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A strategic sign: the geopolitical significance of 'Bosnia' in US foreign policy

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Abstract. Why did the United States government eventually intervene decisively in the Bosnian war in the summer of 1995, first with sustained NATO bombing, subsequently by forging the Dayton Peace Accords, and finally by deploying 20 000 troops to a region its military leaders had long claimed was not strategic? In this paper I seek to provide an answer to this question by arguing that Bosnia became strategic because of its geopolitical location in a Europe supposedly secured by NATO and because of the negative sign value it accumulated over the course of its bloody war. The Bosnian war exposed the limits of the Bush administration's New World Order, the inability of the European Union to impose peace, the weaknesses of the United Nations, the impotency of NATO, and the leadership failures of the United States. It thus became strategically important as a threatening sign of disorder in Europe that the United States needed to confront in order to re-legitimize NATO and its plans for expansionism, and to regenerate its national exceptionalist identity as a global power. In this paper I consider the role of the media in helping generate Bosnia as a 'strategic sign' by arguing that the *videocameristics* of the media play an important role in conditioning the practices of foreign policy.

In early 1989 Warren Zimmermann, the newly appointed US ambassador to Yugoslavia, had a meeting with the newly confirmed deputy secretary of state in the Bush administration Lawrence Eagleburger. A man with years of experience as a diplomat in Yugoslavia, Eagleburger knew the country well and, as Zimmermann remembers it, "they soon agreed that the traditional American approach to Yugoslavia, born in the Cold War years, no longer made sense amid the revolutionary changes sweeping Europe" (Zimmermann, 1996, page 5).⁽¹⁾ It was decided that in his introductory calls in Belgrade Zimmermann would deliver a new message about the United States' consideration of the geopolitical significance of Yugoslavia. "I would say that Yugoslavia and the Balkans remained important to US interests, but that Yugoslavia no longer enjoyed its former significance as a balance between the North Atlantic Treaty Organization and the Warsaw Pact". With the Soviet-sponsored regimes in Eastern Europe crumbling, Yugoslavia's was "no longer unique, since both Poland and Hungary now had more open political and economic systems (Zimmermann, 1996, page 7).

Never a central strategic location in the Cold War struggle in Europe, Yugoslavia enjoyed a distinctive geopolitical identity in the West by virtue of its status as a nonaligned Communist state that had historically defied Stalin and remained outside the Soviet-sponsored security order in Eastern Europe. With the threat posed by that order disintegrating, Yugoslavia's geopolitical significance was diminishing. In the emergent post-Cold-War world, Western security analysts perceived the country as strategically peripheral. When it thus became apparent in 1991 that Yugoslavia as a

⁽¹⁾ There are problems with Zimmermann's account. He places the date of this meeting in early 1989 and then proceeds to take for granted the "revolutionary changes sweeping Europe" and that by 1989 "the world had changed dramatically" (1996, page 7). However, these changes did not occur until the second half of 1989. In the first half of the year, the Bush administration still reiterated old Cold War themes and rhetoric.

federal state was in danger of collapse, the predominant attitude of the United States was shaped by assumptions about its strategic marginality. Secretary of State James Baker made a brief one-day effort on 21 June 1991 to forestall the descent of the country into violence, but when this eventually happened he concluded, along with other policymakers, that ultimately "we don't have a dog in this fight" (that is, we have no interests at stake in this conflict; cited in Danner, 1997, page 58; see Baker, 1995).

Four years later, as the eastern Bosnian town of Srebrenica fell to the besieging Serb army, President Clinton and his foreign policy advisors were belatedly concluding that the United States did indeed have considerable interests at stake in the course of the Yugoslavian war of secession. The halfhearted involvement of the Western powers, NATO, and the United Nations in the conflict—a carefully circumscribed policy driven by France and Great Britain and supported by the USA that was in part dictated by Yugoslavia's perceived strategic marginality—was being viewed by most of the world's foreign community, a community made up of foreign-policy professionals, specialists, diplomats, defense analysts, and the international media, as a failure. According to the sources of *Washington Post* journalist Bob Woodward, at a crucial White House meeting in July of 1995 the president concluded that "this policy is doing enormous damage to the United States and to our standing in the world. We look weak" (Woodward, 1996, page 261).⁽²⁾ Clinton, in referring to the persistent coverage of the war on international television networks such as Cable Network News (CNN), is reported to have remarked that "we have a war by CNN. Our position is unsustainable, it's killing the US position of strength in the world". Madeline Albright, US ambassador and future secretary of state in the second Clinton administration, is quoted by Woodward as responding that "[w]e have to look at this issue beyond Bosnia" and "I'm glad the president sees this in terms of American power in the world". National Security advisor Anthony Lake concurred, and noted that "this is larger than Bosnia. Bosnia has become and is the symbol of US foreign policy" (Woodward, 1996, page 262).

That the fall of a small town most Americans had never heard of amidst a confusing civil war in the strategically marginal 'Balkan region' could be perceived by the US president as "killing the US position in the world" is a surprising turn of events few could have predicted five years earlier. As Danner (1997, pages 57–58) asks, "[c]ould Clinton seriously believe this of an impoverished country of three million whose security, American officials had insisted for four years, seemed to touch no American national interest?" Clinton's reported reaction nevertheless accords with the significance and priority US foreign policy officials gave to the Bosnian war from mid-1995 onwards, which tilted decisively first towards the Muslim–Croat federation, then making an all-out push to secure the Dayton Peace Accords by the end of the year.

⁽²⁾ The study of contemporary geopolitical reasoning and practices is always an imperfect activity. Although there is normally a considerable archive of public information on American foreign policy, crucial meetings and key events obviously happen behind closed doors. Determining the precise ways in which geopolitical crises like Bosnia were understood is not always possible so scholars are forced to rely upon public pronouncements and speeches, contemporary journalistic reporting, memoirs by participants, and the record of foreign-policy practices. The "Washington insider" books of celebrity *Washington Post* reporter Bob Woodward have long been controversial for their unidentified sources and a journalistic reconstruction method that renders the sentiments expressed in key meetings in words which may or may not be necessarily exact. It is not that the meetings Woodward discusses did not happen but that his account of them is the interpretative 'spin' of unidentified sources. More generally, Woodward's stories are driven by the narrative demands of the nonfiction current affairs book market. Indeed, his books problematize the distinction between fiction and nonfiction by foregrounding the important question of the 'employment'—the structuring of stories—of (geopolitical) narratives. On this general question with special attention to the narrativization of the Bosnian war see Campbell (1998, chapter 3).

and subsequently deploying 20 000 US troops to implement and secure the peace agreement. For Richard Holbrooke, the US Assistant Secretary of State who was the diplomatic force behind the Dayton Peace Accords, Baker's assertion that "we had no dog in this fight" lay in the dustbin of history (Holbrooke, 1998, page 318). Bosnia was one of "the three main pillars of American foreign policy in Europe", alongside US–Russian relations and NATO enlargement into Central Europe. A new post-Cold-War European security system could not be built "while part of it, the former Yugoslavia, was in flames. Settling Bosnia was necessary, although not sufficient, for true stability and long-term economic growth in Europe" (Holbrooke, 1998, pages 359, 365). Secretary of State Madeleine Albright publicly declared that to "suggest, as some have, that America has no stake in the future of Bosnia is to propose that America abdicate its leadership role in Europe" (Albright, 1997). US military and economic involvement in Bosnia now costs the USA millions of dollars each year. From being, to US strategists, a relatively unknown location in a geopolitically marginal country, Bosnia has become an emblematic sign of the American-sponsored post-Cold-War security order in Europe, a defining symbol of US leadership in Europe and credibility across the world. Bosnia has become an overdetermined geopolitical sign loaded with meanings and symbolic values that far transcended its immediate geographic context. Once a nonplace geopolitically, Bosnia has become a global strategic drama.

How did this transformation of Bosnia's geopolitical significance occur and what does this tell us about the nature of geopolitics at the end of the twentieth century? This paper has been developed out of an earlier study of the contested scripting of 'Bosnia' as a location in the US geopolitical imagination up until mid-1994 (Ó Tuathail, 1996b). In that paper I argued that two dominant scripts were in contestation over the writing of 'Bosnia' as a place, scenario, and crisis: a Vietnam script, with particular institutional strength in the Pentagon, that sought to write the place as a potential quagmire for US foreign policy and the US military in particular, and a Holocaust script, with particular support amongst certain administration officials and the media, that sought to write 'Bosnia' as the scene of a contemporary mini-Holocaust that demanded a strong moral response by the United States and the international community. The dominant script was that sponsored by the Pentagon, a script that persistently reminded administration officials and the media that 'Bosnia' was not a strategic place. The United States had no 'vital strategic interests' in the region and consequently the United States military should not get actively involved in the conflict.

Yet the US military did end up becoming deeply involved in the region through its leadership role in NATO; it unleashed the most extensive aerial bombing campaign in Europe since 1945 and, after the Dayton Peace Accords, deployed 60 000 troops to Bosnia, the largest troop movement in Western Europe since the end of World War 2 (Holbrooke, 1998, page 319). Why? What caused this change? In this paper I seek to provide an answer by documenting how Bosnia over time became a sign of instability, ethnic hatred, and Western failure in post-Cold-War Europe. The very name 'Bosnia' came to signify an intractable geopolitical problem and ongoing moral dilemma for the West and its institutions of security, principally NATO. Bosnia was, as Warren Christopher (Clinton's first Secretary of State) famously described it, a "problem from hell" but, most significantly, this 'hell' was located in Europe. Despite its lack of conventional strategic value and significance—conflict in the region posed no direct threat to NATO states nor did it contain any valuable economic resources like petroleum—Bosnia acquired strategic significance by virtue of its status as a sign of Western failure and chaos on the European continent. *Bosnia became a strategic sign*. Its accumulated strategic value came from its negative sign value, a sign value projected and promoted by international mass media networks and the global circulation of

images from the war. Geography mattered in explaining why the United States ended up deploying troops in Bosnia, but it was a multifarious geography that (con)fused the territorial and televisual, the symbolic and the strategic. It was not only a war over territory in Europe but a 'war by CNN', recorded by an extensive international press corps and projected to the world by global telecommunication systems. Bosnia was not only in Europe but also in European, American, and other international living rooms. It was consequently a widely distributed geopolitical sign, a sign value of instability and ethnic warfare that the USA and NATO eventually needed to confront and control.

In this paper I present a concise interpretative narrative and analysis of the major geopolitical processes and events that helped transform Bosnia into a 'strategic sign'. Geopolitical processes and events are inevitably contextual and open-ended (Ó Tuathail, 1996b; Ó Tuathail and Dalby, 1998). In this paper I make interpretative decisions in 'emplotting' a narrative and constructing an analysis not in order to deny or ignore that irreducible textuality but to develop a practical critical geopolitical analysis of US foreign policy in Bosnia. Central to that analysis is the assumption that 'Bosnia' is a contested conceptual category, that it is always implicitly if not always explicitly framed by inverted commas signifying its irreducible geopolitical textuality. I argue that 'Bosnia' accumulated greater and greater geopolitical significance as its war progressed with the Clinton administration eventually acknowledging its 'strategic sign value' in the summer of 1995. I subsequently address the role of the media in helping transform Bosnia into a 'strategic sign' and briefly discuss the concept of 'videocamerality' as a way of theorizing the role of the media in conditioning contemporary geopolitical practices. I conclude by briefly reflecting on the politics of Bosnia's 'geopolitical inflation' from a relative nonlocation into a strategic sign, and contrast American intervention in Bosnia to another inflated strategic sign, 'Vietnam'.

The making of 'Bosnia' as a strategic sign

Bosnia and the limits of the 'New World Order'
Yugoslavia descended into violence in the summer of 1991, a few months after the spectacular success of the US-led coalition in evicting the Iraqi army from Kuwait. The effort to assemble an international coalition through the United Nations to evict Saddam Hussein's army had led President Bush to proclaim a New World Order characterized by diplomatic cooperation between former enemies (the United States and what was then still the Soviet Union) to isolate aggressive states which threaten international stability by invading foreign states and, in this case, which endanger the world's oil supply. With Iraq defeated and its infrastructure in ruins, the pro-Western Kuwaiti monarchy restored, and average Americans taking great pride in the spectacular success of the military war machine they led, the prestige and international standing of the United States of America in world affairs seemed at a new high. Amidst a triumphalist atmosphere, President Bush evoked the spirit of Henry Luce (founder of *Time*/Life publications) and proclaimed the beginnings of a second American century. Given Bush's rhetoric about the need to establish the rules for a peaceful New World Order and demonstrating to potential aggressors that they will not succeed, it was thus somewhat ironic that a new and bloody war broke out in 'southeastern Europe' at this time which would eventually seriously expose the limits and contradictions of the New World Order.

Bush's vision of a New World Order was always a contingent and contradictory notion. First, as it gradually became evident that the Cold War as Americans imagined it was over, the dominant tendency in American foreign policy was one of adjustment and withdrawal. America had borne the burden of containing communism in Europe and now that it had collapsed it was time for the United States to come home and begin to address its own geo-economic failings and domestic problems. The United States' enormous

investment in its Cold War defense establishment seemed justified but now a 'peace dividend' was due (Cox, 1995). Professional products of US Cold War establishment such as Henry Kissinger and George Bush interpreted many of these sentiments as overly 'euphoric' and 'isolationist'. For them, the United States needed to reconsolidate its role as the preeminent global power, the world's 'sole remaining superpower'. The Gulf War proved to be a means of reasserting this role and reteaching American citizens about their country's unique destiny to lead, to do what Bush termed in his 1992 State of the Union address the "hard work of freedom" (Bush, 1996). The overall result was a contradictory tension in US foreign policy discourses and practices between a general tendency to readjust to the Cold War by withdrawing commitments and concentrating on domestic priorities on the one hand, and a newly expressed commitment to a grand international project in which the USA would assume the burden of the 'hard work of freedom' on the other. At the same time as Bush was declaring a second American century, critics on both the left and the right were calling on the USA to 'come home'.

The second contradiction of Bush's New World Order is that it was built around a unique set of contingencies, namely the Gulf War of 1991–92. The Iraqi invasion of Kuwait was significant not because it was the invasion of one sovereign state by an aggressive other but because it was Iraq, a nationalistic and bureaucratic military dictatorship in the resource-rich Middle East, that invaded Kuwait, a tiny pro-Western monarchical dictatorship that was no more than a transnational petroleum production station. The United States' mobilization of an international coalition against Iraq was facilitated by the fact that international strategic analysts perceived the crisis, whether rightly or wrongly, as a struggle over the control of oil reserves. In addition, numerous regional powers found it in their self-interest to join an international coalition to oppose Iraq and reduce its potential power in the region. Thus the New World Order as a set of general principles was in actuality based on a set of particular and unique circumstances.

Third, the credibility of the New World Order was based on the spectacular military successes and excesses of the US-led coalition against Iraq. The remarkable nose-cone video footage of 'smart' bombs destroying targets in Iraq, the pictures of thousands of Iraqi soldiers surrendering to the coalition forces, and the darker images of Iraqi soldiers being cut down and slaughtered by war machines they could not see gave the Gulf War a spectacular televisual quality and force. The Gulf War was a flashy and fast show of force projected to a global audience. Yet the circumstances of this triumph of fast and forceful images were also contingent and unique. The Gulf War was a perfect war for military planners in certain ways. The preparation time was considerable, the military objective clear and easily explained to the public, and the desert conditions generally favorable to high-tech warfare. The conflict lent itself reasonably well to the Pentagon's dominant military operations paradigm, the Weinberger–Powell doctrine of overwhelming force, clear objectives, and a specified exit strategy and end game. The security challenges of the post-Cold-War world, however, rarely lent themselves to such a rigidly delimited doctrine of engagement and operation. Furthermore, security challenges such as 'failing states' and 'ethnic violence' resisted the chronopolitical paradigm of the Gulf War, the speed–spectacle–success formula that appeared to solve security challenges in rapid and decisive ways as if they were movies or televisual dramas.

Unlike the Gulf War, which was short and positively spectacular (from the point of view of the US-led coalition), the breakup of Yugoslavia, and the war in Bosnia in particular, was long, drawn-out, and negatively spectacular. Instead of a miniseries of high-tech military images of spectacular force, precision, and decisiveness, Bosnia became a long-running nightmare of low-tech brutality, thuggish terror, indiscriminate shelling, and seemingly premodern siege warfare. Although designated as a strategically

insignificant region by Western defense intellectuals, the images from Bosnia gradually became a serious and significant threat to the idea of a New World Order precisely because of their constancy and duration. The Gulf War and the New World Order were blockbuster productions that captivated and enraptured everyone when they first burst onto our screens. However, like many blockbusters, their staying power was limited and their afterglow soon faded. Bosnia, by contrast, was a slow release low-budget sleeper that refused to go away. The very durability of the 'Yugoslavian catastrophe' and the 'Bosnian nightmare' as scenes of new world disorder in the supposed epoch of the New World Order gradually lent them greater and greater significance as deconstructive horror shows. Bosnia began to expose the contradictions and contingency of the Bush administration's New World Order. In the light of Bosnia, the New World Order was a false promise and cruel dream, a feel-good remake of the late 1940s with classic themes, a short run-time, fine speeches, and spectacular images that quickly faded away. The United States and its allies were not committed to sovereign states suffering from aggression and they proved themselves unwilling to do 'the hard work of freedom'.

As the crisis deepened the nominal strategic marginality of Yugoslavia and its province of Bosnia began to change. In the world of instantaneous communication and mass media it was becoming evident that no place could ever be strictly delimited as truly marginal any longer. The networks of the mass media were becoming newly powerful videographers of the dramas of world politics (Wark, 1994). If regional conflicts and wars produced recordable spectacular footage and images these would eventually find their way onto the screens of a mass media predisposed towards visual spectacle and, if dramatic and persistent enough, thus onto the agenda of global security managers whose work increasingly required them to manage the images of world (dis)order (Gowing, 1994; Rotberg and Weiss, 1996). However, whereas many previously marginal places shot to fame on the basis of spectacular images—Somalia, Rwanda, Chechnya, Haiti, and Algeria, for example—only a few had the staying power of the Bosnian nightmare. It also had the 'myth of a continent' in its favor (Lewis and Wigen, 1997). Unlike many other brutal wars in the post-Cold-War world, it was ostensibly in 'Europe'.⁽³⁾

(3) It should be noted that the idea that the Bosnian war was in Europe was not a given. Articulated within the balkanist discourse that dominated discussions of the region since 1914, the Bosnian war was implicitly represented as 'beyond' Europe. In balkanist discourse, 'the Balkans' were in Europe but not of Europe. They were Europe's immediate 'other', a mountainous land of essential heterogeneity overwhelmed by ancient enemies (Todorova, 1997). The notion of 'southeast Europe' was always an alternative geographical identity for the Balkan region ever since it was first used in the late nineteenth century. Originally proposed as a neutral, nonpolitical, and nonideological geographic designation, the term became associated with the geopolitical vision of the Nazis in the 1930s. Yet the term was never essentially Nazi for it emerged independently in other linguistic traditions at the time. Used interchangeably with the classification 'the Balkans' ever since World War 2, the term 'southeastern Europe' is nevertheless not without political and symbolic significance. Unlike 'the Balkans', the designation firmly and unambiguously locates the region within 'Europe' and thus within the same geographical and moral universe of 'European civilization'. One consequence of the balkanization of Bosnia (that is, the conceptualization of it within balkanist discourse) is that geographic classification tacitly became explanation for the war and violence. In tension with this implicit de-Europeanization of Bosnia was a reinvigorated discourse of 'Europe' as a triumphant Western capitalist civilization expanding beyond its Cold War borders and (re)converting 'Eastern Europe' into 'Central Europe'. Furthermore, in seeking to become independent nation-states, the provinces of the former Yugoslavia had declared an aspiration to become 'European'. Ironically, these tendencies may have perpetuated each other; in seeking to establish 'European nation-states' the Bosnian Serbs ethnically cleansed territory, thus perpetuating the image of the region as the barbaric (non-European) Balkans. The challenge of Bosnia for 'the Europeans' was to recognize it as not only a war unfolding upon the continent of Europe but also as a war over the meanings and extent of 'Europe'.

The failure of European Union and United Nations diplomacy

According to Warren Zimmermann, the last US ambassador to the former Yugoslavia, the major powers of the European Union had shown "torpor" on the issue of Yugoslavia's breakup until the summer of 1991 (Zimmerman, 1996, page 147). With the outbreak of violence in Slovenia and the Krajina, however, the European Community (later to become the European Union) "launched itself like a rocket into the Yugoslav crisis". European Community leaders viewed the crisis as a way of demonstrating its ability to handle security challenges and crises in post-Cold-War Europe. James Gow (1997, page 48) suggests that the European Community was "keen to exercise the ghost of indecision and inaction during the Gulf Conflict the previous year". Certainly the crisis was widely perceived by the world's foreign policy community as a test for European institutions moving further along the road towards harmonization, policy coordination, and unity. Part of the Maastricht Summit of December 1991 had as its goal movement towards a common foreign and security policy. It was, according to the widely circulated soundbite of Luxembourg Foreign Minister Jacques Poos, the "hour of Europe" (Holbrooke, 1998, page 28). This general European sentiment dovetailed with an evident US willingness to devolve the manifestly sticky problem of Yugoslavia's breakup to the diplomatic institutions of the European community working in alliance with the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE, later renamed the OSCE) and the United Nations. A set of understandings and a division of labor emerged within the Western community of states which lead US foreign-policy makers to emphasize that the breakup of Yugoslavia was a primarily 'European problem'.

Yet this geopolitical moment of US withdrawal and European assertiveness was already endowing the dissolution of Yugoslavia with a symbolic value greater than its local or even regional extent. As a so-called test of whether the states of the European Community could come together and formulate a unified policy response towards the crisis, the dissolution of Yugoslavia within the Western foreign-policy community accumulated significance as a sign of the ability of the European Union to live up to its 'united' name and to create for itself a peaceful post-Cold-War security system across the continent. The future security organization and order of Europe became linked to the European Union's ability to 'solve' the Yugoslavian crisis. Affirmation of the idea of Europe required that the war in that region be stopped. Failure by the European Union would not only reflect badly on the ability of that institution to develop its own independent security identity separate from the USA but also tarnish the continental myths—peace, progress, and prosperity through integration and unity—that underpinned the project of the European Union. The European Union's failure would ultimately involve the United States for it served as the ultimate guarantor of the European security order.

As it transpired, the European Community/Union, the CSCE, and the United Nations did indeed fail to 'solve' the Yugoslavian crisis; that is, end the warfare and ethnic cleansing promptly. Although European and United Nations negotiators did have some initial successes in stopping the fighting in Croatia and brokering ceasefires in Bosnia, it was the persistence of the brutal warfare and crimes of ethnic cleansing in that republic which undermined their credibility. There were three major sets of European Union and United Nations failures in the former Yugoslavia. The first was the very public debate and debacle over the recognition of the declarations of independence by Slovenia and Croatia. Domestically motivated moves by Germany's foreign minister Hans Dietrich Genscher to push for their recognition served to undermine the work of Lord Carrington's London Conference and the negotiations of Cyrus Vance on behalf of the United Nations. The European Union's granting of advisory power over such an important matter to a legal commission (the Badinter Advisory

Commission) in its meeting of December 16–17 1991 only served to diffuse power further and postpone problems of unity, problems which were dramatically compounded by Germany's unilateral recognition of Slovenia and Croatia on December 18 despite the appointment of the commission. In January 1992 the rest of the European Union followed Germany's lead and recognized the independence of these two countries, thus ignoring the Badinter Commission's recommendation to recognize Macedonia but not Croatia.

The second set of failures concerned the efforts of Cyrus Vance and David Owen, Lord Carrington's replacement, to get the parties to the Bosnian conflict to agree to a permanent ceasefire and a new map for the republic. Although much has been made of the United States' disquiet with this plan and supposed efforts to sabotage it (Gow, 1997), the success of the negotiations were ultimately dependent upon the willingness of the parties to agree to an unequal peace without the background threat of force by the international community if they did not agree. Without the ability to use independent force to induce the parties to a ceasefire and settlement, Vance and Owen were, in effect, trying to facilitate the surrender of Bosnia as a unified multicultural state and to rationalize the results of the aggression and ethnic cleansing by the Bosnian Serb militias and the rump Yugoslav army. This was hardly an affirmation of the idea of Europe—though Campbell (1998, page 162) argues that “the common political anthropology of both the peacemakers and the paramilitaries in the Bosnian war, with its nationalist nexus of territory and identity, is integral to the Western political imagination”, a somewhat sweeping argument that collapses the differences between liberal realists (such as Owen) and romantic fascist nationalists (such as Radovan Karadzic, leader of the Bosnian Serbs) and tends towards an essentializing of the Western political imagination—and contributed to the sense of failure when negotiations over the map collapsed and the fighting continued.

The third set of failures of the European Union were also those of the United Nations in the form of UNPROFOR. Originally established to police the ceasefire in eastern Croatia, UNPROFOR later became the significant peacekeeping force in Bosnia, made up of troops from the major EU powers (with the exception of Germany until mid-1995) and from non-EU countries such as the Ukraine and Canada. Although UNPROFOR's presence in Bosnia did undoubtedly save lives and enable people in besieged cities to survive cruel winters and inhumane wartime conditions, UNPROFOR was an ambivalent instrument of EU and UN policy in Bosnia that pursued a mandate of neutrality in a land where genocide was occurring. UNPROFOR also constituted a political and bureaucratic self-interest for European powers in such a way as to discourage, hinder, and block decisive forceful action by the international community as a whole against acts of genocide and to end the war. Without adequate military firepower, a more robust mandate, and political support for a more decisive policy in Bosnia, UNPROFOR became the symbol of the political and moral bankruptcy of the European and United Nations' approach to the Bosnian war, an approach that recognized a “humanitarian tragedy” in the region but refused to address the underlying causes that had produced this wilful “tragedy” (Rieff, 1995). As the contradictory and unsustainable nature of the UNPROFOR mission generated further policy difficulties and failures while the Bosnian war dragged on, the image and credibility of the preeminent security alliance in Europe, the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), was drawn into the crisis and began to suffer also.

The eroding credibility of NATO

When by 1991 it became apparent that the Cold War was over on the continent of Europe, NATO was faced with a dilemma. On the one hand, it could and did claim to be the most successful alliance system in history, an alliance that had won the Cold War. On the other hand, it was an alliance without an obvious post-Cold-War role, a potential anachronism in the light of the new security environment brought into being by the arms control agreements signed by the Soviet Union and the United States in the latter half of the 1980s (Mandelbaum, 1996). As many have noted, the functionality of NATO was always greater than merely providing military security for its members and deterring a possible Warsaw Pact attack on Western Europe. NATO was also, as Lord Ismay famously declared, about keeping the Americans in and the Germans down. With strong American pressure, NATO began to recast its role in post-Cold-War Europe as a guarantor of the existing security environment on the continent and as a potential ‘out-of-area’ power by responding to situations like the Gulf War. In November 1991, the alliance's heads of state adopted a “new strategic concept” which identified instabilities arising from economic, social, and political reform in central and eastern Europe as the new danger faced by the alliance. The following summer NATO's foreign ministers asserted that the alliance's new role would be to perform European crisis management and peacekeeping in coordination with the CSCE/OSCE, the European Union, the West European Union, and the United Nations (Ullman, 1996, page 25).

The wars of dissolution in Yugoslavia provided NATO with a means of redefining itself and operationalizing its new strategic concept and mission. As the international community stumbled towards a tougher policy in the region in response to mostly Bosnian Serb provocation and aggression, the power and prestige of NATO increasingly were put on the line. In July 1992 NATO established a joint naval operation with the West European Union to patrol the Adriatic to help enforce the UN's sanctions regime against the states of the former Yugoslavia. After the passage of a ‘no-fly zone’ resolution in the United Nations, NATO undertook to enforce it in early 1993. The United Nations Security Council (UNSC) declared a series of ‘safe areas’ in Bosnia later in 1993, after which the United Nations, in close coordination with NATO, were charged with helping UNPROFOR, in compromise language that absurdly strived to maintain its neutrality in the conflict, to “act in self-defense” and “to deter aggression” against the safe areas. A ‘dual key’ system was established according to which requests for military support by UNPROFOR from NATO warplanes were to be approved both by the UN Secretary General's special representative in the region, the Japanese diplomat Yasushi Akashi, and the North Atlantic Council, the coordinating center of NATO. In practice, this system of joint power and control over the use of military force in the former Yugoslavia was a disaster for it diffused military authority and made rapid reaction to provocations on the ground virtually impossible. In summing up the general problem of coordination between political and military institutions, Lieutenant General Francis Briquemont noted that “[t]here is a fantastic gap between the resolutions of the Security Council, the will to execute those resolutions, and the means available to commanders in the field” (cited in Weiss, 1996, page 64).

There were three sets of incidents where the prestige and credibility of NATO were asserted in Bosnia only to have that prestige deflated and that credibility seriously tarnished. The first was a series of ‘pinprick’ attacks by NATO against minor and symbolic targets in an effort to enforce UNSC resolutions. The first military engagement by NATO in its history was against four aging Yugoslav airforce airplanes. A month later NATO airplanes attacked an empty, rusted, and obsolete tank. In November 1994, NATO aircraft struck once more, and damaged the runway of an

airport but deliberately left warplanes at the airport undamaged. In all cases, the NATO actions were circumscribed by fears of Bosnian Serb retaliation against UNPROFOR troops on the ground in Bosnia. The attacks were purely symbolic and were designed as a form of communication to supposedly "send a message" about NATO capabilities and resolve. The 'pinprick' nature of the attacks, however, rendered them absurd and only intensified NATO's legitimacy crisis (the organization was also in the midst of a profound downsizing) as the small Bosnian Serb army was seen as standing up to the might of NATO. The message they sent was one of irresolution and they were justly criticized by security analysts in the media (Gow, 1997).

The second set of incidents where NATO power was initially asserted only to be later deflated concerned efforts to break the siege of Sarajevo, a city that had been declared by the UNSC as a safe area. In February 1994, the Serb shelling of a Sarajevo marketplace killed 68 people and wounded 200. In response, NATO issued an ultimatum both to the Bosnian Serbs and to the Bosnian government forces to hand over their heavy weapons to UNPROFOR. The ultimatum was successful but momentum was quickly lost and within a few months the Bosnian Serbs had forcefully retaken their equipment from UNPROFOR storage areas. In May 1995, NATO responded to a series of Bosnian Serb attacks by bombing an ammunition dump in Pale. The Serbs responded by taking 350 UNPROFOR troops hostage and chaining them to potential NATO military targets. NATO was forced to back down and the troops of UNPROFOR humiliated. US Assistant Secretary of State Richard Holbrooke notes in his memoir that images of French troops waving white flags of surrender caused consternation in France and elsewhere. "The television pictures were appalling. That the world's greatest powers would be brought to their knees by such thugs seemed to me inconceivable" (Holbrooke, 1998, page 64). UNPROFOR was forced to painstakingly negotiate with the Bosnian Serbs to get its soldiers released.

The third set of humiliations concerned the eastern Bosnian 'safe areas' of Gorazde, Zepa, and Srebrenica. NATO was charged with providing close air support for these areas if they were attacked. However, the concept and organization of the 'safe areas' was flawed from the outset (Ó Tuathail, 1999). UNPROFOR troops were lightly equipped and almost completely dependent upon Serb goodwill for logistical supply. UN Military Commander Bernard Janvier recognized this and sought to reconsolidate UNPROFOR troops in central Bosnia, in effect abandoning the 'safe areas'. When the UNSC rejected his plan to do so, Janvier issued new instructions to UNPROFOR personnel in the safe areas to abandon rather than defend their positions if attacked. These instructions stated explicitly that execution of the UNSC mandate was secondary to the safety of UNPROFOR personnel (Honig and Both, 1996, page 156). As a consequence both of a general failure of leadership amongst the international community and of the specific failure of the UN/NATO military leadership, the eastern 'safe areas' of Srebrenica and Zepa were overrun by the Bosnian Serb army, with appalling acts of genocide as a result. Despite a number of calls for close air support by the Dutch commander at Srebrenica, only one NATO attack was carried out, which destroyed a single piece of artillery (Rohde, 1997). The impotency of NATO was evident for the international foreign policy audience to see.

For the sake of the continued viability and credibility of NATO something had to be done. Contingency plans for the withdrawal of UNPROFOR were at an advanced stage and it was the longstanding US commitment to aid UNPROFOR in the event of it needing to withdraw from Bosnia that finally provoked the White House into vigorous action. In his memoirs Richard Holbrooke notes his astonishment when he was first briefed on the NATO contingency plans for an UNPROFOR withdrawal (1998, page 66). OpPlan 40-104 called for the use of 20 000 US troops and risky nighttime

withdrawal operations that were likely to generate casualties. Furthermore, the plan had an in-built 'automaticity', which meant that it was already approved by the NATO Council as the contingency plan for withdrawal. For Holbrooke, helping the UN withdraw made no sense, but with the French threatening just such a strategy the stakes for NATO were high. A refusal by the United States to support a withdrawal would have seriously damaged the alliance. The resulting recriminations, according to Holbrooke, could have meant the end of NATO as an effective alliance: "It was not an overstatement to say that America's post-World War II security role in Europe was at stake" (1998, page 67).

The option of UN withdrawal was eventually rejected because it was likely to be seen as a devastating admission of failure on the part of the Western powers. A sign of a more muscular policy on the part of the Europeans was the deployment of the British and French joint mobile rapid reaction force which placed 12 000 men and much more powerful armaments than heretofore provided to UNPROFOR detachments in Sarajevo to robustly respond to aggression. The real turning point came at the London Conference of July 19 when NATO leaders moved towards the new US position of drawing "a line in the sand", a phrase deliberately used to evoke the Gulf War, against further Serb aggression (Holbrooke, 1998, page 72). NATO committed itself to the security of Gorazde (though implicitly abandoning the enclave of Zepa) and later Sarajevo. The 'dual key' authority system was abandoned. When another Serb shell killed thirty-seven civilians in Sarajevo's main market on 28 August 1995 NATO began a sustained bombing campaign from 30 August against Bosnian Serb positions (Operation Deliberate Force). The alliance had finally begun a campaign to restore its military credibility and prestige.

Bosnia as a global leadership test

Up until 1995 the United States largely adhered to its policy of deferring to the interests of the major European powers when it came to Bosnia. For the sake of NATO unity and transatlantic cooperation the United States did not push a more muscular NATO policy while troops from France, Great Britain, and other countries were on the ground and vulnerable in Bosnia. Yet through the NATO Council and the "Partnership for Peace" program, American officials were learning of the worries of many of its NATO partners and aspirant members (such as the Czech Republic, whose president Václav Havel spoke publicly of the need to end the war) about the destabilizing effects of a long, drawn-out Bosnian war. By the summer of 1995 it was evident to most foreign-policy observers and practitioners that European leadership, UNPROFOR engagement, and occasional 'dual key' UN/NATO airstrikes were not going to end the war. Meanwhile, the United States had committed itself to the goal of expanding NATO eastwards as its way of establishing a new post-Cold-War security architecture on the continent. This proposed transformation of the European geopolitical landscape was controversial and provocative. The persistence of the war in Bosnia and NATO's failure there reflected badly on the alliance and its proposal of increased security through military alliance expansionism.

Within the context of institutional transitions in Europe and elsewhere, Bosnia developed significance as emblematic of the challenge of the new era, a persistently cited sign system for intractable 'ethnic warfare' (on the inadequacy of 'ethnicity' as a conceptualization of Bosnia see Campbell, 1998, pages 88–93, 120–121). It was a test of the possibility of a more effective United Nations, a test of the foreign policy unity of the European Union, and a test of the future of NATO; multiple tests that were not being passed. In reflecting upon the crisis after he had left office, the former Bush administration official David Gompert (1996, page 141) wrote that what US foreign-policy officials failed to see was that the Yugoslav crisis, especially that in Bosnia, "was setting

the worst possible precedents for the new era. They did not appreciate the importance of defeating this case of malignant nationalism before it metastasized elsewhere in the former communist world".

This idea of Bosnia as a dangerous cancer had been articulated during the Bush administration. Back in 1992 US Secretary of State Lawrence Eagleburger described the wars in the former Yugoslavia as a "cancer in the heart of Europe" (Eagleburger, 1992). The image of Bosnia as a cancer was a powerful one that enabled it to 'jump scale' and become a generic sign of illness in the global body politic. By 1995 the Clinton administration was using the image as a means of globalizing Bosnia. Bosnia was a dangerous symptom of 'chaos' and 'ethnic hatred' that needed to be stopped in its tracks. After the Dayton Peace Accords, President Clinton went on television to explain why Bosnia was important: "A conflict that already has claimed so many lives could spread like poison throughout the region, eat away at Europe's stability and erode our partnership with our European allies". In justifying US troop participation in implementing the Accords, eventually signed in Paris on 14 December 1995, Clinton interpreted Bosnia as a global challenge and test, a sign of the times. The necessity for US leadership in a globalizing era was his overriding theme:

"As the Cold War gives way to the global village, our leadership is needed more than ever because problems that start beyond our borders can quickly become problems within them... nowhere has the argument for our leadership been more clearly justified than in the struggle to stop or prevent war and civil violence... There are times and places when our leadership can mean the difference between peace and war, and where we can defend our fundamental values as a people and serve our most basic, strategic interests. My fellow Americans, in this new era there are still times when America and America alone can and should make the difference for peace. The terrible war in Bosnia is such a case" (Clinton, 1995b).

Bosnia was represented as strategic because it was a sign for 'ethnic strife' and the dangers of 'religious hatred' globally. Bosnia was linked in administration rhetoric to other conflicts around the world and to ethnic and racial hatred breeding terrorism against Americans in Saudi Arabia and Oklahoma City. The United States had to act against the 'Bosnia' overseas in order to avoid a 'Bosnia' at home.⁽⁴⁾ American efforts to implement and enforce the peace symbolized the United States's universal commitment to democracy and diversity.

This conceptual globalization of Bosnia was supplemented by its geographical inflation into a sign for Europe. In the November 1995 television broadcast, Clinton declared that securing peace in Bosnia will "help build a free and stable Europe". Taking geographic license, Clinton proclaimed that "Bosnia lies at the very heart of Europe, next-door to many of its fragile new democracies and some of our closest allies. Generations of Americans have understood that Europe's freedom and Europe's stability is vital to our own national security... That's why we created NATO and waged the Cold War. And that's why we must help the nations of Europe to end their worst nightmare since World War II, now" (Clinton, 1995b). For the sake of Bosnia, Europe, NATO, past generations of US citizens, and universal moral values, the USA needs to be strong and lead. "America", President Clinton declared during the 1996 presidential campaign, "truly is the world's indispensable nation" (Clinton, 1996). As a

(4) The meaning of 'Bosnia' as a signifier of domestic political and cultural challenges varies. To neoconservatives on the right 'Bosnia' is 'balkanization', which they read as a dangerous and undesirable condition of essential political disputation and cultural disunity within US life. The dangerous creeds of 'multiculturalism' and 'postmodernism' would balkanize the United States and turn it into a 'cultural Bosnia'. To those on the left, 'Bosnia' represented the political struggle for a tolerant society in the face of racist political violence and ethnic chauvinism.

strategic sign, 'Bosnia' was not really about Bosnia as a place at all: it was about regenerating US identity and relegitimizing continuing US leadership in Europe and across the world in a globalizing era.

US leadership in the post-Cold-War era, the future of Europe, the restructuring and expansion of NATO, the nightmarish spectacle of warfare, the cancer of 'ethnic hatred': all had become symbolically tied to the Bosnian war by the middle of 1995 and transformed what was once a geopolitically marginal zone into a strategic sign system for the United States and its role in the world. In December 1997 President Clinton announced that the United States would keep troops in Bosnia beyond the expiration of the mandate of SFOR, the NATO-lead stabilization force. Approximately 8500 US soldiers would remain as part of a NATO organized follow-up DFOR (Deterrent Force) mission. The declaration marked an important shift in US foreign policy away from the Weinberger-Powell doctrine's fixation with 'exit strategies' (deadlines for departure) towards a more flexible and ultimately more appropriate concern with 'benchmarks' of progress in the state (for a foreign-policy critique of 'exit strategy' thinking see Rose, 1998). In announcing the policy change and later visiting US forces in the region with Senator Robert Dole, President Clinton used Dole's analogization of the geopolitical value of Bosnia to an American football game: "It's like a football game, we're in the fourth quarter, and we're winning, and some people suggest we should walk off the field and forfeit the game. I don't think we should. I think we ought to stay here, finish the game, and collect the win" (Clinton, 1997b). In geopolitically imagining Bosnia as a football game, Clinton was translating the problem into terms most US males (especially the soldiers he was addressing in Bosnia) instinctively understood. But the sports metaphor also abstracted Bosnia from its geographical context and cast US involvement there as one game in a larger global struggle the United States needed to win. Bosnia was not important in and of itself but because it happened to a place where US leadership and exceptionalism should be seen to win.

Videocameristics and geopolitics

A key process in producing Bosnia as a 'strategic sign' was the role of the global media in making it a visible and significant war. Despite the often considerable risks to reporters, Bosnia attracted the Western press because it was a story of war between outwardly similar white Europeans unfolding in a relatively prosperous and familiar environment. Sarajevo was a modern European city that had hosted the Winter Olympics in 1984. The former Yugoslav region was known to the many Europeans who had vacationed there. The Bosnian civil war slowly became a metaphor of Europe's violent past, which recalled the origins of World War I and genocidal fascism during World War 2, and its uncertain future. The specters of violent nationalism and ethnic intolerance also haunted many other Western states, who were struggling with their own issues of multiculturalism and identity politics. The story of the Bosnian war (unlike wars in the former Soviet Union or in the Third World) was not only physically close to the West but psychologically so also.

A minor location on the territorial map of Europe, Bosnia was to become a major location on the media's map of the challenges and crises facing the world. Traditional global crises usually involve the conflicting strategic interests of great powers and have an impact on the whole international system. Small regional wars that lack strategic conflict between the great powers are nevertheless able to become a global political crisis when, as Martin Shaw (1996, page 4, italics in original) suggests, "there is a world-wide perception of a large-scale violation of human life and globally legitimate principles", a perception "that is largely dependent on media coverage". The mediation of these wars by global communications transforms their initial character, historic importance, and geopolitical

significance. For Shaw (1996, page 4, italics in original) the existence of these non-traditional global crises can be "confirmed by the occurrence of, or existence of significant pressure for, internationally legitimate *intervention* to resolve it".

The transformation of Bosnia from a small regional war with no strategic value into a global crisis with significant strategic implications was facilitated by technological improvements which made it possible to report 'live' from the field in Bosnia each night and also by the emergence of transnational 24-hour news channels to project this video feed around the world around the clock (Friedland, 1992). With their daily diet of journalistic copy and live video feeds from the region, global media networks constituted a telecommunicational panopticon of surveillance, information, and judgment upon the conduct of the Bosnian war. In his elaboration of the concept Michel Foucault (in Bruchell et al, 1991, page 93) quotes Guillaume de La Perrière, a French sixteenth-century thinker, who defines governmentality as "the right disposition of things so as to lead to a convenient end". Although never equivalent to the state, from the eighteenth century onwards governmentality as the mentality of governance became centered in the institutions of the state and associated institutions in civil society. Within Bosnia, global media networks as central institutions in an emergent 'global civil society' came to function as a loose and incipient form of 'global governmentality' in that they inevitably projected 'the wrong disposition of things' in that country, the ways in which everyday life in Bosnia had spiraled into a nightmarish condition where statist governance had broken down and the paragonmental efforts of the United Nations were pitiful and inadequate. In bringing the conditions of everyday life in cities like Sarajevo *in camera*—the dangerous dash through sniper's alley, the struggle to find firewood and keep warm, the rationing of clean water, the wait for fresh bread—global media networks were inevitably sitting in a form of judgment and issuing video indictments of those responsible for allowing this to happen. They were acting as contemporary *videocamerlists*⁽⁵⁾, information-age agitators for 'something to be done' about the collapse of governance and the transparent violation of human rights in Bosnia. In both television images and textual dispatches, they made visible the gap between how things are and how things are supposed to be (Luke and Ó Tuathail, 1997).

Although not all journalists were videocamerlists, the more famous ones tended to be so; they recognized rightly that 'objectivity' did not mean 'neutrality' in Bosnia. Internationally, a few journalists and writers stand out: Roy Gutman for his exposure of Bosnian Serb concentration camps and the horrors of ethnic cleansing, dispatches which earned him the 1993 Pulitzer prize; the reporting of Christiane Amanpour from Bosnia for CNN; and Misha Glenn for his reports on the BBC and book *The Fall of Yugoslavia* (1992) that went through several editions. In Britain, the reporting of Kate Adie, Maggie O'Kane, and Ed Vulliamy (1994) had a significant impact as did the week-long Channel 4 series "Bloody Bosnia" and the powerful series of mini-films "Christmas in Sarajevo". In the United States, dispatches and subsequent books by David Rieff (1995), Peter Maass (1996), David Rohde (1997), and Roger Cohen (1998) exposed powerfully the failure of Western intervention in the region, and ABC's Emmy-Award-winning documentary "While America Watched: The Bosnia Tragedy" laid bare the leadership failure surrounding the conflict. Daily reports on National Public Radio kept the conflict ringing in the ears of official Washington and the policymaking community, some of whom spoke out against the West's failure in Bosnia while others derided these and videocamerlists generally (the "something-must-be-

⁽⁵⁾ This term *videocamerlists* combines 'video' with 'Camerlists', an elite eighteenth century movement for administrative and governmental reform in central Europe. See Tribe (1984).

done crowd" in Douglas Hurd's terms; see Ó Tuathail, 1996a) as 'uninformed' and 'emotional' (Gompert, 1996, page 132).

None of this is to suggest that the media necessarily forced the United States and NATO to finally intervene in Bosnia in the way they did. To conceptualize the media as functioning as videocamerlists is not to suggest a linear model of influence whereby the mass media directly causes certain foreign-policy decisions and actions. Studies of this so-called "CNN effect" by journalists themselves have tended to discredit the view that media images and technology drive the foreign policy decisionmaking process (Gowing, 1994; Neuman, 1996). Warren Strobel (1997) argues that the CNN effect defined as "the loss of policy control" does not exist; the relationship between the media and foreign-policy makers is more subtle and situational. Under the right conditions, the news media can have a powerful effect on the policy process, he claims, but "those conditions are almost always set by foreign-policy makers themselves or by the growing number of policy actors on the international stage (1997, page 5). Yet such a conceptualization does not adequately address the transformative influence of communicational technologies and mass media upon the practice of geopolitics. In seeking to disprove rather narrow and linear models of influence, such studies tend to neglect how contemporary telecommunications systems constitute and condition the representational practices of contemporary geopolitics. States now act on calculations about how media coverage, particularly visual images, will affect public opinion and the behavior of other actors. States attempt to manipulate global media networks in order to send certain signals and convey particular impressions. Global media in turn often force the pace of diplomacy by their speed, spin, and turnover cycles. They not only report but also attempt to mobilize and represent varied public opinions. As Shaw (1996, page 7) notes: "In the era of expanded global communications and serial global crises, media and societal responses are part of world politics at every stage".

Recognition of the power of 'tele-vision' to condition foreign-policy decisionmaking has been a growing subject of concern to the Western foreign-policy community itself. In the edited collection of essays on the conflict for The Council on Foreign Relations, Richard Ullman (1996, pages 4–5) notes that "[w]hen television sets worldwide nightly show pictures of massacred civilians, governments that previously have not perceived an important interest at stake in any specific outcome of a conflict discover that they have a real interest in ceasing to appear—to their own publics and to the world—as not only callous but impotent". Although policymakers try to manipulate it to produce images they want to project, tele-vision can present a serious threat to foreign-policy decisionmakers and natural security managers when it undermines the sign value of their institutions of security and order and the legitimacy of their foundational concepts and myths (keeping the peace, protecting democracy, upholding Western values, etc). It can expose the gap between an institution's idealized image of itself and the actuality of its operation and functioning. The management of national security affairs in increasingly 'informationalized' and televisual societies, therefore, requires an ever more vigilant and committed management of tele-visual images and appearances.

In Bosnia, the power of tele-vision was already a part of the West's initial calculations about how to respond to the crisis. Fearful of the images of troops coming home in body bags, states such as the USA were extremely reluctant to put their troops in harm's way in Bosnia, and states like France and Great Britain worked to restrict UNPROFOR's role so it would be a purely peacekeeping and not a peace-enforcing role. Furthermore, fear of crossing the 'Mogadishu line' and repeating what was perceived as 'mission creep' by UN forces in Somalia led UNPROFOR commanders to adhere to what they considered strict impartiality to avoid becoming participants in

the warfare.⁶ Yet the irony of the Bosnian war was that foreign and military policy calculations made with the power of television in mind ended up creating televisual conditions which delegitimized that policy. The West and the international community were seen to be responding but persistent television images revealed that they were not being very successful at alleviating suffering and ending the killing. Negative images of impotence, humiliation, and failure became much more common than positive images of success, stability, and peace. The European Union could not produce a peace agreement, UNPROFOR soldiers were being humiliated, NATO airstrikes were ineffective pinpricks, and massacres were occurring in so-called UN 'safe havens'. The Bosnian war had become a worldwide story of negative images for the European Union, NATO, the United States, the West, and the international community. As a proliferating negative sign system, 'Bosnia' was a threat.

Yet there was nothing inevitable about US interventionism, the push towards a ceasefire, the Dayton Peace Accords, and the deployment of the NATO-led Implementation Force. Conscious of protecting their own interests and image, many Pentagon leaders opposed the Bosnian deployment and only reluctantly went along with it when it became official US government and NATO policy.⁷ Even then, as Holbrooke's memoirs make clear, certain military leaders like Admiral Leyton Smith interpreted their Dayton mandate in a very narrow manner, refusing to go after war criminals or to prevent the burning of Grahovica by Serbs as they withdrew from this section of Sarajevo (Holbrooke, 1998, pages 335–357). Although Bosnia had become a place for the symbolic reconstruction of US leadership in Europe to the Clinton administration, not all institutions were attentive to generating the positive visuals from the region the Clinton administration sought.

Conclusion

The pattern of an unfamiliar and marginally strategic place developing a strategic sign value way beyond its ostensible strategic 'use value' is not a new one. During the Cold War, a variety of marginal locations such as Angola, El Salvador, Nicaragua, South Korea, and Somalia obtained geopolitical significance considerably beyond their militarily determined 'strategic worth'. Most infamously, the region of Indochina acquired a tremendously inflated geopolitical sign value for the US foreign policy establishment in the 1950s, 60s, and 70s. South Vietnam's eventual fall to the Communist North was experienced as a severe blow to US power, prestige, and credibility in world affairs. In large part, marginal places like Vietnam accumulated exorbitant geopolitical value because US foreign-policy makers conceptualized the Cold War as a universal and

⁶ The motivations for these attitudes probably had more to do with political self-protection and bureaucratic self-preservation than anything else. Public opinion polls in Western Europe and the United States indicated that there was considerable support for more aggressive multilateral action by the West in Bosnia. In suggesting why these US and European attitudes towards intervention in the former Yugoslavia did not translate into decisive action, Sobel (1996, page 157) writes that "the missing element has been decisive leadership".

⁷ Representative of a certain strain of Pentagon thinking is the argument made by Charles G. Boyd, the retired Deputy Commander in Chief of the US European Command, in *Foreign Affairs* September 1995. Boyd argues that the United States "must see things in the Balkans as they are, not as we wish them to be" (1995, page 23). All factions in the former Yugoslavia, he argues, have pursued the same objective—avoid becoming a minority—and are essentially the same. They are distinguished more by power and opportunity than morality. In wrapping the conflict in a Balkanist discourse about essentially antagonistic and morally indistinguishable 'factions', it is ironically Boyd who sees things in terms of popular images and not as 'they are' in their irreducible complexity. Another irony is that Boyd declares that air power has no prospect of ending the conflict at precisely the moment it was doing just that.

indivisible ideological struggle. In their speeches and foreign policy planning, US leaders promised to bear any burden and pay any price for liberty. Too often overwhelmed by this crusading ideological rhetoric was a developed sense of the importance of geographical location and context in foreign policy. The US Cold War geopolitical discourse was more often than not dominated by abstract and universal principles that were ethnocentrically conceptualized and diplomatically operationalized in imperialistic ways.

The end of the Cold War created the possibility of an US foreign policy that was on the one hand less ideological and imperialistic and on the other was more sensitive to geographical particularity and the need to devolve power to regional allies and international organizations. Yet a significant actualization of this, the US deferral to Europe in the handling of the Yugoslavia crisis, ended in failure. Once described as a local problem, then a European problem, US foreign policy decisionmakers were eventually forced to recognize Bosnia as a 'test' of the institutions of the post-Cold-War world. The Bosnian war became strategic as it inflated into a conflict with global significance. As Gow (1997, pages 298–299) notes, "[the] Yugoslav war moved from being an important question for European stability and security and a test of the then CSCE's brand new Conflict Prevention Centre, to being a test of the future of the EU Common Foreign and Security Policy; from that it moved to being a test of UN diplomacy and UN peacekeeping; from that, it became a test of European, transatlantic and East–West relations and post-Cold-War co-operative security; and finally, it became a test of NATO credibility and with that of international and particularly American credibility". As during the Cold War, a previously minor place had become saturated with major geopolitical significance for the United States.

Unlike Vietnam, where the United States' interventionism from the 1950s onwards was a counterrevolutionary one designed to contain indigenous radical nationalism and shore up regimes of corrupt Westernized elites, US leadership and interventionism in Bosnia since 1995 has been a relative force for positive change. Although the attitude of the US military leadership to their role in Bosnia is certainly ambivalent, the United States and its allies are nevertheless investing millions of dollars in a praiseworthy attempt to bring a semblance of order, stability, and reconstruction to the region. Yet the fact that the United Nations and the Western powers failed for so long to take decisive action in the face of genocide is indicative of serious problems with the American-led post-Cold-War security order in Europe and the current organization of the United Nations. Bosnia was only able to become strategic because of its slowly acknowledged European location and its subsequent accumulated sign value to the United States, the European powers, and NATO. Kosovo, another 'Balkan' location, has not yet become a strategic sign. Intervention in Bosnia occurred only when the West's self-image and NATO's strategic credibility were threatened. Regions within and states beyond Europe continue to suffer through bloody struggles without much international attention. Algeria, for example, remains geopolitically marginal with human rights abuses unchecked even though its horrific scenes of slaughter are televised occasionally. The same is true of conflicts from the Sudan to Sri Lanka. Territorial geopolitics may matter more in explaining the geography of geopolitical interventionism than televisual images but territorial geopolitical location, never simply immanent, is often established only through televisual images.

What these cases underscore is that the post-Cold-War world order needs a truly trans-state security architecture—for example, a multinational rapid reaction force run by a reinvigorated United Nations—that is not dependent upon the resources and political vagaries of domestic politics in one or a group of states (Falk, 1995). Developing a trans-state security architecture that is well resourced, militarily effective,

and independent of great power politics is certainly fraught with all sorts of difficulties. Nevertheless, it is the type of institutionalized security order that progressives should be conceptualizing and advocating rather than leaving the domain of 'security' to statist military bureaucracies and their national territorial geopolitical imaginations. Such a supranational order offers peoples across the planet the impossibility of a world beyond the nation-state imagination and where genocide does not have a future. At the end of a century marked by horrific nation-state violence, the construction of such a supranational security system should be a priority for the new millennium.

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