**John Torpey** 00:00

Hi, my name is John Torpey, and I'm director of the Ralph Bunche Institute for International Studies at the Graduate Center of the City University of New York. Welcome to International Horizons, a podcast of the Ralph Bunche Institute that brings scholarly expertise to bear on our understanding of a wide range of international issues. Today we explore the Dayton accords that settled the conflict in Bosnia on the occasion of the 25th anniversary of their adoption in 1995.

**John Torpey** 00:30

We're fortunate to have with us today Professor Susan Woodward of the Ph. D. program in political science here at the Graduate Center. A especialist on the Balkans, her current research focuses on transitions from civil war to peace, international security state failure, and post war state building. She was a member of the United Nations Committee of Experts on Public Administration from 2010 to 2014, a Senior Fellow at the Brookings Institution in Washington DC from 1990 to 1999. And then at the Center for Defense Studies at King's College London 1999 to 2000. She was head of the analysis and assessment unit for UNPROFOR in 1994, and a Professor of political science at Yale 1982 to 89, at Williams College 1978 to 82 and at Northwestern University 1972 to 77. Her many writings include the books: *The Ideology of Failed States: Why Intervention Fails* from Cambridge University Press in 2017; *Balkan Tragedy: Chaos and Dissolution after the Cold War* and *Socialist Unemployment: The Political Economy of Yugoslavia, 1945-199*0, which was published by Princeton University Press in 1995. Thank you so much for joining us today, Susan Woodward.

**Susan Woodward** 02:04

You're welcome, John.

**John Torpey** 02:05

Great to have you. So, maybe we could set the stage and remind people what happened in Bosnia and what the Dayton accords were seeking to resolve. The conflict in Bosnia shocked many observers for the episodes of crimes against humanity and genocide for the first time on European soil after World War Two. It was mistakenly believed by many from the outside as to have been the result of long standing ethnic tensions, but you argued in your book *Balkan Tragedy* that in fact, it was the result of long term political and economic dynamics inside the former Yugoslavia. Could you briefly explain what brought the states of the former Yugoslavia to war at that time?

**Susan Woodward** 02:48

I'll try to be brief. My book was almost 500 pages. So, Slovenia and Croatia, which were two of the six republics and two provinces of federal Yugoslavia, chose to secede from Yugoslavia, making the argument on the grounds of the right to national self determination. But there was no solution offered for the other four federal republics, or two provinces. And in fact, Germany even wanted the other four republics and two provinces to remain as a rump Yugoslavia. But this was especially a problem for the case of Bosnia-Herzegovina, because Bosnia is a republic of three nations, so three having the right to national self-determination.

**Susan Woodward** 03:34

Although, some major foreign policy leaders warned Germany, very intensely, five months before the war began, not to recognize the two Slovene and Croat projects without a solution first for Bosnia that it would lead to horrendous war. They were ignored, but sadly they were right. It is worth remembering, moreover, that there is no international right to secede, nor was there such a constitutional right within the Yugoslav constitution, as several cases in the preceding years to the Supreme Court confirmed. But Europeans ignored international law and Yugoslav law.

**Susan Woodward** 04:17

The Soviets initiated this independence project, and were given early support from Switzerland and Austria and even Norway. But the reason was basically a tax revolt. As the wealthiest republic in Yugoslavia, and after a decade of austerity policies imposed for International Monetary Fund loans, they said "why should we pay for the others or even for the federal budget, including the army". At the same time in the preceding year in Croatia, there were also quite nasty right wing nationalist attacks against minority Serbs, again on nationalist grounds. But the Serbs were already 11% of the population of Croatia, not a small minority. And also since 1981, a whole decade, there was a movement by the Albanian majority in Kosovo province, to get republic status. Not to leave, but to get the full status of a republic. But the war could only happen when the Europeans agreed to break the country up, but without a solution for the rest of it.

**John Torpey** 05:29

Thank you for that helpful recounting of what led to this, as you say, Balkan tragedy, in the title of your book. So that's what the Dayton agreement was meant to address. Can you talk about the extent to which it was successful in doing that?

**Susan Woodward** 05:49

Yes, I would like to. So let me say first, John, that I find it very interesting that the only time outsiders talk about Bosnia seems to be at anniversaries. On all of them after the 1995 peace agreement, which in fact, has changed greatly since. We had conferences at the 10th anniversary then a few of the 15th anniversary and now attention of the 25th anniversary, which is actually a very long time, if you think about it. And I suspect that there is a similar pattern for lack of American attention to any place we do not consider in our strategic interest.

**Susan Woodward** 06:26

But as for your question, no, the Dayton agreement did not resolve any of the conflicts that led to the war. Did not resolve any of the conflicts that led to war in Bosnia Herzegovina, nor did address any of the conflicts over the province of Kosovo, where I've mentioned the Albanian pressure, or in Macedonia. Indeed, the ethno-national conflicts and segregation in Bosnia are much worse than in 1995. Part of the reason is that the Dayton agreement legitimized ethno-national identities and territorial and community separation. And part of the reason is that the United States has been periodically trying to revise the agreement under constitutional reform ever since.

**Susan Woodward** 07:17

The US has been pushing for a more centralized state than the Dayton accord created. But that is the party platform have only one of the Bosnian parties, the Bosniak or Bosnian Muslim party. Not of the other two Bosnian nations, Serbs and Croats. And perhaps I should explain that the three nations of Bosnia were defined by religion based on the Ottoman millet system. But in August 1993, a year and a half after the war began, the Bosnian Muslim leadership decided that Serbs and Croats were not known by outsiders for their religion, even though, yes, Serbs are Orthodox Christians and Croats are Roman Catholics and it's religion that defines their nationality. So the Bosnian Muslims felt they needed for reasons of international propaganda to choose this new name, one that had been used in the early part of the 20th century, and it has worked. So, most people who don't know much about the case, assume that Bosniaks are Bosnians, not just one of its ethno-national groups. There's also no consideration in the US plans for other groups such as Jews, or those who continue to identify as Yugoslavs or a category in the constitution called "others".

**Susan Woodward** 08:36

Although the current pressure from American activists is to switch entirely to the concept of individual citizens --not national rights, a much more radical change that I'm sure will never get support -- Bosnian-Serbs and Croats went to war out of fear of Bosniak domination. So, these periodic efforts by the U.S. only keep the original conflict and war alive.

**Susan Woodward** 09:04

US pressure for internally displaced Bosnians of all categories and Bosnian refugees in other countries to return to their pre-war home after Dayton was signed has also kept the issues of the war alive. And in this case led to quite a bit of violence at the local level to prevent these returns. At the same time, the agreement established a very complex decision-making structure, giving veto power to leaders of all three groups and a highly decentralized federal system of cantons and provinces. The result has been 25 years of paralysis. No decisions get made. While the elected politicians receive humongous salaries in contrast to the poverty of the population. And the World Bank and International Monetary Fund have been insisting on policy since early 1996, once the Dayton accord was signed, that reproduce all the difficulties during the 1980s that led to the economic and political crisis in Yugoslavia, and thus, the causes of the breakup. This, by way, is far more concerning to me than the constitutional problems of the Dayton accord and it's multiple revisions since 1995.

**Susan Woodward** 10:25

No one expects a war to begin again. But it is not because of the Dayton agreement, but because over the horizon, NATO, and more recently, European Union troops, would rush back into Bosnia and put a stop. But the parties still continue to fight the war only not with violence. As I said, this is a very long time, more than half of the entire duration of Federal Yugoslavia between 1945 and 1990, which also emerged from civil war and external intervention during World War II, and built a developed industrialized country with a foreign policy that gave Yugoslavs access with their passports to more countries in the world than any other. Whatever one thinks of single party rule, Yugoslavs had a very good life, traveled all over the world, and had substantial global leadership such as with the creation of the Non-alignment Movement. That nothing has moved in Bosnia for 25 years, makes the contrast even sadder.

**John Torpey** 11:32

So it does. It's all a reminder of what a complicated construct Yugoslavia, which simply means South Slavia land, right.

**Susan Woodward** 11:44

South Slavia.

**John Torpey** 11:45

Yes, South, exactly. And it was a kind of artificial construct and then unraveled in these unfortunate ways.

**Susan Woodward** 11:54

John, I have to interrupt you. The argument that was artificial was the argument Slovenia and Croatia made to allow themselves to go out. Any state is -- except maybe one that is on a continent like the United States -- any state is artificial, if you think about it that way. But that's a propaganda argument you have just made.

**John Torpey** 12:15

I see. Okay, well, I'll stop making it. Tell me, you've spent a lot of time in the meantime, thinking about, you know, the consequences of international interventions, such as in Kosovo, and what's now called North Macedonia and other cases such as South Sudan and the negotiations in Iraq. How do you think the Dayton or Bosnia case influenced those later interventions?

**Susan Woodward** 12:42

Well, I think it's worth beginning with how different the Bosnian case was treated in contrast to international negotiations before then, most specifically in El Salvador and Mozambique. When a military victory or stalemate was a trigger for negotiations, and where the negotiators, Alvaro De Soto, in the case of El Salvador and Aldo Ayello from Mozambique, agreed to be the civilian head of peace implementation missions after the agreement. So, each had a direct incentive to negotiate something that could actually be implemented. And especially in the case of El Salvador, there was also regional group of countries, the Contadora group, who first engaged in helping get the people in El Salvador to the bargaining table, and then the UN Secretary General agreed to help. These are very successful missions/agreements.

**Susan Woodward** 13:40

But in contrast for Bosnia, despite the argument made by many and still now, that the problem was the lack of international action early on, there was a successful negotiation by Cyrus Vance for Croatia with the minority Serbs that led to UN peacekeeping operation in January 1992. But it was then extended to provide humanitarian aid delivery, and negotiate local ceasefires in Bosnia from then on, even before the war began. And there were ongoing European Union and United Nations joint sponsored peace negotiations, even before the beginning of the war, and during it.

**Susan Woodward** 14:22

The Dayton accord was, in fact, the seventh peace plan for Bosnia of these ongoing negotiations. But the US refused to support any of them. The US support for one of the three warring parties, the Bosniaks, Bosnian Muslims, whom I've mentioned before, gave them a strong incentive to keep fighting, so that the war went on for almost four years. And then, rather than a military victory or stalemate, the US using NATO airpower bombed the Bosnian Serbs. We, the United States, said it was to force them to the bargaining table, but in fact, the Bosnian Serbs were already at the table and agreed. While the bombing was actually to persuade the Bosniaks, the so-called clients in the sense of the United States, to come to the bargaining table by giving them what they had asked for. And of course, it worked.

**Susan Woodward** 15:22

Then the negotiations at Dayton were never face to face, but shuttle diplomacy, even though at the same military airbase in Dayton, Ohio, by negotiators moving among the parties. And the agreement was actually negotiated among the Bosniak leadership of Alija Izetbegović, and the presidents of neighboring Croatia and Serbia, as if they represented Bosnian Croats and Bosnian Serbs; both of whom were never included in the negotiations. A principle of all peace negotiations is that only succeed if they're inclusive.

**Susan Woodward** 16:02

Now, let me say a few other influences. First, the idea that this was, as you mentioned, wrongly, an argument about ethnic or national identity and conflict. It was not an ethnic conflict, but one of conflicting rights to a state based on national self-determination. However, Americans from the beginning and continuing on now still see it as an ethnic conflict; what even was called ancient ethnic hostilities, which is nonsense, if you know anything about the history of Bosnia, or even Yugoslavia.

**Susan Woodward** 16:40

One example, of course, of this definition is the application of the Genocide Conventions. The same lens of ethno-national conflict has been applied to Iraq. In 2006, then Vice President [correction: then Senator] Joseph Biden wrote an op-ed in the New York Times with the president of the Council on Foreign Relations at the time, Les Gelb, recommending that Iraq be divided territorially into three units based on religion, exclusively based on the Bosnian model, which they called a success. You can certainly see that I do not agree. Iraqis were furious because they've always seen themselves as citizens of a single nation state as Iraqis, whatever their various religious affiliations. There's a similar parallel to our treatment in Afghanistan, and equal Afghan opposition to it. I can agree to a certain extent, that the Bosnian War created ethnic animosities, but they were not the cause. And I'm sure that's true for all the other cases I know.

**Susan Woodward** 17:49

A second lesson has to do with the concept of power sharing consociational agreements for getting a peace settlement. While some people argue that power sharing compromises among all warring parties, that means giving each party a governmental role, and a consociational consensus mechanism for decision-making are useful as a transitional mechanism. But I see no evidence for that, and I've looked at many, many examples. And their consequences of these power sharing agreements, are to institutionalize ethnic religious differences in conflict, and to create unending instability, and in most cases, a return to war, as we saw in South Sudan. I will be curious in this regard to see how the negotiations between the Taliban and the Afghan government go.

**Susan Woodward** 18:48

My third lesson is that there was very little or no consultation with local citizens. It's interesting that in the European Union and US negotiations to end the conflict between the majority Slav Macedonian and minority Albanian population, and what, as you said we now call North Macedonia as a result of an agreement with Greece, that the EU and us negotiators refused to talk to any of the highly organized civil society organizations, including a referendum that they organized to oppose what was called the Ohrid Agreement, but they were totally ignored. Similarly in Kosovo, none of the negotiators talked to minority Serbs, and were, and remain highly critical, of Serbia in ongoing European Union and now also US negotiations between Belgrade and Pristina.

**Susan Woodward** 19:44

My fourth lesson is that Bosnia was the first example of a NATO deployment. It's the beginning of an entirely new history of international action for NATO. In contrast to its Article 5 commitment to its members, up until then. Now NATO is everywhere. And its most recent strategy document just a month ago, is aimed at what is called the China threat. And it has an allied rapid reaction corps permanent that was first formed to go into Bosnia in 1995, and established as the NATO warfighting corps to be held in readiness.

**Susan Woodward** 20:28

Fifth, the World Bank sent representatives to the Bosnian case. And thereafter beginning with Guatemala, to weigh in on its views about the design of the state for what the Bank considers fiscal responsibility. That also established a new institutional pattern. But both the State Department team with Richard Holbrooke at Dayton and the World Bank representative were completely ignorant of the Yugoslav system and of Bosnian history and context. The European diplomats had far better knowledge and intelligence, but they were hobbled by the need for consensus among them. But even more so by the United States wanting to be, what Madeleine Albright called, the indispensable nation. Bosnian policy was from the very beginning and still is driven by very partisan low level diplomats in the State Department, plus highly mobilized citizen activist groups working for one side. In my book *Balkan Tragedy*, I criticize the Clinton administration for taking the side of the Bosnian Muslims, the Bosniaks. Although we know they did it not for the local result, but to please Muslim countries such as Turkey and Malaysia. But because to support only one of the three sides to the war was to ignore and undermine the very country the Bosnian Muslims needed Bosnia-Herzegovina as a whole, a country of all three nations and others. The Bosniaks lose if they lose Bosnia as a whole.

**John Torpey** 22:14

Thank you for that critical view of how the Bosnian story was taken forward by others. And more recently, you've also written critically about this period and the way in which it developed the idea of state failure, or the way it came out of this period. And I wonder, could you talk a little bit further about the relationship between why peacebuilding operations and international intervention seemed to fail?

**Susan Woodward** 22:46

Well, I'll start with just the concept of state failure, because your question it's a very broad one, another large book. But I argue in that book for the end of the Cold War, provoked a large and interesting set of debates about the basis of national for the US, and global security for others, to redefine the role of military forces, and national and international security for the post Cold War period. There are many concepts, for example, human security, cooperative security, rogue states, and so forth. But the concept that won in the debates during the 1990s was failed states. The argument was that failed states were the cause of all the evils internationally: terrorism, nuclear proliferation, trafficking and illicit goods, or human beings for prostitution or slavery, mass violations of human rights, civil war, humanitarian crises and refugee flows, and so forth.

**Susan Woodward** 23:54

I also argue that there's no such thing as a failed state. Although one can certainly find many examples, even in the United States at times, of states that are failing their citizens in specific ways. But the concept of a failed state was promoted first in the early 1990s, and Bosnia was a very important role in this promotion by people wanting to have the uninanimity in the US State Department, wanting to have the United Nations be more active intervenors in conflict areas and for peacebuilding; now that the conflict between the US and the Soviet Union no longer blocked the Security Council. But also being promoted by aid agencies like the USAID to justify continuing development assistance. Now that the Soviet Union was no longer perceived as a threat, they had to find a new threat to persuade especially American Congressmen. And the wars finally in former Yugoslavia played a major part in this reaction because it led so many ordinary people to see a rash of civil wars at the time.

**Susan Woodward** 25:04

Even though the conflicts in El Salvador, Namibia and Mozambique occurred before the end of the Cold War, and were resolved by UN negotiations very successfully. And the most influentially of all the actors on this conceptual front and debate was the World Bank, which under a new president in 1995, Wolfensohn, established what he called a failed state task force to resolve the problem the Bank was having, because more than 80% of countries that were then engaged in armed conflict, were in arrears to the Bank, that is, they were not able to repay bank loans. They were in a word failing the World Bank. And as a bank, which needs to have loans repaid, was even threatening its existence.

**Susan Woodward** 25:58

But over time, the concept of failed states and a new label, fragile states, that was created by those who wanted to be more diplomatic, like the British, came to mean that a country's government did not have the specific capacities, or the political will, to adopt the policies that these external actors, aid agencies, the international financial institutions, the United Nations agencies, were insistent on. So like the bank, these countries were seen to be failing these external actors, even though the policies had been and continued to be shown to do more damage to them. So that in my view, these local politicians and governments were correct not to follow external demands.

**Susan Woodward** 26:48

But failed states has now become such a common label, and even accusation that no one questions it anymore. But I consider it highly insulting. All the many, many indexes of failed or fragile states identify more than 80% of countries in the world to be failed states. Surely there's something wrong about that. And to the extent there are issues to be addressed in the countries labeled failed states, wouldn't it be better to identify those issues specifically? Civil war, poverty and underdevelopment, a balance of payments crisis due to a radical shift in the country's terms of trade, organized crime networks, regime change operations, especially launched by the United States. And then design actions appropriate to each specific cause or difficulty, one would hope effectively, rather than just use this label of failed states.

**John Torpey** 27:51

Well, this is all a very useful reminder that terminology and framing of things can really have very profound consequences for what people do actually in the world. And against that background, I'd like to ask one last question, which has to do with whether you think -- I'm not optimistic really hear about the answer -- But whether you think the international community has learned anything over the past 25 years regarding negotiated peace settlements and interventions in conflict zones that you can use going forward?

**Susan Woodward** 28:24

You guessed right. I fear it has not learned anything about future peace settlements. Now, peacekeeping and peacebuilding operations, those that go in after an agreement and mainly under United Nations auspices, have made many changes since 1995. But I'm not sure I would call them improvements. In my book, The Ideology of Failed States, I show that all the improvements are in enhancing the operational capacity and resources of these international actors, not any change or improvement in the strategy within countries or even resources to them. And I document this quite thoroughly.

**Susan Woodward** 29:08

Diplomats continue to employ a power-sharing solution in peace negotiations, which as I mentioned, is not a solution at all. Moreover, civil wars these days are ever more complex in the number of parties and the fragmentation of warring parties. So the standard diplomatic methods for negotiating a peace settlement, or even a ceasefire agreement, as bilateral agreements between a government and rebels, no longer suit or apply to current conflicts. It didn't for Bosnia either. The consequence is a large number of long running UN missions that are just holding actions that do not in fact reduce the violence. One of our former students at the Graduate Center in political science who works at the United Nations on peacemaking and peacebuilding even argues these days that the best thing would be simply to stop all UN peace missions, and then we might talk about what can be done in the future.

**John Torpey** 30:11

Well, that's an unexpected and counterintuitive conclusion, but I can see where it comes from based on the analysis you've offered. So that's it for today's episode of International Horizons. I want to thank Susan Woodward of the CUNY Graduate Center for sharing her insights about the legacy of the Dayton Accords that sought to settle the Bosnian conflict of the 1990s.

**John Torpey** 30:37

Please subscribe to International Horizons on Apple podcasts, Spotify and SoundCloud and leave us a review. I want to thank the Otto Walter Foundation for its support of this podcast series. I also want to thank Merrill Sovner for her help in producing this episode and Hristo Voynov for his technical assistance. This is John Torpey, saying thanks for joining us for this episode of International Horizons. We look forward to new horizons in 2021. See you then.