

The Misunderstood Lessons of Bosnia for Syria

In developing U.S. intervention policy in Kosovo, Iraq, Libya, and most recently Syria, the 1992 to 1995 war in Bosnia and Herzegovina¹ has repeatedly been used as an analogy. For example, John Shattuck, a member of the negotiating team at the Dayton peace talks that ended the war, wrote in September 2013 that for Syria “the best analogy is Bosnia...Dayton was a major achievement of diplomacy backed by force...A negotiated solution to the Syria crisis is possible, but only if diplomacy is backed by force.”² Many other analysts and policymakers with experience in the Bosnian conflict—such as Nicholas Burns, the State Department spokesman at the time; Christopher Hill, a member of Richard Holbrooke’s negotiating team; and Samantha Power, who began her career as a journalist in Bosnia—also invoked the Bosnian war to urge greater U.S. involvement in Syria.³ Although the rise of ISIS has significantly altered the conflict over the last year, echoes of the Bosnian conflict remain in Syria: the conflict is a multiparty ethnic civil war, fueled by outside powers, in a region of critical interest to the United States.

Three lessons from Bosnia are frequently identified: first, to understand the problem of ethnic civil wars as a threat to U.S. reputation and its leadership in the world; second, to prescribe diplomacy backed by force in order to end civil wars; and, third, to see military action to end civil wars as a moral obligation.

However, the latter two lessons represent a flawed interpretation of the war in Bosnia. First, the effectiveness of diplomacy backed by force actually depends on the military and political balance on the ground. Second, to the extent that there is a moral obligation to intervene militarily, there is a further moral obligation to engage in a post-war mission to build peace.

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These corrected lessons of Bosnia offer important insight for Syria, especially the fight against Assad. U.S. reputation and leadership are even more at stake in Syria since U.S. forces deployed in September 2014 to defeat ISIS. Violence by the regime against civilians—especially violence that the United States could have prevented—could easily draw the United States into the conflict, and it is difficult to imagine U.S. forces stepping away once they degrade or defeat ISIS.

The Lessons of Bosnia?

Scholars have shown that analogies are not just used rhetorically, but fundamentally shape how policymakers see the world and the decisions they make. Oxford University professor Yuen Foong Khong has demonstrated in detail how the particular analogies that President Lyndon B. Johnson and his staff used to understand the war in Vietnam determined whether or not they supported U.S. escalation.⁴ Analogies are important because policymakers simply do not have enough information to know how any given policy will turn out—instead they draw on history, filtered through their own personal experience, to make decisions.

Khong explains six ways that policymakers use analogies to make decisions, of which three are most relevant to the experience of the Bosnian war: policymakers use analogies to define the nature of the problem; to suggest a policy prescription; and to understand the morality of a given policy. The specific lessons commonly identified from Bosnia are to define the nature of the problem of ethnic civil war as a threat to U.S. leadership in the world; to suggest the policy prescription of diplomacy backed by force; and to see intervention as a

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moral obligation. Most critiques of the use of a given analogy suggest that the wrong analog is being used. Such a critique would suggest that we should use the Iraq war as the best analogy to understand Syria, rather than the Bosnian war. I adopt a different critique: the Bosnian war is a useful analogy for future ethnic conflicts, but policymakers are drawing the wrong lessons from Bosnia.

The first commonly identified lesson from Bosnia is to understand ethnic civil wars as a potential threat to U.S. leadership in the world. From 1991 until July 1995, the United States rejected direct military intervention in the war in Bosnia on the grounds that, while the violence was unfortunate, no clear national interest was at stake. Former Secretary of State James Baker contended, “We don’t have a dog in this fight.”⁵ The July 1995 massacre in Srebrenica, in which Bosnian Serb forces attacked a UN-protected safe area, changed all of

this. Approximately 8,000 Bosnian Muslims were killed, making Srebrenica the worst massacre committed in Europe since World War II. Soon after Srebrenica, the United States adopted a radically different policy and claimed that ending the conflict was indeed a national interest. Within five months, U.S.-led negotiations brought an end to the war.

Samantha Power convincingly claims that Srebrenica led to U.S. intervention because it showed how continued inaction would undermine U.S. leadership in the world. She quotes a senior adviser to the Clinton administration: “This issue had become a cancer on our foreign policy and on his administration’s leadership. It had become clear that continued failure in Bosnia was going to spill over and damage the rest of our domestic and foreign policy.”⁶ As U.S. Ambassador to the United Nations, Power expressed a similar sentiment in a September 2013 speech advocating U.S. action in Syria: “If we cannot summon the courage to act when the evidence is clear, and when the action being contemplated is limited, then our ability to lead in the world is compromised.”⁷

Srebrenica appears to have threatened U.S. leadership in at least two ways. First, the massacre might have led U.S. allies to develop their own response to the conflict, which would diminish the role of the United States as the leader of international security institutions. Following Srebrenica, then-French President Jacques Chirac advocated strengthening the other safe areas in Bosnia. Chirac’s call for action may have made Clinton administration officials fear that European leaders would take action on their own, which would demonstrate that the United States was no longer committed to protecting European security. Holbrooke, the lead U.S. negotiator, wrote, “[T]he perception that Washington had turned away from Europe at the end of the Cold War was hard to shake as long as we did nothing about Bosnia. Dayton changed this almost overnight.”⁸

A second way that Srebrenica might have undermined U.S. leadership was that the shame of failing to address a morally reprehensible act might have diminished the U.S. reputation. Burns emphasizes that “[t]hose killings shocked and shamed Western leaders who had resisted decisive intervention until that point.” Burns draws the connection to Syria by asking, “When will the United States and other global powers experience a ‘Srebrenica moment,’ when they can no longer stand on the sidelines and resolve instead that they finally have to act?”⁹

To a great extent, the historical record in Bosnia supports the point that U.S. intervention came about because the war challenged U.S. reputation and leadership. There are other reasons why the United States might decide to use military force, such as a direct threat of an attack on the homeland or a desire to protect U.S. allies. Neither appear to have been central to U.S. decision-making in Bosnia—as opponents of intervention pointed out, the immediate security threat of the war to the United States or its NATO allies was limited.

Reputation in this case is intertwined with the moral imperative to end violence, but the moral force of the war does not appear to have been sufficient to provoke U.S. action. There was tremendous moral pressure to intervene before Srebrenica, and it is striking that Power, Holbrooke, and Burns each emphasize how the failure to act would pose costs to other U.S. policy objectives. Two factors appear to be especially important in determining whether U.S. reputation is at stake: preexisting involvement in the crisis, and a clear ability to stop the violence. Driving by a car accident poses less harm to one's reputation than failing to help a crash victim when one has already stopped and where there is a clear ability to provide help. Critics of future interventions may question whether protecting U.S. reputation in the world *should* motivate U.S. foreign policy, or they may question whether U.S. leadership will in fact suffer from failing to address violence in, for example, Syria as it did in Bosnia. But it is difficult to discount that reputation *did* motivate the Clinton administration to take action in Srebrenica, and hence that it is likely to motivate U.S. policy again in the future.

The second common lesson from Bosnia is the utility of diplomacy backed by force, also called coercive diplomacy. Several analysts have argued that a NATO bombing campaign combined with Holbrooke's diplomacy forced the warring parties to come to an agreement ending the war. Shattuck, for example, writes, "The purpose of the bombing campaign was to strengthen the diplomatic hand of my late colleague Richard Holbrooke, who prodded the warring parties to the negotiating table. It worked. Three months later, thanks to Holbrooke's brilliant negotiating skills, the Dayton Peace Accord ended the war in Bosnia. Dayton was a major achievement of diplomacy backed by force."¹⁰

Coercive diplomacy was only effective in Bosnia because certain conditions were already in place.

Similarly, writing in *Foreign Affairs* in 2011, Professors Jon Western and Joshua Goldstein explain, "The persistent diplomacy of Anthony Lake, the United States national security adviser, persuaded the reluctant Europeans and UN peacekeeping commanders to support Operation Deliberate Force, NATO's aggressive air campaign targeting the Bosnian Serb army. That effort brought Serbia to the negotiating table, where U.S. Assistant Secretary of State Richard Holbrooke crafted the Dayton agreement, which ended the war."¹¹

However, coercive diplomacy was only effective at ending the war in Bosnia because certain conditions were already in place. First, when the NATO bombing campaign began, the military balance of power had already shifted against the Bosnian Serbs. The United States had helped secure an alliance between the Muslim and Croat factions, and had initiated train-and-equip programs to

strengthen their respective armies. In the summer of 1995, Croat and Muslim forces rapidly began to retake territory, shifting the momentum of the war. Holbrooke, writing in September 1995, observed that the Muslim-Croat offense “has so far helped the peace process...In only a few weeks, the famous 70-30 division of the country has gone to around 50-50, obviously making our task easier.”¹² Wolfgang Ischinger, Kurt Bassuener, Edward Joseph, and Elizabeth O’Bagy have also drawn on Bosnia to suggest that shifting the military balance is necessary to enable successful negotiations to end the Syrian war.¹³

A second critical ingredient for the success of diplomacy backed by force in Bosnia was the shifting regional political balance—namely the increasing desire by Serbia and Croatia to end the war.¹⁴ In their book on the war in Bosnia, Professors Steven Burg and Paul Shoup explain that while the shift in U.S. strategy towards coercive diplomacy “was the key element on the road to Dayton...changes in the relationship between the two regional powers—Croatia and Serbia—played an equally important role in making Dayton possible.”¹⁵ Although strong connections existed between the Bosnian Serbs and Milošević, they had somewhat different incentives. The Bosnian Serbs had a strong interest in securing as much territory and political control in Bosnia as possible, while Milošević had a greater interest in ending the war as quickly as possible because of the increasing harm of sanctions to Serbia.

On August 30, 1995, Milošević announced to Holbrooke that he had secured the ability to negotiate on behalf of the Bosnian Serbs. This dramatically changed the course of negotiations, since Milošević was probably more willing to negotiate territorial concessions than the Bosnian Serbs. Support from Croatia’s leader, Franjo Tuđman, was also critical. Holbrooke emphasizes that Tuđman possessed a number of ways to prevent peace, such as blocking the negotiations at Dayton, initiating a renewed conflict after Dayton, or undermining the Croat-Muslim Federation. Tuđman ended up supporting the Dayton Agreement and facilitating the end of the war, but his support only became secure once Milošević agreed on a framework for Croatia to gain control over the contested region of Eastern Slavonia.

A third lesson many draw from the Bosnian conflict is that military intervention is a moral obligation. Intervention can be a moral obligation not only to save lives, but also to confront apparently evil perpetrators. Power explains, “Western diplomats had at last come to the slow realization that they were negotiating not with gentlemen but with evil. Military force was the only answer.”¹⁶ As then-Secretary of State Hillary Clinton noted, “The world waited until the massacre at Srebrenica before acting in Bosnia...[W]e do have a moral obligation to confront threats such as these, because they are violations of our common humanity.”¹⁷ Similarly, Ischinger, director of the German policy planning staff during the war in Bosnia and current Chairman of the Munich Security Conference, writes that if the West sees Syria “as it did Bosnia 20 years

ago, as a problem from hell that we should stay far away from...It would be a declaration of bankruptcy, both moral and political.”¹⁸

However, military action to end civil wars also carries with it the moral obligation to maintain peace following the war.¹⁹ President Bill Clinton

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emphasized the United States’ moral obligation to Bosnia following Dayton: “Our leadership made this peace agreement possible and helped to bring an end to the senseless slaughter...Now, American leadership, together with our allies, is needed to make this peace real and enduring. Our values, our interests and our leadership all over the world are at stake.”²⁰ Although Clinton initially hoped to bring U.S. troops home after one year, the United States soon recognized that the victory of wartime nationalist parties in the

September 1996 elections meant that Bosnia needed a continued post-war presence. In 1997, Clinton justified his decision to maintain a U.S. military presence by observing, “if we pull out before the job is done, Bosnia almost certainly will fall back into violence, chaos, and ultimately, a war every bit as bloody as the one that was stopped...We should finish the job we began for the sake of that future and in the service of our own interests and values.”²¹ A failure to maintain peace would perhaps be as morally compromising as failing to stop the war.

This moral imperative that interveners have to help societies after war is sometimes known as the Pottery Barn Rule, or “you break it, you own it.” Perhaps based on his experience in Bosnia, Colin Powell explained to President George W. Bush that following the invasion of Iraq, “You are going to be the proud owner of 25 million people. You will own all their hopes, aspirations and problems. You’ll own it all.”²² Some advocates for intervention, such as Western and Goldstein, urge interveners to “avoid laying the groundwork for protracted international presences,”²³ but they fail to recognize that a long-term presence is a moral commitment that inevitably follows military intervention.

Misapplying the Bosnian Analogy

The same individuals who wrote about and participated in U.S. policymaking in Bosnia went on to apply the three conventional lessons from Bosnia in Kosovo (1998–99), Iraq (2003), and Libya (2011). The events in these three conflicts, however, reinforce the above caveats emphasizing the importance of a supportive regional military balance for coercive diplomacy and the moral obligation to help societies after the use of military force to end civil wars.

Kosovo

The conflict in Kosovo is perhaps the clearest example of how policymakers misapplied the conventional lessons of Bosnia.²⁴ President Clinton justified the war in Kosovo in part based on the claim that inaction would undermine U.S. leadership and delegitimize NATO: “Imagine what would happen if we and our allies instead decided just to look the other way, as these people were massacred on NATO’s doorstep. That would discredit NATO, the cornerstone on which our security has rested for 50 years now...America has a responsibility to stand with our allies when they are trying to save innocent lives and preserve peace, freedom, and stability in Europe.”²⁵

The experience in Bosnia also led the Clinton administration to adopt a strategy of coercive diplomacy to compel Milošević to reach an agreement with the Kosovo Albanians. Ivo Daalder, a member of the National Security Council during the conflict, explains that there was a widespread belief, learned from Bosnia, that Milošević “was the kind of bully who, if you hit him across the head, he’ll come back and do what you want him to do.”²⁶ Coercive diplomacy in Kosovo, however, was repeatedly unsuccessful. Milošević refused to accept an agreement for Kosovo’s autonomy drafted in February 1999 at Rambouillet, despite Holbrooke’s clear threat that the United States would begin bombing Serbia. Some U.S. policymakers also believed that airstrikes would convince Milošević to back down in a few days, but instead Serbia responded to the bombing by initiating an ethnic cleansing campaign in Kosovo and digging in against NATO bombing. The air war would last 78 days, far longer than some had anticipated.²⁷

In fact, coercive diplomacy was only effective once the military and political balance had shifted. MIT Professor Barry Posen explains that the war ended only once Milošević realized that the military and political prospects for victory were limited. By mid-May 1999, Russia, Serbia’s main ally, had begun to put pressure on Milošević to come to an agreement with NATO. There were also fewer signs that divisions within NATO would lead to an end to the bombing campaign. Finally, by late May, NATO began to target critical economic infrastructure that, according to Posen, put the Serb nation “in grave danger”²⁸ and significantly shifted Milošević’s calculus.

President Clinton explicitly also recognized Bosnia’s moral lesson here—that intervention is a moral obligation to save lives and confront evil. He explained, “We learned that in the Balkans, inaction in the face of brutality simply invites more brutality, but firmness can stop armies and save lives. We must apply that lesson in Kosovo before what happened in Bosnia happens there, too...Ending this tragedy is a moral imperative.”²⁹ The moral lesson of Bosnia also appears to have influenced then-Secretary of State Madeline Albright: “I had been very concerned about Kosovo for some time...I said firmly that we learned a lot of lessons in Bosnia, where we waited too long to do something—that, as foreign ministers, we would be

judged very harshly if we allowed something like this to happen again... We were dealing with somebody who is genuinely evil, who was committed to overrunning a group of people, and who has control over his country and over his military.”³⁰

However, post-war obligations complicated the morality of intervention in Kosovo. U.S. post-war policy focused on supporting the Kosovo Albanians, whom the United States had gone to war to defend. Albanians returning to Kosovo engaged in ethnic cleansing against the Kosovo Serbs, including forcible eviction and murder, which NATO and the UN were largely powerless to stop. The commitment to support the Kosovo Albanians’ desire for independence continues to cause difficulties for the United States. In effect, intervention in Kosovo led the United States to become a major supporter of a formerly violent separatist movement, and therefore into conflict with any country facing violent separatism. Five EU members, including Spain and Greece, refused to recognize Kosovo’s unilateral declaration of independence in 2008. Spain faces separatist movements seeking independence in Catalonia and the Basque country, while Greece, with its close ally Cyprus, was concerned by Turkish Cypriot separatism. This is not to say that Kosovo’s independence is wrong—it is clear that the Kosovo Albanians could not exercise democratic governance within Serbia—but that the moral implications of intervention do not stop at war’s end.

Iraq

Some supporters of the war in Iraq also drew from Bosnia a moral obligation to act against Saddam Hussein. Journalist George Packer wrote in *The New York Times* that “Bosnian-generation liberal intellectuals,” who “wanted to use American military power to serve goals like human rights and democracy” struggled to figure out their position on Iraq, but did little to oppose the war. Packer explains that these liberal hawks were moved by arguments such as those made by Kanan Makiya, an Iraqi dissident, that if there was “a 5 to 10 percent chance [of bringing about a secular democracy in Iraq] you have a moral obligation, I say, to do it.”³¹

However, post-war moral obligations complicated the moral benefits of saving lives and confronting evil in Iraq. Although the Bush administration did eventually recognize that an extended post-war presence was necessary, the United States does not appear to have fulfilled its moral commitment to create peace and democracy in Iraq, which calls into question the morality of the entire war. Indeed, despite tens of billions of dollars, eight years of effort, and more than 4,000 U.S. casualties, Iraq’s government has authoritarian tendencies and its security forces nearly collapsed in June 2014 in the fight against ISIS. Iraq perhaps offers the clearest example of how the moral requirements to ensure peace and democracy in the post-war period can count against intervention even in the face of mass violence.

Libya

The three conventional lessons of Bosnia were also applied in Libya. The Obama administration appeared to be motivated, in part, by a desire to protect the U.S. reputation. White House staff member Dennis Ross explained, “We were looking at ‘Srebrenica on steroids’—the real or imminent possibility that up to 100,000 people could be massacred, and everyone would blame us for it.”³² President Obama similarly stated, “We knew that if we waited one more day, Benghazi, a city nearly the size of Charlotte, could suffer a massacre that would have reverberated across the region and stained the conscience of the world...I am convinced that a failure to act in Libya would have carried a far greater price for America.”³³

The United States also unsuccessfully attempted to use coercive diplomacy to compel Qaddafi to leave office. In March 2011, the United States insisted that Qaddafi cease attacks on civilians or face NATO military action, and by July U.S. representatives demanded that Qaddafi give up power as a condition for ending NATO military action. However, Qaddafi refused to meet U.S. demands and fought to the bitter end. The war ended only when Libyan rebels, strengthened by Western air support and training, captured Tripoli and killed Qaddafi.

The same moral arguments from Bosnia also appear to have played a role in the decision to intervene in Libya. Power, apparently one of the most prominent voices in the administration advocating action against Qaddafi, noted that a failure to act would be “extremely chilling, deadly and indeed a stain on our collective conscience.”³⁴

However, the international community did not deploy a large enough post-war mission to meet its moral obligations to create peace. The Libyan government appears too weak to compete with Islamist militias, who have been repeatedly able to use violence to impose their will on Libya’s new elected government. While the United States and its allies have sought to train a new army to support the Libyan government, it is far from clear whether this effort will succeed, or whether the limited Western intervention will prevent violence or autocracy from returning to Libya.³⁵ As RAND analysts Christopher Chivvis and Jeffrey Martini write, “The United States and its allies have both moral and strategic interests in ensuring that Libya does not collapse back into violence or become a haven for jihadist groups within striking distance of Europe.”³⁶ The fact that the United States intervened because of a moral imperative means that its failure to take action to maintain peace poses significant moral costs.

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The Right Lessons for Syria

The repeated invocation of the lessons from Bosnia in Kosovo, Iraq, Libya, and most recently Syria demonstrate the tremendous impact of the war in Bosnia on U.S. policymakers and analysts. However, two of the three lessons commonly drawn from Bosnia are flawed. Successful coercive diplomacy depends on the development of a favorable military and political balance, and military action (U.S. or otherwise) carries with it the additional moral obligation to maintain a strong post-war presence to secure peace.

These reconsidered lessons offer insight for U.S. policy in Syria, if not against ISIS then at least with respect to the Assad regime. Through 2013 and most of 2014, analysts including Shattuck, Burns, and Ischinger invoked the conventional lessons of Bosnia to suggest the use of force against Assad to convince him to come to the negotiating table. The Obama administration, however, declined to deploy U.S. forces. Since the summer of 2014, the conflict has transformed: ISIS has emerged and strengthened, presenting the United States with a second enemy in Syria. Beginning in September 2014, a U.S.-led coalition began airstrikes in Syria against ISIS, and the United States intensified its effort to train and equip the “moderate” opposition forces.

U.S. military action against ISIS in Syria appears motivated by the direct threat of terrorist attacks against the U.S. homeland or U.S. allies, rather than the need to protect U.S. reputation or leadership. ISIS is perceived to be an undeterrable terrorist organization with unlimited objectives and with little interest in a negotiated settlement. The Bosnian Serbs were sometimes perceived to similarly represent evil, but the U.S. strategy was very different—it focused on reaching a peace agreement rather than unequivocally defeating an adversary.

Despite its current focus on ISIS, the Obama administration also retains its goal of defeating the Assad regime. Secretary of State Kerry noted in September that the United States would turn to Assad after defeating ISIS: “We are not on the same side as Assad,” he said. “As the president has said, Assad lost legitimacy a long time ago...By degrading the Islamic State and providing training and arms to the moderates, we will promote conditions that can lead to a negotiated settlement that ends this conflict.”³⁷ Hence, even though the fight against ISIS is different from Bosnia, the fight against Assad shares the characteristics of being a primarily ethnic conflict, fueled by outside powers, in an important region.

The first lesson from Bosnia—concerning the link between intervention and reputation—suggests that the U.S. use of military force in Syria will eventually lead to the United States attacking the Assad regime directly. In Bosnia, the realization that U.S. forces were committed to evacuating UN peacekeepers in

the event of a crisis contributed to Clinton's recognition that the United States was necessarily involved in the war, and that its reputation would suffer if it failed to win or allowed massacres to occur that it had the ability to stop.³⁸ Similarly, the presence of U.S. forces in Syria involves the United States in the war, thus increasing the potential reputational cost of backing out of the conflict. Analyst Steven Simon, for example, observes that the United States could easily be drawn into attacking the Assad regime if a moderate group Washington supported were in imminent danger. If it did not help, "the support the United States enjoys among these groups by virtue of its airpower and train-and-equip efforts would swiftly fade."³⁹

Furthermore, if the Obama administration were to gain intelligence that an attack on civilians in Syria was imminent, it would likely have a very hard time not using U.S. military action to stop it. In Power's framing, U.S. reputation would be harmed if the United States failed to act when the evidence was clear and the action contemplated was limited. Even if the United States were somehow able to avoid being drawn into the conflict while successfully degrading ISIS, it would then be obliged to begin attacking the Assad regime as it has promised. The use of military force has linked the reputation of the United States to the outcome of the war in Syria. U.S. forces cannot simply fight ISIS, leave the region, and return home—they are on the hook to defeat Assad.

The use of military force has linked the U.S. reputation to the outcome of the war in Syria.

Second, the experience of Bosnia shows that strengthening moderate factions to shift the military balance of power in Syria is a feasible strategy, but that coming to a settlement ending the war with Assad will require wider regional support from Iraq, Iran, and possibly Russia. Analysts have expressed reasonable skepticism that the United States and its allies will be able to train moderate factions in Syria to the point that they can defeat ISIS or the regime. This goal is likely to prove especially challenging since it appears that the regime is focusing its attacks on the groups that the United States is supporting.⁴⁰ In Bosnia in 1994, it was also uncertain whether training the Bosniaks and Croats would be successful, but those efforts did eventually help win the war. The war in Bosnia shows, however, that even if the effort to strengthen moderate factions were to succeed, political pressure from other countries is necessary to bring the Assad regime to the table. So long as he has support from Iraq, Iran, and Russia, a negotiated settlement that calls for removing Assad from power is unlikely at best. Rebel organizations might eventually be able to remove Assad from power with limited international support, as happened with Qaddafi in Libya. However,

The use of partial, incomplete, or inaccurate lessons undermines effective U.S. policy.

given Assad's continuing strength, a negotiated settlement is likely preferable in order to prevent a prolonged and bloody war.

Third, the experience in Bosnia shows that a morally justified military intervention carries with it an additional moral obligation to help maintain peace following the war. Based on the experience following the 2011 war in Libya, the administration appears to increasingly recognize

the necessity of a sizable post-war mission. In an interview with Thomas Friedman in August 2014, President Obama noted "we underestimated—I think our European partners underestimated—the need to come in full force, if you're going to do this...that's a lesson that I now apply every time I ask the question should we intervene militarily. Do we have an answer [for] the day after?"⁴¹ Senior Fellow at the Brookings Institution, Kenneth Pollack, has also argued that the United States should "start gearing up for nation-building, particularly in Syria," given the mistakes in Iraq.⁴² It is difficult to disentangle the strategic and moral rationales in these statements, but there is good reason to think that part of the logic here is morally based. President Clinton appears to have felt a moral obligation in his decision to help post-war Bosnia, and Powell similarly expressed a moral tone in his warning to Bush about Iraq. It is very difficult to square helping a people end a war with stepping away afterward when it comes time to maintain the peace.

The experience in Bosnia heavily influenced the thinking of a generation of analysts and policymakers. The Bosnian war is a rich source of examples and insight for thinking about how the United States can and should act toward countries experiencing ongoing civil wars, perhaps especially because U.S. intervention successfully ended the war in Bosnia. However, the use of partial, incomplete, or inaccurate lessons drawn from Bosnia, or from any other conflict, undermines the formulation of an effective U.S. policy. By following Khong's lead and systematically thinking about how analogies are used, and by looking at the full scope of U.S. policy formulation and execution, scholars and analysts can do a great service to ensure that we avoid remaking the mistakes of the past.

Notes

1. Hereafter Bosnia.
2. John Shattuck, "In Syria, Use Diplomacy Backed by Force," *USA Today*, September 12, 2013, <http://www.usatoday.com/story/opinion/2013/09/12/john-shattuck-on-syria-diplomacy-force/2801503/>.

3. Christiane Amanpour, "Bosnia's Lesson for Syrian Slaughter," CNN, April 5, 2012, <http://www.cnn.com/2012/04/05/world/europe/bosnia-amanpour/index.html>; Nicholas Burns, "A Srebrenica Moment in Syria?" *Boston Globe*, February 13, 2014; Christopher R. Hill, "When to Talk to Monsters," *The New York Times*, May 15, 2013; Swanee Hunt, "For Action on Syria, Some Lessons from Bosnia," *Global Post*, December 2, 2012, <http://www.globalpost.com/dispatches/globalpost-blogs/commentary/syria-bosnia-lessons>; Michael Ignatieff, "With Syria, Diplomacy Needs Force," *The New York Times*, February 25, 2014; Edward P. Joseph and Elizabeth O'Bagy, "Syrian Peace and the Bosnia Precedent," *The National Interest*, May 22, 2013, <http://nationalinterest.org/commentary/syrian-peace-the-bosnia-precedent-8499>; United States Mission to the United Nations, "Remarks by Ambassador Samantha Power, U.S. Permanent Representative to the United Nations, on Syria at the Center for American Progress, Washington D.C.," speech, September 6, 2013, <http://usun.state.gov/briefing/statements/213901.htm>.
4. Yuen Foong Khong, *Analogies at War: Korea, Munich, Dien Bien Phu, and the Vietnam Decisions of 1965* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1992). See also Ernest May, "Lessons" of the Past: *The Use and Misuse of History in American Foreign Policy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1975); Robert Jervis, *Perception and Misperception in International Politics* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1976).
5. Richard C. Holbrooke, *To End a War* (New York: Random House, 1998), 27.
6. Samantha Power, *A Problem from Hell: America and the Age of Genocide* (New York: Basic Books, 2002), 423, 436.
7. United States Mission to the United Nations, "Remarks by Ambassador Samantha Power." *Op. cit.*
8. Holbrooke, *To End a War*, 359. *Op. cit.*
9. Burns, "A Srebrenica Moment in Syria?" *Op. cit.*
10. Shattuck, "In Syria, Use Diplomacy Backed by Force." *Op. cit.*
11. Jon Western and Joshua S. Goldstein, "Humanitarian Intervention Comes of Age: Lessons from Somalia to Libya," *Foreign Affairs* 90, no. 6 (2011): 48–59.
12. Holbrooke, *To End a War*, 168. *Op. cit.*
13. Kurt Bassuener, "Diplomacy and the Syrian Equation," *The New York Times*, January 24, 2014, <http://www.nytimes.com/2014/01/25/opinion/diplomacy-and-the-syrian-equation.html>; Wolfgang Ischinger, "Opponents of Syria Intervention Must Review Lessons from Bosnia," *Spiegel Online*, April 9, 2013, <http://www.spiegel.de/international/world/opponents-of-syria-intervention-must-review-lessons-from-bosnia-a-920126.html>; Joseph and O'Bagy, "Syrian Peace and the Bosnia Precedent." *Op. cit.*
14. Philippe Leroux-Martin similarly observes that an implication of the Bosnian war for Syria is "the need to grasp the larger regional picture." Leroux-Martin, "Bosnia's Lessons for Syria," *The New York Times*, January 21, 2014.
15. Steven L. Burg and Paul Shoup, *The War in Bosnia-Herzegovina: Ethnic Conflict and International Intervention* (Armonk, N.Y.: M.E. Sharpe, 1999), 407.
16. Power, *A Problem from Hell*, 438. *Op. cit.*
17. "Secretary Clinton: We Have a Moral Obligation to Confront Atrocities That Violate Our Common Humanity," Remarks at the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, July 24, 2012, <http://geneva.usmission.gov/2012/07/25/genocide-prevention/>.
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