

# LEARNING FROM DAYTON

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A DECADE AFTER ITS SIGNING, THE DAYTON PEACE AGREEMENT STILL OFFERS VALUABLE LESSONS ABOUT HUMANITARIAN INTERVENTION, PEACEKEEPING AND POST-CONFLICT RECONSTRUCTION.

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BY THEODORE TANOUE

**T**he 20th century began and ended with wars in the Balkans. The First World War started with the assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand in Sarajevo, and at century's end the dissolution of the Yugoslav republic made Bosnia and Kosovo synonymous with brutal ethnic wars and crimes against humanity. Then-Secretary of State Warren Christopher described the 1992-95 Bosnian War as "a problem from hell." It produced acts of genocide and war crimes on a scale unprecedented in Europe since World War II, accounting for nearly two million refugees and internally displaced persons. A series of failed peace plans underscored the impotence of the international community and dashed hopes that the end of the Cold War could empower the United Nations as a force for collective security and humanitarian intervention. It also proved a false dawn for those eager to declare that the "hour of Europe" as a force for regional security had arrived.

Ten years ago this month, the Dayton accords finally brought that bloody conflict to an end, constituting a signal achievement for U.S. diplomacy. The agreement was the product of a marathon three-week negotiating session led by

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*Theodore Tanoue has been a Foreign Service officer since 1982. He served in Sarajevo as political counselor from 2002 to 2004, and recently completed a year as State Department Fellow at the Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy, where he drafted this article. His previous overseas postings include assignments in Munich, Rome, Taipei, Osaka and Manila.*

U.S. Special Envoy Richard Holbrooke and held under quarantined conditions at Wright-Patterson Air Force Base in Dayton, Ohio. Initialed at Dayton on Nov. 21, 1995, and signed in Paris on Dec. 14, 1995, by representatives of the Republic of Bosnia-Herzegovina, the Republic of Croatia, and the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, the Dayton Peace Agreement created a loosely unified Bosnian state comprised of the Croat-Bosniak Federation and the Republika Srpska. It also set the stage for a massive military and civilian intervention that continues today. This anniversary is a good time to look back at a decade's worth of lessons about humanitarian intervention, peacekeeping and post-conflict reconstruction, and to contemplate the steps needed to ensure that peace continues to take root in this troubled region.

Dayton was a success story, but also a work in progress. The Dayton blueprint had significant deficits in the reconstruction pillars of security, justice and reconciliation, and in ensuring social and economic well-being. Yet as the international community's interpretation of the accords evolved, implementers assumed more robust powers and expanded the original agreement's terms to strengthen the Bosnian state's stability. The result has been a decade of peace, the return of over a million displaced persons, and a growing commitment by all ethnic groups to rejoin international society through the creation of a multi-ethnic state at peace with its neighbors.

Some observers might be tempted to ask whether the Bosnian experience still matters. Beyond the country's proximity to Western Europe, there are several other reasons to pay close attention to its prospects:

- Bosnia's porous borders, abundance of loose weapons

and reservoir of ethnic tensions — as well as the continued presence of wartime mujahedeen and jihadist groups with links to al-Qaida and other extremist organizations — all make it an attractive base for terrorist activity.

- A key lesson of 9/11 is that failed states matter, since they serve as host and vector not only for terrorist groups, but also for organized crime rings, drug traffickers and other non-state actors that threaten regional security.

- Until Iraq, Bosnia was the largest post-Cold War military intervention of the United States and our most ambitious, complex peacekeeping and nationbuilding project.

- Future interventions will also require an integrated approach to post-conflict reconstruction analogous to what eventually evolved in Bosnia. That will entail coordinating the various civilian and military agendas within the U.S. government, as well as those of the many international players involved. And such efforts will also require that America develop a civilian reconstruction and stabilization capacity that is the match of our military prowess.

For all these reasons, we need to learn both from the failures and successes of Bosnia — in order to avoid past mistakes and to build on the best practices in the future.

### **Some Key Lessons**

*Haste makes waste.* The Bosnian experience underscores the fact that peacemaking is a slow process that requires patience on the part of policy-makers. In particular, it highlights the growing — and troubling — disconnect between the duration of the warfighting phase and the length of the stabilization and reconstruction phase in modern peacekeeping operations. While modern wars can frequently be measured in days and weeks, peace implementation and postwar reconstruction will always be a task that requires a sustained

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This was particularly true because initial implementation efforts were slow to create a self-sustaining state and to bring about the conditions to allow the international community to end its massive involvement in almost every aspect of Bosnian political and economic life. In short, Dayton stopped the fighting, but left the country divided between two antagonistic entities, with a weak central authority ill-equipped to provide basic governance or to meet other postwar challenges.

*Nothing happens without security.* The military implementation underscores the importance of deploying from the outset with an overwhelming force capable of creating a security environment that permits civilian reconstruction efforts to proceed with a robust mandate capable of compelling cooperation from all parties.

NATO's initial efforts were undercut by a "mission creep" phobia (a misapplication of the lessons learned in Somalia) and a bias against expanding the roles and missions of military peacekeepers. The NATO-led Implementation Force missed its chance to

detain major war criminals in the immediate postwar period, allowing them to develop the underground political and financial networks that have helped them elude capture ever since. Arbitrary deadlines for the duration for IFOR and successor Stabilization Force missions also tempted local spoilers to hunker down and wait out the departure of the foreign presence rather than cooperate in implementing the peace. So one important lesson of Bosnia is that it is better to focus on an acceptable end-state than an end-date.

*Protect local infrastructure and vulnerable populations.* Peacekeepers also initially did not extend their "safe and secure" mandate to cover refugees and internally displaced persons who sought to reclaim their prewar homes, allowing ethnic paramilitaries to conduct campaigns to intimidate and terrorize returnees. In the immediate aftermath of Dayton, IFOR did not intervene to prevent Bosnian Serb hardliners from destroying housing stock and infrastructure when they withdrew to the Serb side of the inter-entity boundary line. The price of inaction was high, in material reconstruction costs, lost credibility and lost time.

*But the military can't do everything.* Successful peace implementation requires military forces and civilians to work in tandem. In the security arena, for example, civilian policing complements, rather than replaces, the need for a military peacekeeping presence. International and local police forces alone do not have the firepower to deal with insurgents, paramilitaries and other armed groups, but they play an essential role in restoring stability and the rule of law. In Bosnia, the deployment of the U.N.'s International Police Task Force helped immediately to raise local police standards, served as a deterrent to ethnic hate groups and organized crime, and provided reas-

insurance for minority returns in many front-line areas. A corollary to this lesson is that if we want others to underwrite a major share of postwar reconstruction costs — as we succeeded in doing in Bosnia — we must be willing to cede some decision-making authority to others.

*Start with an implementation plan that gets the sequence and priorities right.* Unless all components of a broken system are fixed, repairing isolated parts does little good. The Bosnian experience was characterized by a myriad of U.S. agencies, international organizations and assistance agencies, bilateral players, NGOs and other entities, all operating without a single shared vision of the end-state and end-institutions that we were building toward. Without overall coordination, lack of progress in one area frequently became a drag on others. For example, the absence of the rule of law and the lack of judicial reforms hampered economic growth and security. The vetting, training and recertification of police forces occurred without corresponding reforms in the prosecutorial and judicial system. Getting the sequence and priorities right is helped by having a detailed plan that identifies priorities, aligns objectives with budgets, establishes meaningful metrics for progress, and sets the stage for an exit strategy.

*Too much assistance can hinder, not help, reform.* The boom-bust dynamic of postwar assistance flows was also problematic. Money was wasted because of Bosnia's limited absorptive capacity. Some assistance shielded dysfunctional communist-era economic institutions and practices from market forces. Other assistance was looted by corrupt officials. Only after the rule of law is established and the business environment put on a sound footing should the spigots be turned on for economic development initiatives.

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*tent, not just the willing.* Just as too much assistance at the wrong time can be counterproductive, the wrong mix of implementers can hinder progress. While soldiers, diplomats, international civil servants and other generalists are important, it is critical to enlist teams and individuals with specific competencies, including central bankers, financial examiners and forensic auditors, legal experts, prosecutors, engineers and specialists who can focus on key industrial and public sectors such as power generation, transportation, and rehabilitation and privatization of state-owned enterprises. They will provide the best possible on-the-ground situational awareness of the economic and social environment available, and can help get the information base right from the beginning. These experts need to be assigned on a long-term basis, working alongside local staff to facilitate capacity-building. They must begin the process of handing over responsibilities to local staff at an early stage.

*Don't fight the learning curve.* A related problem in Bosnia was rapid staff turnover and the concomitant loss of institutional knowledge, resulting in reforms moving on a stop-and-

go basis. One exception was the Bosnian Central Bank, led from the start by expatriate staff working alongside local experts. As one banker there told me, "The first year was hell, the second year was purgatory, and then it got better." Constantly cycling new personnel through an intervention means that the international community will be condemned to the eternal purgatory of the bottom of the learning curve.

*Avoid enshrining special ethnic rights.* As in Iraq and Afghanistan, the reconstruction effort in Bosnia had to traverse a minefield of competing ethnic interests. A side effect of the compromises necessary to get to Dayton was favoring ethnic community rights over individual rights. These included quotas on government positions, a tripartite presidency, upper houses of parliament based on ethnicity, and other institutions that conferred special status on the three "constituent peoples" of Bosnia. This has given ethnic groups the institutional levers to block progress and has imparted a zero-sum ethnic dynamic to almost every major political issue. Perhaps a better approach might have been to create a civil system and constitutional guarantees that emphasized individual rights, and which were consonant from the outset with international human rights norms.

*Harness local aspirations to join international society and apply objective international standards.* Eight years after Dayton, the international community fixed what Ambassador Holbrooke acknowledged was the agreement's greatest failure: the lack of central command and control over Bosnia's rival entity militaries. These reforms were launched in the wake of the "Orao" (Eagle) scandal in 2002, which revealed that Bosnian Serb officials had engaged in illegal arms deals with Saddam Hussein's regime. The international communi-

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ty responded with the judicious application of sticks and carrots. These included the ouster of the Serb Republic's defense minister and the departure of the Serb member of the Bosnian presidential triumvirate, coupled with offers to begin a collaborative effort to create a smaller, more affordable military under central command and control.

The effort harnessed Bosnia's aspirations for joining NATO's Partnership for Peace with NATO's standards for defense reform. In contrast to eight previous years of cosmetic tinkering, defense reform succeeded in 2002-2003 because all sides acknowledged that this was not an exercise in dumbing things down to a lowest common denominator but, rather, of rising to a bar set by NATO. By offering the implicit security guarantee of possible future membership in NATO, defense reform also gave Bosnians the reassurance that the impending departure of Stability Force peacekeepers did not necessarily mean abandonment by Western Europe and the United States.

#### **Dump-and-Run vs. Plug-and-Play**

The final step in the process is to create a viable exit strategy — a chapter which is still being written for Bosnia-Herzegovina. Past interventions in Haiti and East Timor suggest that this is where interventions tend to falter, often because the exit stage so frequently becomes the abandonment stage. The peace implementation stage and the exit stage require completely different tools and paradigms. Exit does not equal abandonment, but rather a type of engagement that is different from, but no less important than, the intervention phase. The tools required are mirror images of each other, with intervention calling for robust "hard" powers of imposition and the exit stage emphasizing "soft" powers of attrac-

tion to create a sense of local ownership and responsibility.

The objective should be to move through the intervention stage as quickly as possible, before it plants the seeds of future problems. Benevolent dictatorships — even well-meaning international organizations — are frequently unable to respond to political market signals. In Bosnia, the continued international presence risks perpetuating a dependency culture and instilling a warped political culture with nationalism as its default setting. The local electorate looks to the "internationalists" to deliver reforms and to nationalist parties to protect their ethnic interests. This division of responsibilities allows nationalists to enjoy incumbency without accountability, and international civil servants to occupy the political space that should be assumed by homegrown, multi-ethnic reform-oriented parties.

Bosnia is fortunate in that it has a natural home in Europe. With that in mind, we need to recalibrate our reconstruction paradigm from merely "fixing things" and then departing to focusing on ways to reintegrate Bosnia back into the region and, eventually, with the rest of the world. Specifically, we should leverage Bosnian aspirations to play a meaningful role in international fora — the European Union, World Trade Organization, Interpol, the Egmont Group, the Venice Commission, the Community of Democracies and other groups — both to continue to shape and influence events in a positive direction in Bosnia from outside and to help ensure that reforms are not orphaned once the peacekeepers and civilian implementers depart. The objective should be to replace "bad" networks — organized crime, trafficking rings, arms smugglers, black markets and illicit militias — with "good" ones that enmesh Bosnia

within a web of economic, political, security, cultural and other links with the international community.

### Looking Ahead to the Next Decade

After 10 years, we are nearing the end of the Dayton era. What the international community has given Bosnia is something unimaginable during the bloody conflict and the chaotic aftermath: a second chance. In the context of potential membership in NATO, the E.U. and other international bodies, Bosnia's fractious ethnic groups have an opportunity to create a functioning state and a lasting peace.

It is also a second chance for an international community that proved so ineffectual initially in handling the breakup of Yugoslavia. We cannot put the pieces back together, but what we can do is to create a context within which the successor states can live as

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normal states in a normal region. Toward that end, we need a new compact with Bosnia that hastens the end of Bosnia's political tutelage, and renews the promise of an open door to the E.U., NATO and other international institutions — provided it finally meets its international obligations

by bringing to justice the major war criminals still at large.

Since the Dayton era began, debate over Bosnia issues has often involved only the various international players involved in peace implementation. This debate should be long over, and the architects need to let the rightful occupants take full ownership of their common home. Without active local participation and buy-in, the international community ultimately will achieve little that will last. Dealing with a normal, sovereign polity requires normal tools of engagement. To echo Ambassador Warren Zimmermann's description of prewar Yugoslavia, what the international community has created in Bosnia after a decade of high-intensity intervention is a state, but not yet a nation. In the final analysis, nationhood cannot be conferred by outsiders, but must be reclaimed by the people of Bosnia-Herzegovina themselves. ■

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