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## Documentation

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### British justify refusal to defend Bosnia

*What follows are some brief excerpts from British Foreign Secretary Douglas Hurd's speech at Chatham House (London) on Jan. 27, entitled "The New Disorder." In it, Hurd justified British overseas involvement in three wars in this century which did not involve defending British soil: in 1914, when the Kaiser invaded Belgium; in 1939, when Hitler invaded Poland; and in 1991, after Saddam Hussein invaded Kuwait, but tries to justify the current policy of not opposing Serbian aggression against Bosnia.*

*In the very last phrase of the speech, Hurd calls for an effort "comparable to those of 1815, 1919, and the years after 1945." The three dates refer to the three most egregious modern instances when imperial Britain joined with other great powers to carve up the world. In 1815, the Congress of Vienna put a violent halt to the process of the spread of the American Revolution into Europe; in 1919, the evil Versailles Treaty perpetuated the causes of World War I and led directly into World War II; and 1945 brought the updated version of Versailles injustice, the Yalta accords, which divided Europe between the Soviets and the Anglo-Americans.*

*Note Hurd's embrace of value-free, "politically correct" verbiage: It is not that the crimes against humanity in the Balkans or elsewhere are actually morally repugnant, but rather that they are perceived to be so.*

. . . Soviet Communism is no longer a threat. That gigantic shadow has passed, but its passing has revealed a multitude of lesser shadows. Since the end of the Cold War we are faced with a different world where disorder is spreading. Nationalism in some places is out of hand (Yugoslavia, the Transcaucasus)—in others (Liberia, Angola, Cambodia, Somalia) factions rather than nations breed the hatred. In almost every continent, including Europe, we find dramas and tragedies which do not directly affect these islands nor those for whom we are responsible, nor our allies. Nevertheless they contain the danger of wider conflict. They produce misery which is widely felt to be unacceptable.

Sadly, there is nothing new in such misery. There is nothing new in mass rape, in the shooting of civilians, in war crimes, ethnic cleansing, in the burning of towns and villages. What is new is that a selection of these tragedies is now visible to people around the world. Before the days of hand-held video cameras, BBC Television and CNN,

people might have heard about atrocities, but accounts were often old, and often disputed. The cameras are not everywhere. But where the cameras operate the facts are brutally clear, transmitted within hours in sitting rooms around the world. People reject and resent what is going on because they know it more vividly than before. . . .

My own belief is that there is a British interest, shared with many of our allies, European partners and many others, in a safer and more decent world, but that the resulting effort needs to be rigorously disciplined and constrained. . . .

Obviously we cannot be everywhere and we cannot do everything. Our diplomacy is now undermanned compared to that of our main colleagues and competitors. Our armed forces are already stretched. . . .

Where we act, our action must be proportionate. For example to impose and guarantee order in the former Yugoslavia would take huge forces and huge risks over an indefinite period—which no democracy could justify to its people. . . .

The rest of the world would for example regard it as simply frivolous if we abandoned the common policy toward the problems of the former Yugoslavia. The conference in Geneva, under its co-chairmen, Cyrus Vance and David Owen, works tirelessly to offer peaceful answers to the warring rulers in the former Yugoslavia. That mechanism, created in London in August, is a prototype of cooperation between the EC [European Community] and the United Nations. . . . But when it succeeds, as I believe that one day it will, then it will be seen as a leading example of how a regional and an international organization can pool their efforts to cope with the new disorder. . . .

We shall probably have to say "no" more often than "yes" [to demands for international action]. . . . We must plan more clearly with like-minded countries how to reshape the international institutions for their new tasks. We are not going to achieve a total new order, by ourselves or with others. But an effort comparable to those of 1815, 1919, and the years after 1945 is needed if the international community is to avert a continuing slide into disorder; and in that effort Britain will be expected and will wish to play a worthy part.

*From a related commentary in the Jan. 29 London Times, by Correlli Barnett, a fellow of Churchill College, Cambridge:*

. . . We have already been suckered into the hopeless confusions of the former Yugoslavia, and have just upped our investment by one of our three aircraft carriers. Yet the quarrels of Bosnians, Croats and Serbs are absolutely nothing to do with us, and in no sense threaten our security.

Now that the new American administration is pressing us to commit ourselves even more heavily, we even have to ask whether our membership of the U.N. Security Council is becoming more of a burdensome obligation than a diplomatic asset.