

# THE NATIONAL INTEREST

Published on *The National Interest* (<http://nationalinterest.org>)

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## The Balkan Human Tragedy Continues

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|  
November 10, 2011

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The *Associated Press* reports that officials from Serbia, Bosnia, Croatia, and Montenegro are planning a “donors’ conference”<sup>[3]</sup> next year to raise money for civilians who were displaced by the Balkan wars of the 1990s. Despite some unresolved quarrels on other matters, the four governments are united in their quest for at least \$700 million in assistance from the United Nations, the European Union, and the United States. Officials from those bodies immediately pledged to assist that cause. Assistant Secretary of State David Robinson stated that “it is time to bring the reality of the displacement in the western Balkans to an end.” He added that “the U.S. will support you and not only with words.”

One can certainly empathize with the plight of the refugees. Some 74,000 people, , mostly elderly, remain in so-called migrant centers. They are the remnant of hundreds of thousands who fled the fighting in Croatia, Bosnia, and Kosovo—or who were driven out by victorious forces—during the mid and late 1990s. Most of the original victims are no longer in migrant centers but have resettled in other locales. Yet even for those more fortunate refugees, the wars turned their lives upside down, and many of them have never been able to restore their previous standard of living.

One of the dirty little secrets of the U.S.-NATO crusades in the Balkans is that a large percentage of the refugees were driven from their homes, amidst multiple atrocities<sup>[4]</sup>, by local forces that the Western powers enthusiastically backed. That was true of the more than 250,000 ethnic Serbs in the Krajina region of Croatia who fled their ancestral homes as Croatian troops took control of that area in 1995. And following the victory of the Kosovo Liberation Army (thanks to NATO’s relentless bombardment of targets throughout Serbia) in 1999, more than 240,000 refugees—not just Serbs, but other ethnic minorities as well—were displaced from Kosovo. The KLA’s ethnic cleansing campaign took place on NATO’s watch, while thousands of alliance troops occupying the province stood by and did nothing to prevent or reverse it.

One can make a decent case that financial payments at this point are less foreign aid and more reparations for an injurious policy that the United States and its allies carried out. Even so, U.S. officials need to be cautious about committing money that the United States does not have. A government that is already bleeding some \$1.5 trillion annually is not in a great position to make

additional financial promises. Moreover, the primary lesson from the Balkan interventions <sup>[5]</sup> of the 1990s that created at least two utterly dysfunctional states (Bosnia and Kosovo) should be to refrain from such reckless crusades in the future, not to provide token, belated comfort to the innocent victims.

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