

BOSNIA HERZEGOVINA: ISSUES BEFORE THE WORLD LEADERS

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The fate of Bosnia-Herzegovina is hanging in the balance. European peace conference is taking place at a very crucial moment. The UN General Assembly has also been called in to discuss the Bosnian situation. It is time to reflect on certain aspects of Bosnia's complex tragedy which is piercing the conscience of mankind and exposing the hollowness of the security system that not long ago was being acclaimed as the ground-work for a "new world order".

There are, at least, five aspects, somewhat interrelated, which deserve to be examined.

First and foremost is the human aspect, involving blood-shed and deportations on massive scales of innocent human beings, whatever be their ethnic or religious identity. That the Muslims of Bosnia have suffered most is undeniable. Yet the world must realize that even if the blood that is spilled, the bodies that are maimed and the children that are orphaned are Muslims, they are humans and deserve the same sympathy and concern that is expected to be shown for other humans in Europe and elsewhere. If so evident a genocide of a people can be tolerated in this last decade of the Twentieth century, the future of all humans is doomed.

Second is the fundamental question of the territorial integrity of a sovereign state recognized by the European community and the United Nations? If Serbs are allowed to grab land by brute force, create a "Greater Serbia" occupying seventy per cent of the land area of Bosnia-Herzegovina, what is left of the great principle of non-legitimacy of change of borders by force for which all the civilized world went to war against Iraq only twenty months ago? Or is it that the UN and the Western world have different standards for different aggressors?

Thirdly, the whole question of "ethnic-cleansing" deserves to be examined objectively. The record must be set straight that the Bosnian Muslims do not represent any separate ethnic stock. The Slavs of Yugoslavia whether Serb or Croat or Muslim belong to the same ethnic origins. They belong to the same race, speak the same language and have lived on the same landscape. Islam is not an ethnic phenomenon. Slavs who embraced Islam became Muslims in the same way as those who follow the Orthodox Church identify themselves as Serbs. Bosnian Muslims are not immigrants from any other land or offshoots of a different race. They belong to the same Central Europe as others.

Then what is at stake? Is it that the Muslims of Europe have no right to exist politically and culturally if they seek their identity through a different set of values and principles? If Socialists or Greens do not become outcasts because of their ideological, moral and social commitment why the Muslims should be subjugated to second class status and subjected to such carnage?

Muslims in Bosnia-Herzegovina were only forty-five per cent of the population. There was no religious tension between Muslims, Serbs and Croats. Bosnia-Herzegovina declared to be a multi-religious, multi-cultural and even secular state in the best of European traditions. Then why this "Muslim cleansing", in fact a war of genocide and mass deportation? What message would this give to the Muslims all over the world and how can it help cement friendship and cordial relations between over a billion Muslims in the world and the people of Europe and America?

Fourthly, the present leadership of the world must reflect on the future shape of things if this dastardly principle of "ethnic cleansing" and "ethnic states" is accepted as the basis of state policy. Most states in Europe are multi-ethnic and multicultural. Redrawing of the borders on the "new principle" cannot but cause havoc at an unprecedented scale.

If this pernicious fanaticism is not checked in Bosnia, it is going to destabilize not only the entire Balkans but the whole of Europe and elsewhere. It does not need a prophet to tell that Kosovo is bailing and heat is already simmering in a number of other countries. The time to stop this evil tide is now or never.

Finally, the question that has to be squarely faced is: should aggression, ethnic-cleansing, land-grabbing by force, arbitrary redrawing of borders be accepted as new "facts" and some kind of "canonization" accepted as a fait accompli or there is no alternative but to face this challenge and put a stop to genocide, seize and punish war criminals and defend and restore the state of Bosnia-Herzegovina whose 93% area has already been grabbed by warlords of "Greater Serbia" and "Greater Croatia"?

If the UN and the Western and Muslim countries fail to act in a manner they did to confront Saddam's aggression against Kuwait, then we are heading towards a new era of political instability and fratricidal wars.

Immediate humanitarian aid is important but without working for the vacation of aggression it is no more than a palliative, helping the victims to survive today to be eliminated tomorrow. The minimum that the world must do is to follow the strategy it adopted in the face of Russian aggression in Afghanistan in 1979. Today the UN and the Western leadership are caught in a contradictory fix: they acknowledge Serbia as aggressor and as responsible for large scale deaths, deportations and land-grabbings and yet Bosnians and Serbs are at par as far as arms embargo is concerned. Chapter seven of the UN charter clearly states that "nothing in this charter shall impair the inherent right of individual or collective self-defense if an armed attack occurs against [a UN member] until the Security Council can take measures to maintain international peace and security."

The recent UN Security Council Resolution (12 August 1992) on the one hand affirms "the need to respect the sovereignty, territorial integrity and political independence of Bosnia- Herzegovina" and regards the present situation as " a threat to international peace and security" and on the

other refuses to lift the ban on supply of arms to the aggrieved party, Bosnia, engaged in self-defense. Serbian forces are armed to the hilt. Bosnia needs immediate military support. Minimum that the UN must do is to lift the present arms embargo on Bosnia as Baroness Thatcher has also rightly demanded.

Strict enforcement of economic sanctions against Serbia, and large scale support of Bosnia through humanitarian aid and military supplies along with international pressure on a massive scale can create conditions which may lead to vacation of aggression in Bosnia. Otherwise the aggressor will sit on its aggrandizements and Bosnia would die a slow death or submit on its knees before Serb "Mercy".

The Afghanistan model provides a way out of the impasse. If super-powers are not prepared to directly intervene, the doors should be opened to volunteers from all over the world who may respond to the Bosnian call for help. This would improve the relative position of Bosnia and create conditions for the reversal of aggression. Condoning aggression and appeasement of genocide are only invitations to disaster, not only for the people of Bosnia, who have already lost tens of thousands of their kith and kin, lost their homes and hearths and around two million people have become refugees in the heart of Central Europe but also all those people who could be targets of future "ethnic cleansings".
