

CHAPTER 16**Critical Thinking Activity****Southern Europe and the Balkans****Brokering Bosnia**

Related by blood, Balkan Slavs embraced ethnic identities based on religious background. Today's animosities in the region are also based on World War II, when clashing political ideologies led to internal conflict. After World War II, Yugoslavia was created as a multinational state, or a nation with many different ethnic groups. Six republics were part of the new nation—Croatia, Slovenia, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Serbia, Montenegro, and Macedonia. But it has proven impossible to hold together such fundamentally different groups.

Although each new republic had a dominant ethnic group, the populations were mixed. Dividing the people were centuries-old differences based not only on the ethnic group to which they belonged but on religion and territorial claims as well. In 1991 the republics of Slovenia, Croatia, Bosnia-Herzegovina, and Macedonia declared their independence. They did so after Serbia, the largest of the former republics, refused to agree to a looser confederation that would give the other republics greater autonomy. Under its leader Slobodan Milosevic, Serbia began waging war against the breakaway states.

The most violent fighting occurred in Bosnia-Herzegovina, where Bosnian Serbs wanted to retain ties with Serbia. Bosnian Serb forces followed a policy of systematic elimination of Muslims and Croats. The Serbs also forced out Bosnian Muslims and other non-Serbs from areas under Bosnian Serb control. As a result of the war, about 300,000 people died and 2.7 million lost their homes.

The United States and western Europe were unable to decide how to assist the suffering of the besieged people. Initial steps included the United Nations instituting an arms embargo against all the former Yugoslav states, placing trade sanctions on Serbia, and sending a peacekeeping force into Bosnia. Throughout the conflict, the United States also tried to persuade its NATO allies to stage air strikes against Bosnian Serb military sites. NATO jets, acting under the authority of the United Nations, attacked several military targets in November 1994. In retaliation, Bosnian Serbs kidnapped 165 United Nations peacekeepers and offered to exchange them for NATO flight plans.

Then, in a sudden and surprising move, Bosnian Serb leader Radovan Karadzic requested the diplomatic services of former United States President Jimmy Carter. Carter managed to arrange a shaky truce that turned increasingly fragile as warfare erupted again in early 1995.

When a Bosnian Serb mortar attack killed dozens of citizens of Sarajevo and wounded many more, NATO responded in force. In a massive bombing campaign—the largest mission in the alliance's history—NATO aircraft attacked Serb targets in September 1995. The air campaign played an important part in forcing the combatants back to the negotiating table.

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The Geneva talks ran into new stumbling blocks, but at the same time offered some reasons for optimism. Bosnia, Croatia, and Yugoslavia—acting for the Bosnian Serbs—reached an agreement that affirmed Bosnia’s territorial integrity but provided for an independent separate Bosnian Serb state within its boundaries. Further negotiations to try to close the gap between the warring sides hinged on key issues such as implementing a truce, setting the proportions of the territorial divisions, and providing equitable treatment for Muslim Croats. The ethnic mosaic that Bosnia and Herzegovina presented as a Yugoslav republic in 1991 was altered by war. The December 1995 Dayton Peace Accord carves the now sovereign nation into two autonomous regions separated by a demilitarized zone.

1. Based on the information above, what do you think is the purpose of the 1995 Dayton Peace Accord?

2. What other examples of ethnic conflict in recent history can you think of? Is it possible for ethnic conflict to occur again in the world? Why or why not?

3. Using classroom reference sources, find out what Bosnia had to do with the start of World War I.

4. Is it a moral responsibility or wrongful interference for one sovereign nation to involve itself in another sovereign nation’s activities, as other nations did to Bosnia-Herzegovina?
