

Choosing Genocide

Demographics, the Commitment Problem, and the Bosnian War

I. Introduction

As Yugoslavia began to break apart in 1991, the destinies of each successor state of the confederation were hardly preordained. Many experts expected a rather quick and peaceful dissolution (Silber 1997). Some saw the creep of ethnic nationalism as a sure sign that violent times lay ahead and that the break up would not go smooth. Yet not even the most pessimistic of these voices could have predicted the complete and utter horrors that engulfed the region throughout the Yugoslav wars (Woodward 1995). Soon the images of concentration camps, mass graves, and rape houses would fill the nightly news in Western countries. While the differing states that made up the confederation appeared to be fighting, it soon became very apparent that this was an ethnic war. Rallies of Serbian workers chanting Slobodan Milosevic's name were soon met with Croatian leaders reappropriating fascist flags from fifty years prior (Silber 1997). Even memories of Christian martyrdom at the hands of Ottoman Muslims in the fourteenth

century appeared. All these terrible and once thought dead occurrences of rabid nationalism and bloodshed swept throughout the Balkans.

While all the newly independent countries suffered, one was ravaged like no other. Bosnia-Herzegovina was the most ethnically diverse society in Yugoslavia. Croats lived next to Bosniaks whom married Serbs. Minarets and steeples dotted the skyline of the capital of Sarajevo. If any country was prepared to withstand the buildup to ethnic war, Bosnia seemed to be the best candidate. Yet by 1992, ethnic cleansing was underway in the eastern swaths of the country (Burg 1999). Muslim women were detained and brutally raped by Serb militias. Refugees were sent scattering across dangerous war zones. Most infamously, 8,000 Bosniak men and boys were slaughtered in the fields outside of Srebrenica. Why did a country so seemingly tolerant just a few short years before slide into ethnic war and ethnic cleansing while other Yugoslav states either experienced ethnic conflict on a smaller scale or little violence?

Answering this question is the purpose of this thesis. Ethnic wars occur throughout the world and create regional instability. Ethnic wars often lead to genocidal violence, most notably in Rwanda, Sudan, and Bosnia. Often policymakers, human rights groups, and similar organizations are caught by surprise by just how quickly ethnic war can occur. Does there exist certain precursors or clues to which countries are more likely to experience ethnic conflict and which have the best chance of avoiding war? If these clues can be identified what possible policy steps can be taken to reach a peaceful agreement between the two ethnic groups? The answers to these questions should be sought by humanitarians, policy makers, and anybody who wishes to live in a more peaceful world.

Current existing arguments fail to adequately explain why ethnic war occurred in Bosnia. Most of these arguments rely on constructed models that overly focus on the relative military capabilities of the warring parties. While this factor is important, it does not provide an explanation for why the war lasted for nearly three years before a N.A.T.O. enforced peace treaty ended the fighting. It also does not provide any explanations for why “ethnic cleansing” was such a widely used tool by the Bosnian Serbs throughout the war. Differing arguments rely on the historical animosity between the ethnic groups of Bosnia yet, as explained earlier, Bosnia was seen as a society in which differing ethnicities came together to live in one society. Intermarriage rates were high and cooperation had been occurring in the country in the decades preceding the outbreak of war. Constructivist arguments provide interesting clues for how war initially broke out yet much fail to account for the Bosnian war’s duration and the rather brutal local nature of the war.

As an alternative I argue that demographics need to be examined to fully account for why the war occurred and why the nature of the conflict was indeed so brutal. The demographic trends in the previous thirty years created a commitment problem for the Bosnian Serb elite that led them to apply the tactics of ethnic cleansing and genocide to achieve a pure Serb state. I reason that the growth of Bosnian Muslims relative population growth rates created a fear that the Bosnian Serbs would soon become a maltreated minority by an ever increasing majority of Bosnian Muslims. The Bosnian independence from Yugoslavia acted as an accelerator for ethnic war as it created a rapid shift in the balance of power between the two ethnic groups. The combinations of long-term demographic trends and rapid independence worked together in spreading this fear. In the context of a newly independent Bosnia, the long-term demographic trends went from worrisome to an existential threat. New democracies, such as Bosnia, lack the

institutions to secure the rights of minorities (Zakaria 2003). Power in a new democratic Bosnia, which lacked these institutions, would essentially be majority rule. If ethnicity had become the primary organizational tool for politics, then the ethnic group with the largest population would have the most political power and the resources that came with it. The Bosnian Serb elite came to the conclusion that they could ill afford to remain in a single state with the Bosnian Muslims. What would be needed was a new Bosnian Serb state that was free of Muslim population and influence so the present demographic trends at the time of independence would not harm the Bosnian Serbs' ability to retain political power.

The remainder of this chapter will define the key terms and variables of my research as well as providing a critique of the existing literature on ethnic conflict. Defining genocide is always a difficult task so I have tried to make use of a widely accepted definition. The existing literature on ethnic conflict is numerous yet this thesis will provide a new approach to viewing ethnic conflict in the prism of demographics that most of the existing literature does not.

Definitions

In this section I will define attributes of ethnic conflict, genocide, and important demographic terms that are imperative to my argument. An ethnic group, according to Anthony Smith, shares five key traits: a group name, a believed common descent, common historical memories, and attachment to specific territory (Smith 2007). This ethnic group becomes a nation once it becomes socially mobilized in an effort to gain self-determination. This mobilization is spurred on by a sense of nationalism which is defined as an agenda that seeks political autonomy for the nation (Gellner 2008). Not all nations consist of just one ethnic group as the case examined in this thesis shows.

The existing literature on ethnic conflict is vast and has been growing at a rapid rate since the end of the Cold War. Yet providing a definition of ethnic conflict is still troublesome since the term has become loaded with differing meanings throughout the years. Ethnic conflicts are most notably defined as when one of the opposing groups defines their organization and beliefs around ethnicity (Cordell 2009). Therefore the conflict itself may not be about ethnicity. In fact most ethnic conflicts occur for the same reasons most wars between states occur. When one side believes that violence is an appropriate and effective method of achieving their goals, conflict may occur. What separates ethnic conflict from normal conflict is the organizing principle of ethnicity. Ethnicity is but one of many social constructions used by people throughout the world. Yet in war, because of the seemingly “fixed” notion of ethnicity, it often can have a greater meaning to the participants.

Violence is also included in my definition of ethnic conflict. Surely there are ethnic tensions in many countries. The United States has a long history of ethnic discrimination and in the past this has turned violent. Canadian politics is often marked by the ethnic differences between the Quebecois and the Anglophone population. Belgium also suffers from a language division that has caused recent tensions between the Dutch-speaking Flemish community and the French-speaking Walloons’ community. In Eastern Europe, old scars from Cold War imperialism have proven hard to heal. Russian communities in many former Eastern Bloc states find themselves at odds with the native populations who have yet to forget or forgive the Soviet occupation. These examples however do not fit my definition of ethnic conflict due to the lack of violence. Despite tensions most of these countries have discovered ways to allow for these disagreements to take a peaceful form without resorting to violence as a way to settle them. The former Yugoslavia was not as fortunate. Beginning with the Ten-Day War in Slovenia and

ending with the Dayton Accords, well over a hundred thousand casualties occurred and the civilian death toll is estimated to be even higher than that. Bosnia suffered the greatest number of casualties and experienced the worst atrocities of any country in the Yugoslav wars. While this thesis will not directly examine the role of demographics in other former Yugoslav countries, Bosnia was the only former republic where demographic trends shaped the conflict.

The origins of the definition of genocide began with Raphael Lemkin's quest to have it recognized as an international crime from the then nascent United Nations. Using the evidence from the recent horrors of the holocaust he tirelessly advocated a definition that constituted not just the physical extermination of the victimized ethnic group but attempts to destroy the ethnic groups culture and way of life as well (Power 2002). After an extended battle that saw him enlist the help of any government or lobby willing to lend support to his cause, the United Nations General Assembly adopted his definition of genocide in the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide which defines the crime as:

- (a) Killing members of the group;
- (b) Causing serious bodily or mental harm to members of the group;
- (c) Deliberately inflicting on the group conditions of life calculated to bring about its physical destruction in whole or in part;
- (d) Imposing measures intended to prevent births within the group;
- (e) Forcibly transferring children of the group to another group.

By any account, the orchestrated mass-killings that occurred in Bosnia must be considered genocide. The International Criminal Court, the United Nations, and the United States Congress have all reaffirmed this belief. Yet for the purposes of my argument I will use a more precise definition provided by Martin Shaw who defines genocide as “a form of violent social conflict, or war, between armed power organizations that aim to destroy civilian social groups and those groups and other actors who resist this destruction (Shaw 2007:154)”. Most concepts of genocide focus on the “one-sidedness” of the violence yet this definition classifies genocide as a conflict and thus does not believe a totally helpless victim group is necessary to meet the definition (Levine 2008). The Bosniaks in Bosnia certainly had some means to fight back against their Serb aggressors yet this does discount the orchestrated violence against Bosniak civilians as genocidal. Shaw's definition also defines genocidal action as “action in which armed power organizations treat civilian social groups as enemies and aim to destroy their real or putative social power, by means of killing, violence and coercion against individuals whom they regard as members of the groups (Shaw 2007:154)”. By focusing on violence and coercion as well as killing, this definition does not fall into the sort of “numbers games” that many definitions of genocide succumb to. What is important is the act of the conflict not the amount of dead. Serbs in Bosnia often used targeted mass rape, detention, and forced migration as coercive tools to denigrate and eventually destroy the Bosniak civilian structure. Serbian elites often used the euphemism of “ethnic cleansing” to describe their genocidal practices in Bosnia (Burg 1999). This definition encompasses that term as well and makes no differentiation between it and genocide. Finally, this definition supports earlier definitions in which the target is indeed defined as some sort of group with common characteristics (May 2010). Recently more normative definitions of genocide have come in to use that regard the crime as one against many

individuals and looks to limit the focus on the “groupness” of the victims. While getting bogged down in arguments over identities is certainly undesirable, the very nature of the crime requires a common identity to be ascribed to the victims (Goldenhagen 2009)

Critiquing Existing Arguments

Much has been written on ethnic conflict and a fair amount of this literature has focused on the case of the former Yugoslavia. I will group the existing literature in three schools of thought that are perceived to be distinctly separate by most scholars working in the field of ethnic conflict. These four schools are primordialism, constructivism, and rationalism. I will also critique the subset of rationalist literature that focuses on the role of elites in igniting ethnic conflict. This critique will look to identify the faults in existing arguments for ethnic conflict and thus demonstrate why a new approach is need to understanding how ethnic conflict and genocide occurred in Bosnia. This new approach relies heavily on a rationalist foundation but will focus on factors that are not prevalent in the existing rationalist literature.

The primordialist school of ethnic conflict argues that ethnic hatreds have always existed at some level in human society and that it is only natural for this hatred to manifest itself in violence from time to time. Much of the work in this school focuses on the nature of ethnicity and the social utility that it provides. Ethnicity is seen as one of the most effective ordering devices for humans (Horowitz 1985). The feeling of kinship and belonging is sought by all and thus allows for the development of an ethno-history. Each ethno-history paints one’s own ethnic group as the just and rightful clan and when contact with other ethnic groups does not reaffirm this belief, tensions begin to rise. This school of thought was relied heavily on during the initial

stages of the Yugoslav wars. Robert Kaplan, author of the book *Balkan Ghosts* (Kaplan 1993), described these age-old conflicts as “ancient hatreds”. Thus Serbs were the natural enemy of Bosnian Muslims and Croats due to their differing belief systems and this was only exacerbated by years and years of conflict in the region.

This school of thought has been roundly criticized since the early 1990's. Most ethnic wars were fought for the same reasons that any war is fought be it security, resources or power. Bosnia left the Yugoslav federation to gain more political control over the republic. An independent Bosnia would not have to answer to Belgrade as had been the case since the Second World War. Ethnicity has proven to be to be a very fluid form of identity in the marketplace of even more forms of social identity. In any one day a person can be a nationality, an ethnicity, or an ideologue. Ethnic conflicts may be organized on ethnic lines but the reasons they are fought are almost always over political or material gains.

An examination of the Yugoslav wars shows that below the easy catch-all of “ancient hatreds” lay much more rational and calculated causes. After all in Bosnia, where the most violence occurred, intermarriage of ethnic groups was the highest of any of the states. The capital of Sarajevo was a beacon of multicultural harmony (Silber 1997). Proponents of the primordialist theory often point to the fact that most urban centers are much more tolerant and thus should not be confused with the views of a largely rural country. Yet this fails to explain why these so called “hatreds” ebb and flow at different times. The disputes that set off most of the wars in the Balkans were not ancient battles, although Serbian President Slobodan Milosevic's symbolic use of the Battle of Kosovo in 1389 is a notable exception, but grievances that had lasted since World War II or rather the mid-20th century. It was the genocidal violence, initially started by the

outside forces of Nazi Germany, from this era that stirred up emotions in differing Yugoslav ethnic groups. Yet between that time most Yugoslav citizens remained at peace and considered themselves as citizens of Yugoslavs first then identified with their ethnic group. It was not until the Yugoslav political and economic system began to fail that the Yugoslav identity began to fail. Most citizens of the country also felt closely tied with their local regions and thus it was not until ethnic elites began to evoke the myths of a shared ethnic nationalism did mobilization around the idea of ethnicity began.

Even if primordialism is the sole reason for ethnic conflict it provides no explanation on how that conflict turns into a war in which genocidal violence is common place. Why did the “ancient hatreds” between Croats and Serbs not end in the systematic extermination of one another? Why did Macedonia not attempt to eradicate their large Muslim minority? Primordialism has no answers for these inquiries and consistently fails to take into account the role of political elites in initiating conflict. While primordialism can be an important resource for manipulative leaders to call upon, it is not a sufficient reason. There are likely other reasons for why violent conflict breaks out between differing ethnic groups.

The constructivist theory of ethnic conflict relies much more on symbols and beliefs as well as the perceived history of each ethnic group to explain how ethnicities come into conflict. Therefore the organizing principle of most ethnic groups is constructed often by cultural intellectuals and can change and vary over time. It is in fact cultural and not instrumentalist grievances that lead to much ethnic conflict. While somewhat in debt to the primordialist school, constructivists do not believe in a “fixed” idea on ethnicity. Instead they propose that ethnicity can be changed and reconstructed in order to fit the ethnic group’s perceived sense of self

regarding the current circumstances although this is quite difficult. Constructivists argue that most people use emotions much more than reason when acting. Therefore symbols that evoke certain emotions can play a large role in ethnic conflict (Kaufman 2001). A symbol can mean strength and pride to one ethnic group while meaning submission and defeat to another. Hence the symbols that certain leaders use can greatly affect the prospects for conflict.

With these symbols also comes a sense of historical mythology behind each ethnic group. Constructivist models see ethnicity as almost a religion among certain members of the ethnic group. Tales of an ethno-nation's glories are continually retold and passed on down from generation. Monuments and flags are the symbolic objects that members of the group derive much pride and positive emotion from. In almost every country in which there is a large ethnic majority, the state itself uses mass media to propagate an ethno-nationalist mythology among its citizens (Kaufman 2001). This was especially true during the Yugoslav wars when the heads of Croatia, Bosnia-Herzegovina, and Serbia relied heavily on symbols and myths to rally their citizens for war and consolidate their power. Myths and symbols do not necessarily have to be created by current leaders or ethnic institutions. Many already exist in the mythical history of the ethnic group and thus can be reappropriated by either ethnic nationalists or political elites to achieve their own political goals.

Socially constructed identities can vary in strength from era to era (Horowitz). In Yugoslavia's boom years in the 1950's and 1960's, the Yugoslav identity was a powerful tool used by President Tito to unite all the ethnic groups. Yugoslav elites and cultural intellectuals attacked ethnic nationalism and suppressed it whenever and wherever it made appearances. During this time the ethnic identities that played such an important role in the carnage of the Second World War and would lead to more violence in the breakup of Yugoslavia remained

dormant as Yugoslav citizens had no desire or need for them. Yet when the political and economic system fell apart, the apparent solid foundation of the Yugoslav identity began to crack. By the late 1980's, ethnic-nationalist identities had come back in full force as nationalist politicians trumpeted their return. The constructed Yugoslav identity ultimately lost as the demand for a new constructed identity increased.

Due to their reliance on subjective views of culture, constructivist theories have a tendency to be vague and ambiguous. When speaking of the fluidity of social identities, critics find that many constructivist models of ethnic conflict can be used for nearly any situation. The models are so far reaching that they lack the ability to distinguish or provide indicators before ethnic conflict erupts. Rationalist scholars point to a lack of rigor and objectivity as faults in constructivism and criticize its lack of hard analysis in favor of broad terms (Stathis 2006). The patterns of violence in ethnic conflict illuminate further flaws in the constructivist model. Certain towns in Bosnia experienced relatively low levels of violence while other towns were completely wiped out. Constructivists cannot account for why constructed identities resonate with some members of an ethnic group more than others. Furthermore when viewing why Bosnia's Serbs pursued a policy of ethnic cleansing in the war, the constructivist model fails to account for why this occurred in Bosnia and not other Yugoslav republics. Certainly the ethnic rivalries between Macedonian and Serb as well as Bosnian Muslim and Croat could have led to genocidal violence yet did not. Perhaps due to these criticisms, it is best to view the constructivist model as a tool rather than a sufficient cause of ethnic conflict. I use this term as way to show how constructed identities can be effectively used by political or intellectual entrepreneurs in their quest for power or political goals.

The instrumentalist, or rationalist, theory of ethnic conflict argues that ethnic war should be viewed in the same prism as war between states (Brown 2001). Rationalist scholars see ethnic conflict as a breakdown of a contract for peace between ethnic groups due to insecurity. Rationalist explanation for much of the Yugoslav wars laid the foundation for other rationalist scholars to build upon with focus on the ability of ethnic “groupness” to be a powerful organizing tool for elites as well as how an emerging anarchy forces these groups to focus on security above all (Posen 1993). This mobilization creates a “tipping-point”, in which the more people join the ethnic mobilization, then others fear that they must too mobilize creating a snowball effect. Without the presence of a strong central authority that can help arbitrate disputes, ethnic groups are forced to acquire military capabilities to ensure their own security (Van Evera 1994). Yet this increase in one group’s military capabilities alternately threatens the other group forcing it to increase its own security and thus creating an ethnic security dilemma. Eventually, one ethnic group will seek an advantage by pre-emptively striking against the other. This security dilemma is a product of anarchy as well as informational and commitment problems (Rothchild 2005).

The bargaining model of war views conflict as an extension of politics. War is merely a dispute between states or interest groups for scarce goods such as natural resources or territory. War occurs when one side believes the cost of fighting is preferable to any current peace deal. Yet war should not be viewed as a result of a breakdown in bargaining. It is merely a continuation as each side looks to increase the other’s cost throughout the conflict in order to reach their preferred outcome. War often ends when both sides agree to a bargain and rarely does it involve the total destruction of one side (Reiter 2003).

Informational failures occur because each ethnic group has an incentive to misrepresent its military capabilities while bargaining. By bluffing, the ethnic group can get more of what it wants due to the other fearing its false capabilities. Failures also occur due to the fact that each ethnic group has an incentive to hide private information that might be an asset if per chance war does break out. Usually, a strong central state can act as a guarantee of safety resulting in more information exchanging between the two groups (Rothchild 1998).

The commitment problem is the final cause of conflict and creates fears about the future for each ethnic group. The commitment problem occurs when one group believes that any deal reached with the other group will not be upheld in the future. This is often due to a rapid shift in the balance of power among ethnic groups (Fearon 1995). Since most ethnic conflicts occur in less developed regions, these shifts usually take the shape of rapid demographic trends. In an anarchic state, an ethnic “contract” exists between two ethnic groups dividing resources and territories. If one group’s population begins to increase at a much higher rate than the other’s population, this will soon lead to a shift in the balance of power between the two and thus provide an incentive to not honor the ethnic “contract”. If one side’s power increases by enough, it might soon be in the interest of that group to renegotiate the contract to represent the new balance of power which would be more favorable to them. However, as this shift in power begins to be observed by the minority group, they will then have an interest to fight now instead of waiting for the other side to gradually acquire more power. Ethnic wars in which the commitment problem is a factor prove to be much longer and violent due to the long term ramifications effecting future bargaining (Rothchild 1998).

Some rational models of ethnic conflict factor in a larger role for elites. These elite-based models focus on the behavior and rhetoric of ethnic elites in the run up to ethnic conflict (Weingast 2001). It is the strategic and purposeful policies by those in power rather than simple ethnic hatreds that lead to war (Valentino 2004). This story is one in which a political entrepreneur seeks to gain power by creating a domestic coalition within his own ethnic group (Gagnon Jr. 1995). Resorting to group grievances in ethnic terms, he is able to come to power by stoking fear of other ethnic groups. Since he is now reliant on this ethnic nationalist coalition for power, he is forced use rhetoric and occasionally actions that cause further grievances between the groups. These actions can lead to reactions by the other ethnic groups and increase the security dilemma. This can appear to be at odds with the rather “structuralist” obstacles that create conflict in most rational models. Most rational structuralist models assume both sides do not want conflict yet in almost every ethnic conflict, political leaders use inflammatory rhetoric and seek to demonize the other group. This does not necessarily mean that these elites wish for war only that they engage in a dangerous game in which their political survival relies on disrupting inter-ethnic harmony.

When ethnic nationalists come to power, they use fear of the other group as way to consolidate their new found power. Often times, this pursuit of power can take the shape of “ethnic outbidding”. Elites’ pool of support almost solely comes from their own ethnic group within a state. This leads to a competition for this ethnic support among the elites within one ethnic group. The elites who can attribute most of the ethnic groups’ grievances on competing ethnicities within the state create a supportive constituency that is necessary to hold on to power (Saidman 1995). If this constituency is accepting of moderate pleas for tolerance then ethnic outbidding is unlikely to occur. However, in cases such as economically stagnant Bosnia, where

the individuals of each ethnic group were susceptible to chauvinistic rhetoric, ethnic outbidding can be very successful. By painting their elite competitors as not nationalist enough or too conciliatory to other ethnicities, radical ethnic elites can quickly polarize a state and lead to similar reactions from elites of the opposing ethnic group. By positioning their own ethnic groups as victims at the hands of the other, this fear can spread rapidly among members of the ethnic group and thus a society that was initially against conflict becomes more accepting due to existential fears.

The economic argument for ethnic conflict is one based off competition for resources among ethnic groups within a state and is usually considered to be a rationalist model. This economical grievance model posits that if an ethnic group feels economically discriminated against then it will either fight for more control over state resources or secede from the state (Slack 2001). Alternately if one ethnic group feels that its productivity supports the poorer ethnic group too much then it might also seek to secede so as to benefit greater from its work. Much work has been done to view civil wars in this prism and to highlight how economically disadvantaged ethnic groups often play a large role in these conflicts (Cordell 2010). When a central authority in a state breaks down then it would seem only logical for the ethnic groups in that state to compete for the opportunity to attain the suddenly available resources of the state. This would seem especially true if there were large economic disparities between the competing ethnic groups.

The economic rationalist model provides some insights on how ethnic groups might begin to feel animosity towards one another. Certainly, disadvantaged ethnic groups will always have grievances towards wealthier ethnic groups. Yet this is almost never sufficient for violence

to break out. Even most developed countries have large economic disparity among the dominant and minority ethnic groups yet the thought of full scale war is very remote. When examining the Yugoslav wars, the economic model fails to account for war in Bosnia. Slovenia and Croatia were the two richest republics yet the former experienced a brief ten day war while the latter fought a bloody three year war with Serbia. Both Bosnia and Macedonia were poor republics within the Yugoslav confederation as well as both containing large ethnic minorities. Bosnia was torn apart by war while its Muslim citizens experienced ethnic cleansing. Macedonia however peacefully attained independence while incorporating its large Muslim minority into its political system with varying success. Yet the economic model provides valuable reasons why war could break out at the local level. The Bosnian war was, up until the last few months, one of firefights in towns and villages and not one of mechanized cavalry racing across the country. The local competition for economic opportunities helps explain why ethnic population numbers at the municipal level would weigh so heavily on the minds of each ethnic group.

The evidence for why war broke out in Bosnia appears to lend credence to many of the claims of the rational school of ethnic conflict. My argument will work mainly in this paradigm yet will include one variable that is often missing from rationalist critiques of ethnic conflict. In multi-ethnic states such as Bosnia, ethnic population numbers play a role in how jobs and resources are distributed (Slack 2001). The relative difference in these population numbers can play a critical role in how resources of the state are dispersed among ethnic groups. Most of rationalism focuses on the relative strength of armed adversaries before and during the conflict. Yet armed organizations, outside of the Yugoslavian People's Army, were not present until the 1991 elections in Bosnia. Other factors thus motivated the Bosnian Serbs to arm and seek to carve out a piece of Bosnia for themselves. Demographic trends in the decades preceding the war

explain why Bosnian Serbs felt such insecurity that they chose armed conflict instead of remaining in a multi-ethnic Bosnia. A dwindling Bosnian Serb population would only continue to lose power in a new democratic Bosnia while the increasingly large Bosnian Muslim population would only increase in power if the current demographic trends continued. A government run by Bosnian Muslims would have problems credibly committing to any agreement in the future as their numbers continued to grow.

Theory

This section will lay out the theory that acts as the foundation for my argument that higher Muslim growth rates in Bosnia led the Bosnian Serbs to pursue war and implement a genocidal policy of ethnic cleansing. The theory is based off what is known as the commitment problem in the rationalist school. Even if both sides in a conflict know the others true desires and relative strength, there can exist structural problems that will lead to a failure in negotiations and thus war.

The bargaining model of war views conflict as a destructive occurrence and thus each side has a motivation for peace. Yet war still occurs and the commitment problem is viewed as one of the leading causes to this puzzle. Wars caused by the commitment problem are often known as preventive wars. Preventive war occurs when one party in a conflict will likely continue to decrease in strength over time. With this relative decline there is an incentive of the declining party to wage war now while it still has the strength to win and achieve its political goals. A simple theoretical model can be constructed to show the possible structural scenario in which this will happen.

Shifts in the distribution of power are the heart of the commitment problem. Assume State A wishes for a change in the status quo political agreement with State B. State A can present its new demands to State B in which an agreement can be made this bargaining turn. State B, realizing war is costly and wishing to avoid it, bargains and a peace agreement is reached between the two states. However, assume that the relative power of State A will continue to increase while the relative power of State B will continue to decrease. State A will then have an incentive to push for greater demands as its relative power increases during the next bargaining turn. State B, on the other hand, is aware that State A's demands will only increase as its relative power increases over time. If no third party exists to enforce the agreement, State A will not have an incentive to abide by the agreement as its power increases. State B realizes that its probability of winning a war now is highest and that over time it will have to endlessly continue to renegotiate an agreement with State A with each consecutive agreement more favorable to State A. This scenario represents a dilemma for State B in which it must decide whether to wage war now while its probability of winning is highest or avoid war but risk the scenario in which State A reneges on any agreement as its power increases over time. This dilemma is known as the commitment problem. The declining state chooses war not because it's unaware of the other state's intentions. James Fearon explains "the declining state attacks not because it fears being attacked in the future but because it fears the peace it will have to accept after the rival has grown stronger" (Fearon 406: 1995).

A well-known example of this preventive war spurred on by the commitment problem is Germany's decision to fight in World War I. This war is casually seen by many to have been a case of tangled alliances dragging unenthusiastic countries into a global and violent conflict. Yet recent studies have shown how German elites believed that war was a preferable method of

solving the commitment problem with its Russian rival (Fromkin 2005). Prior to the conflict, Russia was a growing military power and had recently updated its armament. These developments worried the German elite who saw a country with vast resources and a budding alliance with France as a grave threat to their country. The anarchic international system meant that no political agreement reached by Russia or Germany could be committed to over time. As Russia grew more powerful, it would have an incentive not to abide by any agreement reached in the present and to renegotiate with Germany a more preferable agreement as the distribution of power shifted in its favor. The German Foreign Secretary at the time, Gottlieb von Jagow, described his top military commander's views of the situation as such, "Moltke described to me his opinion of our military situation. The prospects of the future oppressed him heavily. In two or three years Russia would have completed her armaments. The military superiority of our enemies would then be so great that he did not know how he could overcome them. Today we would still be a match for them. In his opinion there was no alternative to making preventive war in order to defeat the enemy while we still had a chance of victory" (Rohl 1973). Germany began a process in which German ally Austria-Hungary would declare war on Russia's ally Serbia thus giving an excuse for Germany to wage a preventive war against Russia.

My thesis argues that ethnic demographic trends in Bosnia led the Bosnian Serb elite to choose war instead of agreeing to reside and share power in an independent Bosnia. Since 1961 the Bosnian Muslim birth rate had been considerably higher than the Bosnian Serbs or Croats (as seen in Figure A). In the thirty years prior, the Bosnian Serbs had gone from the largest ethnic group in Bosnia to a distant second behind the Bosnian Muslims. During this time, the growth rates did not matter because Bosnia was part of the Yugoslavia confederation which was largely dominated by Serbia and the Serbs. However once the confederation began to break apart the

Bosnian Serbs began to feel threatened. If Bosnia broke away from Yugoslavia, the Bosnian Serbs would have gone from the dominant ethnic group to a minority cut off from their ethnic brethren in Serbia and Croatia. When Bosnia declared independence and was recognized by Germany and other Western nations, this created a shift in the balance of ethnic power within the country. Suddenly, Bosnian Serbs had no credible commitment that they would not be treated as second class citizens within the new country. Demographic trends showed that the Bosnian Muslims would continue to grow at a faster rate than the Bosnian Serbs and would slowly overtime increase their control of the country. This created uncertainty about the future of political power in Bosnia. Any constitution or agreement reached in 1991 could simply be overturned as Bosnian Muslims continued to increase their portion of the population. Bosnian Muslim leaders often made remarks of eventually becoming the titular ethnic group in Bosnia. Knowing the demographic trends of Bosnia did not favor them, the Bosnian Serbs chose to wage war for their own independent state. To solve the problem of the Muslim population in “Serb lands”, they pursued a policy of ethnic cleansing so as to make the new Bosnian Serb state ethnically pure. This “cleansing” took the form of mass murder, mass rape, and mass forced removal of Bosnian Muslims in Serb held territory. I contend that this fear of higher Muslim growth rates will manifest itself in local data. Municipalities that had higher Muslim growth rate in the preceding three decades will also have higher rates of violence.

In this chapter, I identified that ethnic conflict in Bosnia require an explanation so as to better understand how future ethnic wars occur and thus avoid the same pitfalls as Bosnia. I then examined the existing literature and found it lacking in reasons for why this ethnic war occurred in Bosnia but not in any other successor states of the former Yugoslavia. This chapter also presented the theoretical foundation for my argument. Chapter II will provide the research design

and my operationalization of the data in order to provide statistical evidence for my argument. Chapter III will provide a case study of the failure of the two ethnic groups to avoid war and an examination of why the Bosnian Serbs chose a policy of genocide throughout the conflict. Chapter IV will conclude my thesis with the policy implications derived from my research.

The atrocities of the Bosnian war often seem so inexplicable that the quest for why such violence can happen seems impossible. There have been many memoirs of the victims of the war and observers to the violence. Those who experienced the horrors of the detention camps in Visegrad or the rape houses of Foca are often at a loss to explain just how a community could fall into such madness. If any of the memoirs have a common theme, it is one of a passing nightmare (Drakulic 2004). For three long years Bosnian citizens were not themselves. The decades of multiculturalism and tolerance were murdered and buried by the sweeping fire of ethnic nationalism. Yet it is for the future Bosnians, Rwandas, and Sudans that a search for why is necessary.

II. Empirics

The demographic trends of the preceding four decades in Bosnia created a fear among the Bosnian Serbs that they would lose political power and become an exploited minority within a new democratic Bosnian state. Without being part of a larger Yugoslav union, which included a dominant Serbia, Bosnian Serbs worried that they would lose opportunities to a growing Bosnian Muslim plurality. The Bosnian war had a local flavor in which towns and villages became the scene of violent ethnic reprisals. If the high demographic growth of

Bosnian Muslims was indeed a causal factor for casualties, then it would manifest itself in the statistics at the municipal level.

Research Design

This section describes how I operationalize my main variables of Muslim demographic growth and war casualties. In order to measure demographic growth, I have chosen to use the 1961, 1971, 1981 and 1991 Yugoslav censuses for Bosnia. I start with the 1961 census because that is the first census that Muslims were able to be properly counted in Bosnia. Starting with the 1961 census also allows for a period of 30 years to be examined in particular the proportional rate of increase of Muslims per municipality. This will provide a sufficient time period for the effects of demographic change to make itself felt to the Bosnian leadership. Census data however is surely not always full proof and many caveats are required when using them in research. The 1971 census is the first to allow Bosnian Muslims to identify themselves as a nation yet the 1961 census provides an accurate estimation of the Muslim proportion of the population. Not all Bosnian Muslims identified themselves as such. The Yugoslav identity was still quite popular in the 60's and 70's during Tito's reign. Not until his death in 1980 do the Yugoslav ethnic groups begin to see themselves as an ethnic nationality first and Yugoslav second. Thus a small minority of the increase in differing ethnic groups can be explained by this decline in the constructed Yugoslav identity. By the 1991 census only 8 percent of Bosnians chose to be identified as Yugoslav in the country's census.

My units of analysis are the municipalities of Bosnia. Before the war, Bosnia had 106 municipalities. The municipality is the smallest administrative unit in the country and thus represents the best area unit to examine the effects of demographic trends at the local level. I

operationalized the data into the percentage change of the Bosnian Muslim population in preceding thirty years in each of the municipalities. By observing the change in percentage of the Bosnian Muslim population in each of these municipalities, I identified which ones would be probable candidates for violence.

I rely on the database of the Sarajevo Documentation Center for my war casualty data. The Bosnian war was a brutal war often fought in rural villages. The large presence of paramilitaries and militias blur the line between civilian and soldier. Many reports of the overall dead from the war have ranged from 200,000 to 60,000 with most trending toward the latter. Before the work of the Sarajevo Documentation Center, most researchers had to rely on U.N. estimations or similar ambiguous data. Yet in 2007, the Sarajevo Documentation Center released the “Bosnian Book of the Dead” in which a database with thoroughly documented deaths per municipality is presented in varying categories. With the release of this new data, research can now look for any correlation between differing variables and where deaths occurred. The database however does have some flaws that make ideal research impossible. Citizens and soldiers are counted separately in the regional level however in the municipality level, which is the focus of this thesis, civilians and soldiers are counted together. This lack of differentiation makes arguing that certain factors at the municipal level led to genocide much harder. Another problem posed by the database is the lack of differentiation at the municipal level of ethnicity among the casualties. Bosnian Muslims made up 83.33% of all the documented civilian casualties in the database due to widespread ethnic cleansing that took place by Serbs in Eastern and Central Bosnia. Yet without knowing the numbers at the municipal level, making the case for a directed genocide against them becomes difficult. However, despite these problems, the

new database provides an operationalization of deaths that did not exist in previous research on the topic.

My thesis builds on the work done by Slack and Doyon (who were kind enough to share their research data) in their 2001 article about the effect of Muslim demographic growth on the Bosnian war. Their research made the case that the Muslim population boom in the previous thirty years created an incentive for the Bosnian Serbs to pursue war. They included economic competition as a component in their research and much work has been done on the role of resource distribution in ethnic conflicts yet that is not the focus of this thesis. I have decided to just focus on how the population trends in each municipality affected the number of deaths for that corresponding municipality. My research differs from them by testing the demographic data against an established casualty database. This research will thus make use of a quantifiable dependent variable that did not exist at the time of their research. As noted previously, the Muslim population of Bosnia had been steadily increasing since 1961. The Serb population had been decreasing as well during this time period as Figure A shows.

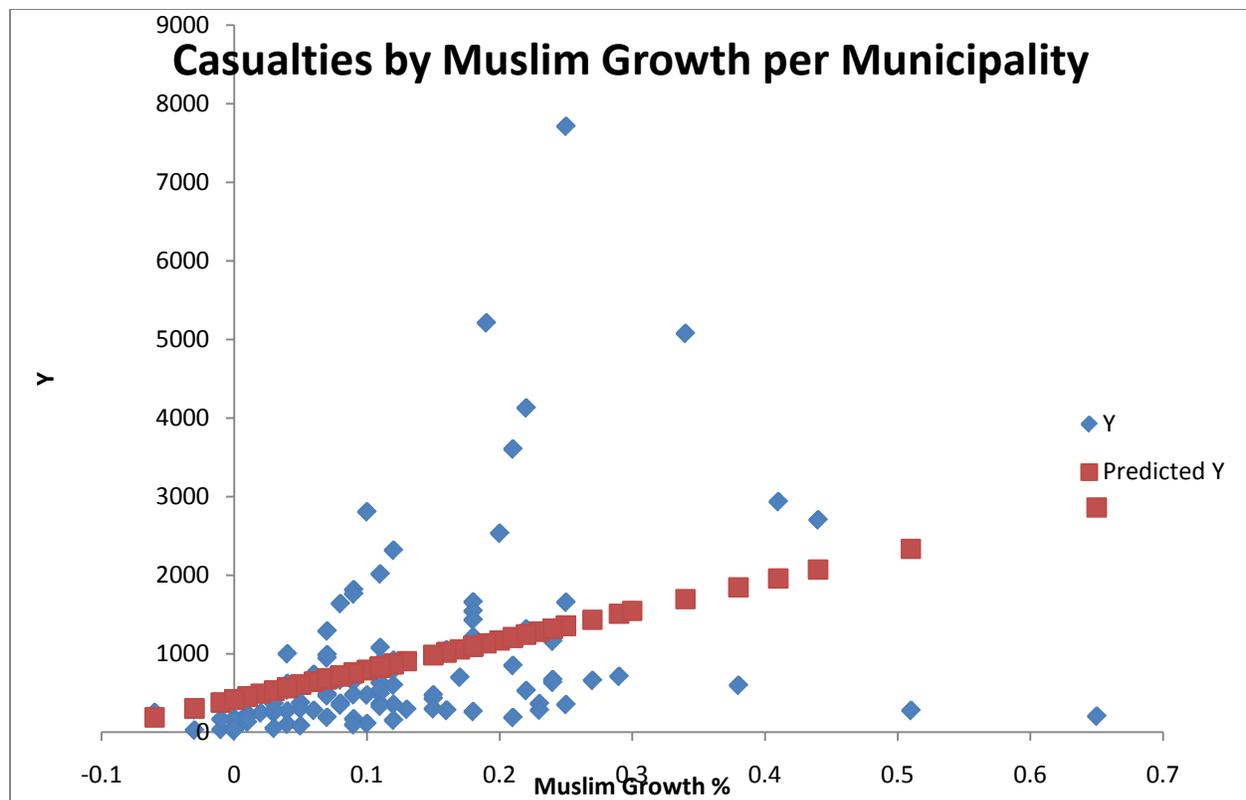
Figure A

Ethnicity	1961	1971	1981	1991
Muslim	26%	39%	40%	43%
Serb	43%	37%	33%	33%
Croat	22%	21%	18%	16%

Yugoslav	8%	2%	8%	6%
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By 1991, Muslim population had grown from a 26% minority to a 43% plurality. In contrast, the Bosnian Serb population had gone from a 43% plurality to a 33% minority. A shift in the balance of ethnic power had begun in favor of the Bosnian Muslim population. Yet the Bosnian war was often made up of local attacks and was not characterized by massive fronts or troop operations until the final stages. The population trends that occurred at the municipal level will likely be of greater importance than ones on the overall national level in revealing if in fact these trends created an incentive for violence. If my hypothesis that high Muslim growth rates at the local level led to violence is correct then there will be a correlation between those municipalities of high Muslim growth and those with high numbers of casualties. This correlation would indicate the severity of the commitment problem at the local level. The higher the growth rate of Bosnian Muslims in a municipality, the more likely violence would be used to solve the shift in demographic power by Bosnian Serbs. The statistical evidence supports this hypothesis as seen in Figure B.

Figure B



There is a statistically significant relationship between higher levels of Muslim growth and casualties suffered per municipality. The slope in the graph shows a positive relationship between the number of casualties and the higher the rate of Muslim growth for each municipality. As the growth rate of the Muslim population in a municipality increases, the number of casualties increases as well. This confirms my hypothesis that the shift in demographic power in the preceding decades caused fear and then ultimately retaliation by Bosnian Serbs. Municipalities that experienced the highest growth were far more violent than areas that experienced low Muslim growth or none at all. Casualties in this test included civilians as well as soldiers and did not differentiate between ethnicities. However on the regional level, outside of the Podrinje region, civilian and military casualties are closely correlated. Thus this

test acts a sufficient proxy of civilian deaths per municipality. Although this test includes all ethnicities, the documented evidence of ethnic cleansing as well as the overall vast disparity of between Bosnian Muslim civilian deaths and Bosnian Serb civilian deaths lend support that most of the violence was overwhelmingly directed at the Bosnian Muslim civilian population.

To put this statistical evidence in an accessible context, out of the top 35 municipalities that experienced the highest Muslim growth, 16 experienced casualty numbers exceeding 1000. Yet upon examining the 35 municipalities that experienced the least Muslim growth, I found that only one of these experienced casualty numbers exceeding 1000. Tests run to see if there were any correlation between 1991 population levels and deaths were not convincing. Those municipalities with high Serb populations were not more likely or less likely to have experienced higher casualties. Municipalities with high level of Bosnian Serbs did not have any reason to fear Bosnian Muslim growth and therefore had little reason for reprisal. This gives further evidence that it was not the presence of Serbs but rather the fear of a Muslim demographic boom locally that led to violence.

Most of the municipalities that suffered high levels of casualties were in eastern Bosnia along the Drina river valley and in northern Bosnia. Both of these areas suffered from high levels of ethnic cleansing throughout the war. The names Gorazde, Zvornik, and Srebrenica have become symbols for genocidal violence in the 1990s. These were also the areas that experienced the highest growth rate of Muslims in the preceding years. By 1991, Sarajevo had become largely identified with this Muslim population boom and was a hotbed of Muslim political activity in the preceding years before the war. Throughout the conflict, it acted as the seat of the Muslim-run Bosnian government. It was shelled mercilessly due to the presence of a sizable Serb

minority though that the Bosnian Serbs wish to incorporate into their new state. The Bosnian Serbs still viewed much of the city and surrounding area as classically Serbian and did not want to relinquish the city despite having lost the city demographically. Srebrenica was the home to the largest mass murder operation in Europe since the Second World War. Not surprisingly it had also experienced a Muslim growth rate of twenty-five percent from 1961 to 1991. The Muslim population in Prijedor had grown nearly twenty percent. This was the site of the famed detention camps in which armed Serbs held Bosnian Muslim men captive. The camps in Prijedor were notorious for beatings, torture, forced starvation, and vast numbers of executions. Many of the local Serb politicians were tried and convicted of crimes against humanity after the war. The Zvornik municipality also experienced some of the worst instances of ethnic cleansing as Bosnian Muslims were expelled and forced from their homes. The Bosnian Muslim population of Zvornik had increased by twenty two percent.

On the other hand, municipalities that did not experience high levels of Muslim growth also did not suffer high casualty numbers. The Serb majority Capiljina municipality suffered a relatively low 239 casualties throughout the war yet Muslims made up nearly a third of the overall population. If anything this would appear to be the perfect municipality for ethnic cleansing to occur. Yet the municipality only experienced two percent growth in its Muslim population and thus was not seen as threatening to the Serbs who lived there. In Kiseljack, Serbs outnumbered Muslims by 2772 which means they had the means for violence and a high enough Muslim population to be seen as threatening to Serb interests. The town had a strategic location near the frontline of Sarajevo and thus would be a prime candidate for ethnic cleansing. Yet the town only suffered 429 casualties in three years of warfare because the fifteen percent growth

rate was not enough to trigger Serbian concerns. While outlier municipalities certainly exist, a relationship between municipal Muslim growth and casualties cannot be denied.

This section provided the theoretical framework for my argument that a shift in the distribution of ethnic power caused a commitment problem among the ethnic groups of Bosnia. Commitment problems often lead to preventive war despite both sides wishing to avoid it. With the absence of a third party to enforce agreements on the Bosnian ethnic groups, there was an incentive for the Bosnian Muslims to renege on any agreement in the future as they would eventually become the dominant majority ethnic group in the new country. The Bosnian Serbs had an incentive to seek war while they still had the numbers to win instead of slowly losing control of the political power in Bosnia. The statistical data provided shows a strong correlation between those municipalities that experienced higher Muslim growth and those that suffered high casualties. The ethnic proportion in each municipality immediately preceding the war was not as strong an indicator of violence as the rate of Muslim growth. Municipalities where Serbs had once been in power but were losing their demographic advantage were much more likely to experience violence.

III. Solving the Commitment Problem in Bosnia-Herzegovina

This section will examine how the Bosnian Serb leadership came to the conclusion to wage a war with ethnic cleansing acting as the dominant feature. By providing a narrative to the data, I will provide further evidence that this decision for war was made largely out of a concern of losing power in Bosnia as the Muslim population continued to grow at a faster rate than the Serb

population. It will also examine how the referendum of independence and international recognition of the new Bosnian state effected the relationship between the two ethnic groups. Finally it will analyze the failure of the international community to act as an enforcement mechanism to solve the commitment problem in Bosnia.

In the run up to the 1991 Bosnian elections, ethnic nationalism began to gain ground. With the rise of Slobodan Milosevic in Serbia and Franjo Tudjman in Croatia, ethnic nationalism became the tool for elites to gain power. It's doubtful as to whether someone like Milosevic actually cared about Serbian nationalism in any real sense outside of a Machiavellian method to increase his own power in Yugoslavia. The election results did not lie though as ethnic nationalist parties gained power in each of Yugoslavia's republics. These politicians success though was likely the result of fear rather than genuine support for their policies (Burg 1999). Many were known to have military wings and thugs at their disposal. In elections, voters feared that if they did not vote for their own ethnic party than one of the others would win.

The 1991 Bosnian election saw the emergence of these nationalist parties in the first free election in the country. The main issue however was whether or not Bosnia should stay in the Yugoslav union or push for independence. By this time Milosevic was in full control of Serbia and had expanded his power into the two autonomous provinces of Kosovo and Vojvodina. This development created tension in Slovenia, Croatia, and Bosnia as Yugoslavia became increasingly dominated by Serbia. Referendums were held in Slovenia and Croatia whether to secede from Yugoslavia and become independent nations. Slovenia, which is ethnically homogeneous, voted to secede and fought a quick successful war with the Serbian dominated Yugoslav army to consolidate its independence. In Croatia, the situation was more complex. After a successful

referendum for independence, Croatia's large Serbian minority constructed barricades and began to arm. The Croatian Serbs decided to fight instead of becoming a minority in the new Croatian state. Yet in Croatia, merely independence was enough to trigger Croatian Serb fears. Bosnian Serbs suffered a more severe commitment problem due to the demographic trends favoring Bosnian Muslims as well as the increased rapid shift due to Bosnian independence. Soon Croatian Serbs set up local governments in Serb territories of Croatia and called upon the Yugoslav army to protect them. This would set a precedent for actions that would later take place in Bosnia. The secession of these countries from the Yugoslav union created rapid shift in the balance of power among the republics. With Macedonia's secession imminent, Bosnia would be left in a rump Yugoslav union consisting of a hostile Milosevic-led Serbia and its allied government in Montenegro.

As noted above, the 1991 elections in Bosnia produced a fractured parliament in which the Muslim SDA was a plurality party over the Serbian SDS. The SDA won 43 seats in the Chamber of Citizens to the SDS's 34. In the Chamber of Municipalities, the SDA won 43 to the SDS's 38 (Burg 1996:54). The SDA controlled 33% and 40% of the seats in each respective chamber. This was not enough to have outright control of the national government such as Croatia's nationalist HDZ party enjoyed. This split national government, with neither party receiving an outright majority, made negotiations on the future political institutions of Bosnia doomed. The fact that each party's percentage of the vote mirrored their corresponding ethnic base was yet another signal to the Bosnian Serbs that democratic elections were not a viable means to secure their political power in the country.

The SDA was led by Alija Izetbegovic who advocated for Bosnian independence from Yugoslavia. The SDS was led by Radovan Karadzic, a Serbian nationalist who argued that Bosnia should stay in the Yugoslav union. The question of Bosnian independence was central to the failure of either side to come to an agreement. If Bosnia had stayed within Yugoslavia then the Serbs in Bosnia would have retained their majority status and could count on Belgrade's nationalist government to look after their interests. Yet in an independent Bosnia, the Muslims would become the largest ethnic group and would have the most power if citizens continued to vote on ethnic lines. In essence the question of independence was a question of the distribution of power in Bosnia. This is where demographics played such a vital role in the thinking of the Bosnian Serb elite. Not only would Bosnian Muslims be the plurality but they would increase their power over time due to their propensity for higher birth rates. Bosnian Serb general Ratko Mladic spoke of a Muslim "demographic bomb" and feared that this would lead to ever increasing desire for land and power (O'Balance 1995). Norman Cigar also notes that Karadzic "focused specifically on the Muslim birth rate as supporting proof of his concern about the Muslim threat" (Cigar 1995). However it was not just Bosnian Serb leaders that were aware of the demographic trends. Just two years before the conflict started, Izetbegovic declared "some people may want that (to make Bosnia a Muslim state) but this is not a realistic wish. Even though the Muslims are the most numerous nation in the republic, there are not enough of them...they would have to comprise about seventy percent of the nation" (Silber 2007). Karadzic offered the chilling rejoinder, "Do not think that you will not lead Bosnia-Herzegovina to hell, and do not think that you will not perhaps lead the Muslim people to into annihilation, because the Muslim people cannot defend themselves if there is war...How will you prevent everyone from being killed in Bosnia-Herzegovina?" (Burg 1999:78). Statements such as these reveal just

how large a role the population trends in Bosnia played in the lead up to war. They also reveal just how hopeless negotiations were between the two bitter sides due to the lack of institutions that could act regardless of who controlled the government.

This demographic shift in power would not have led to war if proper enforcement mechanisms had been in place. Yugoslavia had long been dominated by an authoritarian government that could act as this mechanism among the differing ethnic groups. This government's fortune was largely tied up with the founder of the modern Yugoslav state, Joseph Tito. Tito led an era of "brotherhood and unity" and created a rather large cult of personality around his image. As with any state led solely by one individual, there lacked proper institutions to stabilize the country in his absence. After his death, the Yugoslav government began to rapidly decline and lose power among the republics. The emergence of ethnic nationalist parties in the late 1980s created competing interests in Yugoslavia. Former mediocre bureaucrats such as Milosevic discovered that ethnic nationalism was a powerful tool to gain power. In a multi-ethnic society, this new group of politicians played on citizen's economic and social fears with much success. With the collapse of the communist authoritarian government, these competing ethnic interest groups no longer had a viable third party to enforce agreements. This created a commitment problem as ethnic groups were now on their own to decide their fate in the dissolution of Yugoslavia. As Fearon notes in his important 1998 article, "The problem is that in post-Soviet Eastern Europe, ethnic majorities are not able to commit themselves not to exploit ethnic minorities in a new state" (Fearon 1998).

The Bosnian Muslims would be the most populous ethnic group in the newly independent Bosnia. There lacked an enforcer to make sure that the Muslims did not simply increase their

power over time as their demographic numbers continued to grow. Many attempts were made by European negotiators to create such enforcement mechanisms such as non-proportional ethnic councils or gradual regional autonomy (Burg 1999). It is not so much that these ideas were poor. Many similar ones would eventually be created by the Dayton agreement that ended the war. Yet then the United States and N.A.T.O. acted as the enforcer. During the run-up to war, no entity existed that could enforce commitments made by either ethnic group. Without this enforcer, Bosnian Muslims would not have to pay any price for renegeing on an agreement in the future. Bosnian Serbs had no reason to believe that any newly created institution would still be viable in the future once Bosnian Muslims had increasing control. What was needed was a third party which could be trusted so as to solve this commitment problem. It is in this role that the international community failed Bosnia the most.

After the referendums for independence in Slovenia and Croatia, many countries in the then European Community were unsure whether to recognize the new states or continue to push for a united Yugoslavia albeit with more autonomous control for the republics. If the Europeans had stayed united in their decision, perhaps war could have been avoided in Yugoslavia. However, in December of 1991, Germany recognized Slovenia and Croatia as independent states. This created a fracture in European policy and created a moral hazard for other republics looking to secede from the Yugoslav union. Izetbegovic viewed the recognitions as proof that the Europeans and the Americans would also recognize an independent Bosnian state. Germany's recognition of Croatia and Slovenia gave an incentive for the Bosnian Muslim government to seek independence before a political agreement could be made that would ensure that Bosnian Serb rights and autonomy would be respected regardless of future demographic trends.

The declaration of independence, spurred on by Germany and the United States, played a major role in shifting the demographic power to the Bosnian Muslims. The independence cemented the fears that Bosnian Serbs had in the preceding few years before the war. Demographics created the commitment problem but Bosnian independence acted as a final push towards war. It is possible that the competing groups could have negotiated if the demographic trends did not loom over any such agreement reached. Without the rest of Yugoslavia's Serbs to rely upon, the Bosnian Serbs were now severely limited in their bargaining power. As their population in Bosnia fell relative to the Muslim's so would their ability to bargain effectively. This in itself would not have led to war if the international community, whether the Europeans or the United Nations, could act as viable third party to enforce future agreements. Yet by the time the United Nations actively decided to engage in the Bosnia crisis, it was much too late. Bosnian Serbs came to distrust the West and decided that only one possible solution could secure their power. The Bosnian Serb elite decided that the partition of Bosnia was preferable than staying in the country with an ever increasing Muslim population. They feared losing economic opportunities at the municipal level. They feared being under the increasing control of the Bosnian Muslim nationalist party. They feared losing the connection with their fellow Serbs in Serbia.

The solution to these fears was the creation of an ethnically pure Serbian state created out of the regions in which Bosnian Serbs could bring this to fruition. One last attempt was made at negotiations however "Karadzic found the proposal inadequate, insisting that the Serbs of Bosnia would accept nothing less than their own state" (Burg 1996:109). This would solve the twin issues of faster Muslim demographic growth and the lack of credible commitment mechanisms for enforcing political agreements. The creation of a Bosnian Serb state would mean that only

Bosnian Serbs could decide their political and economic fortunes and would not have to negotiate with the increasing Bosnian Muslim population. The decision to pursue war was made even more desirable by the role of Serbia. Milosevic had supported the Serbs in Croatia in their attempt to create a new state. Karadzic could count on the Serbian nationalist government in Belgrade to help out his efforts in seceding from the new Bosnian state. This may not have been the case in the near future. Bosnian Serbs then declared the new state of Republika Srpska on January 9th 1992. By this time Bosnia's fate was decided. The Bosnian Serbs knew that if they did not fight now, the reality of the demographic situation in their country would make achieving their political goals impossible.

The Policy of Genocide

My research makes the case that municipalities that had the higher Muslim growth were more likely to suffer a higher number of casualties. It is in this data, that the role of ethnic cleansing and genocide makes its appearance. Bosnian Serb actions in eastern Bosnia have been labeled as genocidal by many commentators for the ferocity of the ethnic cleansing that occurred in this region. An international tribunal found the Bosnian Serb leadership guilty of genocide in the case of the Bosnian town of Srebrenica. Ethnic wars that have occurred in the post-Cold War era have been bloody affairs yet few match the Bosnian war for civilian misery. Samantha Powers recalls from her time covering the war as a journalist that "Theirs [Bosnian Serb] was a deliberate policy of destruction and degradation: destruction so this avowed enemy race would have no homes to which to return; degradation so the former inhabitants would not stand tall – and thus would not dare again stand – in Serb held territory" (Powers 251; 2002). What is important to note is the way this cleansing occurred and was carried out. Genocide in Bosnia was

not carried out in the way the Holocaust was in which a large foreign advancing army had special units to round up specific newly conquered ethnic groups for murder. Certain Serbian paramilitaries, such as the notorious Arkan's Tigers, did indeed travel from town to town executing civilians. Yet this would largely ignore much of what Slack and Doyon refer to as the "neighborhood" factor of the genocide (Slack 2001). Many memoirs and accounts of the atrocities that occurred focus on the role of once peaceful Bosnian Serbs who became killers and war criminals once the war started. In municipalities now under the new Bosnian Serb state's control, local leadership often carried out a policy of ethnic cleansing. This included rounding up Bosnian men and boys and detaining them or executing them. It involved the rape of Bosnian Muslim women. Most importantly these policies were used to not only expel the Muslim population in Bosnian Serb territory but to make it impossible for them to continue living in the new Serb state.

The term ethnic cleansing has been used as euphemism for these atrocities. Yet this should not obscure the fact that genocide was the goal of the Bosnian Serbs. "The Serbs had set out to destroy the Bosnian Muslim population, and even if they were not exterminating every person, they were ravaging the Muslim community and doing all they could to ensure it would never recover" summarized Powers (Powers 2002:288). The international community was quick to embrace the term used by Bosnian Serbs because it allowed them deflect responsibility to protect Muslim civilians. "The conduct in Bosnia is genocide, but clearly the abuses that have occurred there over the last year such that they, as I said, border on that particular legal term" stated Bush administration official Patricia Diaz Dennis (Powers 2002: 292) As noted earlier, the international community did not wish to involve itself greatly in the Bosnian conflict. Without coercive Western diplomacy, the Bosnian Serbs believed that the creation of their own state free

of Muslim influence was the only way to ensure Serbian power in the long run. The West's reluctance to engage in a meaningful way or allow U.N. troops to properly protect Muslim civilians with force gave encouragement to the Bosnian Serbs decision for war and genocide. In Karadzic's thinking, no international body could or would enforce agreements between Serbs and Muslims in Bosnia. It was therefore not rational for Bosnian Serbs to continue to share a country that they were eventually going to become an even greater minority in.

Genocide was thus a central part of the Bosnian Serb policy of creating an ethnically homogenous state. This was their solution to the demographic boom that they faced in municipalities under their own control. Norman Cigar notes that "Although the Serbs often appeared to choose targets not having, strictly speaking, any military significance, the targets did make sense in rewriting the demographic balance sheet" (Cigar 1995:56). A Serbian scholar advocated "In order for the [Serbian] people to survive, every woman must give birth to at least three children" (Cigar 1993: 78). This was indicative of a large scale movement among Bosnian Serbs to achieve higher birthrates throughout Bosnia. The Serbian Orthodox Church's spokesman even declared that "The state will belong to those who have the [highest number of] people" (Cigar 1993: 52). Higher birthrates however was only a small long term project and could not change the outcome of current events on the ground in the same quick manner that ethnic cleansing could.

Atrocities were committed by all sides throughout the war. Croats subjected Muslims to ethnic cleansing and Muslims did the same to the Serbs and Croats. Yet there was no direct policy of genocide by these ethnic groups as these instances were likely a result of the chaos and retribution of war. Bosnian Muslims were encouraged by their leaders to stand their ground no

matter where they resided. This was necessary to preserve the Bosnian government's policy of maintaining one united Bosnia. Izetbegovic fought hard to discourage the partition of the country among the ethnic groups and thus lose resources and territory that could eventually come under Muslim rule. With the demographic numbers on their side, the Bosnian Muslim leadership aimed to preserve the country at any cost including endlessly requesting Western involvement and attacks against Serb targets. The Bosnian Serbs however made ethnic cleansing a stated goal and was necessary to achieve their overall policy aims. Creating an exchange in populations provided a foundation for a pure Serbian state. Journalists Steven Burg and Paul Shoup note that "given the number of Muslims expelled from Serb-controlled territory and the brutality that accompanied the expulsions, the sum total of atrocities committed by the Serbs was in a category by itself" (Burg 1996:173).

This section has provided a case study and the necessary historical information to put the statistical data in a greater narrative context. The fear of the Muslim demographic boom among Bosnian Serb leaders has been documented extensively. The international community had a chance to assuage these fears by acting as a viable third party for which agreements could be enforced among the warring ethnic groups. Instead they presented a fractured policy that often was subject to change at inconvenient times. With no guarantee for political or economic security as a minority in the new Bosnian state, the Bosnian Serbs decided to solve the commitment problem through the creation of their own ethnically pure state. This goal would be achieved through a policy of genocide in Serb held territories. This manifested itself greatest at the local level in municipalities. Local leaders saw the rising tide of Muslim growth as a threat to their security and thus those municipalities where this was most evident suffered greatest.

IV. Conclusion

This thesis has made the argument that the Bosnian Serbs chose a policy of genocide as a way of solving the commitment problem. This dilemma occurred in Bosnia once the republic seceded from the greater Yugoslav union. Suddenly Bosnian Serbs went from a majority to a minority. This shift in the balance of demographic power sparked fears among the Bosnian Serbs. The demographic trends of the country did not favor them and the Muslims could not offer any credible guarantee to not exploit their new found plurality over time. The international community failed to act as an enforcement mechanism in solving this problem. It is in this structural context that the Bosnian Serbs chose to wage a preventive war. Their chance of winning the conflict would continually decrease as the shift in demographic power continued to favor the Bosnian Muslims in the future. The creation of a purely Serb state in Bosnia would mean expelling the Muslim population from Serb-held territories. A policy of ethnic cleansing and genocide was chosen as the quickest and most efficient way of achieving this goal.

My research has shown that there is a statistically significant relationship between the municipalities that experienced high Muslim growth and the number of casualties experienced in that municipality. I argue that this data is evidence that the genocide of Muslims by the Bosnian Serbs manifested itself at the local level. Local Serb leaders often detained and executed Muslim men and then proceeded to evict women and children out of the territory. The evidence provided here makes clear that demographic trends were vital in creating the incentive for genocide. Local officials in Bijeljina set a quota of Muslims who would be allowed to reside in the town at five

percent of the pre-war level (Cigar 1993). The war was seen largely as a numbers game and genocide was used as a tool to shift this demographic power back in the Serb's favor.

The policy implications of this research are evident. When ethnic nationalist parties come to power in multi-ethnic states, it is imperative to examine what role demographics play. In developing countries, population numbers are often signs of political strength. New democracies do not have the institutions to guarantee minority rights and thus reassure them of their security. This creates a majority-minority commitment problem when there is no greater authority willing to act as an enforcer of inter-ethnic political contracts.

When the United States invaded and occupied Iraq, the initial elections led to a Shiite nationalist government due to them being the majority religious-ethnic group in the country. The Sunnis, the former favored ethnic group under the former Saddam Hussein regime, were suddenly relegated to minority status and lost many of the opportunities they had been used to. This rapid shift in the ethnic power of the country created a commitment problem among the ethnic groups of Iraq. The Sunnis did not see the United States as a viable neutral third party who could enforce agreements and keep the newly empowered Shiite majority from exploiting them. The Sunnis chose to fight and the insurgency in the country soon developed into an ethnic civil war. It was not until General Petraeus' policy of working with Sunni leaders and bringing them into the political fold through favors did the insurgency begin to die down. The surge of extra combat troops also allowed the United States to increase its bargaining power over the Sunnis by creating a less anarchic environment. This policy of reassuring the political security of ethnic minorities helped solve a deteriorating situation in Iraq.

While the case of Bosnia has notable differences, the same majority-minority commitment problem existed and was made worse by the prevailing demographic trends. The international community failed greatly in its attempts to solve this by not coordinating an effective policy and by not acting as a viable third party to reassure Bosnian Serb fears. The German recognition of Croatia created an incentive for Bosnia to secede immediately. The European Community, then in charge of initial negotiations between the ethnic groups of Bosnia, should have first made an effort to help create a political agreement before recognizing any of the Yugoslav republics. The international community then blundered again by pushing for a referendum on Bosnian independence despite the well-known distrust of Bosnian Serbs. By encouraging the independence of Bosnia, the international community created the final rapid shift in demographic numbers which ultimately played a role in the Bosnian Serb decision to choose war over peace. They also lost credibility among the Bosnian Serb leadership and therefore were not seen as trustworthy for enforcing agreements.

These events created a commitment problem for the Bosnian Serbs. Outside parties as well as the Bosnian Muslim-led government were not credible partners. The Muslims could negotiate a deal and then simply wait for the Bosnian Serb population to dwindle before increasing control over the country's political structure. The Bosnian Serb goal was now to create a purely Serb state in as much of Bosnia's territory as it could. It would use the tool of genocide, which they dubbed as ethnic cleansing, to make this a reality. Local towns and areas that had seen Muslim growth were attacked with greater ferocity. Their plan was quite successful. The war ended with the Dayton agreement in which the Bosnian Serbs received a large amount of autonomy and were able to possess a large amount of the areas they desired. Currently, Bosnia is divided into a

Croat-Muslim federation and a Bosnian Serb republic. The Bosnian Serb territory is now eighty-eight percent Serb.

This thesis does not aim to provide excuses for the genocidal policy taken by the Bosnian Serb leadership throughout the war. Yet only by analyzing the rationale behind such a policy can the motivation be better understood and thus prevented. The international community helped create a structure for which genocide was a preferable choice for the Bosnian Serbs. The genocide occurred not due to ancient hatreds but rather a political structure that should have been avoided. The role of demographics in the creation of this structure should have been accounted for much more greatly than it was by international policy-makers in the initial stages of the war. Instead, foolish diplomats gave middling excuses for why the warring parties could not just get along. The horrors of genocide are often considered so brutal and senseless as to be irrational. This is simply untrue. Genocide, like war, is a rational decision taken to achieve a political goal and the sooner we understand this fact the sooner the phrase “never again” can be taken seriously.

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