

The Civil War in Yugoslavia

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It is the 30th of July 1995. The tensions in Yugoslavia have been going on for years as after President Josip Broz Tito's death no one was truly able to handle such a culturally and ethnically diverse population. Serbs are beginning to enforce their nationalistic and centralist tendencies, which forced the other nationalities to strive for their autonomy as well. Even though Serbian forces still dominate the region, various paramilitary groups have risen, often fueled by defections or by seizing abandoned military supplies. This pattern has also emerged among Bosnian Serbs, where General Ratko Mladić leads a merciless force, likely orchestrating both the Srebrenica massacre and the brutal siege of Sarajevo. In 1991 the conflict escalated, tearing Yugoslavia into many pieces. International intervention attempts have taken place in order to resolve this conflict but these atrocities are yet to be seized by the UN in order to prevent further bloodshed and unrest in the Balkans.

General overview:

The predecessor to Yugoslavia as we know it was the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes, which was founded in 1918 after the First World War and the collapse of the Austrian-Hungarian empire. Early upon its creation, the new country faced problems which would later persist throughout the 20th century and culminate in the Yugoslav Wars in the 1990s - ethnic and religious divisions. The Muslim minority of today's Bosnia clashed with the Christian majority, and there were instances of ethnically motivated violence between Serbs and Croats already in the 1920s following the assassination of the Croatian politician Stjepan Radic. In the years 1941 to 1945, the country was occupied by Germany, which further catalyzed the violence within. Croatian fascists, the Ustasha, massacred Serbs, Jews, and Roma, while Chetniks, Serb nationalists and Yugoslav royalists, committed ethnic and religious violence against Croats and Muslims. The only group that managed to connect the Yugoslav people in anti-Axis resistance were the communist Yugoslav Partisans led by Josip Tito, who managed to liberate the country from German occupation in 1945 and established the Federal People's Republic of Yugoslavia (FPRY) with Tito as the leader.

The newly created country was a federation of six nominally equal republics: Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Macedonia, Montenegro, Serbia, and Slovenia. Alongside that, two Serbian-controlled provinces gained an autonomous status in order to satisfy the needs of the local ethnic minorities: Magyars in Vojvodina, and Albanians in Kosovo. The FPRY was led by Tito's Communist Party of Yugoslavia and its constitution was largely modeled after that of the USSR, even though Yugoslavia broke away from the Soviet sphere of influence and founded the Non-Alignment Movement in 1961. As a political leader, Tito was faced with the challenging task of uniting an ethnically and religiously divided population, in which many before him have failed. His strategies included granting the republics a certain degree of autonomy while keeping firm central control, and by using his strong authoritative regime to suppress any separatist and nationalist tendencies which could pose a threat to the federation's stability. However, with Tito's death in 1980, the delicate relatively peaceful balance held by him for decades began to crumble, and the centuries-long feuds resurfaced.

Following the death of its decades-long leader, Yugoslavia fell into a political and economic crisis. One of the first hints of ethnic division emerged in Kosovo, when Kosovar Albanians began demanding that their province be granted the status of a republic in the federation, instead of an autonomous province within Serbia. This growing sentiment erupted in the 1981 Pristina protests, which were violently suppressed by the police. These increased tensions between Kosovar Albanians and Serbs in the 1980s led to the rise of Serb opposition towards strong provincial autonomy in general, and the belief that Yugoslavia's multi-state federation is an ineffective system and an obstacle to Serbian interests. Furthermore, due to the mass falling of communist regimes in Eastern Europe in 1989, Yugoslavia was faced with an economic crisis, which further gave rise to nationalist, often militant movements, meaning that there was minimal authority on the federal level by the early 1990s. Slobodan Milosevic, a strong nationalist who became the Serbian president in 1989, made use of these conditions, and won public support by pushing Serbian nationalist agenda, mainly by gaining de facto control over Kosovo, Vojvodina, and Montenegro. In September 1990, Serbia repealed the 1974 Yugoslav constitution and reduced the federal presidency to only nine members (one representative for each republic and one ex-officio position for the president of the League of Communists). Milosevic then replaced Kosovo's, Vojvodina's, and Montenegro's leaders with his loyalists, which led to the phenomenon of Serbia being in control of four votes and having virtual veto power in the federal presidency. Milosevic used his position of an upper hand to demand a more centralized federation with Serbia in a dominant role, which was largely opposed by republics like Croatia and Slovenia, who wanted to keep the looser multinational federation. In January of 1990, the 14th Extraordinary Congress of the League of Communists of Yugoslavia took place, in which the Serbian-dominated assembly abolished Yugoslavia's one-party system, breaking up the Communist Party of Yugoslavia into smaller socialist parties. To have this passed, Milosevic used his political influence to block any proposals by Croatian and Slovenian delegates, which led to the two delegations walking out in a symbolic act of ending the 'brotherhood and unity'.

On June 25th, 1991, the prospects of Yugoslavia slowly breaking apart became reality, when Slovenia and Croatia declared their independence and their withdrawal from the federation, which was in both cases faced with strong Serbian opposition. Slovenia fought for its independence with the Yugoslav People's Army (JNA), which was at this point heavily dominated by Serbians, for ten days (the Ten-Day War), before the force withdrew from its territory. Croatia, on the other hand, fought a much longer and bloodier battle, and had its authority challenged even before its declaration of independence. Croatian Serbs, an ethnic minority in the republic, rejected Croatia's plan to withdraw from the federation and cited their right to remain in it. Therefore, due to that and Croatia's openly anti-Serbian policies (for example switching from the Cyrillic script to Latin), the JNA and the Serbian Army helped Croatian Serbs claim around one third of Croatia's territory as a Serbian free state, SAO Krajina in October 1990, which later became the Republic of the Serbian Krajina (RSK) in 1991. After Croatia formally withdrew from Yugoslavia, the RSK launched a campaign of ethnic cleansing of Croats and non-Serbs on its territory with the help of the JNA, resulting in thousands of people killed and displaced. Especially in the second half of 1991, heavy fighting between Serbia and Croatia broke out, seen for example in the shelling of Dubrovnik or the Vukovar massacre. However, in January 1992, the situation calmed down to a certain extent, when the United States laid out the Vance Plan, in which it proposed a UN-monitored ceasefire and UN-protected areas (UNPAs) for Serbs in the RSK territory. The signatures of

both countries did put an end to major military operations, but occasional artillery attacks on Croatian towns and interventions into the UNPAs by Croatian forces prevailed until 1995. The Croatian army used the more peaceful time to prepare major counter-offensives in the spring and summer of 1995: Operation Flash in May 1995, and Operation Storm in August 1995, which ended the Croatian War for Independence with Croatia claiming the UNPA areas back into its territory. The heavy fighting and ethnic violence took the toll of an estimated 20.000 lives before Operation Storm, and some 2.000 after it until the end of the war.

However, the bloodiest of the Yugoslav Wars was definitely the one in Bosnia. Bosnia and Herzegovina had a mixed ethnic composition and religious composition: 43% of the population were Muslim Bosniaks, 33% orthodox Bosnian Serbs, 17% catholic Croats, and 7% other nationalities. The strategic location of the country was also one of the factors that set it up for conflict: both Serbia and Croatia were attracted to take from its land, and even had a secret meeting in 1991, where the two agreed to divide the territory between them and leave a small enclave for the Bosniaks. In September and October of 1991, the tensions between the Croat and Serbian minorities and the Bosniak majority within the Bosnian government increased, because Bosniak representatives wanted the republic to break away from Yugoslavia, while the ethnic Serbians and Croats wished to stay. In response to the disagreements with the Bosnian government, the Croatian minority, with the support of the Croatian government, proclaimed the Croatian Republic of Herzeg-Bosnia on November 18th 1991. Supported by the JNA and the Serbian government, the Serbian minority followed with the proclamation of Republika Srpska on January 9th 1992, and both quasi-states became asserting control over large chunks of Bosnian territory. To settle the dispute over Bosnia leaving or staying in Yugoslavia, there was a referendum in March 1992, which, however, was boycotted by Bosnian Serbs, and therefore resulted in 60% of votes in favor of leaving the federation. In response to the results of the referendum, violence between the ethnic groups occurred already in March (for example the Sarajevo wedding shooting or the Sijekovac killings), and a full-fledged war broke out in April. The beginning of the Bosnian War is commonly recognized on April 6th, which was the day on which the JNA began shelling Sarajevo having seized it the day prior. There were three main factions involved in the Bosnian War: the Bosniaks led by President Izetbegovic with the Army of Bosnia and Herzegovina (ARBiH), the Bosnian Croats with the Croatian Defense Council (HVO), and the Bosnian Serbs led by Radovan Karadzic and backed by the JNA until May 1992 (when it was dissolved), and from then on, by the Army of Republika Srpska (VRS) led by Ratko Mladic. Initially, the Bosniaks and the Croats worked together against the VRS, but the tensions between them caused them to fall apart by the end of 1992 and break into the Croat-Bosnian War in January 1993, which was ended by the US-initiated Washington Agreement on March 18th 1994. Furthermore, after the successes of operations Flash and Storm, the two combined forces again in Operation Mistral in September 1995.

In an attempt to protect civilians, on May 6th 1993, UNSC declared UN safe zones in Sarajevo, Tuzla, Bihac, Srebrenica, Goražde, and Žepa, which were to be protected by UNPROFOR forces. However, there were often issues with effectively enforcing these safe zones. Despite being one, Sarajevo remained under the siege of the JNA and later the VRS from April 5th 1992 to February 29th 1996, making it the longest siege of a capital city in the history of modern warfare. For 3 years and 10 months, Sarajevo was under a blockade and completely cut off from the outside world, except for the humanitarian airlift of UNPROFOR

since mid-1992, and later on, the Sarajevo Tunnel (which became the only direct connection with Sarajevo's surroundings). When under siege, Sarajevo's urban areas frequently endured heavy artillery attacks, and snipers took positions all over the city, mainly on the streets leading to the airport. In September 1995, NATO began its airstrikes on Bosnian Serb forces around Sarajevo, ultimately ending the siege in February 1996. Even so, Sarajevo wasn't the only place in which civilians were targeted. Karadzic, the ultra-nationalist leader of Bosnian Serbs, promised independence to all Serbs in Bosnia, and linked the scattered areas through violent campaigns of systematic ethnic cleansing and forced removal of Bosniak populations by the VRS (Prijedor ethnic cleansing, Višegrad massacres, Foča ethnic cleansing...). The most horrifying case of ethnic cleansing was the Srebrenica massacre in July 1995, in which Mladic's VRS forces surrounded the town of Srebrenica despite it being a UN safe zone, and due to a failure of UN peacekeeping officials to approve the patrolling troops to intervene, they easily seized it. Under the pretext of evacuating citizens to a safe area, thousands of women and children were driven out of the city, and were told that the men and boys would follow them on foot. In reality, 8.000 Bosniak men and boys were executed by the VRS in an act of genocide. Before being driven out, the survivors also reported abuse and harassment at the hands of VRS soldiers, including beatings and rape. The Srebrenica massacre was a breaking point for the West, and NATO airstrikes forced Serbia into negotiations and signing the Dayton Agreement in December 1995, which put an end to the war and agreed to establish a tripartite government with Serb, Bosniak and Croat representation, with a sovereign Republic of Bosnia and Herzegovina composed of Republika Srpska and the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina. As already mentioned, the Bosnian War was by far the bloodiest of the Yugoslav wars, with atrocious cases of numerous war crimes and crimes against humanity. In April 1995, the CIA reported that the most atrocities and war crimes in the Yugoslav wars were committed in Bosnia, and that 88% of them were perpetrated by Serbian forces. Over 100.000 people were killed in Bosnia, and 2 million, over half of the population, were displaced. All conflicting sides set up detention centers in which civilians were abused on a daily basis by the armed forces (e.g. the Musala Camp or the Omarska Camp). Estimated 20.000 - 50.000 mostly Bosniak women were systematically raped while imprisoned in concentration camps or hotels as one of VRS's strategies of ethnic cleansing.

After the 1990 repeal of the Yugoslav constitution, Kosovo lost its autonomy (since Serbia was now in control of its only federal presidential vote) and became facing oppression at the hands of Serbian authorities. From the early 1990s, Albanian language radio and television programs were restricted, Albanian language newspapers were shut down completely, and Kosovar Albanians were fired in large numbers from public institutions like schools or hospitals. As a result of this oppression, the Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA) was formed in the early 1990s, and began attacking Serbian civilians, but later moved on to Serbian policemen and members of secret services. Further escalations began in 1996, when KLA launched its first sabotage campaigns due to Kosovo being left out of the Dayton Agreement (ended the Bosnian War, will be mentioned later). Ultimately the KLA attacks sparked the beginning of the Kosovo War in 1998, which was ended by heavy NATO airstrikes in 1999. The war in Kosovo ended with 13.500 deaths, and with around 750.000 Albanian refugees returning back to Kosovo after the war, while the same caused around 100.000 Serbs to flee for fear of reprisals. Similarly to the war in Bosnia, the ethnic minority, in this case Kosovar Albanians, was the victim of ethnic cleansing by Serbia, alongside an alarming degree of

sexual violence perpetrated by Serbian forces, with an estimate of over 20.000 victims, many of which are waiting for justice to be served to this day.

While Macedonia saw a peaceful separation from Yugoslavia in the fall of 1991 and was even admitted to the United Nations as the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (temporary name), in January 2001, the Albanian minority, namely the National Liberation Army (NLA), began clashing with the Macedonian government and demanding autonomy or independence for Albanian-populated regions. The conflict ended in August 2001, with a peace deal which vowed to disarm the NLA and to share political power between the two ethnic groups.

Therefore, it is evident that the breakup of Yugoslavia was anything but peaceful, and that ethnic and religious divisions always found their way to start turmoil within and between the ex-Yugoslav republics. While the whole course of the Yugoslav wars is well-known and well-documented in the present day, the Special Historical Committee is meeting on July 30th 1995, shortly after the Srebrenica massacre, and therefore is in the position to prevent or limit the bloodshed and violence that continued through the late 1990s and early 2000s.

Key terms:

Ethnic violence - form of political violence motivated by ethnic conflict or hatred

Religious violence - form of violence fueled by religious beliefs

Genocide - intentional and systematic destruction of people in a part or whole ethnic, racial, religious or national group

War crime - serious violation of international humanitarian law committed during armed conflict

Crime against humanity - murder, extermination, enslavement, torture, forcible transfers of populations, imprisonment, rape, persecution, enforced disappearance and apartheid

UN peacekeeping - a global partnership aiming to maintain international peace and security

Recapitulation of previous solutions (described in general overview):

- UNPAs protected by UNPROFOR (Croatia and Bosnia)
- 1992 cease-fire giving Serbia nearly a third of Croatia's territory
- NATO airstrikes in Bosnia and Kosovo (later than 30.7.1995, but an important feature in resolving the conflict)

Main parties:

Serbia

As the country in Yugoslavia with the strongest military force, Serbian leaders had strong nationalist tendencies, striving to create a so-called "Greater Serbia". With the intention of protecting their population in the region, Serbian troops invaded Slovenia and Croatia that recently separated from Yugoslavia. As primarily Eastern Orthodox, Serbians clashed with Bosnian Muslims organizing severe ethnic cleansing. Though certain diplomatic ties were reached between Bosniaks, Croats and Serbs, Muslims kept being severely targeted by the Orthodox.

Croatia

Croatia sought independence from Yugoslavia (recognizing it after a referendum in 1991) leading to a conflict with Serb forces and the Yugoslav People's Army called the Croatian

War for Independence. The large Serb minority opposed Croatian independence, aligning with Serbia. **Bosnia and Herzegovina**

Bosnia declared independence, sparking a brutal war involving Bosniaks (Muslims), Croats, and Serbs. The Serb minority, supported by Serbia, opposed independence, leading to a complex multi-sided conflict, with Bosniaks fighting Serb forces and, at times, Croat forces as well. Ethnic divisions played a significant role in the conflict.

Slovenia Slovenia was the first republic to declare independence alongside Croatia (June 1991), leading to a brief conflict with the Yugoslav People's Army. The war lasted only ten days, partly because Slovenia had a small Serb minority and lacked significant ethnic tensions compared to other Yugoslav republics. **Kosovo** With an Albanian ethnic minority, Kosovo faced large-scale cultural clashes, which contributed to unrest in the region, later advancing into the Kosovo War in 1998. Previously being a part of the Serbian territory, their main opposition was against their armed sources, attempting to gain independence rather than partial autonomy. **JNA** Yugoslav People's Army was the official military force in Yugoslavia having ensured its liberation from Germany after the Second World War. They later sided with Serbia during the conflicts. **VRS** Bosnian Serb Army was the military force of Republika Srpska actively engaging in the Bosnian War. **United Nations** Made several attempts at ceasefire and peacekeeping as well as safety zones during Croatia's War for Independence. **NATO**

Launched a humanitarian intervention without the support of the UN Security Council as they denied authorisation of military action. Airstrikes took place attempting to stop the bloodshed in the region.

USA

Initiated the peace treaty in Croatia and Bosnia, they are also highly responsible for the NATO airstrikes.

Timeline:

1918 - Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes founded after WW1

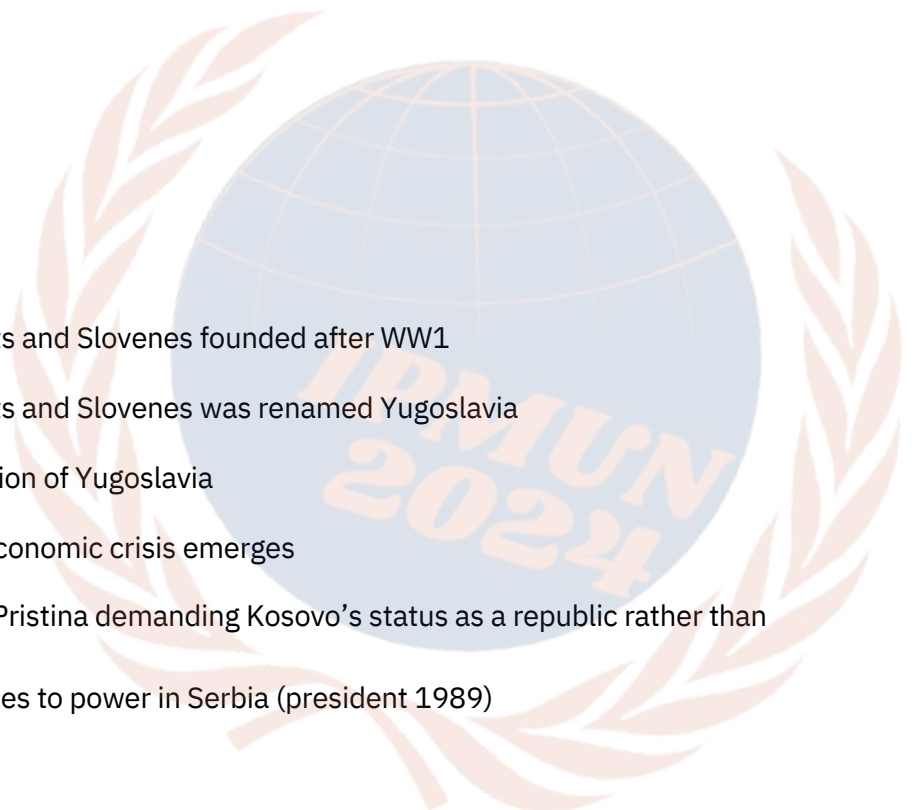
1929 - Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes was renamed Yugoslavia

1941 - 1945 - German occupation of Yugoslavia

1980 - Tito dies, political and economic crisis emerges

1981 - student-led protests in Pristina demanding Kosovo's status as a republic rather than autonomous province

1987 - Slobodan Milosevic comes to power in Serbia (president 1989)



January 1990 - 14th Extraordinary Congress of the League of Communists of Yugoslavia abolished the one-party system, Communist Party of Yugoslavia breaks up into individual socialist parties

1991 - Croatia and Serbia have a secret meeting to divide Bosnia between the two, with a small area for Muslims

June 25th 1991 - Slovenia and Croatia declare independence and split from Yugoslavia (following ten-day war), Croatian Serbs remain in Yugoslavia

October 1990 - SAO Krajina is formed, around a third of Croatia's territory as a Serbian free state (Republic of Serbian Krajina in 1991), leading to an ethnic cleansing campaign to expel Croats and non-Serbs from this area

1991 - heavy fighting between Croatia and Serbian forces - shelling of Dubrovnik or siege and massacre of Vukovar

September 8th 1991 - Macedonia peacefully separates from Yugoslavia

September-October 1991 - political tensions between Bosnian Muslims and the Croatian and Serbian minorities in the government, due to the expressed desire of Bosnian Muslims to break away from Yugoslavia while especially the Serb minority wished to stay

November 18th 1991 - proclamation of the Croatian Republic of Herzeg-Bosnia (internationally unrecognized quasi-state supported by the Croatian government), asserted control over around 60% of the country

January 1992 - Vance Plan - UN monitored ceasefire and established controlled zones (UNPA) for Serbs in the RSK territory

January 9th 1992 - proclamation of Republika Srpska (internationally unrecognized quasi-state controlled by Bosnian Serbs, who had the support of Serbia and JNA)

March 1992 referendum - 60% of Bosnian citizens voted in favor of Bosnian independence (Bosnian Serbs boycotted the vote)

April 5th 1992 - 29th February 1996 - siege of Sarajevo, longest siege of a capital in the history of modern warfare

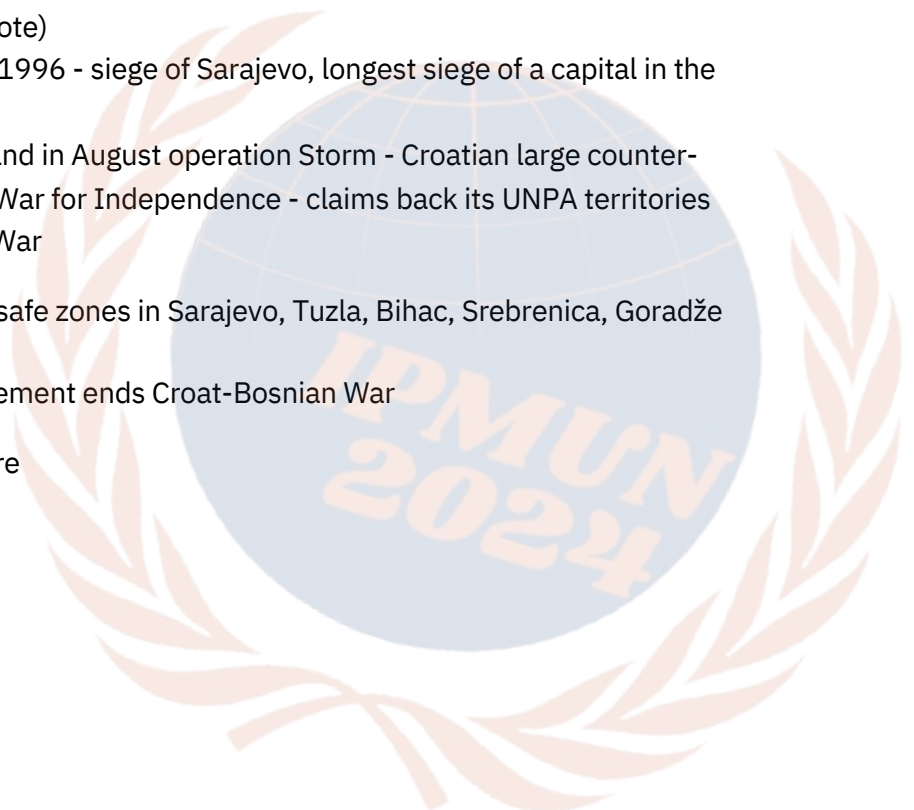
1995 - in May operation Flash and in August operation Storm - Croatian large counter-offensive operations, Croatia's War for Independence - claims back its UNPA territories

January 1993 - Croat-Bosniak War

May 1993 - UNSC declares UN safe zones in Sarajevo, Tuzla, Bihac, Srebrenica, Goradže and Žepa

March 1994 - Washington agreement ends Croat-Bosnian War

July 1995 - Srebrenica massacre



1996, when KLA launched its first sabotage campaigns

1998 - 1999 Kosovo war

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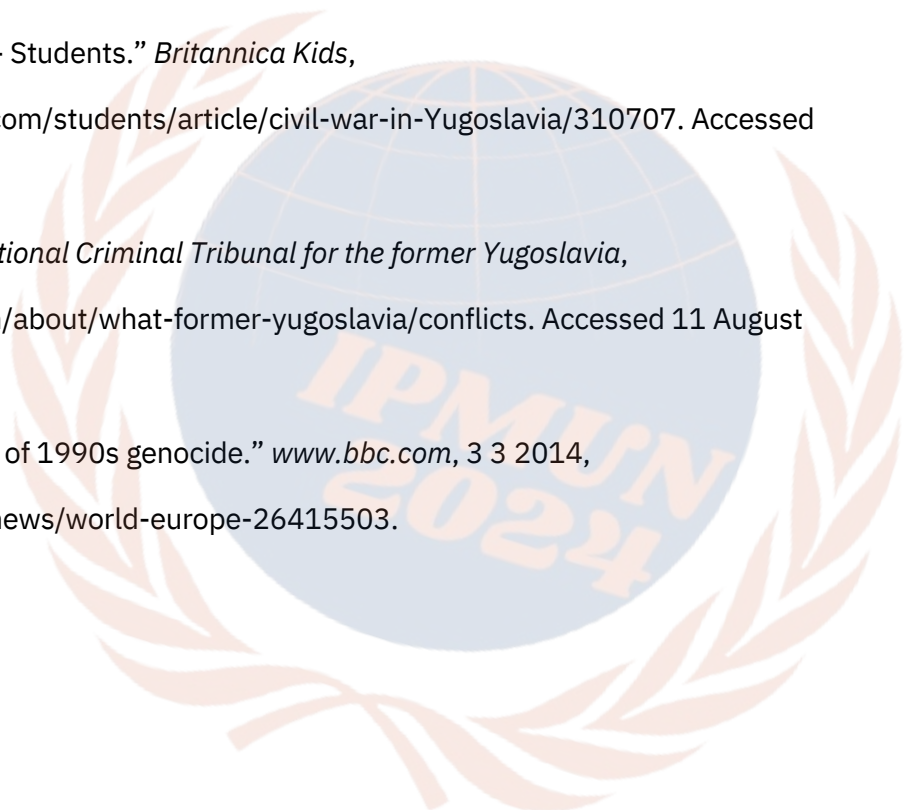
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