

Jackboot Nation Building: The West Brings “Democracy” to Bosnia

Ted Galen Carpenter

With the signing of the Dayton Accords in November 1995, the Western powers committed themselves not only to help bring peace to Bosnia but to help build a viable democratic political system in that country. More than four years later, it is all too apparent that the results bear almost no resemblance to the original intentions. Far from becoming a functioning democratic state, Bosnia is little more than a colony of the West run by increasingly arrogant and autocratic international officials.

A potent symbol of the political reality in Bosnia was conveyed in a recent front-page story in the *Washington Post*. According to the *Post* account, the three members of Bosnia’s collective presidency were called to the New York home of U.S. Ambassador to the United Nations Richard Holbrooke, the principal architect of the Dayton Accords. Once there, they were pressured by Holbrooke to sign a three-page statement affirming an intensified commitment to political cooperation and measures for greater ethnic integration. The three elected presidents responded that the document was far too complex and had far too many political ramifications for them to sign it without careful, extended scrutiny. All three men also told Holbrooke they had social commitments that evening and simply did not have the time to give the document an adequate review. Holbrooke reportedly responded that they could not leave until they accepted the document. Ultimately they did so, and the U.S. government hailed this new accord as another step toward ethnic reconciliation in Bosnia.¹

1. R. Jeffrey Smith, “Outside Efforts Do Little to Mend Fractured Bosnia,” *Washington Post*, 23 January 2000, A25.

Ted Galen Carpenter is vice president for defense and foreign policy studies at the Cato Institute in Washington, D.C.

The spectacle of a U.S. policy maker holding the top elected officials of another country hostage until they agreed to a diktat from Washington should be a jarring image for anyone who supports democracy. Yet that episode in Holbrooke's apartment is an appropriate symbol of the policy that the West has been pursuing in Bosnia. It is a policy based on disdain for the electoral process, a fondness for ruling by decree, and contempt for even the most basic standards of freedom of the press. It is in every respect a perversion of democratic norms.

Muzzling the Media

One of the most troubling aspects of the international nation-building mission in Bosnia is the lack of respect shown for freedom of expression. From the beginning, officials from the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), and the UN showed an almost casual willingness to harass or suppress media outlets that were critical of the Dayton Accords, the conduct of the NATO peace-keeping force, or the decisions of the special war-crimes tribunal. That trend has only grown worse with the passage of time. The flip side of that policy is a belief that media outlets controlled by the international authorities—or by their political allies among the country's three ethnic groups—are an essential tool in carrying out the provisions of the Dayton Accords. Beyond that goal, there is an implicit assumption that a tame media would be an essential component in the transformation of Bosnia into the cooperative, multiethnic, model society visualized by the nation-building bureaucracy. The result has been a rigged, manipulated, and censored media more typical of those found in dictatorships than in democratic countries.

Western officials portray their actions in a different light, of course, contending that they are endeavoring to introduce greater media diversity and a wider range of viewpoints. The UN high representative, the chief international civilian official in Bosnia, complained in 1997 that the major political parties controlled most media outlets and that those nationalist elements "spoke to one nation only." The population had "the right to hear other opinions, too, and therefore we are trying to establish a principle of pluralism in

public life through the opening of the media.”² The OSCE’s media branch stressed that outside financial as well as political and moral support would be necessary to bring about greater media pluralism: “The OSCE must join other international organizations in supporting media organizations identified by our regional and field officers and by other international organizations as enriching media pluralism in Bosnia, but who must be supported to survive.”³

The conduct of the international officials, however, suggests that *media pluralism* is a synonym for media enthusiasm for the Dayton Accords and the objective of a united, multiethnic Bosnian state. Because the Dayton Accords gave the OSCE authority to supervise elections and make certain that they were open, competitive, and honest, OSCE officials argued that they also had an implied mandate to ensure freedom of expression and the press. To that end, OSCE’s Provisional Election Commission (PEC) drew up an electoral code of conduct in early 1996 that included specific standards for journalists and their media outlets. The PEC also created a Media Experts Commission (MEC), headed by former U.S. State Department official Robert Frowick, to monitor compliance with those standards. The MEC held its initial meeting in May 1996 and shortly thereafter held a round table discussion with Bosnian journalists and broadcast editors. It was apparent from that discussion that the MEC had some rather peculiar ideas about the permissible extent of debate on political issues. For example, MEC functionaries chastised journalists for using the “rhetorical jargon of war” in their news accounts. References to the “Bosnian Serb entity” or the “Muslim-Croat federation” rather than focusing on Bosnia-Herzegovina as a nation were deemed examples of such warlike jargon. As University of Northumbria professor David Chandler notes in his detailed study of the West’s nation-building effort in Bosnia, “Terms in common use in the international media were held to be inflammatory in Bosnia itself, and the framework was already established that the media in Bosnia should be pressured to play

2. Carlos Westendorp, quoted in David Chandler, *Bosnia: Faking Democracy after Dayton* (London: Pluto, 1999), 113.

3. OSCE Media Development Office, *Media Development: Strategies and Activities for 1997*, Sarajevo, Media Development Office, 12 February 1997, 4.

down the segmented reality of Bosnian politics and to challenge the nationalist outlook.”⁴

The standards became even more restrictive as Bosnia’s municipal elections approached in 1997. PEC rules required all Bosnian officials to adhere to the provisions of a new document, the *Standards of Professional Conduct for the Media and Journalists*, adopted in March of that year. Many of those standards seemed reasonable, even high minded, but they were also terribly vague. For example, all media were obligated to report the news in a manner that “is factually accurate, complete, fair, equitable, and unbiased.” Moreover, journalists “shall not engage in distortion, suppression, falsification, misrepresentation and censorship, including systematic omission of information.”⁵ Some forms of reporting were emphatically out of bounds: “Media and journalists shall avoid inflammatory language which encourages discrimination, prejudice, or hatred, or which encourages violence, or contributes to the creation of a climate in which violence could occur.”⁶

There were two major problems with such standards. First, despite the euphemism of “standards of professional conduct,” the document was a censorship code replete with enforcement provisions. It seemed more than a little inconsistent to teach the people of Bosnia the virtues of Western-style freedom of the press by starting with the imposition of far-reaching restrictions on that freedom. Second, the standards were so vague that international officials had virtually unlimited latitude in interpreting them. The potential for bias, arbitrary decisions, and the outright suppression of views disliked by OSCE, NATO, or UN policy makers was all too real.

The potential of the standards to chill meaningful press freedoms was mild, however, compared to the potential of the enforcement provisions to do so. For example, a journalist or media outlet accused of violating the standards was required to provide the MEC “any information, including copies of documents, or any materials, including audio and video tapes” requested by MEC officials.⁷ It should be noted that members of the American press

4. Chandler, 116.

5. In OSCE Provisional Elections Commission, *1997 Rules and Regulations as Amended and Compiled from the 1996 Rules*, Sarajevo, May 1997, article 130.

6. Ibid., article 133.

7. Ibid., article 149.

corps have for decades resisted attempts by law enforcement agencies to subpoena audio or video tapes or reporters' notes or to force disclosure of the identity of a source. A good many American journalists have gone to jail rather than sacrifice that principle. Yet there has been little protest from that same journalistic community about imposing such requirements on the Bosnian press.

MEC functionaries were given breathtakingly broad authority to impose penalties and "remedies" for violations of the standards. They could require alleged violators "to publish or broadcast specific materials, at a time and in a manner determined by the MEC." Moreover, media outlets could be required to do such penance even if *other parties* committed violations: "Publications or broadcast stations can be required by the MEC to publish or broadcast such materials to redress government or authorities' violations."⁸ In addition to such so-called remedial measures, the MEC was given a virtual blank check to impose clearly punitive measures (including fines "or any other appropriate penalties") or to take "other appropriate action."⁹ The extent of the "other appropriate action" provision became evident in May 1997 when the high representative acquired the authority to suspend or curtail any media broadcast or publication whose output he determined to contravene the letter *or the spirit* of the Dayton Accords.¹⁰

It quickly became apparent how the self-anointed media monitors would use their vast powers to make a mockery of freedom of expression in Bosnia. Even before the 1997 guidelines went into effect, the intent to silence nationalist voices was evident. The Serbian Democratic Party (SDS) was ordered to forfeit fifty thousand dollars for statements that allegedly threatened the territorial integrity of Bosnia and, therefore, the Dayton Accords. What was especially notable was the reason for the alleged violation. SDS speakers were penalized not because they directly challenged the Dayton provisions but because they "continually stressed the substantial autonomy granted to the Republika Srpska in the General Frame-

8. Ibid., article 149.

9. Ibid., article 150.

10. Peace Implementation Council, *Communiqué: Political Declaration from the Ministerial Meeting of the Peace Implementation Council*, Sintra, 30 May 1997, at www.ohr.int/docu/d970530a.htm.

work Agreement, to the total exclusion of any reference to the unity of Bosnia-Herzegovina.”¹¹

In June 1997, the MEC ruled that a Croatian-controlled television station in the city of Mostar had broadcast an “inflammatory” speech by a former police commander. The MEC then admonished the editor-in-chief of the station and ordered him to broadcast an editorial reply condemning the speech. Instead, the station rebroadcast the original speech and followed with an editorial endorsing most of its content. The MEC ruled that the editorial was also inflammatory and ordered the station to broadcast an OSCE-prepared statement on the evening news for four consecutive days. If the station did not comply, the Croatian political party that had provided it with financial support would have candidates stricken from the ballot for an upcoming municipal election.¹²

As the Mostar episode indicated, defiance of MEC edicts was a guaranteed way to bring the full wrath of the international bureaucrats down on recalcitrant journalists. That point was underscored in September 1997 when Serb Radio and Television (SRT), based in the nationalist stronghold of Pale, signed an agreement under duress to refrain from “inflammatory reporting” against NATO’s Stabilization Force (SFOR) and international organizations supporting the Dayton Accords. Coercing a station to agree to such terms was bad enough, but the diktat also required the station to provide an hour of prime-time programming each day for the airing of other political views and to give the high representative a weekly half-hour prime-time slot.¹³

SRT broadcasters committed a fatal act of defiance the following month. A video of a press conference by the special war-crimes tribunal prosecutor, Louise Arbour, had been given to SRT with orders to broadcast it in its entirety. SRT edited the tape, however, and added editorial comments equating SFOR to the Nazi occupation during World War II and charging that the war-crimes tribunal was a biased political instrument directed against the Serbs. That action was considered intolerable by the high representative’s

11. Quoted in Chandler, 122.

12. Chandler, 124.

13. Office of the High Representative, *Bulletin*, no. 59, 5 September 1997, at www.ohr.int/bulletins/b970905.htm.

office. SRT apologized and promptly rebroadcast an unedited version of the press conference. High Representative Carlos Westendorp spurned the compliance as too little, too late and ordered the Pale broadcasts closed down entirely. NATO troops immediately moved in and seized the transmitters.¹⁴ When the stations were reopened, the operation was placed under the full control of a Serbian faction favored by the United States and its NATO allies—the so-called Banja Luka faction headed by Bosnian Serb president Biljana Plavsic. That step was taken only after Plavsic agreed that all broadcasters brought in as replacements would first be “retrained” by foreign professionals and that a foreign official would temporarily supervise the broadcasts.¹⁵ The degree of arrogance now infecting the international authorities can be gauged by the comment of Duncan Bullivant, the spokesman for the office of the high representative: “We are in a position where we can do what we want with the transmitter sites.”¹⁶

Even the change of management to Serbs loyal to Plavsic did not fully reassure Westendorp and his colleagues. The following February, an international administrator was appointed to oversee editorial content.¹⁷ In spring 1998, the occupying powers created a permanent tribunal to oversee the media. The charter creating that agency institutionalized the rules that had been promulgated by the MEC—in particular, the authority to impose fines, to require a media outlet to publicly apologize for news stories or editorials deemed inflammatory or inaccurate, and to revoke licenses. The new entity, the Independent Media Standards and Licensing Commission (IMSLC), was also empowered to license (or deny applications) for all radio and television stations in Bosnia and to ensure that they operated according to “internationally accepted standards.”¹⁸

Westendorp’s action against SRT belies the arguments that the goal of the international authorities has been to promote greater media diversity in

14. Office of the High Representative, *Bulletin*, no. 61, 1 October 1997, at www.ohr.int/bulletins/b971001.htm.

15. Mike O’Connor, “NATO Says It Shut Down Serb Radio to Silence Propaganda,” *New York Times*, 21 October 1997, A3.

16. Quoted in Chris Hedges, “NATO Troops in Bosnia Silence Karadzic’s Television Station,” *New York Times*, 2 October 1997, A3.

17. Office of the High Representative, *Bulletin*, no. 66, 23 February 1998, at ohr.int/bulletins/b980223.

18. Philip Shenon, “Allies Creating Agency to Rule Press in Bosnia,” *New York Times*, 24 April 1998, A1.

Bosnia. The comments of Western officials at the time suggested a very different motive. The seizure of the transmitters “shows we are willing to take tough, hard measures to make sure there is no mucking around with the Dayton peace process,” said then British defense secretary (now NATO secretary-general) George Robertson.¹⁹ NATO’s action certainly sent a message that any criticism of the Dayton Accords within Bosnia was likely to be silenced.

Shutting down a media outlet for airing critical, even unsavory views is troubling enough, but the subsequent steps were even worse. The high representative did not open the bidding for the rights to operate the transmitters to private organizations. Instead, control was merely passed to a competing political faction favored by the West. (How committed that faction was to a diversity of viewpoints became apparent in July 1998, when the government fired en masse the editorial staffs of sixteen local broadcast stations.)²⁰ Westendorp’s maneuver strongly suggests that he and other international officials were not interested in fostering a free press; they merely wanted a tame press. The appointment of an international administrator provided additional evidence of that motive, as did the subsequent creation of the IMSLC.

The rationale of the nation builders is that steps had to be taken to weaken the alleged stranglehold of the nationalist parties on the media. In defending the seizure of the SRT transmitters, Holbrooke notes that “some argued that this action was a violation of the Serb right to freedom of expression. This argument was backward: in fact, the Bosnian Serbs had ruthlessly suppressed all media except their own.”²¹ Holbrooke’s argument does not stand up to scrutiny. After an exhaustive study, Chandler contends that “there was little evidence of media sources being hampered by the Bosnian authorities.” He notes that merely because the media outlets that were opposed to the main nationalist parties generally remained marginal did not prove that they were being restricted. “In fact, it could be argued that state and regional authorities had less influence over the media in

19. Quoted in Srečko Latal, “NATO Pulls Plug on Serbs’ TV,” *Washington Times*, 2 October 1997, A11.

20. “Bosnian Serb Government Fires Journalists,” *Washington Post*, 28 July 1998, A16.

21. Richard Holbrooke, letter to the editor, *Foreign Affairs* 77, no. 1 (1998): 158.

Bosnia than in other European states.” He concludes: “Far from nationalist Bosnian elites restricting media and political pluralism, it would appear that Bosnian citizens had a wide and varied choice of media sources.”²² How varied is open to question, of course, in light of how thoroughly the would-be architects of democracy have lowered the curtain of censorship and media control.

The data confirm Chandler’s analysis. In mid-1998, at a time when the international authorities were tightening their media controls because of an alleged lack of information diversity, there were some 270 media organizations in the Muslim-Croat federation and an additional 220 in the Republika Srpska (RS)—virtually double the numbers that existed at the end of the war. Those outlets included 156 radio stations, 52 television stations, 5 daily newspapers, and 20 periodicals. That is an extraordinary saturation for a country the size of Bosnia. Indeed, some media experts have argued that rather than an inadequate range of views, “there are more media than the market can realistically sustain.”²³ Even the International Crisis Group, one of the loudest proponents of the nation-building mission in Bosnia, concedes that “the scale of the alternative [nonnationalist] media and the number of journalists is out of proportion to the size of the population.”²⁴ What the International Crisis Group did not say was that many of the media outlets that lacked significant audiences had been generously funded by the high representative’s office and other Western sources, both public and private. Those outlets were widely viewed by the people of Bosnia as nothing more than paid mouthpieces for the international authorities.²⁵

At the time the Independent Media Commission was created, OSCE spokesman Simon Haselock asserted, “What we’re trying to do is put in place a regime that offers a legal framework that improves and guarantees press freedom. It is not about censorship.”²⁶ Yet less than a year later, the commission ordered a Bosnian Serb television station off the air because its

22. Chandler, 128, 129.

23. Safax Agency, “Media in Bosnia and Herzegovina: Spreading Democracy,” *Media News* (Sarajevo), 9 March 1998.

24. International Crisis Group, *Media in Bosnia and Herzegovina: How International Support Can Be More Effective*, ICG Report, Brussels, 7 March 1997.

25. Chandler, 129–32.

26. Quoted in Shenon.

coverage of the Kosovo crisis was deemed inflammatory and unbalanced. Charges included that the station failed to mention that the forces of Serbia's president, Slobodan Milosevic, had driven Albanian Kosovars from their home and that the station portrayed Serbia as a victim of NATO aggression.²⁷ That was a troubling escalation of the campaign to restrict the Bosnian media. The previous acts of censorship had dealt with allegedly inappropriate coverage of developments inside Bosnia, using the rationale that such coverage threatened to undermine the Dayton Accords. This latest action sought to dictate media coverage of events *outside* Bosnia.

The April closure of the television station was not an isolated episode. Earlier that month, NATO spokesman Lieutenant Colonel J. David Scanlon stated that the alliance was "very concerned about the quality of some media reports" in the Bosnian Serb republic. The Independent Media Commission expressed frustration that an address by Secretary of State Madeleine Albright, translated into Serbian, appeared on Bosnian Serb television "only under direct order" of the commission.²⁸ Apparently, freedom of the press in Bosnia now means that media outlets can be ordered by international bureaucrats to transmit statements by a foreign official dealing with events in a neighboring country. One doubts seriously whether James Madison and other architects of the First Amendment in the U.S. Constitution would even recognize such a perverted concept of press freedom. Indeed, the restrictions on the Bosnian media go far beyond those found even in Western European countries, whose standards on freedom of the press tend to be significantly less libertarian than those in the United States.

One of the more depressing aspects of the stifling of freedom of expression in Bosnia is the dearth of criticism from alleged defenders of that freedom in the United States and other Western countries. The *New York Times* did accuse Washington of taking "dangerous short cuts" in pursuit of its Bosnia policy. One example cited was the Clinton administration's approval of "military force to drive ultranationalist broadcasters from the airwaves." A better approach, according to the *Times*, and one "more consistent with free speech values, would be to adopt more effective programs to help inde-

27. Aida Cerkez-Robinson, "Bosnian Serb TV Station Banned," Associated Press, 15 April 1999.

28. Quoted in R. Jeffrey Smith, "Serbs Get One Side of News," *Washington Post*, 5 April 1999, A14.

pendent local media compete for audience attention.”²⁹ On another occasion, the *Times* criticized the portion of the draft charter of the Independent Media Commission that empowered the agency to fine or shut down media outlets that violated vague standards of coverage. The editors found the licensing provision acceptable, however, and they added that licensing requirements should “include the airing of competing viewpoints.”³⁰ In other words, the *Times* wanted a broadcast regulatory system with a strong “equal time” requirement—the requirement the United States abandoned domestically more than a decade earlier because of its inherent chilling effect on the airing of controversial views.

Unfortunately, that tepid and conditional defense of media rights in Bosnia was typical of the response among the U.S. media. A distressing number of American journalists actually defended the censorship regime in Bosnia. Columnist Anthony Lewis, who routinely portrays himself as a staunch defender of the First Amendment, urged NATO to shut down the Bosnian Serb radio and television stations more than a month before that action occurred: “That is a hard thing for a believer in the First Amendment to say. But we have no more obligation there [in Bosnia] than we would have had in post-war Germany to let Goebbels stay on the air.”³¹

That same rationale—that any media outlet that expresses racist or “intolerant nationalist” views should be silenced—has gained an alarming foothold not only among officials in Western governments but even among journalists. Columnist Georgie Anne Geyer, like Lewis, compared the Bosnian Serb media to that of Nazi Germany. She added that in Bosnia, “as in so many other areas, the United States had the power to change the media story. The Western militaries have the technical means to fly over a country and knock out their TV and radio—and even replace the original programming.” Geyer clearly thinks that is a splendid idea, but bemoans that “there is still no resolve” to embrace such a tactic.³²

It is more than a little distressing to see journalists advocating the forcible suppression of views they dislike. Nor is that attitude confined to ques-

29. “A Flawed Achievement in Bosnia,” editorial, *New York Times*, 12 September 1998, A20.

30. “Creating Professional Bosnia Media,” editorial, *New York Times*, 30 April 1998, A36.

31. Anthony Lewis, “Confront the Gangsters,” *New York Times*, 22 August 1997, A27.

32. Georgie Anne Geyer, “Media Controls Role in Bosnia,” *Washington Times*, 29 November 1997, C3.

tions about how to deal with Bosnia. The rationale that media outlets that transmit inappropriate views are merely instruments of propaganda that can and should be silenced was the rationale for the NATO bombing strikes against radio and television stations in Serbia during the 1999 Balkan crisis. And again, the level of criticism of that action within the Western journalistic community ranged from tepid to barely discernible. Even worse, the enthusiasm for politically correct censorship has become a growth industry throughout the circles that embrace nation-building missions by NATO, OSCE, and the UN. Jamie F. Metzl, a former UN human rights officer, published a major article in *Foreign Affairs* openly advocating a campaign of “media intervention.”³³ The goal of such a campaign would be to “monitor, counter, and block radio and television broadcasts that incite widespread violence in crisis zones around the world.”³⁴ And who would decide what broadcasts were guilty of such offenses? Apparently the judges would be the same international officials who would carry out the countermeasures. Such countermeasures would include jamming the offending transmissions and replacing them with “‘peace broadcasting’ of unbiased—or at least more responsible—news and information into crisis zones.”³⁵ Not surprisingly, Metzl is an admirer of the measures taken to suppress obstreperous media in Bosnia. Also not surprisingly, one of the admirers of Metzl’s broader concept is Holbrooke, although he bemoaned the fact that such an ambitious objective on a global basis was probably not practical at this time.³⁶

In other words, there is more than a slight danger that the Bosnia model of media control may become the norm in future nation-building enterprises. One can hardly imagine a better way of engendering cynicism and anger toward the West among the populations of target countries. The lesson being conveyed is that the West’s real definition of freedom of the press is the freedom to air views favored by Western authorities. After watching NATO troops occupy the SRT stations, one peasant woman in Pale said to a

33. Jamie F. Metzl, “Information Intervention: When Switching Channels Isn’t Enough,” *Foreign Affairs* 76, no. 6 (1997): 15–20.

34. *Ibid.*, 15.

35. *Ibid.*, 17, emphasis added.

36. Holbrooke. See also Stephen S. Rosenfeld, “Free to Incite Genocide,” *Washington Post*, 1 May 1998, A15.

reporter that the station spoke for her and many other Bosnian Serbs. “I thought that in the West everyone has a right to be heard,” she said, “What about people like me?”³⁷ For those in the West who aren’t hypocrites on the issue of freedom of expression, it is a very good question.

Rigging Elections

In addition to manipulating and stifling the media in Bosnia, the international authorities have used questionable tactics with regard to a core component of any democratic political system: the holding of elections. Candidates for public office have been threatened with removal from the ballot repeatedly by the high representative or the PEC. That tactic gained prominence as early as the period leading to the RS and the Muslim-Croat federation elections in September 1996, barely ten months after the signing of the Dayton Accords. In July the PEC amended its rules to specify that any political party that allowed a person indicted by the war crimes tribunal to hold “a party position or function” would be “deemed ineligible to participate in the elections.”³⁸ (The Dayton Accords had merely specified that no one under indictment could hold any appointive or elective public office.) The PEC amendment was clearly directed against former Bosnian Serb president Radovan Karadzic’s continuing influence over the SDS. It soon became apparent that the international authorities were not content with barring Karadzic from a party post. Just four days before the election, the authorities warned the SDS that even displaying Karadzic’s likeness on posters would lead to the party’s disqualification.³⁹

The extent and arbitrary nature of the disqualification process grew worse in the lead-up to the September 1997 municipal elections. A month before the balloting, the OSCE had removed more than fifty candidates, the overwhelming majority of them from the SDS and other nationalist parties such as the Croatian Democratic Union (HDZ). Even when the international officials retreated from the most outrageous examples of interference, they were

37. Quoted in O’Connor, “NATO Says It Shut Down Serb Radio.”

38. Office of the High Representative, *Bulletin*, no. 11, 22 July 1996, at www.ohr.int/bulletins/b960722.htm.

39. Chandler, 120.

motivated solely by tactical considerations, not any newfound respect for democratic norms. For example, OSCE head ambassador Robert Frowick overturned an eleventh-hour attempt by the election commission to disqualify the SDS from fielding candidates in its stronghold in and around Pale, but he stated that he did so out of concern for the safety of international election supervisors throughout the RS, not because he believed a decision to disqualify was wrong.⁴⁰ Whenever the international authorities thought they could safely get away with mass disqualifications, they did so. For example, they removed all nine candidates of the HDZ from the ballot in the city of Zepce. Such tactics, according to Chandler, “turned the elections in some areas into a farce.”⁴¹

Matters did not improve the following year in the national and entity elections. Election commissioners disqualified nine Bosnian Serb and fifteen Bosnian Croat candidates in the final stages of the election campaign. Four of the latter were disqualified because of allegedly biased television coverage in their favor by television stations in *Croatia*.⁴² The authorities even toyed with the idea of disqualifying Radical Party presidential candidate (and ultimate winner) Nikola Poplasen for a television appearance in Serbia on the eve of the election. Such an appearance, some election watchdogs argued, violated the twenty-four-hour media blackout period imposed in Bosnia.⁴³ (One wonders just how far the international bureaucrats in Bosnia thought their writ extended. Would a Poplasen appearance on a program in Russia or Britain have put his candidacy in jeopardy?)

Routinely harassing and disqualifying candidates they dislike is not the only method international authorities have used to attempt to manipulate election results. Indeed, skewing the voter registration lists has been an even more pervasive tactic. Instead of requiring voters to vote in the district where they currently reside, the process in Bosnia allowed voters to vote in the place of their current residency, where they resided in 1991 before the civil

40. Guy Dinmore, “Poll Highlights Serb Divisions,” *Financial Times*, 17 September 1997, 3; and Lee Hockstader, “American Voids Order Barring Serb Candidates,” *Washington Post*, 17 September 1997, A1.

41. Chandler, 124.

42. Radul Radovanovic, “Serb Official Banned from Elections,” Associated Press, 7 September 1998.

43. Katarina Kratovac, “Bosnian President Concedes Defeat,” *Washington Times*, 22 September 1998, A19.

war erupted, or where they wished to live in the future. The OSCE strongly encouraged displaced persons (nearly 37 percent of those eligible to vote) to register in their prewar locales. To discourage voters from choosing the “future locality” option, the OSCE tightened the registration rules going into the 1997 municipal elections. Displaced persons within Bosnia (some 18 percent of the electorate) had that option taken away entirely. Refugees abroad (some 19 percent of the electorate) could choose the option only by providing “clear and convincing documentary evidence” that the voter had a “preexisting” connection with that locale.⁴⁴

The result was that most voters cast ballots in their current place of residence, but a sizable minority—including virtually all of those residing abroad—voted for candidates in their prewar places of residence. Votes by the latter contingent amounted to the creation of “rotten boroughs,” since most of the refugees had little prospect of ever returning to their prewar homes.⁴⁵ Their votes, however, greatly altered election results in several places. In the 1997 municipal elections, six municipalities actually elected displaced-person governments.⁴⁶ More than one-fifth of the parliament in the Bosnian Serb republic consists of delegates of Muslim parties “elected” by voters who are unlikely ever to set foot in the RS. Indeed, the victory of the West’s favored candidate for the Serbian seat on Bosnia’s three-member presidency over his nationalist rival was due almost entirely to the votes cast by some two hundred thousand displaced (primarily Muslim) voters.

Allowing voters to cast ballots in this fashion helps preserve the fiction that more than a million refugees will someday return to their prewar homes and that Bosnia will become a tolerant multiethnic state. But it is also seen by many in Bosnia as a cynical ploy by the West to dilute the power of the nationalist parties. Whether intended or not, enabling massive numbers of

44. Chandler, 116–7.

45. Indeed, Bosnia has become *more* ethnically segregated in the years since the approval of the Dayton Accords. See Gary Dempsey, “Rethinking the Dayton Agreement: Bosnia Three Years Later,” Cato Institute Policy Analysis no. 327, 14 December 1998. Moreover, the pace of refugee returns to their prewar homes slowed in 1999 from its already anemic level. See International Crisis Group, *Is Dayton Failing? Bosnia Four Years after the Peace Agreement*, 28 October 1999, annex 7, part 1, at www.crisisweb.org/projects/bosnia/reports/bh51main.htm.

46. International Crisis Group, “ICG Analysis of 1997 Municipal Election Results,” press release, 14 October 1997.

nonresidents to cast ballots delegitimizes the democratic process. Imagine, for example, the potential effect if that rule were applied to other countries that experienced civil wars and large refugee flows. If the Palestinians who fled their homes in what is now Israel during the 1948 war could cast ballots in Israeli elections, the face of Israel's politics (and the nature of Israel itself) would be very different. The same could be said of the Hindus who had to flee Pakistan (and the Muslims who had to flee India) to escape the blood-letting that followed the partition of the Indian subcontinent in 1947. If Greek Cypriots who were expelled from northern Cyprus by invading Turkish troops in 1974 could cast ballots for candidates in the prewar home districts, the so-called Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus would likely have a Greek Cypriot majority parliament. One could cite several other examples.

The refugees in all of those situations undoubtedly suffered grievous injustices, and in an ideal world their property would be restored and they would be able to return safely to their homes and enjoy full political rights. But in reality they rarely are able to do so. It merely compounds the problem to pretend otherwise and create a political system that is based on a convenient fantasy rather than reality. That is what the international authorities have done in Bosnia, and it has a profoundly corrosive effect on the concept of democracy.

Not content with the manipulative measures currently in effect, the office of the high representative has placed the draft of a new election law before Bosnia's state parliament. Among other provisions, the new law would require parties to gain a substantial number of nomination signatures in both of the country's political entities. In other words, a nationalist party that drew support only from one ethnic group could be disqualified no matter how many votes it had amassed in previous elections or would likely amass in forthcoming elections. Typically, the high representative has indicated that he might simply impose the measure if the state parliament does not enact it.⁴⁷

Western authorities have shown contempt for the political process in Bosnia in other ways, as well. When Bosnian Serb president Plavsic broke with hard-line Serbian nationalists in summer 1997, international organiza-

47. Fredrik Dahl, "West Slams Bosnia Assembly over Draft Election Law," Reuters, 20 January 2000.

tions did not maintain a discreet neutrality but instead openly displayed favoritism. When she dissolved the parliament and called for new elections, the Serbian republic's constitutional court ruled that her actions were illegal. The OSCE simply overruled the court and proceeded to organize the elections. When the parliament supported the court decision and declared her dissolution of the legislative body illegal, OSCE ignored that measure as well.⁴⁸ NATO forces in essence became her palace guard, helping her faction gain control of radio and television stations, military outposts, and police stations. It was clear from the outset that Plavsic's political support was shaky at best and that her various actions were of dubious legality. It was equally clear that the Western governments cared little about any of those matters; she was their client—a "reasonable" Serb who was prepared to implement the Dayton Accords—and they were prepared to lavish financial aid on her government and support her by means fair or foul. Some of the nation-building personnel were surprisingly candid in expressing their cynicism. "She is a creature of our creation," admitted one UN official. A Western diplomat stated, "We have to help her build a base of support," implying that she didn't have one of her own.⁴⁹ The transparent effort of the Western powers to support Plavsic regardless of the wishes of the Bosnian Serb population led veteran *New York Times* correspondent Chris Hedges to observe, "President Plavsic, essentially a figurehead, is always accompanied by her bodyguards, never strays more than a few blocks from her heavily guarded office, has no budget, and is propped up by NATO troops who seized this city's [Banja Luka's] police station last week."⁵⁰

When the RS parliament sought to resolve the crisis by authorizing new parliamentary and presidential elections, NATO and the OSCE balked, fearing that Plavsic would lose such a contest. Once again, the international authorities intervened in the republic's internal politics, supporting Plavsic's position that only elections for parliament should take place. The OSCE's

48. Edward Cody, "Serb Military Gives Boost to President," *Washington Post*, 27 August 1997, A21; Chris Hedges, "Bosnia's Latest Power Struggle Pits Serb against Serb," *New York Times*, 27 August 1997, A3; and Raymond Bonner, "Belgrade and Moscow Stall Bosnia Vote Desired by U.S.," *New York Times*, 16 October 1997, A5.

49. Quoted in Hedges, "Bosnia's Latest Power Struggle."

50. Ibid.

explanation for its stance was that for “practical reasons” a presidential election before the onslaught of the usually brutal Balkan winter was simply not feasible.⁵¹ OSCE spokesmen did not explain why it would have been more difficult for voters to mark two places on the ballot instead of one under difficult weather conditions.

Even with the promises of Western aid if the Bosnian Serbs voted correctly, and a significant contingent of Muslim delegates elected by displaced voters, the election left control of the new RS parliament in doubt. Candidates endorsed by Plavsic won only fifteen of the eighty-three seats, but her Western allies worked diligently to line up additional support and to block the nationalists from regaining control of the parliament. At one point, when it looked as though milder measures might fail, the high representative threatened to remove “obstructionist deputies,” an action that would have guaranteed the pro-Plavsic forces a comfortable victory.⁵² The combination of threats and the lure of Western aid finally prevailed. Plavsic’s choice for prime minister, Milorad Dodik, and a new cabinet were approved, albeit by the narrowest of margins.

Western aid began to flow in impressive amounts as soon as the new government was in place. By the time the presidential election was held in September 1998, the United States alone had pledged \$75 million in aid—approximately one-third of the entire budget of the RS.⁵³ Tens of millions of additional dollars came from Western European governments and the OSCE. *Washington Times* correspondent Philip Smuckler described the nature and extent of the support for Plavsic and her faction:

Mrs. Plavsic’s party was inundated with Western help, both direct and indirect. Funding came from the OSCE, the U.S. government and the European Union to provide jobs and infrastructure. . . . NATO’s Stabilization Force also provided satellite links for a pro-Plavsic TV station and beamed television pictures from a special U.S. airplane.⁵⁴

51. Raymond Bonner, “Russia Fails to Block Bosnian Serb Vote,” *New York Times*, 20 October 1997, A3.

52. Chris Hedges, “With West’s Help, Bosnian Serb President May Form Cabinet,” *New York Times*, 13 January 1998, A3.

53. Mike O’Connor, “Bosnian Election Tests Western Resolve,” *New York Times*, 13 September 1998, A8.

54. Philip Smuckler, “Left Hand Hinders Right on Bosnia,” *Washington Times*, 6 December 1998.

The assistance was not enough to keep Plavsic in power. Indeed, there were some indications that it may have backfired, angering Bosnian Serbs and consolidating Plavsic's image as a Western puppet. Whatever the reason, she was defeated by Radical Party candidate Poplasen. But anyone who expected the Western powers and the international officials to accept gracefully the verdict of the electorate was in for a rude awakening. An indication of trouble came just days after the balloting, when Westendorp warned that he could simply remove Poplasen if he proved to be uncooperative. Robert Gelbard, the U.S. special envoy to Bosnia, added, "This man, in our view, is on probation and has to prove himself as a democratic leader."⁵⁵ The disdain that Westendorp, Gelbard, and other Western officials displayed for the democratic process had reached breathtaking proportions. If voters had the temerity to elect someone the international nation builders didn't like, then they would simply overrule the voters.

Ousting Elected Officials and Ruling by Decree

Poplasen discovered that the threat of removal was not an idle one. Western leaders made it apparent from the beginning that he had better choose a prime minister and a cabinet acceptable to them. When Poplasen defied that warning and nominated Dragan Kalinic of the SDS, Washington made its extreme displeasure known and warned that it would cut off aid and administer other unspecified penalties if the parliament ratified that choice.⁵⁶ Indeed, Western policy makers dropped less than subtle hints that the only acceptable candidate would be the incumbent, Dodik.⁵⁷ Poplasen took the not unreasonable position that the results of the election indicated that the population of the RS wanted a different set of leaders and a different set of policies. His defiance proved politically fatal. On 5 March 1998, High Representative Westendorp removed Poplasen from office for obstructing the peace process and "ignoring the will of the people."⁵⁸ The West's democratic

55. Quoted in Mike O'Connor, "Bosnia Results Confirm Serb Hard-Liner's Victory, and Gains by Moderates," *New York Times*, 26 September 1998, A6.

56. "U.S. Says Kalinic Approval Would Hurt Bosnian Serbs," Reuters, 17 November 1998.

57. "West Slams Bosnia Serb PM Nomination," Reuters, 14 November 1998.

58. "Envoy Sacks Hardline Bosnian Serb President," Reuters, 5 March 1999.

mission in Bosnia had reached sufficiently Orwellian levels that a non-elected bureaucrat could oust a duly elected officeholder and accuse him of operating contrary to the will of the people.

Poplasen was not the first elected official to be removed by Bosnia's increasingly intrusive nation builders, but he was the most prominent. The temptation to remove insufficiently cooperative office holders has only grown with time. That urge to purge reached a culmination in November 1999 when the new high representative, Wolfgang Petritsch, fired twenty-two elected officials, including two leading figures in the principal Croatian and Muslim parties. Not only were the offending politicians removed from office, they were prohibited from running in the 2000 municipal elections. Alexandra Stiglmeier, spokesperson for the high representative, told a news conference, "The dismissed officials are not the officials that Bosnia needs."⁵⁹ The fact that the voters believed differently she implicitly regarded as irrelevant. Petritsch himself displayed the same patronizing attitude. "I hope that you will agree that you deserve politicians who will serve you and not only their own interests," he said in a statement to the Bosnian people. He added that the removed officials "had blocked your road leading to a better future."⁶⁰ Apparently the voters were too obtuse to recognize that point, since Petritsch decided they had to be protected from the temptation to vote again for such politicians in the upcoming election.

The reality is that Bosnia's international guardians seem congenitally uncomfortable with the messy give-and-take of a democratic political system. At the time of the 1998 elections, one prominent Western diplomat stated privately that it might be time for the high representative to dispense with all pretense and turn Bosnia into a protectorate.⁶¹ Other diplomats and representatives of nongovernmental organizations active in Bosnia had been whispering similar desires for some time.

Yet in terms of substance, it could be argued that the international authorities *have* been running Bosnia as a protectorate with an increasingly tat-

59. Quoted in Darla Sito-Sucic, "Bosnia Officials Sacked for Obstructing Peace," Reuters, 29 November 1999.

60. Quoted in Aida Cerkez-Robinson, "22 Bosnian Politicians Fired," Associated Press, 29 November 1999.

61. Tom Walker, "Triumph for Radicals Imperils Peace," *Times* (London), 17 September 1998.

tered democratic facade. The high representative's dictatorial tendencies have extended to matters large and small. He has imposed his own choice for the country's currency—with a close convertible link to the German Mark—and his preference for the design of new coins. He threatened to impose his choice of a design for a national automobile license plate. His office even directed the selection of a new Bosnian national anthem, selected by a handpicked commission of academics.⁶²

Bosnia's Potemkin Democracy

The West's nation-building enterprise in Bosnia may be called many things, but a model of fostering democracy is not one of them. Today, Bosnia is a Potemkin state run by legions of autocratic international bureaucrats. *Wall Street Journal* correspondent Neil King Jr. aptly summarizes the situation: "Thousands of international diplomats, human-rights workers and soldiers now run this country-in-the-making as a virtual protectorate, with the Americans by far the weightiest presence. Together, they write the laws, provide security, determine monetary policy and broker deals on everything from mosque construction to the colors of the national flag."⁶³ Even Christopher Bennett, the International Crisis Group's Balkans project director, concedes that Bosnia's so-called democracy is a charade and admits that international officials are "riding roughshod over Bosnia's democratic institutions."⁶⁴

Little consideration seems to have been given to what lessons the people of Bosnia—and, indeed, people throughout the Balkans who have been watching the process—may draw from witnessing this charade. The unintended lesson may well be that Western rhetoric about the virtues of democracy is nothing more than cynical cant. What is occurring in Bosnia today is not the evolution of a democratic system but the ugly face of new-style colonialism. The officials who implement this new, multilateral colonialism may

62. "Bosnians Get a Common Denominator: Banknotes," *New York Times*, 22 January 1998; "Bosnian Mediator Imposes New Coin Design," Agence France-Presse, 29 September 1998; and "License Plates," *Balkan Watch*, 27 January 1998.

63. Neil King Jr., "In Latter Day Bosnia, Foreigners Try to Piece It All Back Together," *Wall Street Journal*, 26 August 1998, A1.

64. Quoted in "Report: Bosnian Democracy a Charade," United Press International, 9 September 1998.

have better motives than their predecessors in the now dead European colonial empires that once dominated Asia and Africa, but their charges do not enjoy more meaningful political rights.

Worst of all, ambitious would-be nation builders throughout the West apparently see the Bosnia intervention as a template for similar missions in the Balkans and beyond. The same pattern of media control, for example, is already emerging in Kosovo. NATO forces shut down one Albanian-language newspaper in Pristina for publishing a story with the headline "KFOR Tolerant with Serb Criminals and Tough with Albanians."⁶⁵ The OSCE has also set up a Kosovo Media Board, patterned after its Bosnia counterpart. In fact, the Kosovo Media Board would appear to have at least as much censorship authority over radio and television as does the Bosnia regulatory agency and even more authority over print journalism.⁶⁶

The nation-building effort in Bosnia may have begun as a well-meaning attempt by Western leaders to help construct a pluralistic, democratic society from the ruins of civil war. The results, however, confirm Lord Acton's memorable observation that power corrupts, and absolute power corrupts absolutely. Regardless of the initial motives, the international mission in Bosnia has turned into a mockery of every significant democratic principle. It is an experiment that should be terminated immediately, before it becomes even more of a symbol of Western hypocrisy and shame.

65. "KFOR Shuts Down Albanian Newspaper, Arrests Publisher," *Kosovapress*, 9 August 1999. Obtained from www.antiwar.com/rep/kosovapress1.html.

66. Garentina Kraja, "Kosovo Board Planned to Oversee Media," *Washington Times*, 18 October 1999, A15; and "Kosovo's Incipient Media Ministry," editorial, *New York Times*, 30 August 1999, A22.