The Bosnian War and the Development of Post-Soviet Russia's Diplomatic and Security Stance, 1992-1996

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1: Introduction

On 28 June 1914, Archduke Franz Ferdinand was assassinated along with his wife by the Serbian nationalist Gavrilo Princip in Sarajevo, today the capital of Bosnia and Hercegovina. One month later, the Habsburg Empire declared war on Serbia, which the Russian Empire vowed to defend against Habsburg aggression. These events lit Europe's powder keg, beginning the First World War and, in turn, Europe's short 20th century.[1] Seventy-eight years later, Bosnia again became a critical issue in European diplomacy and security to which Russia would find itself drawn to "defend" the Serbs from outside powers. In the 1990s, the collapse of Yugoslavia led to an explosion of ethnic nationalism and conflict, with Bosnia being the hardest hit due to its semi-mythical importance for Balkan nationalists and its ethnic diversity.[2]

Under Josip Broz Tito's socialist Yugoslav regime (1945-1980), ethnic nationalism and separatism were suppressed, keeping the Yugoslav experiment afloat. Once Tito died in 1980, the deteriorating Yugoslav economy and increased nationalist tendencies began pulling the country apart. Nationalists in Yugoslavia began advocating for independence, or in the case of Serbian nationalists, greater control over Yugoslavia and even the creation of a "Greater Serbia." Slobodan Milošević – the President of Yugoslavia – exploited these sentiments among Serbs and began to reduce the rights of autonomous regions within the Socialist Republic of Serbia. This, along with preexisting economic and nationalist tensions, prompted Croatia and Slovenia to declare independence in 1991, followed by Bosnia and Hercegovina in 1992. Soon after, Bosnjaks, Croats, and Serbs began to turn on one another, igniting an inter-ethnic and inter-religious "civil war" across the former Yugoslavia. This eventually drew the attention of the

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[1] John Keegan, *The First World War* (London, Sydney, Auckland, and Parktown: Random House, 1998), 56-59.
[2] Edin Hajdarpasic, *Whose Bosnia? Nationalism and Political Imagination in the Balkans, 1840–1914* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2015), 9, 20, 54; Alastair Finlan, *The Collapse of Yugoslavia: 1991–99* (London: Osprey, 2022), 46.

USA and European states – including Russia – as the conflict worsened and cases of ethnic cleansing came to light, prompting UN and NATO interventions and further investing the international community.[3]

Like in 1914, these events marked the beginning of a new era of European diplomacy and security after the end of the Cold War and the USSR in 1991. The Bosnian War is where the West's 21st century security relationships with Russia began to take shape, especially as Russia became more active after the USSR's collapse. Generally, Russia was being pulled in two ideological directions. These ideologies influencing Russian foreign policy are usually labeled "liberal internationalism," meaning cooperating with the "international community," and "realist" nationalist priorities often conflated with being "pro-Serb." While many consider these ideologies mutually exclusive, Russia, which under Yeltsin vacillated between shedding its Soviet legacy and longing for its past great power status, consistently displayed a mixture of them in its approach to the Bosnian War. While policy was relatively consistent, relations with the West – to the degree that the "West" was a single entity – underwent significant changes, especially in part due to Western interventions in the Bosnian War. Russia's optimism for the West was undermined, even if not destroyed, establishing the conditions for deteriorating relations. To repair and continue positive relations in the long term, large, tangibly impactful, and visible actions building trust, understanding and clarity, and continuous discussion and contact among influential policy makers and broader populations were needed. These perhaps could have been built in forms similar to the NATO-Russia Founding Act of 1997 or NATO's Partnership for Peace program. Peacekeeping operations that took place in distant lands and only

[3] Finlan, *The Collapse of Yugoslavia*, 6, 12-17, 48, 88.

directly impacted a few thousand soldiers were not enough to build these wider discussions, trust, or understandings among wider populations and most leaders.

While the Bosnian War was a significant event for Russia-West relations and Russian policy, this aspect of the war has received little attention by scholars. Much was written in the 1990s, but the number of scholarly works being produced in English or Russian significantly decreased after the 2000s. One scholar who has extensively dealt with Russia's role in the Bosnian War is James Headley. Headley argues that Russian policy was guided by domestic considerations, that it went through two phases – a liberal internationalist one and a "neo-realist" one – and that the Sarajevo Crisis in February 1994 was a "turning point" in Russia's relations with the West.[4] Headley's works are some of the most detailed and useful discussions of Russian policy in Bosnia. However, his arguments about certain phases and the significance for Russia of the Sarajevo Crisis are debatable. Throughout the Bosnian War, as this paper will show, Russian policy was consistently informed by *both* "liberal internationalist" (liberal) and "neo-realist" (nationalist) concerns, and it is difficult to say that there were distinct periods. As Russian policy was continuously influenced by these two ideologies, it also means that Russia's relations with the West were often in flux. While relations did change, the Sarajevo Crisis of 1994 being a "turning point" is misleading. It did effect Russia's relations with the West significantly but did not necessarily send Russia firmly down a course in opposition to the West.[5] While suspicion

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[4] James Headley, *Russia and the Balkans: Foreign Policy from Yeltsin to Putin* (New York City: Columbia University Press, 2008), 2-3; James Headley, "The Russian Federation and the Conflicts in Former Yugoslavia, 1992 – 1995," PhD dissertation, University of London, n.d.. <https://discovery.ucl.ac.uk/id/eprint/10104695/1/The_Russian_Federation_and_the.pdf> 2.

[5] Michael Andersen, "Russia and the Former Yugoslavia," In *Russia and Europe: Conflict or Cooperation?*, ed. Mark Webber (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2000), 190.

remained and it would be difficult to resolve this controversy, this was a result of several events in the Bosnian War, not one specific event.

Several other scholars also argue that there were distinct phases and turning points. They only disagree when these periods and turning points were and their exact characteristics. This includes Predrag Simic, Christian Thorun, and Burak Kolot.[6] Another scholar, Aleksei Fenenko, does not directly argue that Russia's positions evolved, but does argue that there were significant changes in Russian policy, bringing him somewhat in line with this group of scholars.[7] While Andrei Edemskii also divides Russian foreign policy into phases, he acknowledges that certain principles did not change. For Edemskii, the phases reflect increasing Russian activism in pursuit of these principles in response to domestic pressures.[8] This paper's divergence from Edemskii is its focus on wider ideologies and motivations behind Russian policy remaining consistent reflected by these principles. Additionally, this paper argues that Russian activism was also in significant part a result of the USA's policy shifting toward interventionism, "creating" a niche for Russian activism to fill, exacerbating the necessary conditions for domestic reaction, and giving "nationalist" policies more credibility.

Another group of scholars – represented by Lenard Cohen and Konstantin Nikiforov – argue that Russian policy was more "consistent," but lacked a coherent ideology or framework.[9]

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[6] Predrag Simic, "Russia and the Conflicts in the Former Yugoslavia," *Southeast European and Black Sea Studies* 1 (2001): 99-101; Christian Thorun, *Explaining Change in Russian Foreign Policy: The Role of Ideas in Post-Soviet Russia's Conduct towards the West* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 81; Burak Kolot, "The Balkan Crisis of the 1990s in the Foreign Policy Concepts of the USA and Russia (1992–2000) [Balkasnskiy krizis 1990-kh godov vo vneshnopoliticheskikh kontseptsiyakh SShA i Rossii (1992-2000)]," PhD dissertation, Moscow State University, 2023, <https://www.prlib.ru/item/1970917> 118.

[7] Andrei Fenenko, "The Balkan Crisis and Russian Foreign Policy Priorities [Balkanskiy krizis i rossiyskie vneshnepoliticheskie prioritety]," *Pro et Contra* 6 (2001): 61-62.

[8] Andrei Edemskii, "Russian Perspectives," In *International Perspectives on the Yugoslav Conflict*, ed. Alex Danchev and Thomas Halverson (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 1996), 29-30, 39, 46-47.

[9] Lenard Cohen, "Russia and the Balkans: pan-Slavism, partnership and power," *International Journal* 49 (1994): 829; Konstantin Nikiforov, "Russian Foreign Policy and the Balkans in the 1990s," *Balcanica* 38 (2008): 233.

These scholars tend to portray Russian liberalism and nationalism as incompatible. When looking at Russian policy in Bosnia more closely, however, Russian liberals did not appear to consider liberalism to be mutually exclusive with nationalism. For example, cooperation with the international community, associated with liberalism, may be done to achieve national revival. Nikiforov in particular overemphasises the influence of liberalism on certain policy makers, making it unintuitive for nationalist ideas to have influenced them as well. Understanding that the Russian state can use nationalist and liberal means for either nationalist or liberal ends allows for consistent, yet relatively coherent, interests in Russian policy.

Scholars such as Jeffrey Surovell, Adnan Pargan, and Vladislav Sotirović represent another group arguing that Russian policy was consistent. However, instead of saying it was incoherent, they argue that Russia acted as the USA's "errand boy" and lacked an independent policy.[10] While Russia did cooperate with the USA on some issues, stating that Russia was in full agreement with or subjugated to the USA is misleading at best. There were many cases when Russia and the USA went head-to-head, especially over NATO's role in the conflict. While Russia did not stop the NATO from intervening, this is explained by Russia lacking the capabilities to do anything besides vocally protest.

Another aspect of the scholarship on Russian policy in the Bosnian War relates to Russia's participation in NATO's Implementation Force (IFOR). Most argue that IFOR was a great success in military cooperation and that similar operations should have been repeated to

[10] Jeffrey Surovell, "The Grand Deception: Post-Soviet Russia and the Wars in the Former Yugoslavia," *The Journal of Slavic Military Studies* 25 (2012): 284; Adnan Pargan, "Russia's Foreign Policy during the Bosnian War," (n.d.): 1; Vladislav Sotirović, "Russia's Balkan Politics: From the Politics of pan-Slavic Reciprocity of the Tsarist Russia to the 'Realpolitk' of the Republic of Gazprom Russia," *Srpska politička misao* 51 (2016): 83.

develop Russo-American relations.[11] While IFOR was indeed successful in training Russian and American soldiers to work together and showing that cooperation was possible, it could not change wider relations between Russia and the USA. Repeating IFOR-esque operations would not have stopped relations from worsening either. While potentially being "building blocks" for other agreements and actions, peacekeeping missions, with the small pool of affected people separated from leadership, could not bring about major changes in policies that the Russian or Western leadership and publics supported or in their views of each other. In fact, IFOR likely succeeded as it was those who often avoided geopolitical competition that made up its participants

The scholarship on Russian policy in the Bosnian War has several issues in its portrayal of Russia's motivating ideologies and Russia's relations with the West. Scholars tend to view Russian policy in the Bosnian War as either liberal or nationalist, but rarely both at the same time. When they do argue that it is influenced by both, they conclude that Russian policy was incoherent or only used nationalism for popular support. This paper pushes against these presumptions. Russian policy throughout the Bosnian War was consistently pursuing a set of objectives, those being, first, proving and reclaiming Russia's great power status, second, keeping powers other than Russia out of what was seen to be Russia's "traditional" spheres of influence, third, upholding principles of national sovereignty, particularly with an eye to Chechnya and Tatarstan, and "objectivity," and fourth, avoiding setting a precedent that could threaten objectives two and three. These goals were considered compatible with both liberal and

[11] Sharyl Cross, "Russia and NATO Toward the Twenty-First Century: Conflicts and Peacekeeping in Bosnia-Herzegovina and Kosovo," *The Journal of Slavic Military Studies* 15 (2002): 36; Beth Crimmel and Jeremy Saunders, *Improving US-Russian Relations through Peacekeeping Operations* (Boston: Harvard University, 2000), ii; Jacob Kipp et al., *Lessons and Conclusions on the Execution of IFOR Operations and Prospects for a Future Combined Security System: The Peace and Stability of Europe after IFOR* (Fort Leavenworth and Moscow: U.S. Army Combined Arms Center and General Staff of the Armed Forces, Second Edition, 2000), 106.

nationalist ideologies, were pursued with liberal and nationalist means, and were supported with liberal and nationalist rhetoric. As the same objectives were pursued throughout the Bosnian War, it is difficult to say that Russian policy went through distinct phases. However, Russia's relations with the West did change in important ways. Worsening relations encouraged the prioritisation of national interests over cooperation, but this was gradual and did not fully undermine Russian liberalism. By the end of the war, Western interventions (and related actions) began to disillusion Russia and sow suspicion of the West, making it unlikely that IFOR's success alone would have a wider impact on Russo-American relations, even if relations were not yet ruined beyond repair.

This paper makes these arguments in three chapters. The first covers the period from the beginning of 1992, when post-Soviet foreign policy began to take shape, to the Sarajevo Crisis of 1994, a period often called "liberal internationalist" in Russian policy due to frequent cooperation with the USA. This chapter argues that Russian foreign policy was also influenced by nationalism – in part being used as a political tool by Russian elites – during this period, and international cooperation was a way for Russia to advance its "great power" interests. The second chapter begins with the Sarajevo Crisis and continues until the Dayton Peace Accords in 1995, a period when scholars argue Russia was more nationalist and belligerent. This chapter argues that Russia had not changed its fundamental positions, even if it was more vocal. The same ideologies – liberalism and nationalism – continued to influence Russian policy together. While preexisting nationalism encouraged Russia to oppose Western actions in Bosnia, this was also influenced significantly by a change in American policy toward interventionism in the Bosnian context, which gradually chipped away at the credibility of Russian liberal approaches in favour of more "nationalist" approaches. The third chapter takes a more bottom-up approach

to Russian policy by examining IFOR's success in building relations between Russian and American peacekeepers. This chapter argues that while IFOR built positive relationships, on its own this was not enough to dissipate fundamental suspicions, misunderstandings, and issues between Russia and the West that led to worsening relations in the long term, even if some cooperation and positive feelings continued for some years afterwards. The population samples involved were too small and too distant from the levers of power. Alongside Bosnia, events in Croatia are occasionally discussed as they often have a direct bearing on this paper's topic.

Through analyzing Russian policy in this period, this paper aims to provide context to current Russia-West relations and Russian President Vladimir Putin's aggressive and revisionist actions. While not receiving as much attention as other topics, the Yugoslav conflicts are important events in post-Soviet Russian international relations and security policies. The Bosnian War fueled mutual suspicion and distrust in both Russia and the West, was the first major security crisis involving post-Soviet Russia and the Western powers, and it was when post-Soviet Russia first came into opposition to American interests. In an interview with American journalist Tucker Carlson in 2024, Putin used NATO's interventions in Yugoslavia to justify his suspicions of the West and his invasion of Ukraine. Putin claims that:

> "It was the United States that let the genie out of the bottle. Moreover, when Russia protested and expressed its resentment, what was said? The UN Charter and international law have become obsolete. Now, everyone invokes international law, but at that time they started saying that everything was outdated, everything had to be changed."[12]

By studying the Bosnian War, we can understand why Russia began to assume the position it has in the world today.

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[12] Tucker Carlson, "Exclusive: Tucker Carlson Interviews Vladimir Putin," *YouTube*, 29:58-30:20, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fOCWBhuDdDo> (February 8, 2024).

2: Internationalism for the Nation's Sake: The Nationalist Aspects of Russian Liberal Foreign Policy, 1992-1994

From 1992 to 1994, Russian foreign policy was considered "liberal internationalist" as it supposedly put international cooperation before Russian national interests. In reality, Russian cooperation was motivated just as much by "realist" nationalism as liberal values. Many of Russia's interests were the same "nationalist" ones that would appear later. As Yugoslavia was disintegrating, Russia was still recovering from the USSR's collapse. Therefore, when the war began, Russia was somewhat hands off, but its pursuit of Russian national interests through international cooperation began to emerge. Most important was regaining Russia's great power status, particularly in Eastern Europe and the former USSR, including the Balkans. This was to be achieved through cooperating with the international community, allowing Russia to gain prestige, be accepted as a "normal great power," and justify a sphere of influence over the former USSR and Eastern Europe, all "needed" for a national revival. Russia also aimed to keep the Balkans as a buffer from the West and free of Western influence. This included a consistent hesitancy or resistance toward "anti-Serb" military interventions and preferring the UN and Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe (CSCE) as organisations for crisis resolution over NATO. Both positions are often associated with Russian nationalist-realist policies. This was pursued relatively easily until 1994 as few countries were considering intervention. While Russia often pressured the Serbs, it still reserved some sympathy for the Serbs and encouraged outside powers to be "neutral" in alignment with Russian nationalists and non-interventionism. When Russian parliamentary opinion in the Duma caught up to the Yugoslav crisis, Yeltsin's opponents began using Russia's lack of "support" for Serbs to delegitimise his presidency. In

response, there was a change in rhetoric among Russian officials, but no fundamental changes in objectives or means. When the Russian opposition was neutralised in late 1993, foreign policy experienced a liberal shift, but this was limited and brief. While Russia's nationalist approach was influenced by domestic politics, it was not defined by it.

While Russian politicians in the early 1990s were focused on domestic reforms and there was little reason for Russia to be seriously interested in the distant and geostrategically unimportant former Yugoslavia, Russia still began to involve itself in Yugoslav crisis by supporting the Yugoslav republics aiming to secede.[13] This culminated in Russia's recognition of Slovenia's, Croatia's, and Bosnia's independence in 1992.[14] While Headley argues that this was done simply to support international law, it also contributed to Russian national interests.[15] By signaling its alignment with much of Western Europe, Russian officials expected to gain Western support. Not only did Russia need European investment in its economy, but some were worried that a *cordon sanitaire* – a buffer of pro-Western countries in Eastern Europe preventing the spread of Russian influence – would be created if Russia did not cooperate.[16] If this happened, it was believed that Russia would be pushed out of its "traditional" sphere of influence and kept weak, preventing Russia's claim to be a regional, let alone great power. These worries and the

[13] Edemskii, "Russian Perspectives," 33.
[14] Russian Federation, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Speeches of Sergey Yastrzhembskogo, April and June 1992, in Elena Gus′kova, *The Yugoslav Crisis and Russia: Documents, Facts, Commentary, 1990-1993 [Yugoslavskiy krizis i rossii: dokumenty, fakty, kommentarii, 1991-1993]* (Moscow: Foundation for Yugoslav Research and Coperation "Slavic Chroncile," 1993), 226, 229.
[15] Headley, "The Russian Federation and the Conflicts in Former Yugoslavia," 64.
[16] "Cordon Sanataire from the Baltic to the Black Sea may Emerge Between Russia and Europe [Sanitarniy bar'yer ot baltii do chernogo morya mozhet vozniknut' mezhdu rossiyey i zapadnoi evropoi]," *Nezavisimaya gazeta*, <https://yeltsin.ru/day-by-day/1992/02/13/#issue904> (1992); Andrei Kozyrev, "Russia: A Chance for Survival," *Foreign Affairs*, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/russia-fsu/1992-03-01/russia-chance-survival> (March 1992); Edemskii, "Russian Perspectives," 33.

desire to get the West to allow Russia to have a sphere of influence motivated almost every act of cooperation coming from Russia hereafter.

Yeltsin's domestic political position also played a role. He generally supported self determination in the USSR, and Milošević previously backed Yeltsin's nationalist opponents. Yeltsin's decision was initially accepted, but later became a controversial issue.[17] Russian nationalists argued that it demonstrated that Russia was failing to be "impartial" to Belgrade and that Russia was selling out a "Slavic brother" to the West. Facing this criticism, liberals who had previously supported Bosnia's recognition began to state that it was "hasty" as Bosnia did not yet control the territory it claimed.[18] Some, however, later justified not putting all support behind Belgrade by using pan-Slavic rhetoric in support of Slovenia, Croatia, and Bosnia, even if this did not neatly fit 19th-century notions of Orthodox Christian pan-Slavism that this was based on.[19]

Nevertheless, Russia was not entirely abandoning the Serbs for the West, but aimed for a "balanced" approach. There was a degree of hesitancy with these actions as Russian officials wanted to preserve Russian influence in Serbia and Montenegro, avoid isolating the Serbs, and avoid involving Russia too closely with the Croats and Bosnjaks. Russian officials emphasized the necessity of secession, but also the inalienable rights Serbian minorities still possessed in the new Croatian and Bosnian states. According to Russia, no faction was justified to use force to achieve their goals, and negotiation through the CSCE's framework was encouraged. This was

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[17] Cohen, "Russia and the Balkans," 822-823.
[18] Russian Federation, Supreme Soviet of the Russian Federation, Transcript of the Meeting on the Yugoslav Question, June 1992, in Gus′kova, *The Yugoslav Crisis and Russia*, 90-92; Headley, "The Russian Federation and the Conflicts in Former Yugoslavia," 66-67.
[19] Vitaly Churkin, "Moskovskim novostyam," March 1993, in Gus′kova, *The Yugoslav Crisis and Russia*, 336.

all communicated to Belgrade by Moscow before any action was taken.[20] These "balanced" positions supported Russian nationalist interests of supporting their "historical" allies and keeping NATO out, while avoiding a bad start to Russia-West relations. The hesitancy to "abandon" the Yugoslav state was also not in opposition to the international community as France and the UK were similarly hesitant.

Similar nationalist motivations appeared behind what has been called "the height of Moscow's pro-Western foreign policy" – Russia's participation in UNPROFOR, a UN peacekeeping mission first deployed in Croatia.[21] While Russia preferred a CSCE peacekeeping mission, it voted for UN Security Council (UNSC) Resolution 743 in February 1992 anyway, creating UNPROFOR.[22] Russia initially contributed 900 soldiers to this mission, despite fears in the Russian Ministry of Defence of Westernising Russian peacekeepers through contacts with Western peacekeepers.[23] While Russia did not oppose Western participation – which some use as evidence that Russia was fully liberal – it was firmly opposed to any operation involving NATO or being undertaken unilaterally.[24] If this happened, it was feared that the USA or NATO, still seen as Cold War threats to a certain degree, would extend influence into a region Russia hoped to keep as a "neutral" buffer. Some worried that even the UN mission could set a precedent for

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[20] Andrei Kozyrev, *The Firebird: The Elusive Fate of Russian Democracy* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2018), 118; Russian Federation, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Statement, April 1992, in Gus′kova, *The Yugoslav Crisis and Russia*, 69-70; Edemskii, "Russian Perspectives," 33-34.
[21] Surovell, "The Grand Deception," 286.
[22]Andrei Kozyrev, Statement at the Meeting of the CSCE, January 1992, in Gus′kova, *The Yugoslav Crisis and Russia*, 68; United Nations Organisation, United Nations Security Council, Resolution 743, February 1992.
[23] Elena Gus′kova, "Russian Battalions in Croatia, BiH and Kosovo as a Factor of Objectivity in the Activities of Peacekeeping Forces in the Territory of the Former Yugoslavia [Russkiye batal'ony v Khorvatii, BiG i Kosovo kak faktor ob"yektivnosti v deyatel'nosti mirotvorcheskikh sil na territorii byvshey Yugoslavii]," In *Together in a Century of Conflicts. Russia and Serbia in the 20th Century [Vmeste v stoletii konfliktov: Rossiya is Serbiya v XX veke]*, ed. Konstantin Nikiforov et al (Moscow: Inslav, 2016), 365-366; Headley, "The Russian Federation and the Conflicts in Former Yugoslavia," 61.
[24] Transcript of the Meeting on the Yugoslav Question, June 1992, in Gus′kova, *The Yugoslav Crisis and Russia*, 87.

NATO intervention and interference in the former USSR.[25] Despite these fears, Foreign Minister Andrei Kozyrev was open to discussing UNPROFOR using force to deliver humanitarian aid, ensure the safety of the peacekeepers, and protect minorities, or even to force a ceasefire.[26] Supporting UNPROFOR had other benefits. Besides strengthening Russia-West relations, it also offered a way to influence regional events and countries.[27]

Yeltsin's government came under criticism for the liberal aspects of its policies after it voted for Resolution 757 in May 1992, imposing sanctions on Yugoslavia.[28] Some Russian nationalists went so far as to call this "religious genocide" against Orthodox Christians.[29] Russia initially rejected imposing sanctions as it was hoped a political settlement could be reached, and that the Serbs would not need to be coerced or isolated. It was believed that Russia was in a special position for mediating a political settlement due to its "historical" and ethnic links to the region and because Russia ostensibly did not rely on threats to achieve its objectives. In the eyes of Russian officials, Russia had a special role in the region and deserved an equal or leading voice in regional crisis response.[30] Nevertheless, Russia ended up supporting sanctions mainly as Belgrade had not been heeding international or Russian suggestions and demands that the Serbs restrain from using force in Croatia and Bosnia.[31] Writing in June 1992, Kozyrev argued that

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[25] Headley, "The Russian Federation and the Conflicts in Former Yugoslavia," 62.
[26] Transcript of the Meeting on the Yugoslav Question, June 1992 and Russian Federation, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Statement, August 1992, in Gus′kova, *The Yugoslav Crisis and Russia*, 84-85, 91, 119.
[27] Anthony Kellett, "Soviet and Russian peacekeeping 1948–1998: Historical overview and assessment," *The Journal of Slavic Military Studies* 1 (2007): 9; Pavel Baev, *The Russian Army in a Time of Troubles*, (Thousand Oaks: SAGE Publications, 1996), 157.
[28] United Nations Organisation, United Nations Security Council, Resolution 757, May 1992.
[29] Russian Federation, Supreme Soviet of the Russian Federation, Transcript of the Chair of the Committee of International Affairs and Foreign Economic Relation's Press Conference, April 1993, in Gus′kova, *The Yugoslav Crisis and Russia*, 288.
[30] Russian Federation, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Statement from the Minister for Foreign Affairs, June 1992 and Andrei Kozyrev, "On which side is Russia in the Yugoslav Conflict? [Na ch'ei storone rossiya v yugoslavskom konflikte], *Izvestia* (June 1992), in Gus′kova, *The Yugoslav Crisis and Russia*, 77-78, 342; Headley, "The Russian Federation and the Conflicts in Former Yugoslavia," 77.
[31] United Nations Organisation, United Nations Security Council, 3082nd Meeting, May 1992.

Russia had to support sanctions as the Serbs ignored "the advice of, in the words of the Yugoslav press itself, 'friendly Great Russia,' the 'Russian world' [*russkiy mir*]."[32] Russia also supported sanctions as the Serbs held the "lion's share" of responsibility in stoking the conflict, even if Russian officials did not believe they were solely responsible.[33] As such, Russia was executing its responsibility as a great power in upholding international law, something closely associated with a liberal foreign policy.[34] This was also in pursuit of the national objective of regaining great power status, however. Kozyrev believed that if Russia supported the Serbs, its regional and global position would be weakened and Russia would be isolated.[35]

Even while criticizing the Serbs, Russian officials still emphasised Russia's historical ties to Serbia and claimed that "true friends must treat each other fairly, without double standards." A way out was also offered to the Serbs by offering to ease sanctions if they deescalated the conflict. This was likely partly an effort to appease Russian nationalists, but was also likely motivated by Yugoslavia being a potential market for Russian exports, particularly for the arms industry, which was tied to Russia's national revival. In response to criticism, Kozyrev also began to explicitly link patriotism to adherence with international norms, particularly those of the CSCE.[36]

Several scholars have argued that due to the sanctions debate in the Duma, Russian policy increasingly became nationalist. The intensity of this backlash was not common for Russian nationalists since 1991, and actively demonstrating that Russia was pursuing its national

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[32] Kozyrev, "On which side is Russia in the Yugoslav Conflict? in Gus′kova, *The Yugoslav Crisis and Russia*, 342.
[33] Transcript of the Meeting on the Yugoslav Question, June 1992, in Gus′kova, *The Yugoslav Crisis and Russia*, 89.
[34] Cohen, "Russia and the Balkans," 830.
[35] Headley, "The Russian Federation and the Conflicts in Former Yugoslavia," 79-80.
[36] Statement from the Minister for Foreign Affairs, June 1992, in Gus′kova, *The Yugoslav Crisis and Russia*, 77-78; Kozyrev, *The Firebird*, 196.

interests did become more important. Indeed, Russian officials openly mentioned the pressure created the by the nationalist opposition.[37] However, this did not necessarily indicate a change in objectives or policy. Russia had already been pursuing its own interests – even if it did not appear so to critics – and Russia did not truly come into conflict with the West until later. Headley argues that at this point great power rights rather than responsibilities became more prominent, but both were already important in Russian policy. For example, Russia already assumed it had a right to influence some countries (e.g., Serbia) but also had the responsibility to be impartial and support humanitarian efforts. Headley also points to Russia "beginning" to oppose military intervention by NATO, even though Russia was already strongly opposed to this possibility.[38] As Andrei Edemskii argues, along with signaling Russia's desire to be part of a great power concert, voting for sanctions was a way to avoid military intervention.[39] Paul Goble points to Russia "seeking modifications" in UN resolutions and attempting to weaken sanctions as evidence of Russia having a "new" position.[40] The revisions Goble is likely mentioning – those in Resolution 777 that avoided Yugoslavia's ejection from the UN – were not entirely new positions either as Russia already was already hesitant about isolating the Yugoslav state.[41] After the nationalist backlash, Russia also voted for a no-fly zone over Bosnia disproportionately affecting the Serbs, some harsher sanctions on Yugoslavia, and proposed plans to pressure the Serbs to cooperate with the USA.[42] As Thorun also shows, other Russian positions critical of

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[37] Headley, "The Russian Federation and the Conflicts in Former Yugoslavia," 99, 105; Michael Andersen, "Russia and the Former Yugoslavia," In *Russia and Europe: Conflict or Cooperation?*, ed. Mark Webber (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2000), 186-187; Simic, "Russia and the Conflicts in the Former Yugoslavia," 103.
[38] Headley, "The Russian Federation and the Conflicts in Former Yugoslavia," 99, 104.
[39] Edemskii, "Russian Perspectives," 35.
[40] Paul Goble, "Dangerous Liaisons: Moscow, the Former Yugoslavia, and the West," In *The World and Yugoslavia's Wars*, ed. Richard Ullman (New York City: Council on Foreign Relations, 1998), 191.
[41] United Nations Organisation, United Nations Security Council. 3116th Meeting, September 1992; Andersen, "Russia and the Former Yugoslavia," 186.
[42] United Nations Organisation, United Nations Security Council, Resolution 781, October 1992; Edemskii, "Russian Perspectives," 38; Nikiforov, "Russian Foreign Policy and the Balkans in the 1990s," 239-240.

Croatia or opposing lifting sanctions affecting Bosnjaks that may appear to have been "independent“ were still in line with many in the international community.[43] Nevertheless, Russia did begin to warm up to the Serbs. This was not only due to the nationalist backlash, but also Milošević's apparent legitimisation by "democratic" elections in December 1992 and Belgrade's growing receptiveness to Russian interests.[44] While Russia had not suddenly become nationalist in policy and interests, nationalist aspects in Russian policy were indeed becoming more explicit and active, particularly in domestic rhetoric.

Eventually, the desire of some nationalists to confront the West would begin to come to fruition as American policy started to shift during discussions over the Vance-Owen Peace Plan. The Vance-Owen plan was announced by the UN and European Community in January 1993. It planned to maintain Bosnia as a sovereign state divided along ethnic lines into ten cantons, allowing the Bosnian Serbs to keep 70% of the land they had occupied with force.[45] Some in Russia were hesitant as they considered the plan unfair to Serbs, but once it was clear that Bosnjaks and Croats also had reservations about the plan, it was widely accepted in Russia for being "even handed."[46] The plan was also based on the principles of the August 1992 London Conference, which rejected military intervention and encouraged trade, calming worries about further sanctions and Western "encroachment."[47] By supporting the Vance-Owen plan, Russia could therefore pursue its national interests while cooperating with the West.

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[43] Thorun, *Explaining Change in Russian Foreign Policy*, 87.
[44] Edemskii, "Russian Perspectives," 39.
[45] United Nations Organisation, United Nations Security Council, Agreement on Interim Arrangements (Vance-Owen Plan), March 1993.
[46] Kozyrev, *The Fire Bird*, 198.
[47] International Conference on the Former Yugoslavia, Statement on Bosnia, August 1992; Headley, "The Russian Federation and the Conflicts in Former Yugoslavia," 128-129.

The plan soon ran into issues, however. Recently elected American President Bill Clinton rejected it for appeasing the Serbs, rewarding ethnic cleansing, and offering no long-term solution. Instead, Clinton supported "lift and strike:" lifting the arms embargo placed on the region by the UN disproportionately affecting Croats and Bosnjaks and using airstrikes to force the Serbs into negotiation. This was unpopular among European states, including Russia, which wished to avoid escalation and continue supporting the Vance-Owen plan.[48] Russia was especially concerned given worries of American influence in the region. When Clinton began to push for lift and strike, Yeltsin stated that Russia would not "patronize those who put themselves in opposition to the international community."[49] While Russia was pursuing its national interests, this was still portrayed as (and indeed was) in line with the international community.

As the Bosnian Serbs also rejected the Vance-Owen plan, some Russian officials supported using force to impose peace via UNPROFOR, but this was not common, and these individuals still rejected NATO's involvement. If this were to be pursued, most Russian officials preferred it to be executed by the UN or CSCE as Russia was a member of both and could exercise some control over operations. However, neither organisation could realistically intervene in such a manner. The best option for Russian officials was then not having any military intervention take place. Besides fearing Western encroachment, Russia was also worried about losing an opportunity to regain great power status.[50] By pursuing political solutions, Russia hoped for a diplomatic breakthrough that would end the conflict without military

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[48] Mike Bowker, "The Wars in Yugoslavia: Russia and the International Community," *Europe-Asia Studies* 50 (1998): 1250.
[49] "Policy of Russia in the Balkans [Politika rossii na balkanakh]," *Kommersant*, <https://www.kommersant.ru/doc/46417> (April 1993).
[50] Vladimir Petrovskiy, *Literaturnoi gazeta*, February 1993, in Gus′kova, *The Yugoslav Crisis and Russia*, 321; Headley, "The Russian Federation and the Conflicts in Former Yugoslavia," 121; Daniel Sneider, "Russia Cautiously Commits to Balkan Peacekeeping," *Christian Science Monitor*, <https://www.csmonitor.com/1993/0506/06061.html> (May 1993).

intervention. According to this view, Russia's reputation would then receive a significant boost for achieving a ceasefire, and Russia would have extended influence in the region to keep the West out.

A related issue was the extension of UNPROFOR into Bosnia to implement the Vance-Owen plan. Russia largely supported this and offered more Russian soldiers as peacekeepers, mainly to prevent UNPROFOR from becoming dominated by NATO. This was also encouraged by an emerging view in Russia that Russia was repeatedly ignored by the West. Russia's perceived treatment by the West was particularly insulting for the Russians.[51] Not only was it considered bad etiquette to ignore other great powers, but many Russian officials also thought their approach was more "competent" than the USA's as it avoided complicating the crisis or the West getting "dizzy with success" and militarising. It was thought that Russia could avoid this treatment by participating in peacekeeping operations more actively. Russia still aimed to avoid confrontation with the West and its isolating and delegitimising effects, however.[52]

To prevent a creeping NATO monopoly over UNPROFOR, Russia insisted that the operation had strict rules of engagement. As Headley points out, these rules inadvertently discouraged Russian involvement as they made it difficult for peacekeepers to respond to threats or coerce factions threatening peacekeepers. This strengthened Russia's preference to have no peacekeeping force in Bosnia, but as it was believed that Russia had to show its credentials as a liberal great power many Russian officials went along with this decision anyway.[53] Russia also

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[51] Headley, "The Russian Federation and the Conflicts in Former Yugoslavia," 121; Justin Burke, "Domestic Opposition Leads Russia to Take Assertive UN Stance," *Christian Science Monitor*, <https://www.csmonitor.com/1993/0128/28061.html> (January 1993).
[52] Headley, "The Russian Federation and the Conflicts in Former Yugoslavia," 121; Russian Federation, Supreme Soviet of the Russian Federation, Transcript of Meeting, April 1993, Sergey Yastrzhmbskogo, Transcript of Press Conference, July 1992, and Vitaly Churkin, Transcript of Press Conference, April 1993 in Gus′kova, *The Yugoslav Crisis and Russia*, 191, 230, 263-264.
[53] Headley, "The Russian Federation and the Conflicts in Former Yugoslavia," 123.

accepted the possibility of NATO interventions, but only if they were approved first by the UN Secretary-General.[54] The Bosnian Serbs eventually agreed to the Vance-Owen plan, but if they reneged and refused to implement the plan, it was likely that force would have to be used in some capacity. Kozyrev did not rule out doing this alongside the USA, even if it was unpopular with others in the Russian government.[55] This, however, was likely simply rhetoric intended to woo the USA and American public opinion, especially considering that Kozyrev soon reverted to opposing American intervention.

Despite restrictions on NATO's involvement, UNPROFOR's extension into Bosnia was still resisted by Russian nationalists. This was due to worries about it being used as a Western tool against the Serbs and that the expansion of sanctions were in the same UNSC resolution. For a moment after the 1993 Constitutional crisis in Moscow, during which Yeltsin dissolved the Duma, Russian liberals were given a free hand as the nationalist opposition was liquidated. With this, Russia swiftly voted for extending UNPROFOR's mandate into Bosnia despite the sanctions being included. While this was a change from Russia's previous position, the Russian ambassador to Croatia denied that this was a part of a new "pro-Croat" policy. Indeed, Kozyrev continued to reject any military intervention and UNPROFOR had the same restrictions, demonstrating that this shift was limited. It was also brief, with Russian nationalists soon making gains in the December 1993 elections. The Russian state was again pressured to explicitly show its nationalist credentials.[56] Kozyrev nonetheless continued to argue that there was no alternative to partnership with the West based on liberal values, but that this did "not mean refusal of a hard,

[54] United Nations Organisation, United Nations Security Council, Resolution 836, June 1993.
[55] Sneider, "Russia Cautiously Commits to Balkan Peacekeeping."
[56] Headley, "The Russian Federation and the Conflicts in Former Yugoslavia," 139; Andersen, "Russia and the Former Yugoslavia," 187; Cohen, "Russia and the Balkans," 834-835.

even aggressive policy of defending one's own national interests" including competition and disputes.[57] Navigating the Vance-Owen plan and UNPROFOR's expansion was difficult for Russia as it was aiming both to cooperate with the West and pursue its own national interests. Russia tended to prioritise its national interests where it could, but eventually opted for the second-best option of a restricted UNPROFOR to support the Vance-Owen plan to avoid confrontation with the West.

While Russian policy between 1992 and 1993 toward the Bosnian war certainly was liberal and internationalist in that it emphasized cooperation with the West, it also contained nationalist aspects. This was seen early on with Russia's recognition of the new ex-Yugoslav states, done to advance cooperation with the West, but also to avoid the West pushing Russia out of its "traditional" sphere of influence. Russia also did not favour the West over the Serbs – who were the more "rogue" actors – but attempted to pursue an early version of a "balanced" policy later pushed for by nationalists. In establishing UNPROFOR, Russia was mainly interested in using it to keep NATO from interfering in the Balkans or setting a precedent for further interference in Russia's neighbourhood. While the Russian state was criticised by Russian nationalists for its support of sanctions, this policy also had nationalist influences as it was motivated in part by the Serbs refusing to heed to Russian demands and to avoid NATO intervention. Russia also continued to emphasize ties with the Serbs and offered ways out as part of a "balanced" policy. Many say the Duma debates over this caused a shift in Russian policy toward nationalism, but this change was largely rhetorical. Continuing its focus on national

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[57] Andrei Kozyrev, "The Strategy of Partnership [Strategiya partnestva]," *Mezhdunarodnaya Zhizn'* 5 (1994), Reproduced in Tatiana Shakleina et al, *Foreign Policy and National Security of Contemporary Russia, 1991-2002: Volume 1 [Vneshnyaya politka i bezopasnost' sovremennoy rossii, 1991-2002: tom perviy]* (Moscow: Moscow State Institute of International Relations, 2002), 165, 185; Kozyrev, "The Lagging Partnership," *Foreign Affairs*, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/russian-federation/1994-05-01/lagging-partnership?utm> (May 1994).

interests, Russia supported the Vance-Owen plan largely as it supported key national interests. Issues and contradictions surfaced in implementing this plan, however, but Russia attempted to maximise the benefit to its interests while avoiding conflict with the West. Russian policy in the first half of the Bosnian War cannot be said to have experienced a distinct "liberal internationalist" phase. Russia consistently pursued the same set of national interests that were not based in mutual benefit and were associated with nationalists. Russia was still liberal – cooperation was important and was one Russian interest – but many Russian interests were those often associated with Russian nationalists. Moreover, this interest in cooperation, including supporting the international system, continued, even though many scholars argue there was a nationalist turn that made Russia more confrontational. This has been credited with worsening Russia-West relations. However, it was not necessarily that Russia changed, but that the West was becoming more interventionist that set off the process. Both phenomena began to be seen in the Sarajevo Crisis in February 1994, when Russia first truly "confronted" Western powers.

3: "To Put Out a Fire by Fuel:" Russia's Increasing Suspicions of the West, 1994-1995

Prior to 1994, Russian cooperation with the West, particularly the USA, did not appear to contradict Russian national interests. However, over the next two years, this began to change and Russian officials grew suspicious of the West. This has been attributed to Russian policy experiencing a "nationalist shift" resulting from internal debates. Headley argues that the 1994 Sarajevo Crisis in particular was the turning point that saw a shift in Russia toward confrontation

with the West and the primacy of national interests over cooperation.[58] It is true that the West's response to the crisis shocked Russia, but it was not a clear "turning point." As discussed in the last chapter, nationalism was already a powerful ideological force. Additionally, while Russian policy was influenced by nationalist ideologies, liberalism remained significant. Russia's suspicion of the West not only came from worries about its national interests being undermined, but also the undercutting of Russia's view of what the international system and law was supposed to prevent ("unilateralism" and military interventions) and uphold ("balanced" approaches). The shift toward Russian suspicion of the West happened gradually and cannot be attributed to one event. Russian domestic politics also did not have domineering influence over policy – there needed to be a reason for "nationalist" foreign policy to gain credibility in the first place. The new unipolar role the USA was assuming as a "global policeman," was an important reason relations deteriorated, although preexisting Russian national interests were important as well. National interests needed to be prioritised before cooperation for relations to deteriorate, but relations also had to deteriorate for cooperation to lose priority. Both appear to have happened simultaneously. Russia already gave importance to national interests, but this was initially compatible with cooperation. When cooperation with the West became less compatible with Russian national interests, Russia began losing interest in liberal cooperation, and nationalist approaches were encouraged further. As national interests were increasingly prioritised, the gap between Russian and Western approaches widened, making cooperation less viable, and bringing us to the beginning of the rough "cycle." Even so, there were periods of

[58] James Headley, "Sarajevo, February 1994: the first Russia-NATO crisis of the post-Cold War era," *Review of International Studies* 29 (2003): 209.

warming relations after crises, showing that this "cyclic" framework was not an inevitable process, and that liberal cooperation continued to play a role.

In February 1994, a (now known to be) Serbian artillery shell exploded in the Markale market in Sarajevo, killing 68 and wounding 144 civilians. In response, UN Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali authorised NATO to use force before he consulted the UNSC. NATO subsequently demanded that the Serbs move heavy weapons behind a 20-kilometer exclusion zone around Sarajevo or face NATO airstrikes.[59] This presented Russia with an opportunity to derail NATO's first attempt at out-of-area operations and to discredit the alliance. This did not mean that Russia and NATO were entirely at odds; Russia's main disagreement with NATO was not over objectives, but the means to achieve them. Russian officials expressed outrage at the shelling, and supported an "objective investigation," but also supported the creation of an exclusion zone.[60] Russian officials believed in using negotiation before force to respect the neutrality of the UN and ensure that UNPRFOR peacekeepers would not face retaliatory attacks, a worry many outside Russia had as well.[61] It was also believed that any action should be taken through the UN as the established organisation for multilateral action.[62] One of Russia's main criticisms was that Russia was not consulted through the UN before NATO acted.[63] According to

[59] North Atlantic Treaty Organisation, North Atlantic Council, Decisions taken at the Meeting of the North Atlantic Council in Permanent Session 1, February 1994.
[60] United Nations Organisation, United Nations Security Council, Statement by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, February 1994; Headley, "The Russian Federation and the Conflicts in Former Yugoslavia," 158.
[61] Bowker, "The Wars in Yugoslavia," 1232.
[62] Headley, "The Russian Federation and the Conflicts in Former Yugoslavia," 159; United Nations Organisation, Statement by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, February 1994.
[63] "Mr. Major's Joint Press Conference in Moscow," *The Rt. Hon. Sir John Major KG CH*, <https://johnmajorarchive.org.uk/1994/02/15/mr-majors-joint-press-conference-in-moscow-15-february-1994/> (February 1994).

Kozyrev, this not only threatened Russian interests, but the "mutual benefit" of international cooperation too.[64]

While Russia also criticised NATO's ultimatum for being "unfair" to the Serbs – it was not yet determined who caused the explosion – instead of trying to prevent the exclusion zone, the Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Vitaly Churkin was dispatched to Bosnia to persuade the Serbs to agree to it. This was rushed as Russia was caught off guard by what appeared to be a sudden change in Western policy, but within days Churkin got the Serbs to agree to the exclusion zone and allow both Sarajevo and the exclusion zone to have an UNPROFOR presence, including 400 Russian peacekeepers.[65] This was considered a great diplomatic victory in Russia. Many believed it showed that Russia was a great power, and the newspaper *Kommersant* even said that Yeltsin and Kozyrev had "saved the world." Hope for future cooperation with the West also increased.[66] It was believed that Russia proved itself a capable and equal partner as it not only helped deescalate the conflict but had also "saved" NATO from "applying pressure without policy" and failing.[67] Churkin told reporters that Sarajevo could become "the Elbe of the 1990s where the Russians and Americans, along with others, stand side by side."[68] Several Western officials publicly expressed gratitude and hopes about future cooperation, but gave more credit to NATO's ultimatum than Russian negotiations.[69] The Sarajevo Crisis, then, had not set Russia and the West on course to confrontation, nor had it led to more "nationalist" Russian policies.

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[64]Kozyrev, "The Lagging Partnership."
[65] Julia Preston, "Move Gives Russia a Leading Sarajevo Role," *Washington Post*, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/politics/1994/02/18/move-gives-russia-a-leading-sarajevo-role/c84addf3-14ab-474d-9ad2-2b62c2bb1121/?utm> (February 1994).
[66] "Russia Sends Reinforcements to Bosnia [Rossiya posylayet podkrepleniye v bosniyu]," *Kommersant*, <https://www.kommersant.ru/doc/72231> (February 1994).
[67] Baev, *The Russian Army in a Time of Troubles*, 158
[68] Quoted in Anderson, "Russia and the Former Yugoslavia," 189.
[69] Preston, "Move Gives Russia a Leading Sarajevo Role;" Headley, "The Russian Federation and the Conflicts in Former Yugoslavia," 175.

However, this event further generated suspicion among some in Russia about NATO's intentions and encouraged Russia to be more active in its approach and defending interests, which was noticed in the West with concern.

Russia and the West took different lessons from the crisis. Russia reapplied negotiation in March 1994 to convince the Serbs to lift a blockade of the town of Tuzla and NATO believed that threats would get the Serbs to back down in future crises. This became relevant again in April 1994 as the Serbs besieged Goražde and NATO conducted airstrikes, which were criticised by Russia. In response, Churkin began negotiations with the Serbs again.[70] The Bosnian Serbs promised Churkin that the siege would end, Serbian forces would pull back, and 150 UN personnel taken hostage would be released. This time, however, the Serbs reneged on all their promises.[71] This incensed Churkin, who stated that Serbs had "fallen ill with the madness of war," that Russia was "not a banana republic" to be controlled by them but a great power deserving respect, and that all contacts with Bosnian Serbs should be cut.[72] Churkin was frustrated that the less powerful Bosnian Serbs were not abiding by Russia's wishes and even humiliated and undermined Russia. According to Kozyrev, Churkin's remarks were passed to Yeltsin with a "negative interpretation," causing Yeltsin to question the validity of such statements, but the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) accepted Churkin's view and convinced Yeltsin of its value. When NATO later threatened to strike Serbian positions again, Yeltsin only

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[70] United Nations Organisation, United Nations Security Council, Letter to the Secretary-General from the Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, April 1994; Viktor Zamyatin, "The Situation in the former Yugoslavia [Situatsiya v eks-yugoslavii]," *Kommersant*, <https://www.kommersant.ru/doc/76337?utm> (April 1994).

[71] Headley, "The Russian Federation and the Conflicts in Former Yugoslavia," 180.

[72] Sonni Efron, "The Bosnia Dilemma: Yeltsin Warns Serbs to Stop Attacks : Russia: The Kremlin leader's sharply worded statement shows shift in attitude toward longtime allies," *Los Angeles Times*, <https://www.latimes.com/archives/la-xpm-1994-04-20-mn-48234-story.html> (April 1994); Maksim Sokolov, "Political Vector [Politicheskiy vektor]," *Kommersant*, <https://www.kommersant.ru/doc/9810?utm > (April 1994); Andrew Marshall and Tony Barber. "Russia Joins West in Condemning Serbs," *Independent*, <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/russia-joins-west-in-condemning-serbs-1370960.html> (April 1994).

criticised the Serbs for bringing it upon themselves, although Russia did not actively support the airstrikes. Kozyrev considered these airstrikes regrettable and rejected plans for wider intervention.[73] Some Russian politicians criticised the airstrikes, but this was minimal as the Serbs had embarrassed Russia and NATO airstrikes were limited.[74] In this crisis, Russia, while prioritising national interests, was for a period "cooperative" enough to permit something to which Russia was traditionally opposed. The alternative of bowing down to the Bosnian Serbs that humiliated Russia appeared to be worse for Russia's interests by harming both international coopearation and Russian prestige.

Russia and the West began to build off their common ground and deepened cooperation through the "Contact Group." The Contact Group was an informal group of states first assembled in April 1994, including Russia, the USA, the UK, Germany, and France.[75] However, cooperation began to be undermined due to disagreements on airstrikes. Russia ostensibly supported airstrikes to prevent the violation of agreements or to defend peacekeepers, but when NATO threatened airstrikes to protect UN "safe zones" from Serbian offensives, Russia began publicly expressing a suspicion that Bosnjak forces may have been illegally using the safe zones as cover. For Russia, this meant that singling out the Serbs was unjustified. Russia was concerned about NATO involving itself on the Bosnjak side, undermining the UN's primacy in conflict resolution – which allowed Russia some influence – and the UN's claim to impartiality.[76] On the other hand, the USA and some NATO members were increasingly disillusioned about the UN's ability to protect safe zones or end the war, and a focus on

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[73] Kozyrev, *The Fire Bird*, 266-267; Headley, "The Russian Federation and the Conflicts in Former Yugoslavia," 182-183.
[74] Bowker, "The Wars in Yugoslavia," 1252-1253.
[75] Bowker, "The Wars in Yugoslavia," 1253.
[76] United Nations Organisation, United Nations Security Council, 3462nd Meeting, November 1994; Headley, "The Russian Federation and the Conflicts in Former Yugoslavia," 185-186.

American unilateralism and NATO force became more prominent.[77] As divisions in the Contact Group widened, particularly between the USA and Russia, how long they could continue to cooperate was beginning to be questioned.

Despite these disagreements, the Contact Group agreed on a peace plan that would keep Bosnia and Hercegovina as one state divided into two entities – the Bosnjak-Croat Federation of Bosnia and Hercegovina with 51% of the land, and the Serbian Republika Srpska with 49%.[78] They also agreed on harsher sanctions on the Bosnian Serbs, although – likely due to Russian pressure – the Contact Group promised to be "equitable and balanced" for the Serbs.[79] However, the Bosnian Serbs refused to agree as they wanted full separation and occupied more land than they would receive.[80] How to implement the "agreement" became an important question, but the Contact Group was unable to formulate any implementation plan, suggesting strong disagreements among its members. Force was considered, but Russia declined to allow its use for imposing a peace plan. How to implement the plan could not be agreed, meaning no implementation plan was made as demonstrating international unity and avoiding the plan falling apart was considered more important by the Contact Group.[81] While the Contact Group's agreement on a peace plan is a significant demonstration of a desire to cooperate, it also indicated a deterioration of relations between Russia and the USA. The growing divide became especially critical as Russia, the USA, and NATO all considered their credibility as international

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[77] Anderson, "Russia and the Former Yugoslavia," 190.
[78] United Nations Organisation, United Nations Security Council, Letter to the Secretary-General from the Permanent Representatives of France, Germany, Russian Federation, United States of America and United Kingdom to the United Nations, September 1994.
[79] United Nations Organisation, United Nations Security Council, Resolution 942, September 1994; Bill Lamp, "Contact group relaunches old peace plan," *UPI*, <https://www.upi.com/Archives/1994/12/02/Contact-group-relaunches-old-peace-plan/8852786344400/> (December 1994).
[80] Nesho Djuric, "Bosnian Serb leader rejects new plans," *UPI*, <https://www.upi.com/Archives/1994/07/01/Bosnian-Serb-leader-rejects-new-maps/1380773035200/> (July 1994).
[81] William Perry, *My Journey at the Nuclear Brink* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2015), 119; Headley, "The Russian Federation and the Conflicts in Former Yugoslavia," 198-199.

actors to be threatened if they failed to achieve peace, encouraging a more active pursual of their respective approaches.

Divides were even more apparent during debates over a Rapid Reaction Force (RRF) set up by NATO to support UNPROFOR. The idea was first introduced in late May 1995 after UN peacekeepers had been taken hostage by Bosnian Serbs, and by June it was beginning to be assembled by Western states, before the UNSC voted on it.[82] Despite being intended to support UNPROFOR, Russia – with some justification – suspected that the RRF was really intended to take responsibility away from the UN, which was failing to deescalate the conflict.[83] Russia abstained from voting for UNSC Resolution 998, which formalised the RRF, and Russia insisted that UNPROFOR's mandate would not be impacted, the RRF remained under UN control, and that the RRF would not make the UN "a party to the conflict."[84] Russia promised not to obstruct the RRF and supported the general concept, but believed, in Kozyrev's words, that diplomatic methods "had not yet been exhausted."[85] In a June 1995 statement, the Russian MFA hinted at what it saw as the consequences of NATO intervention. The MFA said that "there are more and more indications of a real danger of sliding towards a widespread military confrontation ... The attempt to change decisions by force is causing a resurgence of the crisis and threatens to lead to great bloodshed."[86] With the suspicion that these debates created in Russia, some Russians began to more firmly believe that the West was losing interest in cooperation, that the West was going

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[82] United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, UK Parliament, House of Commons Hansard – Bosnia, May 1995.
[83] "OMRI Daily Digest," *Radio Free Europe*, <https://www.rferl.org/a/1140951.html> (June 1995).
[84] United Nations Organisation, United Nations Security Council, Resolution 998, June 1995; United Nations Organisation, United Nations Security Council, 3454th Meeting, November 1994; Headley, "The Russian Federation and the Conflicts in Former Yugoslavia," 207; Bowker, "The Wars in Yugoslavia," 1254.
[85] Quoted in Paul Gould, "Russia Opposes Military Moves in Bosnia," *UPI*, <https://www.upi.com/Archives/1995/07/21/Russia-opposes-military-moves-in-Bosnia/8179806299200/> (July 1995).
[86] United Nations Organisation, United Nations Security Council, Statement by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, June 1995.

to do whatever it could to pursue its own interests (to the detriment of Russia's interests), and that Russia was increasingly being sidelined. Russia did not oppose the RRF as vehemently as some nationalists would have preferred as it was not yet worth sidelining liberal values and entering diplomatic conflict with the West.

That liberal cooperation and values were *beginning* to be sidelined was seen during the Srebrenica Massacre in July 1995, when Serb forces killed thousands of Bosnjak civilians as part of efforts at ethnic cleansing. This was met with outrage in the West, and NATO soon launched punitive airstrikes. In Russia, there was little mention of the massacre. Instead, Russian officials criticised the airstrikes as "senseless" and "counterproductive."[87] Russia did criticise the Serbs for violating international law, but continued to emphasise its criticisms of the USA, NATO, and Bosnjak forces.[88] Russia's response (or lack thereof) to the Srebrenica Massacre was not necessarily because Russia was eager to support the Serbs, but because it had got caught up in suspicions of Western actions. Defending Russian interests against Western "expansionism" was starting to gain more emphasis at the cost of liberal humanitarian values and demonstrating international unity. This did not mean Russian liberalism had ceased to be influential, but it did indicate that relations with the West were deteriorating enough to encourage a more nationalist approach to foreign affairs. Srebrenica was also important for further legitimising the use of force in the West, widening the gap with Russia.

This sense of suspicion only worsened with Croatia's (counter)offensive against Croatian Serbs in August 1995 called *Operation Storm*. *Storm* has received a significant amount of criticism from Russian historian Elena Gus′kova, who argues that it was done in coordination

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[87] "OMRI Daily Digest," *Radio Free Europe*, <https://www.rferl.org/a/1140977.html> (July 1995).
[88] United Nations Organisation, United Nations Security Council, 3553rd Meeting, July 1995; "OMRI Daily Digest," (July 1995).

with NATO and the UN and targeted Russian peacekeepers.[89] The connections between *Storm* and the UN, or NATO actively helping with the operation, are unclear at best. NATO did not, however, attempt to stop the offensive. This was especially striking as *Storm* threatened the peace process, involved attacks on UN peacekeepers, violated UNSC resolutions, and displaced about 200,000 Serbian refugees.[90] From the perspective of some Russians, this "confirmed" that the West was self-interested and uninterested in cooperation.[91] As with the RRF, it also appeared the West was abandoning what Russia considered fundamental to the international system.

In August 1995, Serbian forces began advancing on several UN safe zones and shelling Sarajevo, prompting NATO to launch *Operation Deliberate Force*, a series of airstrikes intended to force the Bosnian Serbs to back down. This was done outside of UN control. As James Peterson argues, Russian policy combined with Russia's veto power in the UNSC inadvertently caused this by closing off the UN as a viable tool for pressuring the Bosnian Serbs when they committed acts of aggression.[92] Pavel Baev notes that there was also reason to suspect NATO was deliberately trying to undermine Russian influence and policy in the region. Even if unintentional, *Deliberate Force* undermined Russian influence as Russia could only "persuade the Serbs to make certain concessions only so far as 'punishment' could be prevented," according to Baev.[93]

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[89] Gus′kova, "Russian Battalions in Croatia, BiH and Kosovo as a Factor of Objectivity in the Activities of Peacekeeping Forces in the Territory of the Former Yugoslavia," 369.
[90] United Nations Organisation, United Nations Security Council, Letter to the Secretary-General from the Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, August 1995; *Croatia: Impunity for Abuses Committed during "Operation Storm,"* (Helsinki: Human Rights Watch, 1996), 2.
[91] Elena Gus′kova, "Politics of the UN and military actions of NATO in the territory of the former Yugoslavia in the 1990s [Politika OON i voyennyye deystviya NATO na territorii byvshey Yugoslavii v 90-ye gody XX v]," <http://guskova.ru/w/wars/ 2000-feb> (n.d.).
[92] James Peterson, *Russian-American Relations in the Post-Cold War World* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2017), 70.
[93] Baev, *The Russian Army in a Time of Troubles*, 158.

Deliberate Force also aroused Russian public opinion, especially following *Storm*, as there were worries in Russia that the Serbs in Bosnia would face ethnic cleansing. An RPG was even fired at the American embassy in Moscow by a Russian "protestor."[94] Yeltsin criticised the West for ignoring UN decisions, threatening to draw the world to war, and usurping "the role of both the judge and the bailiff."[95] Using pan-Slavic rhetoric, the MFA stated that Russia "cannot remain indifferent to the tragic fate of the children of our brother-Slavs."[96] However, Russia did not take any tangible actions to stop NATO. The Duma expected a confrontation with the West and some wanted Russia to withdraw from the Contact Group, but Kozyrev and Yeltsin filtered this out of Russian policy, with Yeltsin giving instructions to his government "to act within the bounds of international law, not to lapse into confrontation, but to argue for our interests through co-operation and partnership with the world around us."[97] Scholars such as Surovell have understood this "inaction" to mean that Russia did not actually disagree with *Deliberate Force*, and that the state's confrontational rhetoric was just to appease domestic nationalists.[98] This is questionable considering how deep-rooted and longstanding concerns about the West were. Also, liberal concerns about the international system appeared to be part of the reason for conflict as well as cooperation. Rather, Russia appears to have lacked the capabilities to do anything and was limited to vocal disagreement.

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[94] Jacob Kipp and Tarn Warren, "The Russian Separate Airborne Brigade – Peacekeeping in Bosnia-Herzegovina," in *Regional peacekeepers: The paradox of Russian peacekeeping*, ed. John Mackinlay and Peter Cross (Tokyo, New York City, and Paris: United Nations University Press, 2003), 43; Lee Hockstader, "American Embassy Struck by Grenade," *Washington Post*, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/politics/1995/09/14/american-embassy-struck-by-grenade/8ef57fd5-c5d4-43d6-a931-c215af437d7c/> (September 1995).
[95] United Nations Organisation, United Nations Security Council, Statement by the President of the Russian Federation, September 1995.
[96] Quoted in Headley, "The Russian Federation and the Conflicts in Former Yugoslavia," 221.
[97] Quoted in Headley, "The Russian Federation and the Conflicts in Former Yugoslavia," 227.
[98] Surovell, "The Grand Deception," 291.

Like previous events, *Deliberate Force* made Russia ever more suspicious of the West. Yeltsin stated in September 1995 that NATO's actions were "only the first sign of what could happen if that organisation expanded ... NATO is now showing what it is capable of," and that "when NATO comes right up to Russia's borders, one can count on there being two military blocs."[99] This view began to be relatively widespread, with Russian peacekeepers in Bosnia and Croatia also expressing deep suspicions of NATO.[100] Nevertheless, Russia and the West still had a brief warming after *Deliberate Force* and the airstrikes contributed to the Serbs eventually agreeing to begin peace talks. Some Russian officials suggested withdrawing from the Contact Group, but most in Russia and the West wanted to avoid excluding Russia from the peace process. The West wanted to repair relations to avoid pushing Russia away from liberalism, and Russia feared that if excluded it would become isolated and weak, lose an opportunity to prove its great power status, and lose influence in Balkan affairs.[101] With this renewed cooperation, the Contact Group moved ahead with organising peace talks in Dayton, Ohio. Eventually, these agreements were "successful" as all three parties – Croats, Serbs, and Bosnjaks – agreed to preserve the state of Bosnia and Hercegovina and divide it into a Serbian Republika Srpska and a Bosnjak-Croat Federation of Bosnia and Hercegovina.[102] With this agreement, the Bosnian War finally ended. Despite Russia wanting to demonstrate its importance, it played a minimal role in the Dayton Accords.

Throughout 1994 and 1995 Russia grew suspicious of the West and relations deteriorated. This was not a sudden event but happened gradually over the two years. Russian

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[99] Quoted in Headley, "The Russian Federation and the Conflicts in Former Yugoslavia," 221.
[100] Kipp and Warren, "The Russian Separate Airborne Brigade," 43-44.
[101] Kozyrev, *The Fire Bird*, 312; Headley, "The Russian Federation and the Conflicts in Former Yugoslavia," 228.
[102] United Nations Organisation, United Nations Security Council, Letter to the Secretary-General from the Permanent Representative of the United States of America to the United Nations, November 1995.

liberalism did not disappear either; Russia frequently returned to cooperation with the West, even after tense moments. Russia also criticised the West for not following "international norms," particularly the primacy of the UN and multilateralism beyond NATO. There was indeed a significant shock to Russian officials in the 1994 Sarajevo Crisis, which made the issue of NATO intervention a more realistic worry and set the foundations for future confrontations. While this crisis impacted Russia's view of the West, it was still followed by close cooperation through the Contact Group. Because of this, the Sarajevo Crisis could not have been a "turning point." While demonstrating international unity and cooperation, the Contact Group's plan also showed growing divisions, and relations soon began to deteriorate as both the West and Russia put their own preexisting interests and proving their credibility first, believing the other would not cooperate. This only accelerated during debates about the RRF. While Russia did not oppose the RRF as it was not worth having a major diplomatic conflict, the fact that the West was creating such a force increased Russian suspicions – the West seemed to be putting aside "neutrality" and cooperation with Russia. *Operation Storm* had a similar effect, while also discrediting the international system as it increasingly appeared to be a tool for Western interests. The "sidelining" of Russian liberal approaches that emerged from the apparent dismissal of the international system was most clearly seen after the Srebrenica Massacre. In their response, Russian officials put national interests before liberal values or cooperation. Eventually, Russia and the West "faced off" during *Operation Deliberate Force*, and while Russia was limited to vocal protest and relations experienced a warming period, Russian suspicions of NATO's intentions had now become truly deep-seated. The process that Russia-West relations went through set the path for future conflict, enabling future crises like the 1999 Kosovo Crisis to significantly worsen relations and encourage Russian nationalism further. Even so, worsening

relations were not necessarily inevitable, and acts of cooperation such as IFOR were met with hope at the time.

4: Another Elbe? IFOR and the Potential for Wider Cooperation, 1996

While the Bosnian War was over, Russia's involvement in Bosnia was not. The Dayton Agreement needed to be implemented, and for this NATO created peacekeeping operations in which Russia participated. The first of these – the Implementation Force (IFOR) – has often been upheld as a model for improving Russia-West relations and as proof that cooperation was possible, even beyond "abstract" policy collaboration between higher officials. IFOR did show that Russia and the West could and were willing to cooperate to a degree, but whether it could prevent worsening relations is questionable. During negotiations surrounding IFOR, suspicions of NATO's influence and control were present, and Russian participation was partly intended to check NATO and preserve Russian influence. While operating, IFOR saw success in getting Russian and American peacekeepers to collaborate and grow friendly with each other, but this was unlikely to be replicated by most politicians. Unlike government officials and politicians, IFOR's peacekeepers were less concerned about geopolitical maneuvering and focused more on completing their mission. Even so, Russian peacekeepers continued to be suspicious of NATO and interested in a "balanced" approach contrary to American perspectives, showing that the "policy gaps" that put Russia and the West at odds remained. This, however, also shows that they could collaborate despite divergent interests. Additionally, IFOR only affected small population samples far from the levers of power, therefore lacking the influence to cause major policy changes. Suspicion among those at higher levels had begun to set in, and while relations

were not ruined nor were suspicions so all-encompassing yet, it would require more than just peacekeeping missions to diminish these suspicions in the long term.

The Dayton Agreement mandated the execution of military and civilian tasks necessary for its implementation, leading NATO to begin planning IFOR.[103] From the beginning, Russian officials showed interested in participating despite it being a NATO mission. Besides some genuine hopes to develop closer relations with the West, it was thought that Russian participation could also check NATO's regional influence while preserving Russian influence.[104] Additionally, both Russia and NATO believed a joint peacekeeping mission could bring the other closer in line with their own geopolitical position.[105] Russia's presence would also create a "noble image of the Motherland" globally as a great power, according to Russian political scientists Mikhail Yermolaev and Valery Manzing.[106]

Nevertheless, Russia had several conditions for IFOR. Easiest for the West to accept was IFOR requiring a UNSC mandate, UN oversight, and an invitation from local parties to the conflict. These conditions were already included in UNSC resolutions and the Dayton Agreement.[107] The more challenging issue was the command structure. Russia refused to have Russian soldiers under NATO command and wanted equal participation in planning and management, whereas NATO and the USA wanted to avoid giving Russia a significant role or

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[103] Letter to the Secretary-General from the Permanent Representative of the United States of America to the United Nations, November 1995.
[104] Cross, "Russia and NATO Toward the Twenty-First Century," 27-28; Headley, "The Russian Federation and the Conflicts in Former Yugoslavia," 244.
[105] North Atlantic Treaty Organisation, North Atlantic Council. Final Communiqué, June 1996; Headley, "The Russian Federation and the Conflicts in Former Yugoslavia," 275.
[106] Mikhail Yermolaev and Valeriy Mazing, *Russia's Peacekeeping Policy: The Balkan Experience* (Alexandria: Center for Naval Analysis, 1999), 61
[107] Letter to the Secretary-General from the Permanent Representative of the United States of America to the United Nations, November 1995; United Nations Organisation, United Nations Security Council, Resolution 1031, December 1995.

operational independence. It was feared that Russian interests were too different from NATO's, meaning that Russia's desired arrangement would cause IFOR to collapse and fail.[108] After difficult negotiations, Russia was eventually allowed to participate in planning, although only late in the process. Russian peacekeepers would also serve under General George Joulwan in his role as an American general rather than his NATO role as Supreme Allied Commander Europe (SACEUR). Joulwan had the Russian General Leonty Shevtsov as a deputy, whose signature was required on any orders involving Russian units. Russian peacekeepers would be attached to the American-led Multinational Division North (MND-N).[109] The decision to have Russian soldiers under an American general rather than NATO was motivated mostly by a feared domestic blowback in Russia, but on other issues Russia was more genuinely following its own interests, albeit rather conciliatory. Some have accused Russia of selling out to the West by accepting a NATO mission.[110] However, Russia's "conciliatory" position is likely due to having few resources and little leverage in negotiations. Indeed, Russia's contribution was deliberately limited for this reason and numbered only around 2,000 men at best.[111] Liberal values likely influenced the broader decision to participate, but Russia still focused on ensuring that the West could not take advantage of IFOR and harm Russian national interests and also restoring visibility as a great power. While the creation of IFOR indicated that cooperation was still possible, Russia did not have much choice and suspicions and their root causes remained.

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[108] Headley, "The Russian Federation and the Conflicts in Former Yugoslavia," 239-240.
[109] Kipp et al., *Lessons and Conclusions on the Execution of IFOR Operations and Prospects for a Future Combined Security System*, 26, 50; Larry Wentz et al., *Lessons from Bosnia: The IFOR Experience* (Vienna: Command and Control Research Program, 1997), 28.
[110] Sotirović, "Russia's Balkan Politics," 95.
[111] Baev, *The Russian Army in a Time of Troubles*, 160; Rick Atkinson, "Bosnia Force Testing New Russian-U.S. Ties," *Washington Post*, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/politics/1996/01/18/bosnia-force-testing-new-russian-us-ties/f2bc66a3-831b-43e9-8ef8-eb1019dfe590/> (January 1996).

The Russian contingent's deployment began in January 1996 and went smoothly, which Russian participants credited to close coordination with NATO. Similar levels of coordination continued afterwards, although through a complicated structure that changed according to how much time there was to deliberate. When there was little time, General William Nash – the commander of MND-N – would brief his Russian deputy on his plan, lead a discussion of his options, or act immediately. When there was time, the Russian deputy would have an equal role in decision making and sign off on the draft decision. This system did not permit much flexibility or efficiency but was good enough for the Russian-American peacekeepers to carry out quickly and forcefully the tasks on which both contingents were agreed.[112] Sometimes there were tensions, particularly during local political crises when Russian commanders refused to obey orders appearing to contradict the Russian government's rules of engagement, but this was rare.[113] Some Russian officers also believed they were not treated equally beyond the tactical level of operations and were "debarred from working out the details," although others believed that the two contingents were indeed equal, but separate forces.[114]

Coordination in IFOR was helped significantly by the personal relationships developed between Nash and Joulwan and their Russian deputies, increasing trust and introducing beliefs in "one force, one mission."[115] The personal relationship among other participants also became friendly, although they were strained at first. When the Russian peacekeepers first arrived, they felt the Americans were skeptical of working together. One commander believed that "the

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[112] Kipp et al., *Lessons and Conclusions on the Execution of IFOR Operations and Prospects for a Future Combined Security System*, 35, 43-44, 53, 59; Tom Wilhelm, "With the Russian Brigade in Bosnia: Military Teamwork and the Success of IFOR," *European Security* 6 (1997): 52.
[113] Kipp and Warren, "The Russian Separate Airborne Brigade," 50.
[114] Quoted in Yermolaev and Mazing, *Russia's Peacekeeping Policy*, 65; Wentz et al., *Lessons from Bosnia*, 261; Kolot, "The Balkan Crisis of the 1990s in the Foreign Policy Concepts of the USA and Russia (1992–2000)," 135.
[115] Kipp and Warren, "The Russian Separate Airborne Brigade," 57.

Americans are afraid of us – they don't want to talk to us."[116] Over time, however, relations improved drastically. Russian and American peacekeepers began joking, betting, sharing food, and generally becoming very friendly with each other. Speaking on this relationship, one Russian military journalist attached to IFOR said "we are both citizens of big countries and professional soldiers, and we are both open-hearted ... This is a very good beginning, I wish that our countries will be real friends by the time I will be a pensioner and look at the American flags and insignia that I got here."[117] According to American peacekeeper Tom Wilhelm, there was a growing sense of unity between Russians and Americans coinciding with "one force, one mission," with national differences being deemphasized in favour of IFOR's common mission and identity.[118] IFOR was able to demonstrate that despite suspicions between governments, a joint Russian-American military force could operate professionally and personally without failing its mission or collapsing from internal divides.

That this military relationship was warmer and saw more success than the diplomatic relationship is likely due to different contexts and people involved. Instead of involving government officials and politicians who were encouraged to compete to advance their countries' interests, IFOR involved soldiers given a single mission to complete and with similar backgrounds, reducing the chance for conflict. These were increasingly absent among Western and Russian leaders especially after the 1994 Sarajevo Crisis. Speaking on the differences between government officials and peacekeepers, Shevtsov said that "I can only say that the militaries found common language much faster than the diplomats and politicians because they

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[116] Elizabeth Schogren, "Building Peace in the Balkans: Russia-U.S. Alliance Met With Scrutiny, Skepticism," *LA Times* <https://www.latimes.com/archives/la-xpm-1996-01-21-mn-27080-story.html> (January 1996).
[117] Alexandra Stiglmayer, "Bosnia-Hercegovina: U.S. and Russian Forces make Friends in Bosnia," *Inter Press Service*, <https://www.ipsnews.net/1996/02/bosnia-hercegovina-us-and-russian-forces-make-friends-in-bosnia/?utm> (February 1996); Schogren, "Building Peace in the Balkans."
[118] Wilhelm, "With the Russian Brigade in Bosnia," 48.

do concrete, practical things and are used to thinking more about real business than about geopolitics."[119] The cooperation seen in IFOR did not mean that, as some suggest, Russia-West relations were going to improve. IFOR worked because it involved soldiers – who usually had little bearing on foreign policy – rather than government officials and politicians.

Cooperation and warm relations within IFOR did not mean that peacekeepers' differences disappeared either. Before IFOR was deployed, there were fears that the Russians would be biased toward the Serbs, which appeared to be confirmed when the Russian contingent's deputy commander met Bosnian Serb General Ratko Mladić, who had been indicted for genocide, war crimes, and crimes against humanity. For Westerners this was highly controversial, but for the Russians, who considered all sides equally guilty, this could have been considered standard peacekeeping procedure, although it was turned into a media event by either Mladić or the Russian deputy.[120] Russian researchers involved in IFOR also argued that the "international community" was biased against Serbs and that IFOR occasionally demonstrated "favoritism."[121] One report found that Russians did show bias, but little more than other participants. While Russian sympathy toward Serbs continued, many sources say that the Russian contingent was "even-handed," even when Bosnjak's created difficulties for them.[122] Some said that the Russian presence helped make IFOR more acceptable to the Serbs and that the more "personal" Russian approach to resolving conflicts was effective in convincing local parties to continue cooperating.[123]

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[119] Leontiy Shevtsov, "Russian Participation in Bosnia-Herzegovina," Presented at *14th International Workshop on Global Security*, 1997.
[120] "Foreign Affairs [Inostranniye dela]," *Kommersant*, <https://www.kommersant.ru/doc/127037> (February 1996).
[121] Kipp et al., *Lessons and Conclusions on the Execution of IFOR Operations and Prospects for a Future Combined Security System*, 56.
[122] Crimmel and Saunders, *Improving US-Russian Relations through Peacekeeping*, 15; Cross, "Russia and NATO Toward the Twenty-First Century," 32.
[123] Perry, *My Journey at the Nuclear Brink*, 125; Wilhelm, "With the Russian Brigade in Bosnia," 50.

Another area where opinions were divided was on the roles of the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE, formerly the CSCE), the UN, and NATO. While an American research project showed that few Russian or American peacekeepers thought the OSCE should "assume responsibility" for IFOR, another source written by the same author says that many Russians would have preferred that IFOR operated under an OSCE mandate.[124] This contradiction possibly stems from a belief that the OSCE was not ready yet. In a Russian-American report, it was noted that the OSCE lacked a legal basis to involve itself in peacekeeping, but that the Russian authors – who participated in IFOR – believed that strengthening the OSCE and limiting NATO would be "constructive and ... benefit all the peoples of Europe."[125] Another possibility is that Russian respondents were less enthusiastic about the OSCE as they preferred the UN. The same research project that showed few Russian peacekeepers supporting the OSCE assuming responsibility also found that 77.7% of Russian respondents thought IFOR should be a UN mission compared to only 10% of American respondents. Additionally, only 10% of the Russians favoured a NATO multi-national peace operation compared to 81% of the Americans.[126] Many Russian peacekeepers pragmatically supported their participation in IFOR only to "prevent infringements on Russian interests in the Balkans and pushing out [sic] from the peacekeeping process."[127] Despite IFOR's successes in military relations, it was unable to change some of the fundamental beliefs and suspicions that made developing diplomatic relations difficult.

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[124] Jacob Kipp, *US-Russian Military Cooperation and the IFOR Experience: A Comparison of Survey Results* (Fort Leavenworth: Foreign Military Studies Office, 1998); Kipp and Warren, "The Russian Separate Airborne Brigade," 57.
[125] Kipp et al., *Lessons and Conclusions on the Execution of IFOR Operations and Prospects for a Future Combined Security System*, 62-63.
[126] Kipp, *US-Russian Military Cooperation and the IFOR Experience*.
[127] Quoted in Headley, *Russia and the Balkans*, 305.

While IFOR being composed of soldiers made cooperation easier, it also meant that many of those involved could not translate it into the larger diplomatic picture, nor could they prevent relations from worsening. Early into IFOR, Russian officials were concerned that American forces sent to Hungary to logistically support IFOR would remain there after the one-year mandate expired, appearing to confirm suspicions that IFOR was being used to expand American influence.[128] In 1996, Colonel Andrei Demurenko, previously the commander of Russian UNPROFOR forces in Bosnia, was also dismissed from the military for being "too close to the Americans" and "in the enemy camp." This happened despite Demurenko being critical of NATO during the 1994 Sarajevo Crisis.[129] Some Western officials were positive about IFOR. For example, American Secretary of State William Perry believed that IFOR "demonstrated how much more effective NATO was as a pan-European alliance; in particular, how it was so much better to have Russia working with us, not against us."[130] However, Western policies did not show change, and Russian suspicions of the West persevered along with Russian policies that caused some concern in the West.[131] Eventually, the 1999 Kosovo Crisis damaged Russia-West relations to such a degree that IFOR's successor, the Stabilisation Force, saw the Russian contingent removed from usual command arrangements and joint operations suspended.[132] Rather than lowering suspicions among higher officials, joint peacekeeping operations could not even prevent these same officials from dismantling military and diplomatic cooperation. While IFOR did not bring meaningful change among policy makers, what significance it had should not

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[128] "Newsline," *Radio Free Europe*, <https://www.rferl.org/a/1141114.html> (February 1996).
[129] Ted Donnely et al. *How Russia Fights: A Compendium of Troika Observations on Russia's Special Military Operation* (Clay Kaserne: United States Army Europe and Africa, 2025), 323-324; Gus′kova, "Russian Battalions in Croatia, BiH and Kosovo as a Factor of Objectivity in the Activities of Peacekeeping Forces in the Territory of the Former Yugoslavia," 386.
[130] Perry, *My Journey at the Nuclear Brink*, 125.
[131] Headley, "The Russian Federation and the Conflicts in Former Yugoslavia," 277.
[132] Crimmel and Saunders, *Improving US-Russian Relations through Peacekeeping Operations*, 15, 37.

be dismissed entirely. It showed that Russia continued to value peacekeeping as a crisis response tool and international cooperation over competition, even if coercion and force were being increasingly considered and used in some areas, such as in Chechnya. It also showed potential for cooperation beyond rhetoric and served as an impetus to the Russia-NATO Founding Act of 1997, outlining future cooperation. However, the Founding Act also failed to bring Russia and the West together as they – like with other actions and agreements – had different understandings of what it meant.[133]

The hopes that IFOR would lead to warmer relations were not necessarily incorrect but were just that: hopeful. The creation of IFOR showed Russia and the West putting aside prioritisation of national interests in favour of cooperation, but this was limited and likely due to Russia being unable to leverage a better deal. Nevertheless, compromise was reached, and successes continued through military cooperation and personal relationships. While the command structure was complicated and had some critics, it was good enough to foster connections and enable IFOR's success. These successes in cooperation and personal relationships are due to IFOR having been run by soldiers with similar backgrounds and trained to prioritise their mission before geopolitics. This, however, also made it less likely that such cooperation could be transferred to the global or continental scale. Additionally, while NATO and the USA hoped that IFOR would be able to bring the Russians in line with their policies, it was unable to do this as Russian peacekeepers remained interested in a "balanced approach" and keeping NATO out of the Balkans if possible. This further emphasises that soldierly duty is why IFOR worked, not diplomatic closeness. That IFOR did not include senior officials also prevented the soldiers' cooperation from being translated into wider diplomatic cooperation.

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[133] Headley, "The Russian Federation and the Conflicts in Former Yugoslavia," 275.

Russia continued to be suspicious, neither Russian nor Western policy changed, and when relations took a hit peacekeeping operations were some of the first to suffer, showing that they could not prevent worsening relations. Despite all these issues, IFOR still showed that Russia-West cooperation was possible even with differing geopolitical views, and that worsening relations were not necessarily inevitable. IFOR was only unable to achieve the task of significantly decreasing the suspicions created by the Bosnian War and other fundamental disagreements, misunderstandings, and issues. This is not to say that cooperation was impossible, that there was no desire for it, or that relations constantly deteriorated after the Bosnian War, but the process of deteriorating relations had begun, the conditions for future crises to seriously harm relations were created, and IFOR-esque operations alone could not stop this. More substantial and widespread changes would have needed to happen alongside peacekeeping operations for suspicions to be dissolved and future deterioration of relations to be halted.

5: Conclusion

As in 1914, a Bosnian crisis again pushed Russia and Europe into the next century of diplomacy and security. Many have argued that the Bosnian War saw Russian policy go through a liberal and a nationalist phase, with a "turning point" separating them, implying that Russian liberalism and nationalism are mutually exclusive. In reality, Russia had been prioritising its own national interests alongside support of the international system and cooperation before most argue there was a nationalist shift. This was not contradictory as the international community was not (yet) opposing Russian interests. Russia's liberal policies and approaches were supposed to advance Russian national interests by giving credibility to a Russian sphere of influence over

the former USSR and Eastern Europe, avoiding the spread of Western geopolitical influence, and restoring Russia's great power status. Russia also showed the same beliefs in a "balanced" approach and opposition to NATO force throughout; both commonly associated with nationalists. Saying that there were distinct liberal or nationalist periods in Russian foreign policy is questionable. Rather, policy changed gradually, and Russian liberalism experienced a slow "death." Based on the shared interests of Russian liberals and nationalists, it can also be argued that in the longer term Russia not only shifted from liberalism to revanchist nationalism, but also from neo-imperialism to more direct forms of aggressive imperialism, as seen in Ukraine. Russia's concerns about the West and desire for an area of influence did not suddenly appear, are not "new," nor are they exclusive to Russian nationalists or Putin. It is more widespread in Russian society and politics and will not necessarily dissipate if Putin and his associates ever leave power.

The Bosnian War also established the Balkans as an area of competition between Russia and the West, continuing today with Russian support for Serbia and Serbian nationalists in Bosnia.[134] Likewise, the war contributed to the creation of fault lines between Russia and the West more broadly. Many have pointed to a nationalist turning point or shift in response to domestic opposition to explain why Russia came into conflict with the West. Domestic politics indeed played a significant role but did not exist in a void separated from Western actions. As American, and then Western, policy shifted, Russia grew suspicious, leading it to pursue its own national interests more actively while also losing hope in the international system and cooperation. With Russia's prioritization of national interests, cooperation with Russia became

[134] James McBride,"Russia's Influence in the Balkans," *Council on Foreign Relations* <https://www.cfr.org/backgrounders/russias-influence-balkans> (November 2023).

more difficult, further hurting Russia-West relations. As the shift toward Western interventionism was gradual, so was the decline of Russia-West relations. Indeed, Russian liberal interests and ideals persisted, as seen during "warming" periods and Russia's criticism of the West for "ignoring" international norms. The process of Russia continuously getting more suspicious of the West and prioritising national interests over liberal values continued after the Bosnian War until Russia "fully" came into opposition with the liberal international system sometime between 2000 and 2014.

Some believe that IFOR could have turned this process around, but this is unlikely as those participating in it had little bearing on foreign policy. The form IFOR took after negotiations was a sign of Russia placing cooperation before competition, but Russia had little choice, and the result was not Russia's preferred option. IFOR succeeded specifically because government officials and politicians were not deeply involved, but this also meant that the breaking down of barriers between Russians and Americans rarely spread to those who made policy decisions. Indeed, the differences in perspectives that contributed to a tense diplomatic relationship remained even among IFOR's participants. Even so, IFOR demonstrated that cooperation was still possible in some forms despite differences, and that processes harming cooperation were not constantly or inevitably going in one direction.

This episode in Russian foreign policy sheds light on how Russia's position in the world today came to be. Domestic issues in Russia, such as a desire to be a great power, assumption of rights to "traditional" spheres of influence, and a "historical" rivalry with the West, among others, were key to the rise of Putinist revisionism, but so were perceptions of Western actions. Relations worsened in part as both sides misunderstood and miscommunicated with each other, and both Russia and the West gave each other reasons to distrust the other. In the Bosnian

context, Russia perceived that NATO and the USA were acting purely out of self-interest against Russia and the international system through launching airstrikes outside of UN control, "ignoring" Russia and showing "bias." This was particularly shocking for Russians as it was expected that Russia and the Western states would act as united but independent and equal "policemen" globally, each having their own areas of responsibility. Likewise, many in the West assumed that as Russia was liberal, it would continuously grow closer to Western policy, lowering the number of disagreements there had been historically. When this began to change in the 1990s, Russia appeared to some to be aiming to undermine what the West saw as liberal values and internationalism. It also it appeared to some, understandably, that Russia could not reasonably be involved in Western decision making. Indeed, both Russia and the West acted in ways that could be considered provocative; for example, Russia's "balanced" approach which frequently favoured Serbs even when they were aggressive, or the West's use of force against the Serbs. Neither position is completely incorrect, nor the entire truth. What was needed was a way for Russia and the West to communicate intentions through cultural, historical, and political differences – a difficult tasking, especially considering the constraints created by the Bosnian War. Therefore, the Bosnian and wider Yugoslav wars set the stage for Russia and Europe's 21st century and the competition between Russia and the West that has defined Europe's security and diplomatic climate since 2022 at the latest, making it crucial for understanding today's world.

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