

SARAJEVO, WHENCE COMES THY GLOOM?

ETHNIC AND RELIGIOUS ROOTS
OF THE FIRST WORLD WAR

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ABSTRACT

This paper seeks to identify the dimensions of ethnicity and religion which led to the assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand on June 28, 1914. Intertwined is the growth of nationalism in nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Europe. The paper focuses primarily on Slavic nationalism, with some attention to German, Hungarian and Turkish nationalism, as well as the confluence of Islam with Orthodox and Latin Christianity. The overarching goal is to determine what provoked individuals in Serbia and Bosnia to violence. Though the causes of the First World War were numerous and complex, ethnic and religious tensions set the machinery of war in motion.

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INTRODUCTION

*The wars of peoples will be more terrible than those of kings.*¹

Winston S. Churchill, 1901

*In his native Bosnia, whose tribal society had been disintegrating under the impact of modern colonialism, Princip fired his pistol not only at an Archduke but also at the façade of a quiet, apparently stable world.*²

Vladimir Dedijer

Otto von Bismarck once remarked that the Balkans were not worth the bones of a single Pomeranian grenadier. It is ironic, then, that the region was responsible for igniting a conflict with fatal consequences for Wilhelmine Germany and its Austro-Hungarian ally. There has long been a cottage industry of historians who attempt to assign blame for the outbreak of the First World War. Reams have been written on the subject. The author does not intend to take part in that sterile debate. Rather, this paper seeks to identify the dimensions of ethnicity and religion which led to the assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand on June 28, 1914. Intertwined is the growth of nationalism in nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Europe. The paper focuses primarily on Slavic nationalism, with some attention to German, Hungarian and Turkish nationalism, as well as the confluence of Islam with Orthodox and Latin Christianity. To that end, an analytical framework will be developed integrating concepts from works by Anderson, Arendt, Connor, Gurr, Horowitz, Huntington, Kohn, Shultz, and Smith. The overarching goal is to determine

* The title is extracted from a Serb folk song reprinted in R. W. Seton-Watson, *Sarajevo: A Study in the Origins of the Great War*, (London: Hutchinson, 1925), p. 25.

¹ Quoted in Martin Gilbert, *The First World War: A Complete History*, (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1994), p. 3.

² Vladimir Dedijer, "Sarajevo Fifty Years After," *Foreign Affairs*, 42:4 (1964), p. 569.

what provoked individuals in Serbia and Bosnia to violence. The exact mechanism by which violence was enacted — the Black Hand’s plot — is treated as a secondary matter, since the history of the assassination plot has been dealt with at length elsewhere.³ A detailed history will not be attempted here.

Conventional wisdom has it that the First World War grew out of a combination of geopolitics, diplomatic blunders, and reckless German ambition. That is only partly true. Though the causes of the First World War were numerous and complex, ethnic and religious tensions set the machinery of war in motion. Over the preceding century, powerful historical and cultural forces had converged to produce a virulent strain of South Slav nationalism, especially within Serbia and the Slavic provinces of the multiethnic Austro-Hungarian state. Overlapping and reinforcing this nationalism was a broader Slavic nationalism linked to Russia, the self-proclaimed “Third Rome” and aspirant to leadership of a grand Slavic-Orthodox Christian confederation. Slavic ambitions encountered competing nationalism on the part of Austrian Germans, Magyars, and various other national groups. Located at the intersection of Islam and Christianity, the Balkans were also characterized by mounting religious tension which was inextricably linked to ethnicity. These ethnic and cultural frictions intensified at a time when geopolitical interests brought the Great Powers into direct, and ultimately irreconcilable, conflict in the Balkans region. A series of Balkan crises marred the early 1900s.

Increasingly vocal calls for Bosnian independence and a South Slav confederation met with stern repression from Vienna. With the obvious exceptions of Austria-Hungary

³ See Vladimir Dedijer, *The Road to Sarajevo*, (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1966); and Seton-Watson, *Sarajevo*.

and its German ally, each Great Power's interests required the dismemberment of the Habsburg Empire; a result which Vienna naturally resisted with its utmost strength. This propelled Europe into a war of proportions vastly disproportionate to its proximate causes. Nationalist sentiments within Serbia and Bosnia-Herzegovina prompted the Black Hand secret society, with support from elements in the Serbian government, to plot the assassination of Franz Ferdinand during a visit to Sarajevo. Twenty-year-old Black Hand member Gavrilo Princip carried out the plan, shooting the archduke on the anniversary of the 1389 Battle of Kosovo, a central date in Serb history. A volatile situation, fueled by ethnic and religious tension, flared into world war.

ANALYTICAL FRAMEWORK

This paper does not aspire to be a comprehensive history of the origins of the First World War. To attempt such a feat in a brief space would be folly. However, a sketch of the seventy years prior to Sarajevo will be helpful in identifying factors leading to Franz Ferdinand's assassination and the subsequent world war; and in highlighting the global consequences of ethnic and religious conflict in 1914. Thereafter the paper will draw heavily on theoretical writings on nationalism and ethnic conflict, integrating primary and secondary source material. The framework for analysis will include the following points:

- Explanation of the Gurr analytical framework;
- Philosophical, theoretical and cultural roots of nineteenth-century nationalism in Europe;
- A historical "snapshot" of the causes of the First World War, focusing on the intensification of nationalism and the increasing propensity to violence;

- Origins of national consciousness: the “imagined community” and evolution of ethnic myths of common descent;
- Collective disadvantage perceived by the Bosnian Serbs within a system displaying both ranked and unranked characteristics;
- Ties between the Serbian state and Serb irredenta, producing a desire for union under Belgrade, a South Slav federation, or possibly a grand Slavic confederation;
- Elite attempts to exploit the Bosnian Serb population’s sense of grievance;
- Repressive control by Vienna stemming from fear of a chain reaction leading to the dissolution of the Habsburg Empire;
- Global processes shaping the context of political action, most notably the advance of colonialism and modernity;
- International factors facilitating political action, particularly support for the assassins from elements in the Serbian government and from Serbian secret societies;
- Opportunities for political action, focusing on why political action was channeled into communal rebellion, and why these opportunities failed to produce a general uprising in Bosnia and union with other Slavs; and
- The ramifications of ethnic violence occurring in a climate of entangled and conflicting geopolitical ambitions by the Great Powers.

Ted Robert Gurr identifies four major processes which interact to produce communal mobilization for political action, possibly including violence. First is the issue of group history and status, which encompasses the formation of a group identity, the group’s perception of collective disadvantage, and the existence of grievances which may lead to political mobilization. Secondly, Gurr observes that global processes may shape the context of political action, notably by the advance of economic development, the level of state power, and the extent of democracy. The economic factors feed into the perception of

present grievance, and the extent of democracy determines whether political mobilization will be expressed through communal protest, or diverted into communal rebellion. Thirdly, international factors facilitating political action include the possibilities that communal conflict will diffuse into an area from a neighboring area experiencing conflict; that a conflict in a neighboring territory may be contagious; and that there may be active international support for the group, for its communal rivals, or for the government. These factors enhance the group's identity and cohesion, and may improve the potential for political mobilization. Finally, opportunities for political action stem from persisting, long-term grievances, active grievances, and the group's potential for mobilization. If the grievances are viewed as sufficient to justify political action, and the group has the potential for mobilization, communal protest or rebellion may result.⁴ The heart of the present analysis will be the discussion of Serbian group history and status, since, as will be seen shortly, ethnic cleavages limited the extent of political mobilization in Bosnia-Herzegovina. Gurr's broad framework will be augmented by the ideas advanced by other authors, where appropriate.

PROLOGUE: FORMATION OF A SEVERELY DIVIDED SOCIETY

Centuries of migration and war coalesced in the nineteenth-century Balkan peninsula. The ebb and flow of Islam and Christianity created a "belt of mixed populations" in which the ideal trinity of people, territory and state was merely a fiction.⁵

⁴ Ted Robert Gurr, *Minorities at Risk, A Global View of Ethnopolitical Conflicts*, (Washington: United States Institute of Peace Press, 1993), pp. 123-38.

⁵ Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, (San Diego: Harcourt Brace & Company, 1975), p. 232.

As Huntington asserted his seminal article “The Clash of Civilizations?”, turbulence is the rule at the boundaries or “fault lines” between civilizations.⁶ The Slavs had invaded the peninsula in the sixth and seventh centuries A.D., and converted to Orthodox Christianity in the ninth century. Stevan Nemanja established a powerful Serbian dynasty in 1168, and after decades of expansion, Serbian rulers were able to style themselves Emperor of the Serbs and Greeks. In 1389, however, their gains were reversed. The Serbs suffered a catastrophic defeat at the hands of the Ottoman Empire, at the Battle of Kosovo — a central event in Serb history, as will be seen below. The Serbs rallied, but by 1463 the kingdom had been largely subjugated, in the wake of the Turkish conquest of Constantinople. Herzegovina held out until 1482, then succumbed as well. The Turks eliminated or converted the Serb nobility, and reduced the Serbs to peasant status within the empire.⁷

The province of Bosnia and Herzegovina (hereafter Bosnia-Herzegovina) will occupy most of our attention in this paper. Donald Horowitz has noted that migration and incomplete conquest may generate lingering historical grievances, and, once national consciousness has developed, revanchism.⁸ Though Bosnia-Herzegovina was the most Slavonic of the South Slav provinces in the Balkans, there was a diverse blend of religions, with large numbers of adherents to Islam, and to Orthodox and Catholic Christianity. Additionally, while ethnic Serbs were the largest ethnic group in the province, a large minority of Croats was present. After the conquest in 1482, a third of the population was killed or enslaved, and a militarized and centralized government was installed, using

⁶ Samuel Huntington, “The Clash of Civilizations?”, *Foreign Affairs*, Summer 1993.

⁷ Barbara Jelavich, *History of the Balkans*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), pp. 19-42; Charles Jelavich, *The Balkans*, (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1965), pp. 13-16.

Bosnian lords who accepted Islam (and Turkish overlordship) as surrogates. Significantly, the peasantry was left in relative isolation to preserve the traditional Serb culture, which emphasized communalism based on the *zadruga*, or extended family.⁹ The Battle of Kosovo henceforth was the focus of national pride, and of national sorrow.

Richard Shultz has written that ethnic tensions are a product of a severely divided society.¹⁰ Bosnia-Herzegovina was the archetype of such a society. Bosnians were fairly homogeneous in their language and cultural traditions. Still, Serb and Croat coexisted uneasily, and religious tension was ever present — though it was difficult to disentangle religion from ethnicity in a society which was a throwback to the Middle Ages. The society took on aspects of both a ranked and unranked society, to use Horowitz's terminology: a foreign regime had been imposed on the province as a superior caste, and underneath, Orthodox Serbs and Catholic Croats jostled for influence alongside one another.¹¹ The Muslim nobles not only favored Islam over Christianity, but played off Catholics against followers of Orthodoxy. This "divide and rule" strategy was commonplace not only under the Ottoman Empire, but later under the Habsburgs. Not surprisingly, this exploitation of divisions exacerbated tensions among the Bosnians, as well as against the Muslim nobility. In 1848, Istanbul made the feudal lords owners of the land, reducing the peasants to serfdom, with brutal treatment and heavy taxation the rule rather than the exception. In his landmark *Through Bosnia and the Herzegovina on Foot during the Insurrection* (1875), Sir

⁸ Donald Horowitz, *Ethnic Groups in Conflict*, (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1985), p. 30.

⁹ Dedijer, *Road to Sarajevo*, pp. 28-29.

¹⁰ Richard Shultz, "State Disintegration and Ethnic Conflict: A Framework for Analysis," *ANNALS*, September 1995, p. 77.

¹¹ Horowitz, *op. cit.*, p. 20.

Arthur Evans, a recent Oxford graduate, observed first-hand “the policy of the Mahometan conqueror to favor the Roman Church in the province, as a ready counterpoise to the orthodox Serbians, [who] are imbued with national aspirations.”¹² Gross outrages, he claimed, could be committed against the serfs with impunity, especially by Muslim tax collectors: “all kinds of personal tortures are applied to the recalcitrant. In the heat of summer men are stripped naked, and tied to a tree smeared over with honey or other sweet-stuff, and left to the tender mercies of the insect world.”¹³ Rebellion was a frequent occurrence under these conditions, with uprisings common by the early nineteenth century. In sowing discontent among the inhabitants of Bosnia-Herzegovina, the foreign rulers and their Bosnian surrogates not only fostered a climate of hatred against themselves, but aggravated tensions among the Slavic underclass.

THE LARGER CONTEXT: ORIGINS OF THE FIRST WORLD WAR

“Fifty years,” observed B. H. Liddell Hart, “were spent in the process of making Europe explosive. Five days were enough to detonate it.”¹⁴ As early as 1848 Europe had been convulsed with revolution against authoritarian dynastic regimes. Inhabitants of the Balkans saw this, and learned: the 1848 revolutions kindled a rudimentary idea of a South Slav, or Yugoslav, union of some type, though Slavs differed on the form it should take.¹⁵ Serbs and others with ethnic ties and common historic bonds, or “myths” in Anthony

¹² Arthur Evans, *Through Bosnia and the Herzegovina on Foot during the Insurrection, August and September 1875*, (London: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1877; reprint, New York: Arno, 1971), p. 180.

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 259.

¹⁴ B. H. Liddell Hart, *History of the First World War*, (London: Pan Books, 1972), p. 1.

¹⁵ Seton-Watson, *op. cit.*, p. 18.

Smith's terminology, began to propose political programs after 1848 to resurrect ancient "culture-communities."¹⁶ Increasingly prevalent was a brand of nationalism based on ethnicity and cultural unity, rather than the liberal model of individual rights and freedoms.

The multiethnic empires were especially susceptible to this new form of national aspirations, which would dominate the foreign policy of the Habsburg Empire, in particular, henceforth. In 1867 Emperor Franz Josef, whose empire had recently suffered a crushing defeat at Prussia's hands, in 1866 at Königgrätz, felt compelled to offer a concession to Magyar nationalism. The Dual Monarchy of Austria-Hungary was forged in this *Ausgleich*, or compromise, under which Franz Josef reigned as emperor of Austria and king of Hungary; a large measure of autonomy was granted to the Hungarian minority, while the empire maintained common defense and foreign policy apparatuses. For a time the *Ausgleich* appeared to be a satisfactory solution to the Austrian nationalities question. Ultimately, though, it proved unsuccessful, since Austrians and Hungarians together formed a minority in the empire, with political, cultural and economic rights denied to the majority. By seeking to expand in the Balkans at Ottoman expense, Franz Josef's empire only worsened the problem of nationalities. Austria-Hungary would never be a "nation-state"; indeed, it was probably the polar example of a fragmented state.

Nationalism was at work elsewhere. Italian unification was proclaimed in 1861, with Victor Emmanuel II installed as king; among other things, this inspired the neighboring Slavs to seek their own independence from foreign rule. In the German states,

¹⁶ Anthony D. Smith, *The Ethnic Origins of Nations*, (Oxford: Blackwell, 1986), p. 142.

nationalism had arisen from cosmopolitanism by 1815, an outgrowth of the need to cast off the yoke of Napoleon's domination. Otto von Bismarck and Prussian King William I orchestrated German unification under Prussian leadership, largely by unleashing nationalism in a series of limited wars against Denmark, Austria and France from 1864 to 1871. German nationalism was grounded in centuries of weakness and fragmentation, and the resultant feeling of inferiority: F. C. Moser, articulating a typical view, commented, "What are the Germans? For centuries we have been a puzzle with respect to our political constitution, a source of booty to our neighbors, an object of ridicule, divided and weak."¹⁷ German nationalism took an especially virulent form, with the desire for nationhood paramount; hence it encompassed both liberal and conservative views. Hence the Second Reich was formed not from below — that is, not from mass sentiment — but from above, in what is often termed a "revolution from above."¹⁸ In typical acerbic style, Bismarck observed that "[t]he great questions of the time are not decided by speeches and votes of the majority — that was the mistake of 1848 — but by iron and blood."¹⁹ Henry Kissinger has asserted a lack of a philosophical framework uniting Germany as a nation-state, since Austrian Germans, indistinguishable culturally from citizens of the Reich, had been excluded by force in 1866. Rather, he contended, nationalism was a cynical device for expanding Prussian power. Political elites have often bent mass nationalist sentiment to their purposes. Whatever the case, the new state was far stronger than its neighbors in economic and military power, and it seemed to have little idea of its position in the world.

¹⁷ F. C. Moser, *Von dem Deutschen Nationalgeist*, in Hagen Schulze, ed., *Nation-Building in Central Europe*, (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1987). p. 5.

After Bismarck's removal by William II in 1890, the Reich pursued an erratic and reckless foreign policy, spurred by nationalism: "[i]t was as if Germany had expended so much energy on achieving nationhood that it had not had time to think through what purpose the new state should serve."²⁰ The Kaiser seemed to devote greater energy to attaining the symbols of Germany's "place in the sun" — notably a powerful army and High Seas Fleet — than to thinking through the substance of German foreign policy. Ultimately, the consequences of his indecision would be disastrous for Europe.

German nationalism was permeated by chauvinism, directed in particular against Slavs. Martin Gilbert commented recently that the "racial concept of Teuton against Slav was a force for conflict"²¹ which helped to engender Russo-German rivalry. General Moltke (the Younger) declared on February 10, 1913, that "a European war is bound to come sooner or later, in which the issue will be one of a struggle between Germandom and Slavdom," and, further, "to prepare themselves for that contingency is the duty of all States which are the champions of Germanic ideas and culture."²² A French observer of 1917 went so far as to label German nationalism, allegedly embodied in a "Pangerman Plot," as the single cause of the First World War.²³ These national ideas were transmitted to the German demesnes of Austria-Hungary, including, notably, Bosnia-Herzegovina after 1878. The focus of German nationalism on language and culture was to be a prominent feature of the nationalities question henceforth, and is analyzed below.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 15.

¹⁹ Otto von Bismarck, Speech to the Prussian Diet, September 30, 1862, in *ibid.*, p. 14.

²⁰ Henry Kissinger, *Diplomacy*, (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1994), pp. 169-70.

²¹ Gilbert, *op. cit.*, p. 8.

²² *Ibid.*, p. 9.

The Balkans were transformed in 1875-78. Bosnia-Herzegovina was convulsed in rebellion in 1875, beginning in Herzegovina. The abuses and economic deprivation identified by Arthur Evans sparked the revolt, which took place during his travels. By August 1875 the rising had spread throughout the province, with Serb partisans issuing the following demands to the Muslim nobles:

- The cessation of molestation of Christian women and girls by the nobles, which had been widespread;
- Cessation of the degradation of Christian churches, and the free exercise of religion;
- Equality with Muslims before the law;
- Cessation of brutality by the gendarmes;
- Cessation of unpaid forced labor, which was required by the feudal masters; and
- Reform of the confiscatory tax system.²⁴

It is noteworthy that independence was not among the Serbs' demands, reflecting the immature state of national aspirations. In any case, their demands were rejected outright.

There was a significant religious component to the Bosnian rebellion, reported Evans.

"The East Orthodox children under the Iguman, the Catholics under the Franciscan priest, the Mussulmans under the *ulema*, go to school to learn to hate each other, and in fact this is the only lesson which as men they take care to remember."²⁵ Local Orthodox priests led companies of insurgents, while the Orthodox bishops, installed by Istanbul, sided with the Turks. Still, the revolt was primarily against the feudal lords and their Ottoman masters.

²³ André Chéradame, *The Pangerman Plot Unmasked*, (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1917), p. 1.

²⁴ Dedijer, *Road to Sarajevo*, p. 34.

The fighting was bitter, especially in Herzegovina, where 12,000 insurgents, using guerrilla-warfare techniques, managed to kill half of the Turkish pacifying force of 30,000. By 1877 the Turks had defeated the main insurgent units, but sporadic guerrilla war dragged on until 1878. Seeing a long-awaited opportunity, Serbia and neighboring Montenegro, which had long since achieved *de facto* (though not official) independence,²⁶ declared war on the tottering Ottoman Empire. They were joined by an opportunistic Russia whose policy was fueled by Slavic ties and long-standing geopolitical ambitions for control of the Straits. The Slavic forces quickly overran the Turkish army and advanced to the outskirts of Istanbul, where they compelled the Sultan to sign the Treaty of San Stefano, with extremely favorable provisions for the Slavs. However, a strong negative reaction from Austria-Hungary and Britain, which feared Russian domination of the Balkans, obliged the Tsar to back down. The Congress of Berlin was called in 1878 to resolve the dispute.²⁷ The episode of 1875-78 inaugurated the era of Balkan competition not only among the Great Powers, but also the small states; and it effectively marked the end of the Turkish presence in Europe.

Russia's policy in the Balkans deserves some comment. Ever since the Turkish conquest of Constantinople in 1453, Orthodox Russia had claimed to be Byzantium's successor, a "Third Rome" and leader of the Slavic people. This religious dimension combined with and reinforced the empire's eternal, pragmatic quest for control of the Dardanelles and the Bosphorus. "Even older than the desire to secure control of the Straits,"

²⁵ Evans, quoted in *ibid.*, pp. 38-39.

²⁶ The last Turkish garrison had been withdrawn in 1861; hence the Sultan held only nominal suzerainty over Serbia.

noted Donald Kagan, “was the more sentimental aspiration...to regain control of Constantinople and place the Christian cross on the church of St. Sophia, as well as to aid the oppressed Christians of the Balkans in their fight for liberty” from the Turkish yoke.²⁸ Expansion was an outlet for pan-Slav aspirations, and it diverted attention from appalling conditions at home. Eric J. Hobsbawm described Russia as “gigantic, lumbering and inefficient, economically and technologically backward.”²⁹ Though the Romanov dynasty was not yet in jeopardy, the seeds of class warfare had taken root by the 1870s: resources had been diverted from the peasantry, which paid the vast majority of taxes, to state-funded industrialization. The rapid growth of an industrial proletariat accompanied this abrupt industrialization, and threatened the peasants’ traditional, cherished communal way of life.³⁰ Revolutionary sentiment among the elites was gradually propagated to the masses. Shrouded in mysticism, pan-Slavism, which also was popular among the intelligentsia, held that Russia should take its rightful place as leader of a grand Slavic confederation.³¹ This “continental imperialism,” to borrow Hannah Arendt’s term, lent particular urgency to the Tsar’s pan-Slavic policies in Balkans, offering a useful diversion for peasants and revolutionary elites alike.³²

These, then, were the conditions under which the Congress of Berlin convened in June 1878. The terms of the Treaty of San Stefano, under which Serbia, Montenegro and Rumania had gained independence and increased their territory dramatically, were

²⁷ Dedijer, *Road to Sarajevo*, pp. 40-43.

²⁸ Donald Kagan, *On the Origins of War and the Preservation of Peace*, (New York: Doubleday, 1995), p. 103.

²⁹ Eric J. Hobsbawm, *The Age of Empire, 1875-1914*, (New York: Pantheon, 1987), p. 292.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 292-94.

³¹ Kagan, *op. cit.*, p. 103.

retained essentially intact. The Congress, after prolonged haggling, ruled that Austria-Hungary would henceforth occupy and administer Bosnia-Herzegovina, which would however remain under nominal Turkish sovereignty. Russia was required to withdraw from Ottoman territory, and had to be content with having liberated fellow Slavs, and having improved conditions for Christians living under Ottoman rule. Kagan believed that was sufficient: though its territorial gains had been reversed, "Russia had gone to war for reasons of national pride and of Pan-Slav sentiment, not to achieve any practical aim; and the congress was a blow to her prestige rather than a setback to her policy."³³ By contrast, the Congress's terms brought the Serbian state in direct and irreconcilable conflict with Vienna over the status of Bosnia-Herzegovina. Observers frequently cited the recovery of the lost province as the central object of Serbian foreign policy. Austria-Hungary had gained in the short run, but had sealed its destruction over the long run by exacerbating its nationalities problem.

The Congress of Berlin settled little as far as Belgrade was concerned. Bismarck commented astutely that Serbia would now exert a powerful attraction on Southern Slav subjects of the Habsburg dynasty. Seton-Watson remarked that

the hopes of the entire Serbian race were centred upon Bosnia-Herzegovina, that Serbia and Montenegro, having fought in vain for its delivery, regarded its occupation by Austria-Hungary as downright robbery, and declined to accept it as a finally accomplished fact...the mass of the Bosnian population itself struggled valiantly for union...and, though reduced to subjection, remained sullenly unreconciled.³⁴

³² Arendt, *op. cit.*, p. 232.

³³ Kagan, *op. cit.*, pp. 104-106.

³⁴ Seton-Watson, *op. cit.*, p. 63.

During the generation following the Bosnian rebellion, things were relatively quiet. Serbia's prestige plummeted after its failure to recover Bosnia-Herzegovina, and in Bosnia itself the Habsburg rulers proved little better than their Turkish predecessors. The feudal order was retained intact, and Kállay, the governor, sought with considerable success to maintain disunity among Muslim, Catholic, and Orthodox Christian. Kállay also sought to foster a "Bosnian" nationalism, to little avail. There was no parliament and little education, and the province remained largely backward.³⁵

Meanwhile, the political situation throughout Europe had evolved dangerously. Under Bismarck, Germany had been guided by a firm hand which kept nationalist excesses in check. He had resisted expansionism and limited the acquisition of colonies. His policy was predicated on keeping Germany's enemies divided, and on maintaining cordial relations with all of them to the extent possible. Above all, the Iron Chancellor sought to convince fellow Europeans that his country was a satisfied power which had no desire to overturn the post-1871 *status quo*. He diverted France into colonial ventures, hoping it would not seek to regain Alsace-Lorraine, which Germany had seized in 1871; concluded a Reinsurance Treaty with Russia; and formed the Dual Alliance with former enemy Austria-Hungary in 1879.³⁶

The situation changed for the worse upon William II's ascent to the German throne. Possessed by visions of grandeur, William was heavily influenced by nationalism. Young, brash and arrogant, he considered himself the modern incarnation of a medieval emperor;

³⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 65.

³⁶ James Joll, *The Origins of the First World War*, 2nd ed., (London: Longman, 1992), pp. 42-68.

the wrong sort of man to rule a Germany which needed to placate neighbors fearful of the new titan in their midst. He soon managed to wreck the edifice of Bismarckian diplomacy, dismissing the Iron Chancellor in 1890. Bismarck's successors proved unable to restrain the emperor's impulsiveness. William refused to renew the Reinsurance Treaty, prompting the Tsar to seek an alliance with France. This unfortunate turn of events yielded the Entente Cordiale in 1891, and the subsequent Franco-Russian military alliance in 1894. William and Admiral Tirpitz, moreover, managed to drive Great Britain, with which they desired good relations, out of Splendid Isolation and into the arms of Germany's adversaries. Tirpitz demanded the construction of a fleet of battleships designed to confront the Royal Navy and "wrest the trident away" from the world's foremost naval power.³⁷ France and Britain settled their colonial disputes, and by 1914 a Triple Entente confronted Germany and Austria, which were joined by Turkey and Italy as the Central Powers.

German leaders had failed utterly to conserve their enemies, and had instead provoked the formation of a countervailing coalition. The alliance system became ever more rigid, with none of the flexibility needed to prevent a hegemony under a balance of power. It gradually assumed an offensive character: the 1894 Franco-Russian alliance, for instance, contained a secret clause mandating mobilization in case of mobilization by any opposing power. A formerly innocuous act, mobilization came to be viewed by generals as tantamount to a declaration of war. Moreover, the relationship between policy and

³⁷ Robert K. Massie, *Dreadnought: Britain, Germany and the Coming of the Great War*, (New York: Random House, 1991), pp. 173-81.

strategy was severed or even reversed throughout Europe, with generals developing war plans predicated on total war, without consideration for political implications. By 1914 Germany had adopted the Schlieffen Plan, which called for an invasion of France, followed by war in the East with Russia, in the event of war. Significantly, this was Berlin's only war plan, with no thought given to the possibility of a limited war. Any war would be total war, then, with the firepower revolution then underway producing levels of sacrifice wildly disproportionate to the Great Powers' political objectives.³⁸ Such was the political climate prevailing in June 1914. Though the alliance system did not in itself cause the First World War, it created a fragile peace which could easily be shattered, even by minor events. "Diplomacy as the art of compromise ended. It was only a question of time before some crisis would drive events out of control."³⁹

The Great Powers' interests brought them into conflict in the Balkans. The "Russian mania for new conquests"⁴⁰ propelled Russia into conflict with Japan by 1904. After a humiliating defeat at Japanese hands in 1905, the Tsar turned his gaze back to the West to redeem Russian prestige. Throughout the nineteenth century, Russia had equated territorial expansion with great-power status, and it now sought to expand through continental imperialism in the Balkans. "Thwarted in Asia," Kissinger observed, "Russia reverted to its dream of Pan-Slavism and a push toward Constantinople, which, this time, ran out of control." The Straits beckoned. The Tsar knew he would not be able to detach the Slavic provinces of Austria-Hungary without defeating Habsburg forces. Since

³⁸ Joll, *op. cit.*, pp. 69-108.

³⁹ Kissinger, *op. cit.*, p. 182.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 176.

William II had refused to renew the Reinsurance Treaty and had formed an alliance with Vienna, there was reason to believe Germany would resist Russian aims in the Balkans. Russia, it was thought, had little chance against Germany without its French allies.⁴¹ Hence weakening or defeating Germany was considered a prerequisite for achieving French and Russian goals, and dismembering Austria-Hungary was a corollary.

By the turn of the century, the Austro-Hungarian nationalities crisis intensified. Driven by Magyar nationalism, Hungary demanded its own army, and the introduction of the Magyar language as the only language for regiments of the combined army which were stationed in Hungarian territory. This was anathema to Vienna, and particularly to Franz Josef's son and heir apparent, Archduke Franz Ferdinand, a vocal advocate of harsh measures to deal with the nationalities. He plotted to reduce the Hungarians' influence over military affairs, and even to overthrow the Magyar regime; getting wind of this, Hungarian prime minister Count Stephen Tisza exclaimed, "If Franz Ferdinand as Emperor Franz II uses force against me, I will start a national revolution against him, and the last word will be mine."⁴² Franz Ferdinand briefly flirted with the idea of "Trialism," or forming a third, South Slav, pillar of the Habsburg Empire to diminish Hungarian influence.

The situation among the South Slavs was little better. At the Congress of Berlin, Russia had privately offered to exchange Serbian claims in Bosnia-Herzegovina for access to the Straits by Russian warships. For a time, understandably, the Tsar was considered

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p. 180.

⁴² Dedijer, *Road to Sarajevo*, p. 127.

untrustworthy in Belgrade. Moreover, the Tsar had transferred Russian patronage to Serbia's Slavic rival, Bulgaria. In 1881 Serbian King Milan Obrenović bowed to events: he concluded a secret treaty with Vienna, essentially reducing the country to vassal status, by pledging not to make any foreign-policy decisions without Franz Josef's approval. Milan's arbitrary and repressive methods of governing stimulated internecine feuding within Serbia, and foreign policy was equally inept. He launched an attack on Bulgaria in 1885 and was saved only by timely Austrian intervention. As time wore on, the government's legitimacy suffered, and King Milan was forced to abdicate in 1889. Anti-liberal tendencies continued under his son, Alexander II, who was assassinated in 1903 with Vienna's tacit support. Some improvements followed his death. Kállay, the Austrian governor of Bosnia-Herzegovina, died around the same time, and life in the province improved marginally.⁴³

The aspirations toward a Slavic confederation coalesced in the secret program of Svetozar Marković, leader of Serbia's radical Russophiles. "The liberation and union of all Southern Slavs," he proclaimed, "can only be attained through the destruction of Austria-Hungary." Marković proposed to (1) smooth over relations with Bulgaria, (2) seek a league with Montenegro, (3) promote economic emancipation from Austria-Hungary, (4) promote the South Slav movement within Austria-Hungary, and (5) use propaganda to discredit the Habsburg dynasty. Under the weak King Peter after 1903, Marković's disciples usurped control of Serbian foreign policy and began to implement his recommendations.⁴⁴

⁴³ Seton-Watson, *op. cit.*, pp. 23-27.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 27.

Vienna replied to these initiatives with stern measures designed to suppress South Slav nationalism. In 1906 it imposed an embargo on all economic activity with Serbia, which, given Austria-Hungary's position as Belgrade's dominant trading partner, produced a severe impact on the Serbian economy. To evade the so-called "Pig War" — Serbia's principal export was pork — Serbia frantically searched for alternate markets. The situation underlined the country's geographic predicament, which included no access to the Adriatic and Mediterranean seas. Henceforth the quest for a corridor to the sea assumed a prominent place in Serbian foreign policy. Geopolitics complemented national aspirations. Ironically, exports were shifted to Germany, Austria's principal ally, and the Pig War came to an end.⁴⁵

The next crisis came in 1908, prompted by events in the Ottoman Empire. In the 1890s, the Committee for Union and Progress had been formed, dubbed the "Young Turks." This group of nationalists recognized, first, that the empire was in its last days; and, second, that the nucleus of an ethnically and linguistically Turkish state was already in place as a successor. Upon seizing power in 1908, they sought to create a secular, all-Ottoman patriotism spanning ethnic, linguistic and religious divisions, by reviving ancient folk traditions and "nationalizing" religion. Under Kemal Atatürk the Young Turks proclaimed a republic, adopted the Roman alphabet over the Arabic, and, most importantly, abolished Islam as the state religion, together with Islamic dress among the people. The revolution was dominated by soldiers, owing to the lack of mass support or a revolutionary middle class; and Atatürk's program was carried out by force when

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 27-29.

necessary. Ultimately the Young Turks were unsuccessful in their efforts, since their modernizing program appealed less to rural agrarian populations than to narrow elites, and since they proved unable to dominate non-Turkish groups.⁴⁶ The Young Turk revolution followed the authoritarian pattern: Hobsbawm described it as “[p]assionately committed to progress and enlightenment against tradition, ‘development’ and a sort of populism untroubled by liberal debating.”⁴⁷ For the next decade Turkey was governed by a Young Turk dictatorship under the guise of a constitutional monarchy.

In 1908 Austria-Hungary seized an opportunity to exploit Russia’s weakness following the war with Japan, and thereby sped Europe on the path to war. The Young Turks had implemented a vigorous program of Turkification throughout the Ottoman demesnes, including Bosnia-Herzegovina. Atatürk’s government chose to contest Habsburg control of the province by demanding the installation of parliamentary institutions. In October Vienna replied by annexing Bosnia-Herzegovina, thereby reneging on an understanding with Russia regarding access to the Straits.⁴⁸ A deliberate, severe blow had been dealt to Russia’s prestige among the Balkan Slavs. Additionally, to observers in Belgrade the situation underscored the permanence of the Austro-Hungarian occupation of Bosnia. Austrian officials blamed the annexation on Serbia, based on (trumped-up) charges that the Serbians controlled rebellious pan-Slav parties in Austria-Hungary. Not surprisingly, the Serbian government was enraged, and for a time war

⁴⁶ Hans Kohn, *The Age of Nationalism: The First Era of Global History*, (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1962), p. 105-107.

⁴⁷ Hobsbawm, *op. cit.*, pp. 284-85.

appeared imminent. With Russia still too weak to come to its aid, however, Belgrade was compelled to acquiesce publicly in the annexation. In view of this, Serbia increasingly came to be regarded as the champion of the South Slavs, and the Serbian public began to take a keener interest in the welfare of their kin in neighboring provinces. *Narodna Odbrana*, the Society of National Defense, was formed in Belgrade with the tacit approval of the Serbian government.⁴⁹ Many Bosnians were displeased: a member of one of the secret societies pledged, "if Austria-Hungary wants to swallow us, we shall gnaw its stomach."⁵⁰ "In a word," Seton-Watson noted, "the Bosnian crisis [of 1908] converted the Southern Slav Question into an international problem of the first rank, and this rank it was to retain through a whole series of crises in 1912 and 1913, till at last it served as the spark which lit the world war."⁵¹ Austria-Hungary had initiated a dangerous game, since Russia, after the Bosnian affair of 1908, vowed never again to tolerate such humiliation at Habsburg hands. Its policy toward Serbia henceforth virtually guaranteed a new confrontation: British diplomat W. E. Goschen reported to Sir Edward Grey, "the whole object of the directors of Austro-Hungarian policy [was] to humiliate Servia as much as possible and to make her feel that politically and commercially she was entirely at the mercy of her powerful neighbor."⁵²

⁴⁸ Joachim Remak, *The Origins of World War I, 1871-1914*, (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1967), p. 47. Russia had agreed not to oppose Austrian annexation, in return for Habsburg support for the Tsar's claim regarding the Straits.

⁴⁹ Seton-Watson, *op. cit.*, pp. 30-36.

⁵⁰ Dedijer, *Road to Sarajevo*, p. 179.

⁵¹ Seton-Watson, *op. cit.*, pp. 36.

⁵² Goschen to Grey, August 31, 1908, reprinted in *British Documents on the Origins of the War, 1898-1914*, (London: Great Britain, Foreign Office, 1926), p. 362.

The next round of controversy centered on Belgrade's claim to Macedonia. Citing "historical rights," cultural similarities, and the close relation of the Macedonian and Serbian dialects, Serbian nationalists pointed to the province's status as part of fourteenth-century Serbia⁵³ (displaying the backward-looking character of ethnic nationalism). On the level of pragmatic interest, acquiring Macedonia would remedy Serbia's lack of access to the Adriatic, a geographic constraint punctuated during the Pig War. Encouraged by Italy's defeat of Turkey in 1912, Belgrade joined in a Balkan League with Greece, Bulgaria and Montenegro. The League declared war on Turkey, while the Great Powers, confident of an Ottoman victory, remained on the sidelines. Christian forces invaded Albania, inflicting a surprising, and convincing, defeat on Turkish forces. Slavic victory underlined the extent of Ottoman weakness. Encouraged by their success, the Slavs forged on, nearly driving Turkey from Europe before the Great Powers finally stepped in to impose peace. The Serbs had established themselves as an independent power, in dramatic fashion; avenged the defeat of Kosovo after half a millennium; and taken a giant step toward the formation of a South Slav state under Belgrade's leadership.⁵⁴ Euphoria swept the South Slav provinces of Austria-Hungary, with demonstrations in every town and young men flocking to the Serbian banner. An Austrian diplomat in Belgrade reported that

the relations between the Dual Monarchy and Servia have been strained by the animosity and jingoism of the latter and by effective propaganda for the "Great Servian" cause, carried on in those parts of our country which are inhabited by

⁵³ The Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, *Report of the International Commission to Inquire into the Causes and Conduct of the Balkan Wars*, Introduction by George F. Kennan, (Washington: The Carnegie Endowment, 1914; reprint, Washington: The Carnegie Endowment, 1993), p. 27.

⁵⁴ Kagan, *op. cit.*, p. 178.

Serbs...it now manifests itself at times in outbreaks of frantic passion bordering on madness.⁵⁵

His description was accurate. "In the Balkan platform," enthused one cleric, "we see the dawn of our day."⁵⁶

It was increasingly apparent to statesmen in Vienna that Austria-Hungary's survival hinged on "punishing" Serbia in an attempt to resolve the nationalities question. The Austro-Hungarian press trumpeted tales of Serb atrocities and thundered against "Serbian vermin," echoed by Habsburg diplomats. By then Serbia had quarreled with Bulgaria over the status of Macedonia, and uneasy relations among the South Slavs erupted into war. Vienna fanned the flames. Urged on by Austria, Bulgaria turned on its erstwhile allies in June 1913. Bulgarian forces invaded Greece and Serbia, but suffered a quick defeat. Franz Josef was tempted to intervene militarily, but was restrained by William II. Subsequently Belgrade doubled its territory at Bulgarian and Turkish expense, although Austria-Hungary compelled Belgrade to relinquish its brief possession of the Macedonian coast.⁵⁷

Fear of revolution gripped Austrian statesmen henceforth. Franz Ferdinand believed the Slavs were only emulating the restive Magyars, who were agitating for greater autonomy and had implemented a program of aggressive Magyarization in their territories. A chain reaction, he believed, might ensue leading to the Habsburg Empire's disintegration, should Magyars and Slavs succeed in their national aspirations. Again he

⁵⁵ Baron von Giesl to Count Berchthold, extracted from the Austro-Hungarian Red Book, July 21, 1914, reprinted in *Official German Documents Relating to the World War*, trans. Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, International Law Division, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1923), p. 12.

⁵⁶ Seton-Watson, *op. cit.*, p. 41.

urged his father to take drastic measures, failing to realize that Habsburg medieval institutions were losing all legitimacy and needed to be adapted to a different age.⁵⁸

Austrian chief of staff General Conrad remarked, “the union of the Southern Slavs is one of those nation-moving phenomena which cannot be denied or artificially prevented.”⁵⁹

After restraining his ally throughout the series of Balkan crises, William II was reluctantly converted to the cause of war in October 1913, when he proclaimed, “at last there comes a situation in which a Great Power can’t look on any longer, but *must* draw the sword.”⁶⁰

William had linked Germany’s foreign policy to Austria-Hungary’s Balkan troubles, thus — since the Schlieffen Plan called for war against France and Russia — ensuring a general war in case of a new conflict on the Balkan peninsula. Dealing forcefully with Serbia was now a life-and-death affair which would draw in the Great Powers: Austrian premier Count Stürgkh observed that a “reckoning with Serbia and her humiliation is a condition of the Monarchy’s existence.”⁶¹

Matters came to a head in June and July of 1914. On June 28, Archduke Franz Ferdinand and his wife visited Sarajevo and were attacked twice as their car proceeded along the city streets: first, unsuccessfully, by Nedeljko Čabrinović, a bomb-throwing member of the Black Hand secret society; and second, with fatal consequences, by the pistol-wielding Gavrilo Princip, a colleague of Čabrinović. The archduke could scarcely have timed his visit to Bosnia-Herzegovina more poorly, since June 28 was the anniversary

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 47-48.

⁵⁸ Dedijer, *Road to Sarajevo*, p. 141.

⁵⁹ Quoted in Seton-Watson, *op. cit.*, p. 44.

⁶⁰ Quoted in *ibid.*, p. 53.

⁶¹ Quoted in *ibid.*, p. 55.

of the Battle of Kosovo and emotions were running high among Bosnian Serbs. The Serbian government denied any responsibility for the attack, and most historians seem to accept Belgrade's account. It seems clear, however, that elements of the government had provided support and training to the assassins, in conjunction with *Narodna Odbrana*. The British translation of an Austrian dispatch reported,

Serbia became the centre of a criminal agitation. No time was lost [in 1909] in the formation of societies and groups, whose object, either avowed or secret, was the creation of disorders on Austro-Hungarian territory. These societies and groups count among their members generals and diplomatists, Government officials and judges — in short, men at the top of official and unofficial society in the kingdom.⁶²

After some debate, Austria-Hungary, whether it believed Belgrade's denials or not, came to the conclusion that the time of reckoning was at hand. Vienna embarked on a vigorous propaganda campaign designed to excite war fever against Serbia. Belgrade's minister in Vienna noted with alarm, "[t]he tendency at Vienna to represent, in the eyes of Europe, the outrage committed upon the Austro-Hungarian Crown Prince as the act of a conspiracy engineered in Serbia is becoming more and more apparent. The idea is to use this as a political weapon against us."⁶³

To trace the diplomatic maneuvers of the so-called "July Crisis" is well beyond the scope of this paper; a brief sketch will suffice. It appears that there was no intention by any of the parties to start a European war. Franz Josef and his advisers believed that German backing would deter Russia, as it had heretofore, and would limit the scope of Austria's

⁶² Extracted from the British Blue Book, July 24, 1914, reprinted in *Times* (London), *The Times Documentary History of the War*, Vol. I, (London: The Times Publishing Company, Ltd., 1920), p. 85.

⁶³ M. Yovanovitch to M. N. Pasitch, extracted from the Serbian Blue Book, June 30, 1914, reprinted in *Times* (London), *The Times Documentary History of the War*, Vol. II, (London: The Times Publishing Company, Ltd., 1920), p. 83.

action to a purely Balkan affair. Central to their efforts, therefore, was gaining a promise of full German backing. William II tried to avert war, but finally issued the infamous “blank check” pledging German backing in an Austrian reckoning with Belgrade. The Serbian government made every effort to placate Vienna; but in the end, Franz Josef believed punishing Serbia was crucial to his empire’s survival. On July 23, 1914, Austria-Hungary issued a harsh ten-point ultimatum to Serbia, with a 48-hour deadline, alleging government complicity in Franz Ferdinand’s murder. Vienna demanded, among other things, the dissolution of *Narodna Odbrana*; suppression of any publication “which incites to hatred and contempt of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy and the general tendency of which is directed against its territorial integrity”; participation by Habsburg officials in an investigation of the plot against the archduke; and so forth.⁶⁴ After brief deliberation, Belgrade acquiesced in all of the demands save Austrian participation in the investigation, which was held to be a purely internal matter. The ultimatum had been designed to be rejected, and the Serbians’ conciliatory response came as a shock. Nonetheless, by rejecting part of the Austrian demands, Belgrade had provided a *casus belli*, tenuous though it may have been.⁶⁵

German and Austrian hopes of deterring Russia failed. A Serbian request for the Tsar’s support found a sympathetic ear, and the Russians reasoned that strong support of their Slavic kin would deter German interference. Stung by the events of 1908, the Tsar refused to abstain from the conflict. Both alliances considered mobilization as a

⁶⁴ Reprinted in *The Times Documentary History of the War*, Vol. I, pp. 81-83.

⁶⁵ Joll, *op. cit.*, pp. 10-15.

demonstration of political will; the generals, as noted previously, took this to be a sign of impending war. On July 28 Austria-Hungary issued a declaration of war against Serbia, and on July 29 the Danube flotilla bombarded Belgrade, though the Habsburg army was not yet sufficiently mobilized for offensive operations. That same evening, France commenced preparations for war, and Britain kept the fleet concentrated in home waters. Communiqués flew among European capitals, seeking to avert general war, even as preparations advanced. “Between 28 and 31 July,” James Joll observed, “events were moving far too fast for the diplomats because the decisions were now more and more being taken by the soldiers.”⁶⁶

On July 31 the Tsar ordered general mobilization, and Germany followed suit on August 1 after the Tsar rebuffed German demands that Russian forces stand down. All of the Great Powers’ bluffs had been called. On August 1 Moltke, the German chief of staff, informed the Kaiser that it would be impossible to demobilize, or to fight only on the Eastern front. His assertion demonstrated the extent to which statesmen had lost control of policy and strategy. By August 2 a reluctant British cabinet had accepted the necessity of protecting France’s northern coasts from German attack, as required by their naval agreement; and of defending Belgian neutrality, in keeping with long-standing British policy. On August 4 France and Britain declared war on Germany. That same day German forces invaded Belgium, while the French army pushed into Alsace-Lorraine. France and Britain belatedly declared war on Austria-Hungary on August 12, and the First

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 21.

World War was underway.⁶⁷ German chancellor Theobald Bethmann-Hollweg saw “a doom greater than human power hanging over Europe and our own people.”⁶⁸ The course of events prompted Sir Edward Grey, British prime minister, to remark sadly that “[t]he lamps are going out all over Europe. We shall not see them lit again in our lifetime.”⁶⁹

PHILOSOPHICAL AND CULTURAL ROOTS OF NATIONALISM

*Whoever will not fight at Kosovo,
May nothing grow that his hand sows,
Neither the white wheat in his field
Nor the vine of grapes on his mountain.*⁷⁰

Serbian Prince Lazar, “Song of the Battle of Kosovo”

How, then, did things come to such a pass? We have seen that the Great Powers’ political interests converged in the Balkans, and that the alliance system’s rigidity ensured that even a minor clash would escalate to world war. But what accounts for the power of nationalism, and how did ethnic nationalism among Bosnian Serbs lead to violence against Franz Ferdinand? Part of the answer lies in the evolution of European culture, which produced the concept of a “nation” which could inspire such intense loyalty, even to the point of willing self-sacrifice. Benedict Anderson has defined the nation as “an imagined political community — and imagined as both inherently limited and sovereign.”⁷¹

⁶⁷ Gilbert, *op. cit.*, p. 35.

⁶⁸ Quoted in Joll, *op. cit.*, p. 38.

⁶⁹ Quoted in *ibid.*, p. 38.

⁷⁰ Anne Pennington and Peter Levi, trans., *Marko the Prince: Serbo-Croat Heroic Songs*, introduction by Svetozar Koljevic, (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1984), p. 13.

⁷¹ Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, rev. ed., (London: Verso, 1991), p. 5.

Anderson's postulate will be our working definition of the nation in an exploration of the philosophical roots of ethnic nationalism.

Our first clue lies in antiquity. Aristotle analyzed the role of partnerships in developing a theory of politics. The family, he reasoned, was a partnership for daily needs, and the village was a partnership allowing for long-term needs. The city, a union of several villages, "reaches a level of full self-sufficiency...and while coming into being for the sake of living, it exists for the sake of living well."⁷² He asserted, furthermore, that "man is by nature a political animal."⁷³ In his assumption that the city would be a small *polis* of homogeneous, like-minded individuals, Aristotle may have, unwittingly, struck at the heart of nationalism. He linked the powerful familial bond to the *polis*. Moreover, nations are geographically limited in Aristotle's model; likewise, for Anderson nationalism involves differentiating one's uniform group from others — the "inherently limited" character of the nation, as he described it.⁷⁴ Nationalism seems to mean the distinction of one's *polis* from all others, both culturally and through finite geographic boundaries beyond which other nations lie.

The nation's sovereign character was largely an outgrowth of Enlightenment political theory. John Locke, in particular, articulated the notion of popular sovereignty, in which the people are the repository of all political power. With the decline of church domination of people's lives, a body of humanistic intellectuals arose, who looked to Greek and Roman philosophy and literature for guidance. In the process, the hub of intellectual

⁷² Aristotle, *The Politics*, trans. Carnes Lord, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984), p. 37.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, p. 37.

⁷⁴ Anderson, *op. cit.*, p. 5.

life shifted from the church to the university. “Liberalism and the Enlightenment,” remarked Anderson, “clearly had a powerful impact, above all in providing an arsenal of ideological criticisms of imperial and *anciens régimes*.”⁷⁵ Enlightenment, then, simultaneously undermined the legitimacy of the dynastic order based on divine right of kings, and offered an alternative: statehood grounded in the people or “nation.” Locke’s was not a chauvinistic but a liberal vision; nevertheless, as the nineteenth century progressed, university research into the antiquity of peoples — nations — abetted the growth of nationalism based not on Reason, but on ethnicity. To use Anthony D. Smith’s term, these “ethnie,” or peoples aspiring to nationhood, became politicized throughout the nineteenth century.⁷⁶ Ultimately, in the wake of the French Revolution, nationalism metamorphosed from a liberal to an ethnic, authoritarian model.

In 1789 France it seemed that Locke’s vision of Enlightenment had come to fruition. Exposure to the ideals of the French Revolution engendered throughout Europe, in Hans Kohn’s words, the

cult of liberty, the aspiration toward nationhood one and indivisible, the longing for a new national cohesion and a new national spirit, the idea of a state rooted in popular consent and enthusiasm and supported by the active participation of the people...⁷⁷

In France itself, though, the emphasis shifted by 1793. The Revolution was redirected from combating tyrants at home to overcoming foreign enemies and achieving national independence and power. Individual freedom was subordinated to national glory. In

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 65.

⁷⁶ Anthony D. Smith, *The Ethnic Origins of Nations*, (Oxford, England: Blackwell, 1986), pp. 154-60.

⁷⁷ Hans Kohn, *The Age of Nationalism: The First Era of Global History*, (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1962), p. 3.

other countries, among them the South Slav territories, the French Revolution bred a militant strain of nationalism, with the state conceived of less as an instrument of law than as a tool of the nation.⁷⁸ Henceforth, asserted Smith, the model of nationalism was less the Western, or “territorial,” version exemplified by the American Revolution, than a chauvinistic “Eastern” brand, founded on ethnicity as the defining characteristic of citizenship.⁷⁹

This boded ill for ancient, multiethnic dynastic empires such as the Habsburg Empire, the Ottoman Empire, and Romanov Russia. Nationalism mutated, among the masses, from concepts associated with liberalism to a more conservative version emphasizing national competition and independence from foreign rule. By the years immediately preceding the First World War, nationalism had mutated to such an extent that any body of people regarding itself as a nation could demand its own sovereign state, with ethnicity and language the criteria for admission.⁸⁰ The political philosophy of Rousseau, with its emphasis on the “general will” of the people, only added fuel to the fire. Nationalism met, clashed with, and ultimately overcame its philosophical competitors such as socialism, with its international outlook and emphasis on revolution. Socialism’s ascendance was postponed until 1917. The so-called nationalities question dominated Austro-Hungarian policy for most of the nineteenth century, as we have seen, and proved to be the catalyst for world war.

⁷⁸ Arendt, *op. cit.*, p. 230.

⁷⁹ Smith, *op. cit.*, pp. 135-37.

⁸⁰ Eric J. Hobsbawm, *Nations and Nationalism since 1780: Programme, Myth, Reality*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990). pp. 102-123.

A related phenomenon was the advance of secularism, which had begun to supplant religion as the central force in individuals' lives as early as the Renaissance. People searched for an alternative to religion as a spiritual anchor, perhaps explaining why the nation often took on semi-mystical trappings. In 1789, Paris became a New Jerusalem, and the revolution, observed Alexis de Tocqueville, "created an atmosphere of missionary fervor and, indeed, assumed all the aspects of a religious revival....This strange religion has overrun the whole [Western] world with its apostles, militants, and martyrs."⁸¹ Anderson contended that the nation, like religion before it, gave its citizens a sense of continuity, of immortality transcending death:

What then was required was a secular transformation of fatality into continuity, contingency into meaning....few things were (are) better suited to this end than an idea of nation. If nation-states are widely conceded to be "new" and "historical," the nations to which they give political expression *always loom out of an immemorial past, and, still more important, glide into a limitless future*⁸² (emphasis added).

The writings of Hegel reinforced the focus on eternity. In his *Philosophy of Right*, the great German philosopher proposed the notion of historical progress, of an eternal dialectic stretching into the future without bound, until a mythical end of history.⁸³ Nations, it could be inferred, were eternal. Mobilizing Hegel's *Volkgeist* for national purposes was held to be paramount. The nation as religion lent itself to the crusading impulse, which soon was channeled into the nationalities' rebellion against the multiethnic empires. Nationalism eroded dynastic legitimacy, by destroying the religious basis of the ruler's

⁸¹ Alexis de Tocqueville, *The Old Regime and the French Revolution*, (Doubleday Anchor Books, 1955), p. 13.

⁸² Anderson, *op. cit.*, pp. 11-12.

⁸³ Hegel's *Philosophy of Right*, trans. T. M. Knox, (London: Oxford University Press, 1967).

authority; and it delivered a potent weapon into the hands of nationalists to wield in their rebellion against “foreign” rule.

Walker Connor has asserted that scholars traditionally underestimate the emotional power of nationalism, preferring to explain ethnic nationalism in terms familiar to Westerners: economic equality, job discrimination, or other material factors. In this way, nationalism may be explained within the confines of Reason and rationality, a mistake in his — and the author’s — view.⁸⁴ Great movements often provoke countervailing reactions, and the Enlightenment was no exception. By the early nineteenth century a powerful school of Romanticism was gaining momentum in European culture. The South Slavs, with tremendous emphasis on poetry and folklore, were susceptible to the lure of Romanticism, perhaps to a greater degree than other groups. German Romanticism in particular fueled nationalism among the Balkan Slavs. Johann Gottfried Herder compared Slavic civilization favorably with the decadent culture of the West, postulating that it was closer to the state of nature and hence uncorrupted by modernity. He and his contemporaries Goethe and the Brothers Grimm extolled the virtues of Slavic folk tales and songs; prominent composers, notably Brahms and Dvorak, composed magnificent pieces based on Slavonic folk dances. Johann Christoph Friedrich von Schiller’s *Wilhelm Tell* (1804) told of a Swiss revolt against Habsburg tyranny, and hence was influential in the Balkans. Significantly, the real hero of the poem was not the title character, but the Swiss people. Schiller posited a natural-law basis for resistance to foreign tyranny, as a moral

⁸⁴ Walker Connor, *Ethnonationalism: The Quest for Understanding*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994), pp. 69-70.

duty to be executed for the nation's common good: "As a last refuge, when all others fail, [Nature] puts the sword into her children's hands."⁸⁵ *Wilhelm Tell* also lent credence to the peculiarly Serb concept of tyrannicide, since Tell ambushes and slays the Habsburg tyrant, Gessler, with an arrow. Schiller's masterpiece influenced the development of Serb nationalism perhaps more than any other single work. Young nationalists were reared on Schiller and Herder. The emotional impact of Romanticism, in short, was central to the development of nationalism.

Herder, in his "Ideas for the Philosophy of the History of Mankind," 1784, proclaimed that the nineteenth century would bring vindication to the Slavs. He advised them to develop their own vernacular language as an alternative to German and French. Pan-Slavic enthusiasts embraced Herder's writings, which provided the intellectual underpinnings for the concept of a Slavic confederation. Slavic nationalists of the nineteenth century carried out an intensive search for the "historical" and "scientific" roots of Slavic heritage, hoping to validate Herder's convictions.⁸⁶ The combination of folklore, emphasizing the heroic past, with Romanticism's glorification of the people and the homeland, contributed greatly to the development of a potent brand of nationalism in the Balkan peninsula.

SERBIAN GROUP IDENTITY

*I will go down to flat Kosovo
To spill my blood for the honorable cross*

⁸⁵ Schiller, *Wilhelm Tell*, quoted in Dedijer, *Road to Sarajevo*, p. 161.

⁸⁶ Hans Kohn, *Pan-Slavism: Its History and Ideology*, (Notre Dame, In.: University of Notre Dame Press, 1953), pp. 1-2.

And die with all my brothers for the faith.

Song of the Battle of Kosovo

The pervasive influence of Romanticism, science, and history blended with other elements to form the intellectual and emotional basis for politicized “imagined communities” intent on wresting their own states from dynastic rulers. Anderson has postulated that nationalism, which evolved gradually to form the American and French models, thereafter became exportable, or subject to “pirating” by aspiring national groups. This explains the rapid proliferation of national claims in nineteenth-century Europe. Connor’s definition of the nation is a useful adjunct to this notion of the “imagined community”: he has identified a nation as “the largest human grouping characterized by a myth of common ancestry.” The essence of the nation, in this view, is

- A sense of kinship, which has coalesced in a common kinship myth;
- A sense of distinctiveness and exceptionalism arising from the myths of common origin; and
- Affinity for a particular piece of territory, or homeland, which is linked to the kinship myth.⁸⁷

Implicit are a common national ideology, common institutions and customs, and a sense of homogeneity, just as in Aristotle’s tight-knit *polis*. The expansion of the kinship bond — perhaps the strongest of human relationships — to a large body of individuals is a clue to the power of ethnic nationalism. “A nation can exist only where there are people who are prepared to die for it,” observed Connor.⁸⁸

⁸⁷ Connor, *op. cit.*, p. 80.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 203.

Nations are self-defined and self-invented. The question in the Balkans was whether a sense of South Slavic or pan-Slavic nationhood could overcome ethnic and religious variations. Moreover, would Slavic nationhood take the form of a confederation based on equality, or would it be dominated by Greater Serbia, Greater Croatia, or from afar by Russia?

A real or invented heroic past would be essential in forging a South Slavic nationalism. Heroes of antiquity embodied the nation's virtues. Smith asserted that

To turn a motley horde of people into an institutionalized nation, to give them a sense of belonging and identity, to unify and integrate them, to give them a sense of authenticity and autonomy and fit them for self rule, all require a symbolic framework in and through which they can be mobilized and sustained. This is just what the mythology of the past...can provide.⁸⁹

The role of ethnic myth-making proved to be a crucial pillar of the Serbian nation. Serbian nationalism was founded on a romanticized past, and on subsequent centuries of domination by the Ottoman and Habsburg empires. Horowitz remarked that a collective sense of inferiority is a powerful stimulus for formation of group identity, and for attempts to vindicate group worth vis-à-vis competing groups. Legitimacy for national claims stems from prior occupation or ownership of the homeland; from a sense of special mission; and from prior glory — a heroic past — or prior domination.⁹⁰ These elements were all present in the Serbian homeland: a Serbian empire once had dominated the Balkans and had fallen under foreign domination in dramatic fashion, and many Serbs viewed their nation as the rightful leader of the South Slavs, and defender of Orthodox Christianity against Islam.

⁸⁹ Smith, *op. cit.*, pp. 200-201.

⁹⁰ Horowitz, *op. cit.*, p. 214.

The past was a living thing for Serbs, propagated through literature, songs, and oral traditions. “Their spirit,” declared Sir Arthur Evans of the Bosnians in 1875, “has been continually refreshed from the perennial fount of epic song.”⁹¹ A common observation in the literature on nationalism is that ethnic nationalism’s gaze is focused on the past, and that was certainly true here. The Battle of Kosovo, June 28, 1389, was the defining event in the Serbs’ history, and the wellspring of their sense of national destiny. The Song of the Battle of Kosovo, an epic lay, was central to the classical cycle of Serbian tradition, enshrining the “anguish of the collective soul of the Serbian people.”⁹² The lay describes Serbian Prince Lazar’s decision to offer battle to overwhelming Turkish forces under Sultan Murad; the battle, in which both rulers are killed; and the aftermath, which is lamented as the end of the Serbian kingdom (though in fact the final defeat was decades later). On the night before the battle, an angel offers Lazar a stark choice: he may choose the worldly kingdom, and triumph over the Turks; or he may decide on the kingdom of Heaven, and be defeated and killed. He chooses the heavenly kingdom and makes the supreme sacrifice, thus holding out the possibility of eternal reward and ultimate national redemption. Martyrdom in the best crusading tradition was one recurring theme running through the Serbian national movement, especially in the Young Bosnians’⁹³ plot against Franz Ferdinand. By the nineteenth century, the Serbian nation had largely replaced Heaven as the object of martyrdom, but the tradition of self-sacrifice endured

⁹¹ Evans, *op. cit.*, p. 139.

⁹² Radmila J. Gorup, “Kosovo and Epic Poetry,” in Wayne S. Vucinich and Thomas A. Ennert, ed., *Kosovo: Legacy of a Medieval Battle*, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1991). p. 118.

⁹³ The umbrella term for the loose association of radical student groups.

undiminished. Tyrannicide was a second theme in the Kosovo cycle. Milosh Kobilovich, one of Lazar's lieutenants, pretends to defect to Murad's army:

Milosh came to the glorious Sultan,
and bowed his head low to kiss his right knee,
and drew his knife of gold and struck him down,
and turned around one step and trampled him.⁹⁴

The Young Bosnians embraced the notions of martial valor, martyrdom, and personal sacrifice for higher ideals. The warrior tradition persisted throughout the centuries: in the seventeenth century, for instance, the Habsburg Empire recruited and trained Serbs to defend Austria's "Military Frontiers" as a barrier to further Turkish incursions. By the nineteenth century, commented Vasa D. Mihailovich, "Kosovo had attained the status of a national cult, permeating the thoughts and feelings of every Serb and playing a crucial role in the struggle for national independence."⁹⁵ The notion of permanent rebellion entered the Serbian lexicon. Kosovo embodied the Serbian national virtues, and was not only an enduring myth in Serbian popular consciousness, but a reference point by which all important events of the present day could be measured. It lent a sense of purpose amid the dreariness of everyday life: it was not uncommon for mothers to greet their infants, "Hail, little avenger of Kosovo!" Defeat at Kosovo had inaugurated centuries of darkness; the Song of the Battle of Kosovo promised national resurrection. Smith noted that a real or invented golden age "confers upon often downtrodden populations a sense of their (former) dignity and antiquity," and is a powerful unifying force.⁹⁶ Here, it was also a stimulus for violent action. Clearly, the Archduke had selected the worst possible day to

⁹⁴ Pennington and Levi, *op. cit.*, p. 5.

pay a visit to Sarajevo, where memories of the battle pervaded society. Striking a blow against foreign domination would have maximum symbolic value on June 28, the Serbs' national day.

The South Slavs remained fragmented because of ethnic and religious differences, and a pan-Slavic identity consequently proved elusive. Rifts among Serbians, Bulgarians and Croats, Catholics and Orthodox Christians proved too wide to bridge, outweighing striking cultural similarities. Misguided Austro-Hungarian attempts to impose a "Bosnian" patriotism after 1878, for instance, produced dismal results. Both Serbia and Croatia asserted historic claims to Bosnia-Herzegovina, so conflicting loyalties were the norm. If a national group looks to the past to justify its claim to nationhood, it is likely to encounter competing aspirations by other nationalities. As the revolutionary movement gathered steam, various factions advocated a Greater Serbia, a Greater Croatia, a South Slav federation, or a grand confederation under the Tsar's leadership. The Young Bosnians, the movement of revolutionary students in Bosnia-Herzegovina, took a relatively liberal position: they demanded the formation of a South Slav federation predicated on democratic equality among the Slavic peoples. Hence these young radicals emphasized tolerance and tended to downplay differences among Slavs; and they even formed a coalition with like-minded Croats by 1914. Their allies in *Narodna Odbrana* and the Serbian government, in contrast, envisioned a Greater Serbia in which Belgrade would resume control of the medieval empire. Theirs was a conservative, authoritarian model of

⁹⁵ Vasa D. Mihailovich, "The Tradition of Kosovo in Serbian Literature," in Vucinich, *op. cit.*, p. 147.

⁹⁶ Smith, *op. cit.*, p. 210.

nationalism. Battlefield success against Turkey and Bulgaria in 1912-13 reinforced the messianic sense that Serbia was the rightful leader of the South Slavs, home to a chosen people. "My father is Serb, my mother is Serb," went a popular nationalist poem, "All my ancestors were Serb. The heaven is blue, Serbia's color. God who lives in heaven is Serb too."⁹⁷ Since nationhood is a matter of self-perception, the Slavic peoples evidently found their differences to be too great to surmount in the quest for a South Slav nation-state.⁹⁸ It should come as no surprise, therefore, that the assassination of Franz Ferdinand was the act of a tiny minority of Bosnian Serbs, or that Princip's act failed to provoke a general uprising against Habsburg domination. There were strict limits to South Slav group identity.

COLLECTIVE DISADVANTAGE

Marked collective disadvantage for the Bosnian Slavs fueled the perception of persisting historical grievances. As mentioned previously, the province had been occupied and administered by Austria-Hungary since the 1878 Congress of Berlin, and had been annexed in the crisis of 1908. The province was administered as a colony. By 1914 there was a distinct lack of material progress in the province, with an obsolete education system serving only 17.48% of children; a severely limited constitution and parliament; and a feudal system which had been retained essentially intact. General Marijan Varesnin was installed as Bosnian governor in 1909, and his brutal methods of government managed to

⁹⁷ Kohn, *Pan-Slavism*, pp. 56-57.

⁹⁸ Dedijer, *Road to Sarajevo*, pp. 213-14.

provoke a peasants' revolt by 1910, and an attempt on his life by a student radical.

Collective disadvantage exacerbated tensions within the Dual Monarchy.

The system installed in Bosnia-Herzegovina displayed aspects of a ranked and unranked system, to apply Horowitz's framework. As Evans so poignantly described, the Turks had replaced the feudal system in existence in the Middle Ages with a similar one, which was administered by the Bosnian nobles willing to convert to Islam. Subordinated by the nobility, the peasantry was relegated to the mountainous terrain on the periphery of Bosnian society, where the peasants preserved traditional Serbian culture through the mechanisms already examined. The incomplete conquest guaranteed continual resistance to rule from the Muslim center. Discrimination was common on the part of the Muslim nobles, who rejected Western influences and, by the late nineteenth century, resisted Ottoman control as well.⁹⁹ The system's unranked characteristics exacerbated the majority's sense of subordination: underneath the Bosnian Muslim elite lay the Orthodox Serb majority and a sizable Catholic Croat minority, eternally jostling for position and the favor of the ruling caste. Evans attributed the periodic unrest in Bosnia-Herzegovina to the system of ranking:

It has been the policy of the Mahometan conqueror to favor the Roman Church in the province, as a ready counterpoise to the orthodox Serbians, who in numbers far outweigh the Mussulmans...In return, the monks have exerted their influence in rendering the Latins submissive to their rulers, and have backed up the Mahometans in their oppression of the Serbs...¹⁰⁰

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 31.

¹⁰⁰ Evans, *op. cit.*, p. 180.

The Turks and the Bosnian Muslims thus worsened ethnic and religious tensions by their “divide and rule” strategy: they exploited every opportunity to keep Serb and Croat disunited and mutually hostile, so as to preclude any effective resistance to the center’s domination. They were more successful than they knew. Eternally bickering and suspicious, Serb and Croat were unable to find common ground, even to achieve their common aim of throwing off the Habsburg yoke imposed in 1878.

All of Shultz’s characteristics of ethnic and religious conflict thus were present in Bosnia-Herzegovina. First, there was a severely divided society, with a layer of elite Muslims dominating subordinate unranked groups of Orthodox Serbs and Catholic Croats. Second, segments of large ethnic groups came to view their differences as permanent and irreconcilable; of which more later. Ethnicity, thirdly, was the primary means of self-identification, with attempts to extend ethnic identity to the entire mass of South Slavs ultimately falling short. Supplies were plentiful of “others” with which to focus ethnic nationalism. For the Serbs the “We-They” prism encompassed not only Turks, and later Habsburgs, but also neighboring Croats and Bulgars. Fourth, elements of society rejected existing state boundaries, demanding union with ethnic kin within the multiethnic empires. Finally, newly emergent political elites tapped into the fount of discontent, hoping to lead the masses against foreign domination.¹⁰¹ To use Huntington’s memorable phrase, the “fault lines” between civilizations¹⁰² ran through the Balkan peninsula, partitioning several nations into a jumbled mass of conflicting nationalist aspirations.

¹⁰¹ Shultz, *op. cit.*, pp. 77-79.

¹⁰² Huntington, *op. cit.*

With Habsburg domination, the Serbian nation, like its Croatian neighbor, was partitioned into an independent state and irredenta under the domination of the dynastic empires. Bosnia-Herzegovina was under Austrian rule, Croatia was ruled from Budapest, and, until the Balkan Wars, Macedonia and Kosovo remained under the Ottoman Empire. Recognizing the danger to his ally's survival, Bismarck observed to an Austro-Hungarian colleague, prophetically, that the Serbian state would exert a magnetic influence on Serbs under foreign rule. Arendt agreed, observing that "continental imperialism" prompts assertions, based on "enlarged tribal consciousness," that all people perceiving a common origin should be united "independent of history and no matter where they happened to live."¹⁰³ South Slavs had multiple levels of identity, as predicted by Huntington:¹⁰⁴ they were simultaneously Serbs, South Slavs, and members of a Great Slavic civilization. Ultimately the most compact form of identity prevailed. The incongruence of state with nation combined with the Serb majority's resentment of the system of ranking. Horowitz remarked that unranked systems tend to seek ethnic homogeneity, while ranked systems take on characteristics resembling class warfare; in Bosnia-Herzegovina, both tendencies were present. While mutually reinforcing in stirring discontent with the *status quo*, these elements tended to prevent consensus on a solution to the province's problems: was it to be a Greater Serbia or Croatia, a Yugoslav federation, or simple reform within the existing framework? Some form of union appeared to be desirable, but a consensus on its shape was never forthcoming.

¹⁰³ Arendt, *op. cit.*, pp. 223-24.

¹⁰⁴ Huntington, *op. cit.*, p. 24.

Anderson has written eloquently on the role of language, education, and literacy in fostering national aspirations in nineteenth-century Europe. The dramatic spread of printing technology, he contended, made possible a sense of “simultaneity” which was lacking during the Middle Ages: by reading a novel, or especially the morning newspaper, one was able to perceive the simultaneous existence and activity of thousands or millions of fellow human beings. This process promoted the expansion of the kinship bond to a much broader range of individuals — to all of those perceived as members of one’s own nation.¹⁰⁵ Henceforth people were often willing to kill and die for the nation, just as they had for God and the clan in foregoing centuries. The question of how many individuals were included in the kinship group, though, was purely a matter of perception.

Capitalism sought out the new reading class as an available market, resulting in an alliance of “print-capitalism” which was available to the growing bourgeois classes. There was even a ceremonial aspect to reading: Hegel noted that the newspaper served modern man as a substitute for medieval man’s morning prayers. In turn, the ready availability of printed matter propelled the middle classes into a process of radical questioning of the legitimacy of *anciens regimes*. The vernacular eclipsed the international languages of empires, German and French, even as these languages had supplanted Latin. With the rise of nationalism, the vernacular was elevated to the language of state and society. The locus of sovereignty was not only in the people, as Locke had asserted; it lay in the readers and speakers of the vernacular. Consequently, the new interest in history and linguistics prompted efforts, centered in the universities, to find the historical and linguistic roots of

¹⁰⁵ Anderson, *op. cit.*, pp. 23-26.

peoples as theoretical underpinnings for nationalist claims. Romanticism, philosophy, the notion of popular sovereignty — all of these intellectual and cultural influences were intertwined with language, education, and literacy in promoting ethnic nationalism.¹⁰⁶ The printed word proved to be a powerful vehicle for mobilizing political support.

Suffice it to say that education and literacy made the younger generation of Bosnians aware of their plight, of their collective disadvantage; this awareness blended with the ever-present tradition of Kosovo to produce an intense desire to destroy the existing system of ranking and national partition. “It [was] in this period of violent ferment,” commented Seton-Watson, that

an entirely new movement [made] itself felt among the rising generation, no longer confined to the small intellectual class...in whose hands political leadership had hitherto mainly been concentrated, but recruited more and more from the masses in every Yugoslav province. This process had been hastened by the foundation of secondary schools, with Serbo-Croat as the language of instruction, and by the consequent growth of what was virtually an intellectual proletariat...¹⁰⁷

The halting growth of secondary and university education produced an elite concentrated among the young, who, after all, were the first educated generation of Bosnians. Education propagated ideas the *anciens regimes* considered subversive: denunciation of clerical influence; the importance of political struggle; the need for incremental measures to strengthen South Slav culture; and above all, the ideals of national revival.¹⁰⁸ Increasingly resentful, the new elite — eventually labeled the Young Bosnians — was restricted to subordinate status by the structure of ranking in Bosnian society. Elite resentment found

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 35-48.

¹⁰⁷ Seton-Watson, *op. cit.*, pp. 66-67.

¹⁰⁸ Dedijer, *Road to Sarajevo*, pp. 178-79.

tangible expression in the proliferation of secret societies. The societies sought to downplay the system's unranked aspects, especially Serbo-Croat competition, by harnessing South Slavic unity as a weapon to overthrow the *status quo*.

Their zeal was of an almost religious intensity: Dedijer identified their conviction that youth "should be the main supporters of the liberation of a country, with the mission of building a new type, self-denying crusaders prepared for sacrifice... ." ¹⁰⁹ Hence the Young Bosnians, in contrast to conservative advocates of Greater Serbia, displayed an affinity with socialism, which taught the virtues of absolute equality, internationalism, and revolution. They proved remarkably adept at juggling conflicting loyalties, meshing the particularistic nature of ethnic nationalism with the universal doctrine of socialism. The students promoted the laudable goal of unity, in order to discredit and overturn the prevailing system of subordination and domination. ¹¹⁰ Hobsbawm identified the powerful symbolic value of linguistic nationalism, and the need to appeal to mass sentiment in forging a national movement. ¹¹¹ The Young Bosnians' efforts ultimately failed in that regard: it is well-nigh impossible artificially to impose nationhood, since it is largely a matter of perception by the masses. They claimed, rightly, that the Habsburg empire was a mishmash of nationalities with no national identity and, with the decline of divine right, no rationale for ruling. Yet the students repeated the Austrian mistake by attempting to forge a national Slavic consciousness where none existed. They were unable to mobilize mass

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 178.

¹¹⁰ Seton-Watson, *op. cit.*, p. 67.

¹¹¹ Hobsbawm, *Nations and Nationalism since 1780*, p. 110.

support on that level. The author would conclude, based on this, that the strength of national movements is inversely proportional to the heterogeneity of their followers.

Rebellion and violence were implicit in the secret societies' beliefs. The growth of education promoted a gulf in generational attitudes toward change: an exasperated Gavrilo Princip remarked, "in the people as a whole there existed the wish for national liberation....The older generation wanted to secure liberty from Austria in a legal way; we do not believe in such liberty."¹¹² This complicated efforts to exploit the population's sense of grievance. There was no unified base of mass support for resistance to Habsburg rule; the grievances against fellow Slavs seemed to be at least as significant as those against Turks and Austrians, so mass opinion remained in a severely fragmented state.

While it is difficult to reach definite conclusions on the causes of ethnic and religious conflict, it seems fair to say that collective disadvantage punctuates the existence of domination by "aliens," which is often accompanied by attempts to undermine the ethnic group's identity. Vienna responded to South Slav nationalism in the repressive fashion which seems typical of multiethnic states confronting national demands. Horowitz has contended that the more divided and heterogeneous the parent state is, the more likely it is to resist the demands of nationalists. Accommodation was anathema to the Habsburg Empire. After the upheavals of 1848, the Austrian Foreign Office articulated the empire's approach to the nationalities question:

The claim to set up new States according to the limits of nationality is the most dangerous of all Utopian schemes...to carry it into execution in any part of Europe

¹¹² Quoted in Dedijer, *Road to Sarajevo*, p. 208.

is to shake to its foundations the firmly organized order of States, and to threaten the Continent with subversion and chaos.¹¹³

Considering the empire's patchwork ethnic composition, this was an understandable position to take. Austria-Hungary's survival hinged on its ability to adapt to nationalism. Emperor Franz Josef advised Austrian officials in 1858, "[w]e must...keep a very watchful eye upon all revolutionary mischief, so as to stifle any outbreak at its birth...I would therefore advise you to *have recourse to severity in the event of even the smallest revolt*¹¹⁴ (emphasis added). Suppression of nationalism was the empire's watchword: if national claims succeeded, declared a Habsburg diplomat in July 1914, "exhausted Austria-Hungary would fall helplessly into the lap of the Greater Servian Empire which before long come into being."¹¹⁵ The ongoing disintegration of the Ottoman Empire challenged the Dual Monarchy to prove that it could survive in a world of conflicting nationalities. This explains why Vienna believed Serbia, champion of the Bosnian Serbs, had to be punished and subordinated in 1914.

Dynastic power exceeded the reach of printed language, complicating efforts to pacify the empire. Shultz has written, "[m]ultiethnic regimes have not experienced great success in integrating nonruling ethnic groups...Rather, the ethnonationalism of these states has been based on the ethnicity of the ruling group, which dominates many or all political activities. In other words, it is particularistic nationalism."¹¹⁶ Anderson termed this phenomenon "official nationalism," or the attempt by multiethnic empires to impose

¹¹³ Quoted in Dedijer, *Road to Sarajevo*, p. 73.

¹¹⁴ Quoted in *ibid.*, p. 74.

¹¹⁵ Baron von Giesl to Count Berchthold, July 21, 1914, reprinted in *Official German Documents Relating to the World War*, p. 12.

the ethnic nationalism of the dominant group on the entire state. He referred to it as a “willed merger of nation and dynastic empire,”¹¹⁷ a violent attempt to weld the ancient and modern orders. In an effort parallel to outright repression, Austria-Hungary responded to internal cleavages in such a way. What had been portrayed as universal — legitimacy based on divine right — now became national. The late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries witnessed ruthless campaigns of Germanization and Magyarization within the Dual Monarchy, with the imposition of an official language being the key ingredient. Attempts to impose linguistic nationalism were foredoomed to failure:

In [Austria-Hungary’s] huge, ramshackle, polyglot, but increasingly literate domain the replacement of Latin by *any* vernacular, ...promised enormous advantages to those of its subjects who *already* used that print-language, and appeared correspondingly menacing to those who did not.¹¹⁸

Hence “official nationalism” was viewed by South Slavs as a direct assault on their group identity. Its symbolic value was wide-ranging. The status of Bosnia-Herzegovina contributed to Austria-Hungary’s downfall in another way. Both Austria and Hungary claimed the province upon annexation in 1908, and it remained a bone of contention in the ongoing struggle for supremacy between Vienna and Budapest. Dualism threatened the survival of the empire, and official nationalism increased frictions between Vienna and Budapest geometrically. Their best attempts to foster nationhood for the Habsburg Empire were viewed as nothing short of attempts to impose German or Hungarian nationalism on

¹¹⁶ Shultz, *op. cit.*, p. 80.

¹¹⁷ Anderson, *op. cit.*, p. 86.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 78.

unwilling Slavs, who resisted to the utmost this attack on their ethnic identity.¹¹⁹

Multiethnic empires were poorly equipped for survival in an age of self-determination.

GLOBAL PROCESSES SHAPING THE CONTEXT OF POLITICAL ACTION

Far-reaching global processes, of which nationalism, advancing modernity and nineteenth-century imperialism were the most prominent, shaped the context for political action in Bosnia-Herzegovina. Nationalism has already been dealt with at length, so we will turn our attention to modernity and imperialism.

Modernity is intertwined with economic development, secularism and material standards of living. Not only were the multiethnic empires located along civilizational fault lines; they were located along the frontier between modernity and backwardness. Industrialization and urbanization tended to form an urban proletariat, as individuals left the agrarian environment to seek employment. The departure of the younger generation undermined the Bosnian Serb *zadruga*, or communal unit based on extended families. Harsh working conditions and low pay created a mass of alienated workers susceptible to the calls of nationalists. Arendt referred to the phenomenon of “social atomization,” in which individuals are divorced from traditional affiliations and seek to belong elsewhere.¹²⁰ Meanwhile, traditional groups resisted the perceived corrupting, secularizing influence of modernity, which they viewed as undermining religion, traditional values, and group identity. This is a typical response to processes which

¹¹⁹ Hobsbawm, *Age of Empire*, p. 323.

¹²⁰ Arendt, *op. cit.*

superimpose a secular, “corrupt” regime on ancient religious traditions. Migration to the cities also brought individuals in contact with people different from themselves, bringing with it the challenge of coexisting with “foreigners” or “others.”¹²¹ In Bosnia-Herzegovina, modernity injected new dynamics into a society which had remained essentially static for centuries.

Economic disadvantage and differential levels of development thus were a constant source of friction in the Balkans. A colonial power, Austria-Hungary propagated modernity into outlying provinces unevenly, reinforcing perceptions of dominance and subordination. The system of serfdom was retained essentially intact under Vienna, though a program of modernization was carried out to improve Bosnia-Herzegovina’s value as a colony.¹²² In 1875 Sir Arthur Evans, making an observation equally true of 1914, asserted that “the most galling oppression, and the main cause of the present revolt, is to be found in the system of taxation. The centralized government in Bosnia...is so much machinery for wringing the uttermost farthing out of the unhappy Bosniac [peasant].”¹²³ Brutality, as we have seen, was the norm in the enforcement of the taxation system’s requirements. Taxation was not the whole story, though. Connor has argued persuasively against economic disadvantage as the principal factor in ethnic nationalism. Regional variations within an ethnic group usually fail to generate conflict, while government attempts to level the distribution of wealth have often been accompanied by escalating ethnic nationalism. In many cases the prospect of diminished economic well-being does

¹²¹ Hobsbawm, *Nations and Nationalism since 1780*, pp. 109-10.

¹²² Dedijer, *Road to Sarajevo*, p. 79.

¹²³ Evans, *op. cit.*, p. 256.

not appear to deter ethnic nationalists from pressing their claims.¹²⁴ Socialists, with their insistence on the primacy of economics, have often been forced to appeal to nationalism. The “tendency of peoples to resent and resist being ruled by those deemed aliens appears to operate quite independently of the economic variable,” while “economic arguments can act as a catalyst or exacerbator of national tensions.”¹²⁵

The author, like Connor, does not believe that economics is sufficient in itself to generate ethnic conflict. The Bosnians, while economically backward, enjoyed a higher standard of living than fellow South Slavs who chafed against domination far less vigorously. The revolutionary movements displayed little interest in economics; indeed, with their socialist and ascetic ideology, they scorned capitalism and denounced materialism at every opportunity. To return to Gurr’s terminology, economic disadvantage is a potent source of active grievances, which may augment persisting historical grievances in the political mobilization process. Still, it is more symptomatic of conflict than a root cause: economics is a concrete representation of domination, inferiority, and repression from afar.¹²⁶ It is symbolic. Economic disadvantage underlines the extent of domination, and may indicate an attack on a nation’s most prized possession — its cultural identity.

A byproduct of modernity was the formation of an educated bourgeoisie, as we have seen. In 1914 Bosnia-Herzegovina this class remained small, owing to the province’s status as an Austria colony and its consequent backwardness. Still, a growing number of

¹²⁴ The recent Czechoslovakian “Velvet Divorce” being perhaps the best example.

¹²⁵ Connor, *op. cit.*, pp. 150-52.

¹²⁶ Horowitz, *op. cit.*, p. 237.

young Bosnians were able to study in universities in Vienna, Prague and other cities. Anderson identified a process leading to the emergence of bourgeois coalitions for national action, an outgrowth of print technology and capitalism. Typical was “a coalition of lesser gentries, academics, professionals, and businessmen, in which the first often provided leaders of ‘standing,’ the second and third myths, poetry, newspapers, and ideological formations, and the last money and marketing facilities.”¹²⁷ Modernity came late to Bosnia-Herzegovina; hence such a coalition was only in its formative stages, with students dominating intellectual life. The Young Bosnians were long on “poetry, newspapers and ideological formations,” but woefully short in other areas. They assumed, wrongly, that enlightened Slavs would set aside rivalries viewed as petty in favor of Slavic unity. To mobilize mass support the revolutionaries had to appeal to peasants who did not share their national consciousness. In the end, such political mobilization proved impossible to achieve.

“The problem of the obsolete empires,” proclaimed Hobsbawm, “was that they were simultaneously in both camps: advanced and backward, strong and weak, wolves and sheep.”¹²⁸ Material progress coexisted with feudalism, brutality and abject poverty. Continental imperialism emphasized exploitation of peripheral areas to buttress economic prosperity in the center. With the growth of an educated class of intellectuals, growing numbers of Bosnians were aware both of the backwardness of their homeland compared to advanced Habsburg provinces, and of the empire’s social injustice and weakness.¹²⁹

¹²⁷ Anderson, *op. cit.*, p. 79.

¹²⁸ Hobsbawm, *Age of Empire*, p. 279.

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 279-80.

Education and literacy both drove home the fact of national inferiority and subordination, and informed members of the bourgeois movements that redress might be possible through protest or force.

INTERNATIONAL FACTORS FACILITATING POLITICAL ACTION

International factors were crucial in the outbreak of the First World War.

International support from Serbia enabled the Bosnian secret societies to carry out an assassination attempt. As we have seen, moreover, the Great Powers' geopolitical ambitions were in direct conflict in the Balkans. The growth of a rigid alliance system guaranteed that a new Balkan war between Austria-Hungary and Russia would draw in Germany, France and Britain.

A few comments on the actual plot against Franz Ferdinand are in order to illustrate the point. In his excellent article "Sarajevo Fifty Years After," Vladimir Dedijer offered a concise account of the growth of the secret societies, including "the social and political milieu in which they grew up, the interrelations between their political and personal motives, and the relations of the secret Bosnian societies with other secret societies among the South Slavs."¹³⁰ Most of the plotters were born in feudal bondage among the rural peasantry. Hence they were steeped in the oral folklore and poetry analyzed previously — Serbian society's way of transmitting its culture over centuries of foreign domination. To kill a foreign tyrant was the noblest goal for a young Bosnian Serb. Assassin Gavrilo Princip and many of his fellow conspirators knew the Kosovo cycle by heart, and were

familiar with *Wilhelm Tell* and other works. Literature was the world for members of the student societies: while awaiting trial for the assassination, Princip's chief complaint was that he had nothing to read. The intellectual ferment of the nineteenth century found fertile ground among the South Slavs.

All of the cultural influences identified previously coalesced in the cauldron of the secret societies. The ethics of tyrannicide were a frequent topic for debate, and the revolutionaries believed fervently in the notions of self-sacrifice and permanent rebellion. New myths and new grievances were incorporated into their ideology, alongside the lore of Kosovo. In 1910 a student named Bogdan Zerajic had made an attempt on the life of the Bosnian governor, General Varesnin, and committed suicide, believing himself (wrongly) to have succeeded.¹³¹ Afterward Varesnin was alleged to desecrated the body of Zerajic:

The story of the General's contemptuous spurning of the corpse with his foot, as Zerajic still lay where he fell on the bridge of Sarajevo, spread on all sides and appears to have done more than anything to breed successors to Zerajic among the youth of Bosnia. *It may have been entirely untrue, but it was universally believed*¹³² (emphasis added).

Bosnian youth embraced him as a symbol of their national struggle, a new hero in the tapestry of Kosovo. In a movement which was largely secular, he became a saint. Perhaps even more than Lazar and Kosovo, then, Zerajic galvanized the students to violence. A pamphlet entitled *Death of a Hero* appeared shortly after his death, lauding him as the exemplar of Serbian national virtues: "there comes upon the stage a man of action, of strength, of life and virtue, a type such as opens an epoch, proclaims ideas, and enlivens

¹³⁰ Dedijer, "Sarajevo Fifty Years After," p. 571.

¹³¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 575-77.

suffering and spellbound hearts.”¹³³ Assassination attempts on Austrian dignitaries were common after Zeraji’s death.

By 1914, the revolutionary youth were primed for violence. Princip had placed a wreath on Zeraji’s grave, and sworn to assassinate the first Habsburg he encountered. Franz Ferdinand was a natural target for assassination. He had crafted elaborate plans for the *Thronwechsel*, or his installation as emperor. The archduke intended to reduce the Hungarians to their former vassal status, and for a time he flirted with the notion of enlisting the South Slavs’ support as a third pillar within the Habsburg Empire. He soon rejected the idea of trialism, however, in favor of a new Holy Alliance against revolution. Franz Ferdinand had aggressive designs: in the *Thronwechsel* documents he outlined a militaristic program: a “revolution in Hungary, war with Italy and perhaps with Serbia and Montenegro, are expected with certainty.”¹³⁴ He did not shrink from using harsh measures to resolve the nationalities question. Consequently, three attempts had been made on his life by 1914.

The assassination appears to have been the result of cooperation between Princip’s Black Hand society and a Serbian military intelligence officer,¹³⁵ Colonel Apis, who was also a member of *Narodna Odbrana* and the secret society *Ujedinjenje ili smrt*. Contact between the Bosnian Serb societies and secret societies in Belgrade had been established in 1912-13, when Bosnian youth had sneaked across the border to join irregular units of the

¹³² Seton-Watson, *op. cit.*, p. 41.

¹³³ Quoted in *ibid.*, p. 70.

¹³⁴ Dedijer, “Sarajevo Fifty Years After,” pp. 574-75.

¹³⁵ Lending credibility to Austro-Hungarian claims that the Serbian government was responsible for the assassination.

victorious Serbian army. In contrast to his Bosnian allies, Apis was an ardent advocate of a Greater Serbia in which the South Slavs would fall under Belgrade's domination. He hoped that an assassination would sow confusion in Vienna, and postpone the reckoning with Serbia, which he believed to be at hand, until Russia was stronger. Apis arranged to supply training and weapons for the Black Hand youths, along with transportation across the tightly controlled borders of Bosnia-Herzegovina. He and his Young Bosnian allies found common cause only on the negative aim of throwing off Habsburg tyranny; there was no consensus on the form a Yugoslav nation-state should take.¹³⁶ International support from Serbians was crucial to Princip's assassination attempt.

"AUSTRIA-HUNGARY IS THE BEST SCHOOL FOR ASSASSINS"¹³⁷

OPPORTUNITIES FOR POLITICAL ACTION

We will glorify war — the world's only hygiene — militarism, patriotism, the destructive gesture of freedom-bringers, beautiful ideas worth dying for...¹³⁸

F. T. Marinetti, 1909

In this final analytical section we shall examine briefly how group history and status, global processes, and international factors converged to produce a violent communal rebellion. Austria-Hungary had it wrong when it blamed Serbia for the assassination of Franz Ferdinand. There is no evidence that Belgrade desired a military confrontation with its powerful neighbor, and every indication that it needed a respite to

¹³⁶ Dedijer, "Sarajevo Fifty Years After," pp. 577-584.

¹³⁷ Quoted in Hobsbawm, *Age of Empire*, p. 302.

¹³⁸ Quoted in *ibid.*, p. 302.

recover from the Balkan Wars of 1912-13. The government, along with broad segments of Serbian and Bosnian society, loudly deplored the act as an outrage.

Seton-Watson pointed out that Serbian policy in effect had fallen into the hands of the most reckless fringe of Serbian and Bosnian society. Many Bosnian Serbs may have looked on Zerajic as a national hero, but that is different from actually dabbling in terrorist plans.¹³⁹ A virulent brand of Serb nationalism had arisen throughout Serbia and Bosnia-Herzegovina, accompanied by awareness of foreign domination and sensitivity to assaults on group identity. A sense of historical grievance persisted, particularly among aspiring elites in the secret societies. Coupled with active grievances, including Zerajic's death and taxation by brutal methods, there was significant potential for political mobilization among segments of the population. Cultural influences extolled the value of self-sacrifice in the destruction of tyrants, and hence prepared the way for violence. There was no peaceful way for Serbs to gain their political objectives: modernity had not yet brought democracy, which remained a dream of student radicals, and Bosnians were barred from political power at the center of the Dual Monarchy. Violent reaction to Bosnian protests in 1912 underscored the point. Habsburg repression promoted a zero-sum mentality in the secret societies, which realized they could not achieve a Yugoslav state except at Austria-Hungary's expense. Hence nationalism was channeled into communal rebellion and, ultimately, violence.

Yet the assassination sparked no general uprising in Bosnia-Herzegovina. Why? Several reasons suggest themselves. Most prominently, there was the question of pan-Slav

identity. There was no serious question of union with the Romanovs' Russia; the historical legacies were too diverse for the formation of a common identity — the prerequisite for nationhood. Kohn articulated the difficulty of forging even a limited South Slav national identity, remarking that the

obstacles, not only to Pan-Slavism but even to a closer union of the southern Slavs, revealed themselves in their whole strength from the beginning: *differences of religion, of dialect and above all of historical memories*.... Though Pan-Slavism showed great strength in the writings of many intellectuals and in the unsophisticated feelings of the masses, it hardly determined practical politics (emphasis added).¹⁴⁰

Attempts to translate ideals of nationhood into concrete reality foundered on the simple fact that South Slavs did not consider themselves a nation. Even among those committed to the idea of some sort of Yugoslav nation-state, political aims were conflicting and often incoherent. It had abundant romantic notions of self-sacrifice and vengeance against tyrants, but the Black Hand appears to have had no well-conceived political objectives. His accomplice Colonel Apis rejected Princip's notion of a federation grounded in equality of Slavic peoples, although for his own reasons he sponsored the assassination. Additionally, the mass appeal of revolution proved to be limited. Only a handful of intellectuals had partaken of what Anderson called the revolution in "print-capitalism" which fostered revolution; the masses remained largely illiterate, hence resistant to political mobilization through the printed word. There was some sense of national revival stemming from the tradition of Kosovo, but nationalism had not yet flowered among the masses of Bosnian society. A related point is that Serbian culture emphasized the heroic action of an

¹³⁹ Seton-Watson, *op. cit.*, p. 72.

¹⁴⁰ Kohn, *Pan-Slavism*, p. 52.

individual to defeat tyranny. Earlier rebellions had been sporadic, and prompted by material causes; the idea of a mass uprising in pursuit of nationalist goals may not have taken root among the bulk of Bosnians by 1914. The author would assert that perhaps nationalism is not quite as portable as Anderson has suggested. Nationalism among the South Slavs, and even among Bosnian Serbs, may not have matured sufficiently to allow a full-blown revolution in 1914. Whatever the case, at that time the South Slavs were too fragmented to form their own nation-state.

CONCLUSIONS: JULY 28, 1914

The archduke and archduchess of Austria-Hungary rode through the streets of Sarajevo on June 28, 1914, offering a heaven-sent opportunity for revolutionary youth to commemorate the Battle of Kosovo. There they were the victims of what Dedijer described as the most amateurish assassination attempt in history. Gavrilo Princip's shots set the machinery of war in motion: Emperor Franz Josef had been convinced beforehand of the necessity forcibly to punish Serbia and bring her within the Habsburg orbit. The assassination simply offered a *casus belli*. Forceful action would, he reasoned, provide a solution to the nationalities question. Driven by pan-Slavism and political interests, Russia stood by her Slavic kindred, hoping to deter German intervention. Likewise, Kaiser William II believed that firm public support of Austria-Hungary would deter Russia. They were wrong. Alliance commitments brought Britain, France, Italy and the Ottoman Empire into the fray. Princip's actions had sparked a war whose consequences far exceeded any rational gains to be had.

The study of history as a guide to present events, and as a predictor of future events, is scarcely a new idea. Strategic theorist Carl von Clausewitz proclaimed that, based on his study of the Napoleonic Wars, war was essentially a rational political act, the continuation of policy by violent means. Our analysis of nationalism and the origins of the First World War tells a different tale. Military historian John Keegan recently described war not as the extension of policy by violent means, but as a cultural act.¹⁴¹ Nationalism is not a strictly rational phenomenon, yet it is among the most powerful forces of which we are aware. It centers on intangible things like honor, common identity, and perceptions of attacks on the group's identity. Phenomena grounded in symbols are rarely amenable to compromise; hence ethnic and religious conflicts are supremely intractable. People, we have seen, are willing to kill and to die for these extended kinship groups. They inspire the same fervor which is associated with great religious movements, on occasion accompanied by the same brutal behavior associated with the Crusades. Denial of national aspirations may lead to protest, rebellion, and even violent revolution. Anyone who crafts foreign policy in this turbulent post-Cold War era without taking into account nationalism, ethnic, and religious conflict does so at his own peril.

For anyone interested in fostering a lasting international peace, therefore, the ethnic and religious roots of the First World War are instructive. The ideals of self-determination were enshrined in the postwar Versailles settlement and the United Nations Charter. Nationalism was implicitly proclaimed to be an ideal. Many who believed in this approach to nationalism overlooked the Law of Unintended Consequences. Theodore

¹⁴¹ John Keegan, *A History of Warfare*, (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1993).

Roosevelt declared on one occasion, "Europe must be reconstructed on the basis of the principles of nationalities." In his view multiethnic empires should be dismantled in favor of a multitude of smaller states, one for each nationality. What he and like-minded individuals did not foresee was the tangled web of conflicting, seemingly irreconcilable claims. Newly liberated groups were hardly gentle with their own minorities, raising a host of new questions for the international community. As we have seen, the evidence was there: a South Slav nation proved elusive despite striking cultural similarities. A war has recently been fought over the political shape of the Balkan peninsula. Since Roosevelt's time, national claims have devolved to ever-smaller groups, prompting many to wonder where the process will end. The answer is unclear. Perhaps the process of ending the current Balkan war, which was waged for essentially the same reasons as the early Balkan Wars, will provide a guidepost for statesmen and soldiers. Anyone hoping to resolve successfully ethnic conflicts, and to achieve meaningful war termination and postwar peace settlements, should understand the powerful and dangerous forces at work.