

Contextualization

- During the late 1980s and early 1990s, Eastern and Central Europe underwent huge instability as the Soviet Union dissolved, union republics of the USSR re-emerged as sovereign states throughout the region, and tens of thousands of state-owned firms under communist regimes were privatized.¹ Social services collapsed as governments faced deep recessions and as inflation spiraled out of control.² It was in this context that ethnic tensions flared up violently within Yugoslavia!
- Following the dissolution of the USSR, the Maastricht Treaty—the legal foundation of the European Union—was signed in 1992, transforming the European Community into a more closely-integrated economic and political union
- As Eastern Europe gradually stabilized, many nations sought entrance into the EU and NATO. Beginning in 1999 and then escalating in 2004, the EU's enlargement process saw many Eastern European nations join: Hungary, the Czech Republic, and Poland in 1999, followed by Bulgaria, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Romania, Slovakia, and Slovenia in 2004. Since then, Albania, Croatia, Montenegro, and North Macedonia have also become EU member states

History of Yugoslavia

- For centuries, the territory that later became Yugoslavia was ruled by foreign powers, including the Ottoman Empire, followed subsequently by the Austro-Hungarian Empire. However, most people living under the control of these foreign powers were ethnically Slavic—they viewed themselves as a distinct group with distinct cultures, identities, and traditions
 - In 1878, following the Serbian-Ottoman Wars, Serbia and Montenegro declared independence from the Ottoman Empire, but the remaining Yugoslav states—such as Slovenia and Croatia, for instance—remained under the control of the Austro-Hungarians
 - However, during World War I, the Austro-Hungarian government invaded and occupied Serbia and Montenegro, prompting the national governments of both states to flee and abandon their people
- The notion of “Yugoslavia,” then, was the idea of a unified Slavic nation, ruled *by* Slavic people and inhabited *by* Slavic people. This Slavic nationalism accelerated towards the end of the 19th century: many Slavs were inspired by the 1871 unification of Germany's various princely states and autonomous provinces into a centralized state under Otto von Bismarck
 - In 1917, as World War I was still raging, political leaders from Montenegro, Serbia, Slovenia, Croatia, Vojvodina, and Bosnia-Herzegovina convened and

¹ For the most part, the process of privatization was managed in a kleptocratic manner: massive assets, like farms, mineral extraction plants, and factories, primarily fell into the hands of a small number of wealthy elites, who profited enormously off of the instability that seized the region towards the end of the 20th century

² In Romania, for instance, inflation surpassed 135%, while in Ukraine, inflation reached as high as 800%

declared their desire to form a new, unified Slavic state. As the war neared an end, the Austro-Hungarian Empire began to falter, facing major revolutions in the capital cities of both Austria and Hungary. Subsequently, the Yugoslavian territories inhabited by the Slavic people declared independence!

- After the war ended in 1918, the Allied Powers supported the proposal of creating a separate, Slavic state, as Western victors were opposed to the continued post-war existence of a powerful, geographically expansive Austro-Hungarian Empire
- These Slavic nations officially formed the **Kingdom of Slovenes, Croats, and Serbs**, which was later renamed as the Kingdom of Yugoslavia in 1929. Literally, this means “Land of the South Slavs”—a linguistic representation of how many Yugoslavians viewed their country!
- In 1941, during World War II, the Axis Powers invaded Yugoslavia. The Croatian ultranationalist and fascist Ustaše was appointed as the Nazi puppet government in Yugoslavia; the Ustaše’s occupation was brutal, with hundreds of thousands of Croats, Jews, political dissidents, and ethnic minorities being slaughtered
 - Following the Nazi invasion of the USSR, the Soviet Union ordered the Yugoslav Partisans, a communist militia led by Josip Broz Tito, an anti-fascist revolutionary, to launch a guerilla campaign against the Axis occupation in Yugoslavia. The Yugoslav resistance became the most effective resistance movement in Europe, and—having received only minimal tactical and military support from the more powerful members of the Allied Powers—ousted the Ustaše from power in 1945, thus liberating the country!
- After the communist liberation, Yugoslavia became known as the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia. The first elections were held in late 1945: the socialist People’s Front of Yugoslavia, led by communist revolutionary Tito, won in a landslide with nearly 85% of the popular vote. Subsequently, Yugoslavia became a one-party communist government under Tito, who assumed the role of President for life and marshal of the Yugoslav armed forces
- Under Tito, Yugoslavia pursued an economic and political system of orthodox communism, with significant centralized economic planning and minimal private control over the means of production. Ideologically, this meant that in the immediate aftermath of its independence, Yugoslavia maintained relatively friendly relations with the USSR, but soon afterwards, Yugoslavia’s Tito and the Soviet Union’s Stalin split and entered a period of geopolitical hostility known as the Informbiro period. A few major disputes between Yugoslavia and the Soviet Union caused this divide:
 - 1) Yugoslavia and the Soviet Union viewed their alliance differently. While Yugoslavia regarded itself as an ally of the USSR, the USSR viewed Yugoslavia as something of a satellite state. Moreover, the Soviet Union maintained that Yugoslavia’s liberation movement only succeeded due to the partial backing of

the Red Army, whereas Tito—who had lead the movement for independence, and achieved great success well prior to the arrival of Soviet reinforcements—vehemently rejected such claims as factually nonsensical

- 2) The Soviet Union and Yugoslavia pursued differing foreign policies, much to the chagrin of the Soviets. A few notable instances where Soviet and Yugoslavian foreign policy diverged:
 - The Soviet Union heavily opposed the ideology of Yugoslav irredentism, under which Yugoslavia desired further political, economic, and social integration with bordering countries like Bulgaria
 - While the Soviet Union secretly opposed the communist insurgency in Greece, Tito's Yugoslavia explicitly supported and backed the revolutionary movement—despite private pressure from Stalin to not do so!
 - In 1947, Yugoslavia signed the Bled Agreement with Bulgaria, which promised a future of bilateral cooperation and mutual assistance between the two countries. The Soviet Union opposed this!
- 3) Politically, Yugoslavia—which had originally not included the territory of Albania—pushed for the integration of Albania into its socialist federation. Stalin was heavily opposed to this, as he viewed Albania as a Soviet satellite state. Nonetheless, in 1948, Belgrade admitted Albania into Yugoslavia!
- Although the Soviet Union and Yugoslavia split apart largely due to political and territorial considerations, the public announcement of their division was framed almost exclusively through the language of *ideology*, chiefly because the Soviet Union wanted to minimize any perception of *political inconsistency* within the Eastern Bloc: in a series of published letters and essays, the Soviets blamed the Yugoslavs of pursuing Trotskyism and heading down the path towards capitalism, to which the Yugoslavians responded by castigating the Soviet model of communism for not being sufficiently revolutionary and attacking Stalin's government for being insufficiently democratic and not acting as a vanguard for true socialism. However, the split between Tito and Stalin had, chiefly, three major implications for Yugoslavia:
 - 1) The Soviet Union had historically acted as a large trading partner for the Soviet Union, but as their political relations were severed, so too was the inflow of Soviet aid. The major consequence of this was a stunting of growth within the still-emerging Yugoslavian economy, but in the long run, this counterintuitively *benefited* Tito's regime: owing to economic pressures caused by the lack of Soviet support, Yugoslavia implemented a series of mixed-market reforms that saw partial decentralization of economic power to workers and businesses, rather than exclusively consolidating decision-making power within the hands of the central government in Belgrade; for instance, Yugoslavia implemented market mechanisms to determine the supply and price of goods, rather than setting those

at the federal level. Most importantly, though, Yugoslavia also pursued a system of co-operative business ownership: under this system, employees were given majority ownership over the companies they worked for, which gave them—rather than wealthy investors and non-employee shareholders—direct influence over corporate decision making

- This economic pragmatism, rather than unyielding commitment to communist orthodoxy, proved to give the Yugoslavian economy the flexibility and adjustability needed to industrialize and develop!
- 2) Externally, the US saw the splintered relationship between the Soviet Union and Yugoslavia as an opportunity to expand its influence in Eastern Europe during the early stages of the Cold War. By 1948, this led to US loans and grants being provided to Yugoslavia, but Tito was reluctant to accept larger-scale American aid, such as aid dispensed through the Marshall Plan, for fear of incurring a Soviet invasion.
- 3) Internally within Yugoslavia's dominant Communist Party, Tito became paranoid of Stalin-aligned party members and the threat they might pose to his grasp on power, which resulted in a mass political purge that imprisoned or killed thousands of "Cominformists," or Yugoslavian communists supportive of Stalinism
- As a consequence, Yugoslavia under Tito remained officially neutral during the Cold War, opting to side neither with the US—for fear of triggering Soviet retaliation—nor the Soviet Union—due to ideological disputes. However, following Stalin's death in 1953, Yugoslavia partially mended its relations with the USSR under the new Premier Nikita Khrushchev. Even after the Yugoslavia-USSR alliance was restored, though, Tito did not budge, and maintained Yugoslavia's official position of neutrality. Similar to India, this brought considerable inflows of aid into Yugoslavia from *both* sides of the Cold War: the US under Eisenhower feared that Yugoslavia would be forced to turn to the Soviet Union in the absence of US support, and the Soviet Union sought to moderate Yugoslavia's divergent foreign policies by leveraging its provision of aid

Nationalism, Solidarity, and Brotherhood under Tito

- While the ethnic tensions that eventually erupted into violence in the 1990s pre-dated Tito's rise to power, his communist regime was effectively able to keep these tensions in check and maintain relative peace within the country. There were several mechanisms that allowed this to happen:
 - 1) Officially, Yugoslavia was divided into six equal republics, all of which were entitled to a large degree of autonomy. In the immediate aftermath of World War II, most of these republics were *largely* ethnically homogenous—it wasn't until decades later, after substantial amounts of intra-Yugoslav migration, that substantial pockets of ethnic pluralism would arise within republics like Croatia

and Kosovo. As a consequence, ethnic tensions were kept relatively—that is, *comparatively*—in check for the first many years of Tito’s rule, in particular because each republic was given a great degree of autonomy³

- 2) Tito sought to cultivate a national Yugoslavian identity that placed emphasis on the *shared history* and *shared culture* of the Slavic peoples. There were two dominant narratives at play here:

- The narrative of “**Yugoslavism**” posited that all of the South Slavic peoples—Bosniaks, Croats, Macedonians, Montenegrins, Serbs and Slovenes—belong together in a single, unified, centralized nation. Yugoslavia pushed this narrative through the education system, but also used force when the narrative was questioned; for instance, during the late 1960s, reformers within Croatia pushed for greater federal autonomy, demanded economic reform⁴, and publicly opposed the over-representation of Serbs within the national Yugoslavian government. Tito and many other members of the Communist Party viewed this “Croatian Spring” as a burgeoning form of Croatian nationalism, which threatened the narrative of Yugoslavism. Consequently, Tito purged thousands of members from the League of Communists of Croatia; some were simply ousted from the party, while others were put on trial and convicted of attempting to overthrow the socialist republic
- The narrative of “**Brotherhood and Unity**” emphasized the common struggle of the Yugoslavian people against the Nazi occupation and the collective effort required to maintain and strengthen the Yugoslavian state! This narrative more *directly* tackled Yugoslavia’s multi-ethnic identity, and was incorporated into Yugoslavian society through a variety of mechanisms: the country’s official constitution(s) explicitly endorsed the narrative of “brotherhood and unity,” as did the official party platform of the League of Communists of Yugoslavia. The largest highway in the country was named the “Brotherhood and Unity Highway,” quotas were introduced in government institutions to ensure equal representation of Yugoslavia’s various ethnic groups, and citizens were encouraged to self-identity as “Yugoslav” rather than affiliate with their Slavic ethnicity. Most significantly, Yugoslavia pressed charges and arrested hundreds of people deemed to be opposed to the “brotherhood and unity” narrative—and interestingly, many of the people arrested for breaking these laws (like against chauvinistic propaganda and separatist/irredentist

³ For instance, each republic was allowed to develop its own, independent militia, and each republic was given more control over their own economic systems

⁴ Many of these reforms related to currency disputes: corporations within each republic were required to transfer large amounts of hard currency to the federal government, which Croatia heavily opposed!

rhetoric) later became leading pro-independence figures during the breakup of Yugoslavia in the 1990s!

- In short, Yugoslavia under Tito sought to cultivate a national identity of fraternity, brotherhood, and supra-ethnic nationalism, but also tried to limit the rise of separatism and ethno-nationalist sentiment! For the first several decades within Yugoslavia's post-liberation period, this was actually quite effective: Tito was widely supported, not only because of his effective balancing between federal consolidation and federal decentralization, but also—and more importantly—because of his legacy as the “liberator” of the country and his ties to the anti-Usašte cause. The dominance of Tito within Yugoslavian politics allowed people to set aside ethnic differences and rally behind the idea of Slavs' shared experiences during the fight for liberation

Post-Tito Strife: Politics, Economics, and Ethnicity

- In 1980, however, Tito died, thereby creating a power vacuum and undermining many of the tension-quelling narratives that he had instituted as President. His death created a major political crisis within Yugoslavia, since the unifying, uniting presence he had brought to Yugoslavia's post-war political realm vanished, and in its place, political elites sought to exploit the resulting period of instability and uncertainty for their own gain. Ethnicity, then, was simply the weapon they used, even if not the true, underlying motivator of conflict! In essence, though, post-Tito Yugoslavia faced three major crises it was ultimately unable to overcome: (1) political fragmentation, (2) economic stagnation, and (3) the rise of ethno-national separatist movements
- After extensive disagreement over how to structure the post-Tito federal government, the republics eventually agreed on a “collective presidency.” Yugoslavia, at the time, was composed of six official republics—Serbia, Montenegro, Slovenia, Macedonia, Croatia, and Bosnia-Herzegovina—as well as two autonomous provinces—Kosovo and Vojvodina. The newly-formed presidential structure featured a rotating power structure, where each of the eight republics and provinces would hold the Presidency for a one-year period. Importantly, though, federal decisions—including those made by the legislature, and not just the Presidency—required a majority of the eight republics/territories to be in support! This accelerated political fracturing within Yugoslavia: prior to his death, Tito had exercised *de facto* unilateral authority, but with the eight-part system that followed his demise, the various competing regions of Yugoslavia—each of which had differing interests and priorities—came into direct conflict
 - Kosovo desired enhanced levels of autonomy—and more significantly, wanted to eventually become Yugoslavia's seventh official republic, which would have conferred greater autonomy to Kosovo's regional government!
 - Serbia desired a stronger federal government, where the Serbian faction would have benefited from disproportionate control!

- Slovenia and Croatia, as the two richest regions within Yugoslavia, wanted more control over their own economies—in particular, they wanted to abandon federal measures that redistributed wealth away from their economies to poorer parts of the country—and wanted a more liberal and progressive Yugoslavian agenda!
- Bosnia-Herzegovina was, of all the regions, the most explicitly supportive of explicit independence, particularly since Bosniaks—or Bosnian Muslims—are religiously quite different from the other ethnic groups within the broad category of the Slavic peoples
- Compounding political disputes between Yugoslavia's various regions was the increasing weakness of the nation's economy. Several factors contributed to Yugoslavia's crumbling economic health:
 - While the cooperative model of business ownership—whereby workers were given shareholder rights in the companies they worked for—was good, in principle, for workers, it also contributed to a crushing period of stagflation within the pre-breakup Yugoslavian economy. Since workers were given significant control over companies, they had the right to elect managers onto corporate management boards; in order to win employees' votes, prospective candidates frequently promised bloated benefits packages and better wages. The implication of this was that companies faced ever-rising labor costs, which forced them to raise prices; however, many companies simply couldn't afford to meet these salary demands, and eventually went out of business, thus compounding high levels of inflation with high levels of unemployment. This *also* put pressure on the Yugoslavian government to expand welfare programs to address rising poverty levels in the country—which was all well and good, but put an increasingly unsustainable fiscal burden on the state, requiring the country to go into enormous amounts of debt that it rapidly found itself unable to pay back
 - Towards the end of the 1980s, the reform-minded Gorbachev became the Soviet Union's final Premier and—cognizant of the USSR's waning global power and domestic insecurity—began limiting Soviet involvement in global affairs, such as by withdrawing Soviet forces from the Soviet-Afghan War. This signaled the end of the Cold War, which resulted in the contraction of the Yugoslav economy because Yugoslavia had historically relied on competing inflows of aid from the US and USSR—but as the Cold War came to a close, there was no longer a meaningful incentive for either side to pour billions of dollars into Yugoslavia
 - Following the 1979 Iranian Revolution, oil production sharply declined, causing oil prices to skyrocket. While all countries were hit, Yugoslavia's economy was hit particularly hard, especially because the energy crisis coincided with Tito's death—this combination of factors led many investors to be skeptical of Yugoslavia's fiscal health, contributing to a credit crunch that made debt refinancing a near-impossibility for the government

- Yugoslavia tried to cope with its economic contractions by printing money (to allow continued government assistance to struggling businesses and the poor, writ large) and by imposing steep tariffs on imports in order to boost domestic industry. The former caused hyperinflation, with prices soaring by as much as 1000%, while the latter increased the prices of much-needed imported inputs used by Yugoslavian businesses, like electronic chips for the computer industry and cotton for the textile industry. This forced companies to raise prices even higher, contributing to a devastating inflationary spiral
- As Yugoslavia's debt burden became increasingly unsustainable, it was forced to turn to the IMF for financial assistance; as per tradition, the IMF demanded the imposition of harsh austerity measures: property markets were restructured, taxes were hiked, government expenditures were slashed, and worker co-ops were largely abolished. The "shock therapy" Yugoslavia subjected itself too may have been necessary for long-term economic restructuring, but the short-term implication of structural adjustment was a profound amount of economic pain and resultant socio-political instability
- The financial difficulties faced by Yugoslavia had a variety of impacts not only on the economy, but also on the political system. Primarily, Slovenia and Croatia were vastly wealthier and more fiscally sound than poorer regions like Kosovo and Macedonia—for instance, by the early 1990s, the average person in Slovenia was nearly *eight-times wealthier* than the average person in Kosovo! As a consequence, richer regions were largely opposed to austerity measures, since they believed that they had, historically, been far more fiscally responsible, whereas poorer regions had blown vast budgets on inefficient and wasteful vanity projects. This ideological dispute—over who should bear the costs of Yugoslavia's economic restructuring—fomented political fracturing within the federal government and added fuel to separatist movements in places like Slovenia and Croatia!
- Most central, however, to Yugoslavia's eventual breakup was the deteriorating state of ethnic tensions within the country. Throughout its history, Yugoslavia had been home to dozens of different ethnic and religious groups. Officially, Yugoslavia only recognized several of them: Serbs, Slovenes, Croats, Montenegrans, Bosnian Muslims (or "Bosniaks"), and Macedonians. Members of officially-recognized ethnic groups received special perks, like public schools taught in the language of your ethnicity and freedom to express your religion, but most importantly, entitled those groups to their own ethnically-affiliated republic! Two problems arose by the 1980s and '90s because of this:
 - 1) Not all ethnicities were officially recognized—for instance, Kosovo Albanians weren't officially recognized despite the fact they were a demographically larger group than Macedonians *and* Montenegrans. Many members of non-represented ethnicities resented the Yugoslavian government, resultantly!

- 2) While some regions—like Serbia—were relatively ethnically homogeneous even by the 1980s, internal migration throughout the latter half of the 20th century had diversified the ethnic and cultural makeup of several federal republics
- Beyond the issues posed by state recognition and relocation of Yugoslavia's ethnicities, the rise of Serbian nationalism in the late 1980s was, arguably, the largest factor that contributed to the outbreak of the Yugoslav Wars.
- Slobodan Milošević joined the League of Socialist Youth of Yugoslavia while he was a student at the University of Belgrade; subsequently, he entered a career in local politics, and eventually rose up the ranks of the League of Communists of Serbia, and in 1986, he was unanimously elected head of the Serbian branch of the League by Serbian party members. The following year, Milošević rose to prominence within the broader Serbian political scene by embracing Serbian nationalism. He did this in a few major ways:
 - 1) Milošević explicitly came out in support of ethnic Serbs living in Kosovo, which was ruled by the dominant Albanian majority. He claimed that the Albanians were persecuting and oppressing Kosovo's Serbian population; Milošević used this narrative to justify calls for crackdowns on Kosovan separatism and limitations on Kosovo's political sovereignty. Even within his own party, this was a controversial advocacy: such ethno-nationalist rhetoric was highly taboo within Yugoslavia due to the dominance of the "Brotherhood and Unity" narrative!
 - 2) Milošević endorsed the ideology of a pan-Serbian "Greater Serbia," which called for Serbia's borders to be expanded to include the current and historical homelands of all Serbian peoples. Through this rhetoric, Milošević built a base composed of hardline Serbian nationalists, which enabled Milošević to double down on his advocacy *against* the Yugoslavian system of decentralized federalism!
- In 1989, Milošević was elected as Serbia's President. He enacted a dominant one-party rule to consolidate power and reformed the constitution to crack down on the autonomy of Kosovo and Vojvodina—which was in-line with his advocacy for centralization within Yugoslavia. Next, Milošević sought to develop a coalition of like-minded leaders within other republics such that he would control at least four of the eight republics/regions in Yugoslavia, which would give him *de facto* veto power over any policy proposed in the Yugoslavian federal government. To pull this off, Milošević's supporters staged uprisings and mass protests throughout Yugoslavia's federal republics and installed pro-Milošević regimes
 - In late 1988, Milošević had Serbian media run an avalanche of articles that (often falsely) portrayed the governments in Vojvodina and Montenegro as corrupt and power-hungry; protestors swarmed government buildings⁵ and demanded regime

⁵ In Vojvodina, the anti-Milošević government in power attempted to limit protests by handing out free food to protestors, which included cups of yogurt. Many protestors instead threw their yogurt servings at government buildings, so the riots in Vojvodina are sometimes called the "Yogurt Revolution"

changes. In the ensuing chaos, confusion, and instability, the governments in both Vojvodina and Montenegro resigned and were replaced with Belgrade puppet governments loyal to Milošević

- In early 1989, Milošević arranged for Azem Vllasi and Kaqusha Jashari, the highest-ranking politicians in Kosovo, to be replaced with pro-Belgrade cronies. Subsequently, the Serbian Parliament introduced a series of constitutional amendments that functionally stripped Kosovo of its status as an autonomous political region, subject to ratification from Kosovo's legislative body. Kosovo Albanians heavily opposed these proposed amendments and turned to the streets in protest; for instance, the 1989 Kosovo miner's strike saw hundreds of Albanian miners in Kosovo engage in a hunger strike to signify their opposition! However, Yugoslav police forces—under heavy influence from Belgrade—arrested many of the leading Kosovo Albanian protestors and illegally detained them, despite outcry from the other Yugoslavian republics. Subsequently, the Parliament of Kosovo passed Milošević's amendments despite not having the requisite two-thirds worth of votes.
- After the Serbian Parliament signed the constitutional changes into law, Milošević had functionally overtaken the governments of Kosovo, Vojvodina, and Montenegro, giving him control over the voting behavior of four of the eight territories of the Yugoslavian federal government—and thus, the power to veto any proposed laws/changes that he opposed! This functionally destroyed the remaining power of the federal government in Yugoslavia to settle disputes between republics, as Serbian interests would always win out
- Political tensions between the republics reached their peak in January of 1990 at the 14th Congress of the League of Communists, which saw each regional branch of the Communist Party meet in Belgrade. Predictably, most discussion within the Congress featured heated debates between Milošević's Serbian branch—which advocated for a more centralized political system—and the Slovenian and Croatian branches—which advocated for a more democratized and regionalized political system. The Croats and Slovenes, motivated in part by the successful wave of pro-democracy revolutions which had taken place throughout Eastern Europe in 1989, consistently motioned for measures that would delegate more power *away* from the central government, but Milošević's voting coalition ensured that each and every motion failed. Three days into the meetings, after being stifled by Milošević's intransigence, the Slovenian and Croatian delegates stormed out of the Congress, which functionally dissolved the League of Communists of Yugoslavia and brought an end to the multi-decade dominance of one-party rule in Yugoslavia. Subsequently, multi-party elections were held in every republic and autonomous province within Yugoslavia
 - Serbia's elections saw Milošević's re-election; similarly, in Montenegro, a rebranded offshoot of the original Communist Party, with ideological ties to

Milošević's pan-Serbianism, was elected. As a consequence, Serbia and Montenegro officially functioned as a pro-Serb political bloc

- In Croatia, Franjo Tudman's nationalist Croatian Democratic Union, or HDZ, was elected, explicitly on a mandate of protecting Croatian sovereignty from Milošević's Serbian terrorism.
- Pro-independence parties were also elected in the other Yugoslavian republics—that is, Slovenia, Macedonia, and Bosnia-Herzegovina. Together, these new parties proposed that Yugoslavia be reorganized into a new federation, with most governing power being devolved to the six constituent republics. Milošević immediately rejected this proposal; this denial, however, only served to further accelerate separatist movements within these republics

Beginnings of Conflict

- Croatia was the first main battleground in the eventual fight for ethnic self-determination. Milošević effectively convinced ethnic Serbs living inside Croatia⁶ that the rise of the Croatian nationalism in the form the recently-elected Croatian Democratic Union posed a threat to their very existence—and this message *registered* with Croatian Serbs, who had very real and very visceral memories of the brutal occupation of Yugoslavia during WW2 by the Ustaše, which was, itself, loyal to Croatian ultranationalists. This historical association engendered significant fear within many Croatian Serbs, which was further exacerbated in December of 1990, when Croatia rewrote its constitution to downgrade the status of ethnic Serbs from “narod” (a *nation*) to “manjine” (a *minority*)
- In response to the perceived threat posed by Croatian nationalism, many Croatian Serbs agitated for the right to remain a part of Yugoslavian Serbia in the event that Croatia declared independence from the broader federation. The most notable instance of such a movement originated in the Croatian city of Knin, which was dominated by Serbs, who formed the Serbian Autonomous Oblast of Krajina. This Serbian secessionist movement was ardently supported, both in rhetoric and in tangible backing, by Milošević; perhaps more importantly, the leading general of the national Yugoslavian army—which was mostly loyal to the Serbian-Montenegro faction—secretly provided strategic advice to the Croatian Serbs in Knin and advised them on how to rebel against the Croatian army
- In the so-called “Log Revolution,” Serbian nationalists blocked major Croatian roadways with logs and barred Croatian entry into Knin. Subsequently, the Croats sent in helicopters to quash the rebellion, but as the helicopters were *en route*, fighter jets from the Yugoslav Air Force—that is, the federal government's national army!—intervened and ordered the helicopters to return to their base in Zagreb, an order which the Croatian helicopters complied with. This proved to be a critical inflection point, because it

⁶ By 1991, Croatia was composed predominantly of ethnic Croats (78%), but was also home to a minority of ethnic Serbs (12%)

demonstrated to the Croats—but also to the Slovenes—that the national army was *de facto* under Milošević's control

- In early 1991, a secret tape was released that showed a high-ranking Croatian official privately saying that Croatia was at war with the Yugoslav armed forces and was engaging in illegal arms smuggling, primarily from Hungary. This news, in conjunction with the increasing fervor of secessionist sentiment within Bosnia-Herzegovina, Macedonia, and Slovenia signaled the inevitable: that Yugoslavia was headed for a bitter and bloody breakup

Declarations of Independence & Outbreak of the Yugoslav Wars

- On December 23rd, 1990, Slovenia held an independence referendum, where Slovenians overwhelmingly (95%) voted for secession. On May 2nd, 1991, Croatia, too, held a referendum on the question of secession, which yielded similar results, with 93% voting in favor of independence. Just a few weeks later, both Croatia and Slovenia—the two nations which had been most opposed to Milošević's vision of a Greater Serbia—declared their independence officially on June 25th, 1991
 - In response to these declarations of independence, the Yugoslav army forcibly entered Slovenia in hopes of suppressing the secessionist movement; the “Ten Day War” followed, after which the European Commission—the precursor to the European Union—sponsored negotiations between the Milošević-dominated Yugoslavia, Slovenia, and Croatia. During these negotiations, the three parties eventually signed the Brioni Agreement, which ordered a three-month ceasefire and temporary moratorium on independence declarations, as well as the subsequent withdrawal of Yugoslavian forces from Slovenia.⁷
- During the intervening period, the Yugoslavia military drew up plans for a large-scale attack on Slovenia—which would have likely succeeded, given the relatively weak state the Slovenian military found itself in—but Serbia vetoed the authorization of the invasion. Chiefly, Milošević wasn't particularly concerned with Slovenia's secession, since Slovenia was (relatively) quite removed from Serbia and had a negligibly small Serbian minority. However, Milošević's desire to keep Croatia within the Yugoslavian Republic was unwavering, given the large number of ethnic Serbs living within Croatia! Moreover, by the time that Slovenia officially seceded and declared independence, the situation in Croatia was already escalating, with a dozen cities on the border between Croatia and Serbia having fallen under the control of Serbian nationalists
 - Thereafter, at the command of Serbia, the Yugoslav army was sent to the Croatia-Serbia border, ostensibly to serve as “peacekeepers.” Within just a few days, though, Croatian Serbs expanded further into Croatian territory with the support of the military and took over many Croat-majority villages—revealing,

⁷ Additional measures were also tacked on, such as prisoner-of-war swaps and legal rights for Slovenia to take control of border posts, but these were less significant than the main provisions of the Agreement

quite clearly, that Milošević's vision for Serbian expansion had more to do with aspirations for *power* than aspirations for a truly homogeneous Serbian nation!

- As violence escalated in the region, each republic's state head was summoned to the Hague, where the European Community's Lord Carrington, a British conservative, proposed Croatia being recognized as independent, subject to the good treatment and protection of ethnic Serbs living in Croatia. Milošević agreed to this proposal at first, but later withdrew when the written agreement proposed the dissolution of Yugoslavia entirely into six, fully sovereign republics. Despite Milošević's opposition, Carrington's proposition was still put to a vote, where it would need five of the six republics' support to pass—and surprisingly, the other five republics sans Serbia voted in support! This was shocking to Milošević, since Montenegro was a close ally of Serbia; later, it was revealed that Italy had privately offered a large aid deal to Montenegro for supporting the proposal. However, Milošević blackmailed Montenegro into backing out of the deal
 - Around the same time, Germany—which had recently been unified as a single country for the first time since the end of WW2—unexpectedly recognized Slovenia and Croatia as sovereign nations, which further heightened tensions in the region
- Simultaneously, Macedonia held a referendum on independence, which—just like the others—showed overwhelming support (95%) for secession. Afterward, Macedonia officially declared independence, and broke away from Yugoslavia bloodlessly, the only country to do so!
- In the following years, three more major wars of independence would be fought—all of which would be rife with genocide and ethnic cleansing
 - The **Croatian Civil War** was fought between 1991 and 1995. Fighting intensified in August 1991 following brutal conflict in Vukovar and Dubrovnik, where a World Heritage site was bombed. Chiefly, the fighting was between the Serb-dominated Yugoslav Army—which aligned with the self-proclaimed Serbian separatist oblasts within Croatia—and the Croatian army. The UN intervened in 1992 during a temporary ceasefire to establish several protected areas; UN peacekeepers ensured the stability of these areas, which acted as safe havens from the war effort. By 1995, following the Operation Flash and Operation Storm—two large, offensive movements by the Croatian army—Croatia recaptured almost all of its former territorial losses and became an independent, sovereign nation. By this point, Croatia was the third nation to leave Yugoslavia, following Slovenia and Macedonia
 - The **Bosnian Civil War** was waged between 1992 and 1995, and was the bloodiest of the Yugoslav Wars. While the Croatian Civil War was predominantly fought between Croatia's two large ethnic groups—Croats and Serbs—the Bosnian demographic landscape was more complicated, as Bosnian Muslims (known as “Bosniaks”) represented the majority, with a smaller Serbian minority

and an even smaller Croat minority. In February of 1992, Bosnia, too, held a referendum on independence: Bosniaks and Croats, both wary of Serbia's irredentist aspirations, voted in support of independence, while Serbs boycotted the election, such that 99.7% of the referendum's participants voted for secession, despite only 64% of the electorate turning out. Soon afterward, Bosnia was plunged into bloody wars waged across ethnic lines when a Bosniak man killed a Serbian civilian, which provoked Bosnian Serbs to retaliate by setting up massive roadblocks throughout Bosnia's capital city of Sarajevo. Subsequently, Bosnian Serbs declared an independent Serbian republic, called "Republika Srpska," while Bosnia moved to declare its own independence

- As the Bosnian War raged on, the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia functionally crumbled: Slovenia, Macedonia, Bosnia, and Croatia had all left, leaving just Montenegro and Serbia, which reorganized the former country into the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia
- At first, Bosniaks and Bosnian Croats were unified by their common hatred of the Serbs—but soon after fighting began, Croats began seizing Croat-majority areas in Bosnia. Having established a sizable Croat-occupied territory, Bosnian Croats—much like the Serbian oblasts in Croatia before them—declared themselves independent from Bosnia and announced the formation of the Croatian Republic of Herzeg-Bosnia
 - At this point, the Bosnian War became a three-way conflict between the Bosniaks (supported by Bosnia), the Croats in Herzeg-Bosnia (supported by Croatia), and the Serbs in Republika Srpska (supported by Serbia)
- Later, the UN became involved in the war more directly; for instance, UNSC Resolution 819 unanimously declared that Muslim-populated areas in Bosnia would serve as safe havens, and UN personnel were dispatched to Bosnia to ensure the safety of these areas. Eventually, though, this implicitly backfired: in February 1994, a series of rocket attacks against Sarajevo killed sixty-eight civilians, prompting NATO to issue an ultimatum to the Milošević-backed Bosnian Serbs, which threatened airstrikes against the Serbs if Serbia didn't withdraw its heavy weaponry from the region (most importantly Sarajevo, the capital city of Bosnia). However, Bosnian Serbs wanted to demonstrate their military superiority and didn't want to appear that they were being bullied into submission by the West, prompting an aggressive counter-strike against the UN-controlled area of Srebrenica. The small peacekeeping force responsible for protecting Srebrenica failed to hold off the Serbian offensive, and within just a few days, more than *eight-thousand* innocent Bosniaks living in the city's refuge were slaughtered. This has become known as the Srebrenica Massacre
- In the aftermath of these war crimes, NATO launched an intense bombing campaign against the Bosnian Serbs; facing external pressure, Milošević

demanded that Bosnian Serbs cede negotiating authority to him, or else lose Belgrade's backing in the war effort

- Eventually, peace talks in Dayton, Ohio yielded the Dayton Accords, which successfully put an end to the war. The Accords stipulated that Bosnia would be divided into two distinct legal entities: the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina and the Republika Srpska
- The **Kosovo War** was the last major conflict in the Yugoslav Wars, and began as a low-intensity war in 1996 when the Kosovo Liberation Army was formed in response to persistent Serbian repression of the Albanian socio-ethnic identity. Western military forces quickly intervened after a NATO-brokered ceasefire in 1998 broke. After the Serbian army committed the Račak massacre,⁸ NATO demanded that Serbia allow thirty-thousand NATO troops to enter the region to ensure stability and peace. Serbia refused, implicating a forceful installation of NATO peacekeepers in the region. Additionally, NATO launched a heavy-duty, three-month-long bombing campaign against Serbia until the signing of the Kumanovo Agreement, which functionally separated Kosovo from Serbian control and created a joint Kosovo-NATO military force to replace the remnants of the Yugoslav Army within Kosovo
 - Since 2008, Kosovo's sovereignty has been recognized by a majority of Western countries, but vehemently denied by Serbia and Russia!
- Following the Yugoslav Wars, Montenegro *narrowly* voted for independence in a 2006 referendum, marking the official and complete dissolution of the original Yugoslav Republic

International Tribunal

- The Yugoslav Wars were brutally bloody: as many as two-hundred thousand people were killed, and roughly four million people were displaced. Following the end of the conflicts, the International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia ("ICTY") was established as a sub-organ of the United Nations to prosecute those responsible for carrying out war crimes
- In total, 161 people were indicted for various types of war crimes. 18 of them were later acquitted, 91 were convicted, 13 cases were transferred to national courts within Balkan states, 20 indictments were withdrawn, and 17 died before sentencing could take place
- Most notable was the indictment of Milošević, who served as Serbia's President until 2000, at which point massive protests forced him to resign during the "Bulldozer Revolution," during which a heavy equipment operator drove a bulldozer towards the Radio Television of Serbia building, which had historically produced much of Milošević's propaganda

⁸ During the Račak massacre, Serbian forces killed forty-five innocent Kosovar Albanians

- In 2001, Milošević was arrested by Serbian authorities on suspicion of corruption, abuse of power, and embezzlement. However, Serbian Prime Minister Zoran Đinđić quickly realized that the lack of hard evidence of Milošević in domestic courts would make an effective prosecution difficult, prompting him to extradite Milošević to the Hague to stand trial for accusations of war crimes
 - Milošević died in his prison cell before a verdict was issued after his four-year-long trial