

Will Republika Srpska's Decision to Separate from Bosnia Plunge the Balkans Back Into War?

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The Bosnian Croats' reaction and that of their neighboring eponymous NATO-member state to Republika Srpska's planned separation will be the most pivotal factor for determining whether the West resorts to military force to stop the Serbs.

President of Republika Srpska Milorad Dodik confirmed in an interview with [TASS](#) at last week's St. Petersburg International Economic Forum that his state plans to separate from Bosnia but is proceeding very carefully in order to avoid any instability. He then met his Serbian counterpart Aleksandar Vucic in Belgrade during the Pan-Serbian Assembly there, which produced the "[Declaration on the Protection of National and Political Rights and the Common Future of the Serbian People](#)".

That document importantly calls for their institutions to act in coordination with one another to further the Serbian people's interests and essentially amounts to the beginning of their informal merger along the lines of the commonwealth model that Dodik briefly touched upon in his abovementioned interview. As he explained, this is a natural development that represents the historically justified aspirations of the Serbian people, which he compared to the unification of East and West Germany after the Old Cold War.

The problem is that the West is unlikely to abandon its three-decade-long failed political experiment in Bosnia, however, since the whole purpose behind artificially keeping that polity together all this time has been to divide-and-rule the Serbian people. Moreover, since Serbs are among the most Russian-friendly people anywhere in the world, Western anti-Russian hawks are likely to spin this long-overdue move as some sort of Russian plot to sow instability in the Balkans exactly as [the Associated Press just speculated](#).

Accordingly, the odds of them respecting the UN-enshrined right of Republika Srpska's majority-Serbian people to separate from Bosnia and unite with Serbia are low. In all likelihood, they'll use every means at their disposal to oppose this peaceful process, especially since successfully obstructing it could then be presented as a faux victory over Russia to boost Western morale. This includes warmongering and possibly even acting on their threats to stop Republika Srpska in the worst-case scenario.

To that end, the West is expected to gaslight that it's Republika Srpska and Serbia that are preparing for war with secret Russian support, not the West. In that way, they can reframe everything as the opposite of what it really is by swapping the roles of victims and villains like they always do, which is aimed at manipulating public opinion in their support. That's not to say that the West will definitely resort to military force to stop Republika Srpska, but just that they'll at least likely convey such threats to it.

That'll be much more difficult to do though if Republika Srpska convinces its Bosniak and especially Croat counterparts from Bosnia's other half, the Federation of Bosnia & Herzegovina, to agree to its peaceful separation. In that event, this rump state can either remain as Bosnia's successor or bifurcate once more if the Croat part joins Croatia, thus leaving the Bosniak part as its own country. There are pros and cons to these scenarios from each of their perspectives so it's unclear what they'll ultimately do.

The Bosnian Croats' reaction and that of their neighboring eponymous NATO-member state to Republika Srpska's planned separation will be the most pivotal factor for determining whether the West resorts to military force to stop the Serbs. If they agree that this is the most pragmatic way to truly advance the best interests of Bosnia's three constituent people and doesn't pose a threat to the region due to the lack of Serbian claims on others, then they're unlikely to go along with the West's warmongering.

Another argument in favor of them letting Republika Srpska peacefully separate from Bosnia is that few want to fight a war over the future of this country. Each of its three constituent people already have their own niche where they live in safety unlike right after Yugoslavia's dissolution. Socio-economic ties between them can therefore easily continue even in the absence of political ones. Since nobody has any claims to anyone else's land anymore, ending this experiment wouldn't automatically lead to instability.

Moreover, so long as the [Ukrainian Conflict](#) continues, the West's military priority is to keep fighting Russia by proxy. Republika Srpska and Serbia's armed forces are incomparable to Russia's in the sense that they'd be easily defeated by NATO, but even so, another regional war would distract from the West's military focus on Russia and lead to the further depletion of its already stressed stockpiles. It's for this reason why their use of force to stop Republika Srpska can't be taken for granted even if they threaten it.

One possibility is that Western military threats deter Republika Srpska from declaring independence and then merging with Serbia but that Dodik withdraws his state's recognition of Bosnia just like [Puntland withdrew its recognition of Somalia](#) earlier this spring after a constitutional dispute. That African sub-national polity is still universally recognized as part of its UN-member state but it's functionally independent in all respects and has been for a while already even before the latest development.

In Republika Srpska's case, its withdrawal of recognition might be irreversible but stop short of outright secession, thus resulting in a compromise whereby it and the rest of Bosnia can

go their own separate ways without any political red lines being crossed that risk provoking the West into an overreaction. During that time, Republika Srpska and Serbia could accelerate the implementation of their joint declaration, which would change the political facts on the ground and create a fait accompli.

At this point, it's obvious that the West's political experiment in Bosnia failed to divide-and-rule the Serbian people, who've begun to peacefully unite once more. The only way to stop them is to resort to force, but that would divert arms and attention from the Ukrainian Conflict, plus Croatia might not go along with it. For these reasons, observers shouldn't assume that Western warmongering signifies another impending war, but they also shouldn't ignore any tangible moves in this direction either.

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