



Bosnia (1992 - 1995)

The war in Bosnia between 1992 and 1995 killed an estimated 125,000 people, more than half of them civilians, in a three-sided conflict among Muslims, Croats and Serbs.

Declaring the independent Republika Srpska, Bosnian Serbs forced hundreds of thousands of Muslims and Croats from their homes and summarily executed thousands. Bosnian Croats and Muslims fought each other early on, but in 1994 they formed a federation to counter the Serbs. The conflict ended in 1995 when all parties agreed to the Dayton Peace Agreement, brokered by the United States. The agreement created two separate entities within a greater Bosnia - the Republika Srpska and the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina. The International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY) was set up in 1993 to try the perpetrators of war crimes.

Bosnia was the most ethnically diverse of the six republics that made up Yugoslavia, with 43% Muslims (also known as Bosniacs), 35% Serbs, and 18% Croats. Inter marriages were common and the different religious-ethnic groups had long lived in peace. In 1991 Croatia and Slovenia declared independence from Yugoslavia. Serbia, the dominant republic of Yugoslavia, fought to retain control of the breakaway republics. In 1992 Bosnia held a referendum and voted for independence. War broke out, and Bosnian Serbs formed the Republika Srpska (Serb Republic), launched a campaign of “ethnic cleansing,” and laid siege to the capital, Sarajevo. Bosnian Muslims and Bosnian Croats began to fight each other in 1993, leading to the destruction of much of the city of Mostar. In the March 1994 Washington Agreement, however, Muslims and Croats formed an alliance against Serbs.

The United Nations sent peacekeepers to protect enclaves of Bosnian Muslims and Croats in so-called “safe areas.” But there was no peace to keep, and the UN’s declaration of neutrality paralyzed its own forces and endangered thousands of refugees seeking safety. Serbs forces took 370 UN soldiers hostage before overrunning the “safe area” of Srebrenica and massacring thousands of Muslim boys and men in July 1995, in one of the most infamous acts of the war. In 1995, NATO became the key international presence in Bosnia, conducting air strikes against Serb positions and aiding the advance of Bosnian Muslim and Croat forces. In December, the Dayton Peace Agreement ended the war. A tripartite joint presidency was created, with the internationally Office of the High Representative vested with the authority to resolve disputes within the presidency and to make other decisions. The country’s cumbersome governance structure has left it weak, and international forces remain to stabilize the country. Many refugees and internally displaced persons have not yet been able to return to their homes.

Print Resources

Ali, Rabia and Lawrence Lifschultz, eds. (1994) *Why Bosnia? Writings on the Balkan War*. Stony Creek, CT: Pamphleteer’s Press.

Woodward, Susan L. (1995) *Balkan Tragedy: Chaos and Dissolution After the Cold War*. Washington: The Brookings Institution.

Magaš, Branka and Ivo Žanić (2001) *The War in Croatia and Bosnia-Herzegovina, 1991-1995*. London: Frank Cass.

Power, Samantha (2002) *A Problem from Hell: America and the Age of Genocide*. New York: Basic Books.

Tabeau, Ewa and Jakub Bijak (2005) 'War-related Deaths in the 1992-1995 Armed Conflicts in Bosnia and Herzegovina,' *European Journal of Population*, Vol. 21, pp. 187-215.

Online Resources

Human Rights Watch. *Bosnia and Herzegovina Documents*.

United Nations International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia

International Crisis Group. *Bosnia and Herzegovina Documents*.

BBC News. *Country Profile: Bosnia-Herzegovina*.

Timeline

1991 - Croatia and Slovenia declare independence from Yugoslavia

1992 - Bosnian referendum favors independence; Bosnian Serbs, aided by Serbia, seize half of Bosnia, expelling Muslims and Croats; Serbs place Sarajevo under siege

1993 - Bosnian Muslims and Croats begin fighting; UN declares "no-fly" zone, which is violated more than 500 times, dispenses humanitarian aid, establishes "safe areas" and begins negotiations; ICTY founded

1994 - Bosnian Muslims and Croats form federation, supported by Croatia; Serbs kill dozens at Sarajevo marketplace, attack aid convoys

1995 - "Safe area" of Bihac under siege; Serbs continue shelling of Sarajevo; Serbs overrun "safe area" of Srebrenica; NATO launches air strikes on Serb positions; ICTY issues first indictments; Dayton Peace Agreement signed