CHAPTER-4

MAIN ISSUES IN THE BOSNIAN CRISIS

The recognition of the Bosnian Muslim as a nation (narod) was intended to have four major effects on the political affairs of Yugoslavia. Firstly, the Bosnian Muslim’s ethnic identification had historically been a bone of contention among the Serbs and Croats. National recognition of the Bosnian Muslims meant that they would no longer be the targets for attempts by Serbs and Croats toward either national group. Tito had expected that this move would quell Serb and Croat nationalist passions and aspirations aimed at Bosnia and Herzegovina.

The second objective of Tito’s more in recognizing the Bosnian Muslims was to mobilize their leadership towards active support of Yugoslavia in order to preserve for their own nation any gains accruing only to Bosnia and Herzegovina from a more cohesive country. This point arose from the 1974 constitution’s assignment of sovereign rights to each nation and nationality in its own republic. The Bosnian Muslims had become an officially recognized nation and at least some of the Bosnian Muslims could logically have concluded that Bosnia and Herzegovina had become their republic, as the Serbs and Croats each had a home republic. To protect their new status and perhaps an implicit, if
never explicitly mentioned, homeland, the Bosnian Muslims would be even more loyal to the Yugoslav federation.

Indeed, upon the republic's recognition of their nationhood, the Bosnian Muslims immediately sought to justify it with a historical record equal to the Serbs and Croats. To promote a national separation from the Bosnian Serbs and Croats, the Bosnian Muslim historians during the 1980's were strenuously attempting to prove beyond all doubt that their people had always retained a sense of their own distinctiveness. They stressed that official recognition of Bosnian Muslim nationhood was simply recognition of an already extant Bosnian Muslim national identity, not just a religious affiliation.

The third reason why Tito had elevated the status of the Bosnian Muslims was overcome the Serb-Croat squabbling over resource distribution within Bosnia and Herzegovina. By adding a third group to the situation perhaps more rational and less nation-based policies would be crafted within the republic and even perhaps at the federal level. However, adding the Bosnia Muslims to the equations did not erase national argument over purely regional economic or political decisions in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

The confederation as prompted by the 1974 constitution altered the way the Yugoslav market operated and even the
characteristics of Yugoslavia's state sovereignty. While Tito was alive procedures, of course, worked well enough. He remained the ultimate arbiter and until his death all power except his was relative. But no one was really satisfied with the system, which became evident after his death. Much of the economic and political decision making moved to the republic and localities, which were now expected to compete with one another for the state's limited resources. The lessening of centralization lowered the federal government's ability to ameliorate regional conflicts because of its declining influence at all levels and change in emphasis was the exacerbation of national particularism, both in regard to political as well as economic decisions.

The League of Communists of Yugoslavia (LCY), too, had abdicated power to the republic parties. There was a greater political advantage in being part of the republican, not the federal, party elite. In effect, then, Yugoslav turned into a multiparty political system with the elites of each republic vying for influence and for resources for their own party structure. This, too, encouraged national chauvinism. Increasingly, party and state decision making was based on nationalism, rather than coherent, federally conceived initiatives. In Bosnia-Herzegovina because of the power sharing conditions established by Tito wherein he inserted the Muslims into the equation coalitions drove the decision
making. The Bosnian Muslims, of course, had played that role throughout their history. Nevertheless, during the 1980's the Bosnian Muslims began to widen their power base and legitimacy within the republics and the federation at the expense of formerly dominant Serbs. The Serbs were increasingly frustrated with having to play coalition politics in Bosnia-Herzegovina in the post Tito era. And, indeed, a great deal of mistrust in the federation was created at least partially because leadership positions and in fact staffing of Yugoslav political institutions as a whole depended upon ethnic definition rather than some more ascriptive elements. The heterogeneity of many regions of the country was in conflict with politically supported national particularism, a volatile mixture that could produce national conflict.

Finally, with an eye on the international scene, Tito had hoped to coopt potential Muslim enchantment with the militant international pan-Islamic movement, while increasing his own prestige within the non-aligned movement. Tito wanted to encourage the Bosnian Muslim intellectuals. However, there occurred a growth of religious identification and sentiment within the Bosnian Muslim community. Of course, this was not supposed to happen in a communist country, where religion was discouraged. Recognition of the Bosnian Muslim nationhood was expected to have only secular implica-
tions, since previously the Bosnian Muslims had shown no real religious predilections. However, once they gained national recognition and increased communal self-identification, their religiosity was concomitantly reinforced. Indeed, as soon as the nationhood of the Bosnian Muslims was officially recognised, the Bosnian Muslim religious hierarchy began to pursue a more active and public role in the life of Bosnian Muslims.

However, Tito’s foreign policy was able to turn this increased religiosity and elevation of the Bosnian Muslims to national status into a positive factor. These advances increasingly endeared Yugoslavia to middle eastern and north African Arabs who were discovering their own augmented power through worldwide Islamic activism. In accordance with Yugoslavia’s foreign policy aims, the Yugoslav delegation to Islamic states usually included a Muslim representative from Bosnia. Likewise visiting Islamic leaders were generally taken to Sarajevo for a visit with local Muslims.

The Bosnian Muslims also increased their contacts and links with Foreign Muslims. For example, the Bosnian Islamic Council, which supervised all affairs of the Islamic

religious community in its region, began to distribute literature discussing Islamic concerns and Arabic language literature from the Middle East. Hajj figures indicated an increasing degree of participation by the Bosnian Muslims. Nevertheless, the Islamic religious hierarchy was not permitted to assume the role that Islamic religious hierarchy would normally play in a Muslim dominated society. The LCY was uncomfortable with rising Islamic activism among the Bosnian Muslims. The risk in Bosnia's case was that its Muslims would begin to pursue their political interests more as members of a Muslim religious community than as one of the Yugoslav nations. The religious implications of the national designation for the newest Yugoslav nation-Muslim were not subtle and were not lost on the population. For instance, there was a noticeable increase of the Bosnian Muslim Youth being educated in Muslim centres throughout the world during the 1980's. Those that returned "had ceased to be communists and had become instead fanatic Moslems, not only in the sense, but what was even more dangerous for the regime, in the religious sense as well." The Yugoslavs were thus caught in a contradiction of the recognition of a


nation whose dominant factor was religion, an anti-Marxist paradox to say the least.

The Muslim national challenge was taken very seriously in Yugoslavia throughout the 1980's. Islam was the total ideology/theology that could like (or instead of) Marxism, regulate the entire life of its citizens.

NATIONAL MOVEMENT IN BOSNIA-HERZEGOVINA

Until Tito recognised the national status of Bosnian Muslims, "republic nationalist manifestations were of severe value" in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Tito's acknowledgement of their nationhood in his pursuit of political agenda, however, opened up a new front for nationalist conflict in Yugoslavia. As the former Yugoslavia discovered there was no small paradox in a Communist country taking steps to ease the plight of a religious group in order to obtain its cooperation in achieving other political goals.

Despite the uses to which Yugoslav leaders could put to the rising Bosnian Muslim nationalism was discouraged among them. Following the rather lukewarm attempts to control

Bosnian Muslims nationalism in the 1970's the Yugoslav leadership in the 1980's launched a major salvo starting on April 10, 1983 against what was perceived to be chauvinistic Bosnian Muslim nationalism. Thirteen Muslims, including current Bosnian President Alija Izetbegovic, were arrested on charges of "hostile and counter-revolution activities. The dependents were described as "active Muslims" who had used Muslim nationalism "in order to destroy the brotherhood, unity and equality of the nationalism and national minorities in the socialist republic of Bosnia-Herzegovina. Their crimes aside from having described communism as a threat to Islam, welcoming of anti-Yugoslav turmoil in Kosovo, the criticism Yugoslav national policies aimed at the Serbianization of the Muslims plotted to eliminate the Serbian and Croatian population in Bosnia-Herzegovina, and manipulation of the religious feelings of others in an effort to mobilize support for a militant Islam, the al-

5. Other defendants were well educated professional people ages 26 through 61. They included two Muslim Clerics, two lawyers, two teachers and few engineers. Two of the defendants were women, one defendant was a former party member and another former Persian. See "The Trial of Moslem Intellectuals in Sarajevo", South Slav Journal, Spring 1983, No.6, p.5.


leged illicit links with reactionaries abroad and the spread of hostile propaganda within Yugoslavia. The latter claim dealt in particular with the dissemination of a document written in 1970 by Izetbegovic called the Islamic Declaration: A programme for the Islamization of Muslims and the Muslim peoples. This document was certainly provocative from the point of view of Yugoslav authorities in that it appeared to preclude Muslim allegiance to a non-Muslim ruler. However, the defendant denied that anything in the treatise referred particularly to Yugoslavia or to the Bosnian Muslims.

Aside from the fact that most Muslims were not stirred to action in Yugoslavia by the publication of the declaration, that document "became obsolete after the Islamic revolution in Iran in 1979". Nevertheless, even a whisper of such thoughts and actions must have stunned the Yugoslav leadership. The fragility of the ethnic balance in Yugoslavia had become even more delicate with the burgeoning of the Bosnian Muslim nationalism. That such nationalism should occur in a national-religious form reminiscent of the Serb

8. Just like an individual, a people that has accepted Islam in thereafter incapable of living and dying for any other ideal. It is unthinkable (sic) that a Muslim should sacrifice himself for any king as ruler, no matter who he might be or for the glory of nation or any party because the strongest Islamic instinct recognises in thisa paganism and idolatory. From Alia Izetbegovic, "The Islamic declaration, published in the south Slav journnal, no.6, 1984, p.44."
and Croat variants would appear doubly dangerous to Yugoslav authorities. In fact, Fuad Muhi, characterized as "an ardent defender of the Moslem nationality in Yugoslavia," described Muslim nationalism as false. This was so because the Muslims have created "some sort of spiritual union with Moslems all over the world from Gibraltar to Indonesia, based on the Koran.

Perhaps this was the reason through which the Serbs believed there was a justification to crack down on the Bosnian Muslims from making common cause with Bosnian Croats based on mutual interests what some considered strong historical, ethnic and linguistic connections. Their coalescence would have made a union of 60% of Bosnia and Herzegovina's population, which would undermine Serb power in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Nevertheless, the position of the Bosnian Muslims improved during the 1980's. The Muslims simultaneously seemed to have integrated into Yugoslav life while developing a new sense of either religiosity or national consciousness. The Bosnian Muslim elite and the Islamic religious community no longer appeared to be totally without influence in the decision making spheres of the government, although they certainly were not equal in power to the other nations either in Bosnia and Herzegovina or in Yugoslavia as a
whole.

THE TRAGEDY OF THE 1990’S

Yugoslav leaders had carefully crafted a set of institutions to replace Tito upon his demise. The institutions were created to ensure as much continuity and as much pressure to maintain a united federation as possible without undermining Tito’s own power.

However, after Tito’s death, the operation of the institutions, in fact, encouraged narrowly rather than Yugoslav aspirations. The complexities of the issues and the liberalization of the LCY, the economy and the political system were not readily apparent at Tito’s death. Gradually through the 1980’s, however, the dynamics of the machinery inevitably produced policies based on distinctions and nations (and nationalism). When the political unit for economic and political decision making (the republic or autonomous province) coincided with ethnic boundaries, it was inevitable that economic and political decisions would be infused with nationalism.

The destructiveness of this nationalistic emphasis was shown most poignantly in the case of disintegration of Bosnia and Herzegovina. Caught in the inherent contradiction between Croat aspirations of autonomy and Serbia desire to regain its interwar hegemonic position in Yugoslavia, the
options for the Bosnian Muslims became more and more circumscribed. The main post-Tito protection, the LCY collapsed, and nationalism replaced communism, as a legitimating ideology in Yugoslavia. Nor was the international arena able or willing to take on the role of protector of the Bosnian Muslims. In the end, their homeland was to fall victim to Croat and Serb aspirations, as well as to the indecision and flawed decision making of the international community which was too absorbed in dealing with the ramifications of the sudden implosion of the communist system as well with Saddam Hussein’s challenge in the Persian Gulf to spend much time or treasure on Yugoslavia.

The Bosnian Muslims were not permitted to realize their aspirations for a pluralistic, democratic state that would accommodate the political, social, economic and cultural needs of Muslims, Serbs, and Croats. But the Serbs and Croats very eagerly wanted to absorb them into their domain and make them toe their own line.