



## **ANALYSIS - The Bosnian crisis from the isolationist perspective**

Political tensions in Bosnia and Herzegovina have a capacity to become a global crisis

Dr. Admir Mulaosmanovic

February 2, 2022

### **ISTANBUL**

Bosnia and Herzegovina is facing "the greatest existential threat of the post-war period," were words uttered by current High Representative Christian Schmidt late last year and this precise description of the situation should echo in the international community on a daily basis. Mr. Schmidt as an experienced politician and someone who has significant executive powers (most efficient are Bonn Powers given to the Office of the High Representative in 1997), probably attempted to alarm European leaders and its global allies to undertake serious political action before it can be too late.

Indeed, so many reasons could be presented to advocate that state of urgency. Yet, historical reminiscences should be enough; the Serb terrorist Gavrilo Princip, who assassinated Archduke Franz Ferdinand in Sarajevo (1914), was a spark that ignited Great War; the fall of communism in Eastern Europe at the end of the 20th Century had deadly consequences in former Yugoslavia with mass atrocities (and genocide) committed by mostly Serb forces in Bosnia. The somehow small state of Bosnia and Herzegovina marked the beginning and the end of the previous century in a very negative way, and it is sufficient reason to take a recent crisis seriously.

In addition to these, there are other reasons for concern. European security, endangered by Russia's firm stand towards Ukraine and its possible NATO enlargement, is balancing the whole continent at the "Thucydidean Brink." The entire context resembles a new conflict between the West and its liberal, democratic order against the East and its autocracy. Moreover, it has a dangerous impact in former communist states in a broad belt from the Baltic to Central, Eastern and Southeastern European countries because of growing Chinese influence by investment policy. The Eurasian block, foremost Russia and China conduct tactical moves to disorient the EU, also using energy as a political tool in that struggle.

**Tensions may lead to a global crisis**

In that sense, political tensions in Bosnia and Herzegovina have the capacity to become a global crisis. This "European hotspot" has so many potential explanatory patterns that any researcher might count on their opinion, which would be shared with the public. Awareness about the significance of narrative contextualization on and vis a vis fragile society is a must. From the cultural and religious point of view, for example, Bosnia represents the meeting point of monotheistic faiths and traditions, indeed that any hostility will influence relations between Islam and Christianity.

If someone would like to explain it through lenses of modern statehood, the comprehensive account on ethnic diversity, the rise of nationalism on the eve of the decline of universal empires (Austro-Hungarian, Ottoman, Russian), and recent political ideas should be included. That account should deal with the Western Balkan's history in the 19th and 20th centuries, not only with the current Bosnian turmoil. Otherwise, the public would probably be misinformed.

Most likely, an ordered opinion is published at [www.antiwar.com](http://www.antiwar.com) by Doug Bandow, a Senior Fellow at the Cato Institute (Washington, USA). Reflecting upon the Bosnian Crisis Mr. Bandow totally misinterpreted the Serb attack on Bosnian sovereignty led by Milorad Dodik, a member of the Bosnian Presidency, putting it into its domestic disputes on US foreign policy. Libertarian advocacy toward non-interventionism is used to emphasize the bad sides of military operations in the '90s, as was the case in the Clinton administration. Is it possible without observation on essential issues such as justice, human rights, right to defense etc.? These issues were totally suspended by the Milošević regime and its associates in Bosnia and Herzegovina, war criminals Karadžić, Krajišnik, Mladić and dozens of others.

### **International institutions fail**

Failure to protect vulnerable nations all around the globe is a shame for the UN and all other global alliances. We know that the US is a leader in the promotion of international security no matter what political option, Republicans or Democrats, were in power. But it is connected to the sense of justice, too, where protection of the weak is needed action and above political games and foreign policy strategies. However, as in the case of the Rohingya and the Uyghurs, we now see that the issue of protection of the vulnerable is not a priority anymore.

A different view, advocating for specific ideas is more than legitimate, but it also needs to be argued. This is not the case with Bandow. Dodik's secessionism cannot be accepted as non-threatening and against imperialism. On the contrary, advocating the secession of the part of Bosnia where horrific crimes were committed, including the crime of genocide in the Srebrenica area, testifies that the Greater Serbia threat would inevitably lead to armed conflict, but also that Belgrade's desire to establish its hegemony over the entire region is vivid. Small imperialisms are as dangerous as big ones.

American isolationists, in that case, need to operate with clear indicators. Complex relations in the Western Balkans have been the product of influence by many major powers in the long run, including the United States. Withdrawal from the region cannot be on the principle of raising one's hands and leaving. Justice should be served by those who declaratively advocate it. Justice

would be to respect the decision of the Bosnian state to be part of the EU and NATO, but also to erase the results of the genocide. In that case, many disputes would be settled, and genuine cooperation at the regional level would be given a clear framework. All countries, Montenegro, Serbia, Northern Macedonia, Kosovo, and Albania, would have space to find solutions among themselves, without the mediation or imposition of decisions by international actors.