in the 1980s and 90s were undergoing a process of serious reification that would solidify their ethno-religious identities to an unprecedented degree. The synthesis of fear and a narrative of victimhood led to dangerous conclusions – Croat nationalism became the new Ustaše, a growing Muslim

population represented a Turkish effort to steal Bosnia from the Slavs, and Serb nationalism was portrayed as reactionary and militaristic – glorifying the World War II Četnik Serbs who were as equally fascist and brutal as the Ustaše (yet, by Croat and Bosniak accounts, significantly less discussed) (Sindbaek 2002 : 150-170). These terms, Četnik and Ustaše, were irresponsibly used, both pejoratively and as a means of glorification, during the Bosnian War. Thus, fear and historical revisionism tended to be at the root of why ethno-religious tension was so caustic in Bosnia.

Lastly, Bosnia was an undemocratic, low capability state when it voted for its independence. Bosnia was undemocratic because almost the entire Bosnian Serb population refused to participate in this democracy, making it representative of only two of the active ethno-religious communities in Bosnia. Additionally, much of the Bosnian Serb leadership was supported by Serbia proper, undermining both the sovereignty and the political boundaries of the state of Bosnia & Herzegovina. The capabilities of the state were low, especially after an arms embargo was passed by the United Nations (UN) in 1992. The embargo disproportionately affected the Bosniak community – Serbs were consistently supplied with weaponry by the JNA and Croatia had a multitude of smuggling routes along their Adriatic Coast – this left the Bosniaks as the least armed group in the midst of an ethnic conflict. The results for the Bosniak community were fairly disastrous, as evidenced by the genocide at Srebrenica and the almost four-year siege of Sarajevo. According to Azar, undemocratic and low capability states have the highest tendency to foment the conditions that can lead to civil conflict. In democratic, high capability states, relative deprivation is generally not a problem or, if it is, the state is strong enough to prevent any real mobilization by affected identity groups.

## Conclusion

Following the September 11, 2001 World Trade Center terror attacks, there has been a marked shift in United States foreign policy. The Cold War was over, and the world was mostly established under a unipolar order with the United States as a hegemon – thus the principle of the nation-state as the primary actor in the international realm was put to rest. Religious motivated extremism became the most pressing discussion within American political discourse – most notably what can be done to prevent religiously motivated extremists. When viewed in the context of American political discourse, religious extremism usually implies the actor in question is Islamic or acting in favor of political Islamism. This is highly problematic, and the Bosnian War offers a strong counterexample to this presumption. According to CIA estimates, 90% of war crimes committed during the Bosnian War were committed either by the Serb-staffed JNA or Serb paramilitaries. In fact, the Bosniak community in Bosnia was so victimized by the Serbs that the Americans found themselves supporting them along with one of the chief representatives of political Islamism, the Islamic Republic of Iran. This irony highlights not only how fluid international relations are, but also that terrorism and extremism are not specific to any individual faith.

It is clear, however, that there were lessons to be learned from Bosnia by American policymakers. This can be seen in the change of strategy employed in Kosovo, where, in response to an ethnic cleansing of Albanians by Serbs, NATO launched a bombing campaign against Serb economic and military establishments to pressure Milošević, “bombing him to the negotiating table,” to quote American Ambassador Richard Holbrooke (*Give War a Chance*, 1999). While this bombing campaign was less impactful and efficient than the one employed at the end of the Bosnian War, it is significant to note the change in approach to the Milošević

government between Bosnia and Kosovo. What the Clinton Administration learned from Bosnia, and applied later to Kosovo, is that ethnic cleansing has residual and unintended consequences for the international community. This is most relevant in the case of refugees. In the midst of the Bosnian War, Serbia and Croatia were faced with a massive influx of Bosnian Serb and Bosnian Croat refugees, respectively. Peter Galbraith, the United States ambassador to Croatia at the time, attempted to contextualize the severity of the refugee crisis in the Balkans by claiming the situation was similar to the United States taking in 30,000,000 refugees. This helps to contextualize the severity of the conflict not only for victims directly affected, but also for neighboring states and global superpowers that are tasked with processing and relocating refugees.

The relationship between refugees and conflict is very relevant to American political discourse today and also to the tenets of PSCT. The residual effects of the Syrian Civil War are being felt internationally, with an estimated 9 million individuals having fled their homes, either being displaced internally or fleeing Syria entirely. A refugee crisis is not an inherently violent phenomenon and is something that is not necessarily associated with violent conflict itself, but at the same time it is impossible to separate the Syrian Refugee Crisis from how it is situated within the context of the Syrian Civil War. Syria is like Bosnia in that it is a mostly religiously heterogeneous community (although to a much lesser degree, ethno-religious identity in Syria is generally contained within different sub-sects of Islam) where ethno-religious identity developed primarily under the suzerainty of the Ottoman Empire and the *millet* system. Thus, it could be reasonable to say that a DPA-styled approach may be relevant to Syria – this has been discussed under the guise of “federalism” in recent talks in Geneva that proposes the idea of a Federal Syrian state, centered in Damascus, that gives cultural, political, and military autonomy to the



different ethno-religious communities of Syria. Similar to the Bosnian War, this has been promoted by groups who would absolutely benefit from this arrangement (Kurdish Christians in northern Syria - Serbs in northeastern Bosnia) and opposed by groups that would lose power or geographic space (Alawite Shia Muslims in Damascus and Latakia - Bosniak Muslims in Sarajevo).

These are all examples of how these factors intersect and that conflict is not an easily explainable phenomenon. People act with different motivations, goals, and pursuits, but at the same time are constrained by whatever identity they affiliate with. There are international factors, religious factors, historical factors, and human needs factors that are relevant to why different people or groups of people would find violent conflict to be their most reasonable option. PSCT is a sufficient theoretical application for this reason – that it tackles all of these causes and condenses them into a web chart. This calls into question the relevance of the ethnic lens in understanding conflict. Azar and PSCT do not seek to dismiss the relevance of ethnicity and identity in fomenting conflict, but it understands that there is a more nuanced relationship between ethnicity, identity, and conflict. Thus, it would be myopic to refer to the Bosnian War as an ethnic conflict based in ancient hatreds. These were not ancient hatreds; in fact, most of the relevant anxieties stemmed from World War II and how war atrocities were not addressed properly by the Tito regime in the SFRY. Additionally, much of the Serbian criticisms regarding the Bosniak Muslim population were cultural and socioeconomic in nature. The invocation of Četnik and Hajduk imagery among the JNA and Serb paramilitaries was intentionally used to highlight the supposed economic disparity between the two groups - playing on a legacy of Islamic domination and Christian peasantry. Ethno-religious identity was absolutely a relevant factor to the individuals and parties involved in the Bosnian War. It is of the opinion of this

author, however, that socioeconomic concerns and political opportunism were more relevant to the fighters and parties involved.

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