

## **Peace Journey: The Struggle for Peace in Bosnia**

by Carl Bildt. London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1998. 423pp. £25.00

## **Bosnia: Faking Democracy After Dayton**

by David Chandler. London: Pluto Press, 1999. 239pp. £14.99

More than four years have passed since tens of thousands of soldiers and international civil servants poured into Bosnia-Herzegovina in what was, and remains, one of the most ambitious experiments ever in post-conflict peace-building. In these two books, Carl Bildt and David Chandler offer divergent though complementary perspectives on this experience. Bildt, the former EU peace envoy, provides a first-hand and largely upbeat account of the negotiating efforts culminating in the Dayton Accord and its initial implementation, the civilian aspects of which he oversaw in his capacity as High Representative of Bosnia through June 1997. Chandler, by contrast, provides a radical critique of the peace-implementation process which, while not always persuasive, raises some important questions deserving of consideration.

The divergence of views is most evident in the respective treatments of the Office of the High Representative (OHR) itself. The Dayton agreement envisioned a relatively weak role for the High Representative – largely as coordinator of the civilian organisations and agencies operating in Bosnia – and a theme sounded throughout Bildt's book, not surprisingly, is the extreme difficulty with which the author laboured to promote local compliance with the peace settlement. 'I had the moral authority of the international community behind me', Bildt recounts, 'but moral authority alone did not cut much ice in the hard political game over the future of Bosnia' (p. 203). To secure the cooperation of the parties, Bildt sometimes resorted to economic conditionality – threatening, for instance, to postpone critical donors' meetings unless the parties could agree the rudimentary measures necessary for the functioning of a unitary state. But sanctions, Bildt acknowledges, were a double-edged sword that risked undermining economic regeneration on which peace in the region ultimately depended. Moreover, Bildt was under pressure from the Clinton administration to 'accentuate the positive' so as not to jeopardise US plans for an early withdrawal (p. 204).

Over time, the powers of the High Representative would gradually be strengthened and Bildt's successors would even enjoy the authority – backed by SFOR, the NATO-led stabilisation force – to remove from public office individuals deemed to be obstructing implementation of the Dayton Accord. Chandler is highly critical of the sweeping executive powers that have been vested in the High Representative and his associates. To begin with, he maintains, the experiment has failed utterly. 'Three years of intensive involvement by the world's most powerful states, including the Contact Group of the US, Britain, France, Germany, Italy and Russia, and the leading international institutions, including the International Monetary Fund, World Bank, United Nations, OSCE and NATO, has done little to create viable institutions of self-government in the state', he writes (p. 2). Ethnic politics still predominate in Bosnia and peace has become the continuation of war by other means.

Furthermore, Chandler contends, the international community's approach is fundamentally flawed: 'it is not possible to impose a common bond on the people of Bosnia merely by administrative fiat', he observes (p. 197). Indeed, the international community risks generating a new breed of aid dependency, as local authorities avoid politically inconvenient decisions (such as economic restructuring, the establishment of regulatory bodies, the enactment of human-rights legislation) which they know the High Representative will impose anyway. And, Chandler asks, what kind of lesson in democracy is the international community providing when its High Representative removes duly elected officials, allocates seats in disregard of poll results, and censors media outlets critical of international policy?

To some extent Chandler has a point. Even the Office of the High Representative under Wolfgang Petritsch has been preoccupied with questions of Bosnian 'ownership' of the peace-implementation process. And there is no reason why the OHR should not involve local Bosnians more deeply in the planning and execution of its initiatives. However, left to their own devices, there can be little doubt that the local authorities would seek to cement the ethnic divisions on which their power depends, and thus perpetuate the logic that fuelled the conflict, leading perhaps to a renewal of hostilities. The answer, it would seem, lies not in abandoning the international administration altogether, but in fine-tuning the process, seeking to apply the relevant lessons from where the international community has succeeded in achieving its objectives – notably in the areas of customs policy, media regulation, and the establishment of a Central Bank. Here efforts have been more focused, and the international community has managed to separate policy-making from ethnic politics.

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