

Chapter 2: Legend-Induced Paranoia of the Serbs and the Hits and Myths of the Croats

"Whenever one pulls a trigger in order to rectify history's mistake, one lies. For history makes no mistakes, since it has no purpose. One only pulls the trigger out of self-interest and quotes history to avoid responsibility or pangs of conscience."

--Joseph Brodsky, Nobel Prize laureate.

From the moment the Serbs unleashed their onslaught on Croatia, pundits, reporters, and authors of numerous books and articles about the Yugoslav crisis have offered highly speculative and suspect opinions. They've persistently pontificated that regional history was the exclusive genesis of today's conflict without accurately understanding that history. So they've invariably recounted Serbian mythologies instead.

To the detriment of more important priorities, the Croats have spent a great deal of energy trying to set the record straight. In the process, they've gotten caught in the trap of quoting their own history ad nauseam. The Croats felt history was on their side and once the world learned the real truth, in contrast to the Serbian version, everything would miraculously fall into place for Croatia.

Instead of discussing the contemporary political situation, most Croatian government representatives spent all their time trying to deconstruct the Serbian take on Croatia's past. Croatian spokesmen didn't comprehend that the attention span of their audiences started to drift as soon as they brought up the Croats' significance during the time of Christ's birth. By the time the spokesmen reached the seventh century when the Croats finally settled in the Balkans, they had lost their audiences completely. Croatian officials never reached the point where they could articulate the real issues and Croatia's present agenda because they spent all their energy explaining history. For example, Croatia's representative to Washington, Franjo Golem, always thought the answer to any American legislator's question, "What can we or what do you want us to do for Croatia?" was *carte blanche* to deliver a lesson on Croatian history. One leading congressman told me that he dreaded having to meet with Golem, but did so because of protocol. He described the meetings as analogous to asking someone for the time and receiving a lecture on how to make a clock instead.

Every interested outside party and all the protagonists in former Yugoslavia except Slovenia have used a different version of history to embellish their own agendas. Whether that history was credible was of least importance. For a long time we were bombarded with the "Looney Toons" Serbian version because it was the only one used by Western leaders and the media. But I have no doubt that because of the decisive Croatian military victories in 1995; we'll soon be inundated with the Croatian "Merry Melodies."

Although history is always instructive, the past had little bearing on the recent debacle. The war was simply a land grab by Serbia to control the industrial and economic wealth of its neighbors. Because the Croats have buried their agenda in bombastic history lessons, they've never been able to clearly articulate that their goal is simply self-determination.

Everyone in the world watched the Berlin Wall fall, none with greater interest than the former captive nations. But Serbia was only marginally affected by the world-wide change in political climate and attitudes that followed the fall. The Belgrade government functioned as normal because it remained intact. But in order to stay in power and maintain its privileges, Milosevic's renamed Serbian Communist Party decided to reawaken a twisted version of history that would pander to Serbian nationalism and chauvinism.

The West's perception of former Yugoslavia as an amalgam should be corrected. Yugoslavia was a

contrived country. Being markedly heterogeneous, multi-ethnic, multi-religious, and having four distinct languages and two alphabets, Yugoslavia possessed none of the prerequisites for a lasting, successful union. Despite their differences, the various ethnic groups lived side-by-side in peace for 45 years after World War II, and it wasn't until Milosevic divided Yugoslavia along ethnic lines that the peace shattered. Behaving like a classic mountebank, Milosevic tried to unilaterally redefine the area's demography. He found his power base among Serbian intellectuals and Serbian Orthodox Church officials.

Milosevic raised that most visceral of appeals, nationalism, to hysterical heights. Fully realizing the power of the media, he placed his loyalists in all the influential positions of the Serbian press establishment. Even the bureau chief of the Associated Press in Belgrade was loyal to him. Using television, he fomented hatred by exposing the Serbs to a daily diet of wartime footage of the Ustashe; the quisling government installed in Croatia by Nazi Germany, and equated the Ustashe with Tudjman's government.

To fully understand the motives for the Serbian war, the West must fathom the Serbs' morbid fascination and obsession with darkest aspects of history. The linchpin of Serbian history, based more on legend than fact, is their defeat at Kosovo in 1389 by the Ottoman Muslims. In 1993, Serbian-American Dusko Doder wrote in *Foreign Policy*: "For centuries the myth of Kosovo has been the banner of Serb national pride and a justification for the Serbs' miserable condition. The Kosovo myth is the touchstone of the Serb national character, its disdain for compromise, its messianic bent, and its firm belief in the meaninglessness of loss and the promise of restoration of Serb glory and might." After the defeat at Kosovo in 1389, Serbia remained under Ottoman influence until 1878, when it was recognized as an independent state by the Berlin Congress. This recognition came as a result of a number of uprisings against Ottoman rule that started in 1804.

Newly independent Serbia revived the dormant Greater Serbia concept that Ilija Garasanin, the Minister of Internal Affairs in 1844, articulated in a document called *Nacertanije*. Its ramifications are fundamental to understanding all later Serbian policies.

The *Nacertanije*'s primary goal was to unify all the Serbs within one empire. Serbia wasn't to remain a small country, but would have to expand outside its ethnic and historical borders by conquering its neighbors. Men of science, university professors, writers, journalists, and the Serbian Academy of Science and Arts (SANU) formulated a far-reaching and deliberate strategy to fulfill these goals. What was articulated in the *Nacertanije* was reintroduced in 1986 by Dobrica Cosic in the SANU Memorandum, with input from the same professional fields and Academy. Milosevic further refined the plan to include the concept that any place is considered to be Serbian soil where there's a Serbian grave.

Although Serbs thrive upon the legend that their ancestors defended Christendom at Kosovo, they never mention that an equal number of non-Serb Christians also participated in that battle. They also fail to mention that after Kosovo, the Serbs fought as loyal Ottoman-Muslim vassals for several centuries against Christian forces. The Porte in Istanbul maintained a special relationship with the Orthodox Church, affording it privileges denied other subjected religions. Under Ottoman rule the Serbian Orthodox were the only Christians granted autonomy to administrate and collect head taxes. The Ottomans looked upon Roman Catholics with suspicion. As Roman Catholic churches and monasteries deteriorated in Ottoman held lands, the Catholics were denied permission to repair or build new ones. Orthodox institutions, on the other hand, prospered. Yet contemporary Orthodoxy views Islam with hatred.

As members of the Eastern Rite of Christianity, the Serbs were inexorably bound to Byzantine thought and mores, which added to their paranoia about the West. Because the Serbs had been under Ottoman domination for almost 500 years they weren't exposed to and couldn't participate in the ideas that emanated from the Renaissance and the Age of Reason, the cornerstones of Western civilization. The first Serbian exposure to Western philosophical ideals came in the late 19th century.

The SANU Memorandum, the expression of Serbia's Academy of Sciences and Art, became the Serbian equivalent of Mein Kampf. The document portrayed the Serbs as victims, as the most oppressed nationality in Yugoslavia. Most importantly, it clearly espoused Serbian aspirations and raised the specter of the right of Serbs to live in a single state known as Greater Serbia.

The first real effort to implement the Greater Serbia concept occurred in 1903 when a group of Serbian army officers led by Colonel Dragutin Dimitrijevic-Apis formed the Black Hand, a secret terrorist organization. In 1911 its name was changed to Unity or Death.

The Black Hand organization had a long history of violence in the promotion of a Greater Serbia. Gavrilo Princip, who assassinated Archduke Ferdinand in Sarajevo and in so doing triggered World War I, was one of 27 Black Hand terrorists armed with bombs and guns stationed at different points along Ferdinand's processional route. Black Hand conspirators murdered the King of Serbia, Alexander Obrenovic, and his wife Draga in 1903. Exiled Alexander Karadjordjevic, who was linked to the Black Hand, returned to Serbia and was crowned. A Black Hand member in 1928 shot and mortally wounded three Croatian delegates, including Stejpan Radic, in the parliament in Belgrade. The perpetrator of the crime was confined for a short time in his home. Rather than punish the Black Hand, who were responsible for the conspiracy, King Alexander Karadjordjevic declared the Kingdom a dictatorship, renamed the country Yugoslavia, and imposed Draconian measures on all non-Serbs. To implement his mandate, King Alexander appointed Prime Minister Zivkovic. He was the individual who opened the gates for the assassins of King Alexander Obrenovic and his wife in 1903.

The Memorandum's main grievances were the deteriorating economic conditions of Yugoslavia, the loss of faith in socialism, and the deleterious effect these factors had on the Serbs. The document concluded that the non-Serbs, particularly the Muslims of Kosovo, victimized the Serbs perniciously. It also blamed the Croats for the deterioration of Yugoslavia.

The Memorandum, which was universally hailed by the entire spectrum of the Serbian intelligentsia and Serbian Orthodox Church, provided Milosevic with the ideological basis justifying his militaristic actions. Milosevic precipitated a war intended to rectify mythological grievances by resurrecting Serbian nationalism and ethnic hatred toward non-Serbs. He cast the Croats, in particular, as devils.

To understand just who these devils were that the Serbs ranted about so despairingly, a brief background on them would be instructive. I may be criticized for giving a too superficial and simplistic view. But that's precisely the intent, because I don't mean to be comprehensive. For in depth studies, I defer to the works by a number of excellent historians including Noel Malcolm, Ivo Banac, Robert Donia, and John Fine.

Since the outbreak of hostilities, most of the media and Western pundits have ceaselessly cited Serbia's version of history, but none honestly addressed the history of the victims. Whenever the victim's history was expressed it was shallow and distorted. History didn't create the present situation, but history can help us understand the background of the people comprising the area.

The area that makes up present day Croatia and Bosnia-Herzegovina arose from the ruins of the Western Roman Empire. After Rome's disintegration in 476 A.D., the Balkan Peninsula became the scene of mass movements from a variety of marauding tribes that came into Europe. One tribe, the Slavs, unlike other groups, engaged in agriculture and established settlements. The Slavs were firmly entrenched in the area by the mid-seventh century.

The Croats, a tribe of Indo-European origin, who became Slavicized in culture and language during their migrations, also arrived in the seventh century and settled in the area corresponding to modern Croatia and most of Bosnia. In tandem with the arrival of the Croats, another tribe, the Serbs, settled in the area that is modern Southwestern Serbia.

According to the Byzantine historian and Emperor Constantine Prophyrogenitus, the Croats came in response to an invitation from the Byzantine Emperor Heraclius I to drive out the Avars who had allied themselves with the Slavs to usurp Byzantine rule. At that time, the area was under Byzantine dictum. Records indicate that Christian baptisms occurred among the Croats in the seventh century, and by the ninth century the Croats were almost totally Christianized. The region was governed by a number of loosely organized principalities.

In 925, at the height of Croatian power and stability, King Tomislav integrated the principalities into a unified Croatian state. After his death, dynastic power struggles threatened the survival of the state. For political stabilization, Croatian and Hungarian feudal lords signed the Pacta Conventa in 1102, which acknowledged the rule of the Hungarian King Koloman. Although Croatia's sovereignty was compromised at times, the state remained intact. The contractual relationship between Croatia and Hungary remained intact until 1918 despite much waxing and waning.

Soon after the Pacta Conventa was realized, the Mongols invaded Europe. Some of the most decisive battles against the Golden Horde were fought on Croatian soil. Those Croatian nobles who fought so well were rewarded with land; the nobles thereby created powerful dynasties that weakened and diluted the Hungarian king's ability to rule.

The Venetians, who had long coveted the Dalmatian coast, were able to wrest it easily from the enfeebled kingdom of Hungary-Croatia in 1408 because the Croats were actively fighting in the Eastern reaches of the kingdom against the new threat to Europe, Islam.

Following the Ottoman excursions of the 15th century, the Croatian state lost much of its territory. Seemingly unending bloody battles were fought in the area because it marked the fault line between Christian Europe and Islam. But none of the battles were considered ethnic.

The battle of Mohacz had tremendous ramifications for Croatian history, despite the fact that the Christian forces were beaten decisively. The Hungarian-Croatian dynasty was almost wiped out; their king, Ludovic II, and most of the nobles were killed in the battle. To fill the vacuum, the Croatian parliament chose Ferdinand Hapsburg as king in 1527. The merger with the Hapsburg Monarchy lasted until 1918.

The Croats had hoped the alliance would support their efforts against the Muslims. Many years of battling the Ottomans resulted in numerous deaths, lowered birth rates, and a mass exodus of Croats from the battle areas. As a consequence, the demarcation line between the Muslims and Christians became sparsely settled, and that vacuum placed the European defenders at a disadvantage. The Pope bestowed the title *antemurale christianitatis* (the bulwark of Christianity) on Croatia for its valiant efforts and bravery against Islam.

More for its own security than Europe's, Austria encouraged Serbs to man the border areas called the Military Borderlands. Contrary to Serbian revisionism, the arrival of the Serbs in the 16th century was the first time the Orthodox religion made its appearance west of the Drina and Neretva Rivers. Austria provided all the financing and weapons. Once Muslim-held territories in Croatia were liberated in 1699, the Military Borderlands became institutionalized and expanded upon by Austria rather than reverting back to Croatia.

The Napoleonic wars brought yet another outside force that had a far-reaching political impact on the region. When the French came to rule Croatia in 1806, French inspired ideas and Italian nationalism stimulated Croatian intellectuals. The Croats came up with their own romanticized version of nationalism that was based on linguistics, but ignored the reality of diverse cultural characteristics. Nonetheless, the kernel of the idea of "Yugoslavism" took root. The so-called Illyrian movement remained limited for the most part to Croatian intellectuals and was almost totally ignored by the Serbs.

Under the terms of the Congress of Vienna in 1815, after the defeat of Napoleon, Austria acquired Venice's properties in Dalmatia. The Hapsburgs saw the Military Borderland as a tool that could be used to dominate central and southeastern Europe. The Austrians enlisted the Serbs manning the Croatian frontier as regular soldiers under the command of Vienna. The communities in the Borderlands were free from feudal bonds. But all decisions regarding the areas were the responsibility of the Hapsburg military and bypassed Zagreb's authority. This situation lasted until 1881, when the Borderland was abolished and the region reverted back to Croatia.

The Military Borderland corresponds roughly to the course of the Una River and generally to the regions that the Serbs have conquered in Croatia during the present conflict.

In 1848 the Hungarians rebelled against the Hapsburg crown and declared that Croatia should be abolished. Hapsburg Emperor Franz Joseph offered unity and autonomy to Croatia if it would help him crush the Hungarians. But once achieved the emperor broke his pledge. In 1867, the Ausgleich (Compromise) returned Croatia to Hungary, but recognized Croatia as a nation. Hungary returned the Military Borderlands to Croatia. But Hungary always had pretensions of absorbing Croatia as its vassal state and did everything in its power to provoke incidents that would justify its rule. In a Machiavellian move, Hungary encouraged dissension between the Serbs and the Croats. The Austrian-Hungarian-Croatian alliance ended with the Treaty of Versailles.

In reaction to the almost dictatorial fiats imposed by Hungary, disillusion with the protection promised by the Austrian crown, and the disturbance caused by the influx of Serbs into Croatia's Military Borderlands, the Croats demanded their own national state. The movement was led by Ante Starcevic of The Party of the Right (Stranka Prava). The party's ideas and basic tenets are the linchpins of today's self-determination movement in Croatia. Serbia's rule by fiat in Yugoslavia eventually caused the same backlash that Hungary's dictates had caused in Croatia.

In the late 19th century, the Yugoslav idea was brought to full fruition by Josip Juraj Strossmayer from the seeds planted by the Illyrian movement. Strossmayer, a Catholic bishop, was a firm believer in ecumenicism and sincerely wanted to mend the schism between Catholic and Orthodox Christianity. He founded the Yugoslav Academy in Zagreb, an institution that had far reaching political impact. At best, the Yugoslav idea received a lukewarm reception among the Serbs.

In the mid 19th century, many of the ethnic groups under Muslim suzerainty (Serbs, Bulgarians, Greeks, and Montenegrins) established nation states while the ethnic groups in the Austro-Hungarian Empire had to wait until 1918. Out of the ashes of World War I and the break-up of the Austro-Hungarian and Ottoman Empires a number of new nations came into being.

The south Slavs (Slovenia, Croatia, Bosnia-Herzegovina, and Vojvodina) joined with Serbia to establish the Kingdom of Serbia, Croatia, and Slovenia. Serbia received a significant economic gain with the merger. Although much smaller geographically and numerically, Croatia's real and net assets were several times greater than Serbia's. After Serbia's designs became clear, the Croatian Sabor (Parliament) refused to ratify the union. Nonetheless, the kingdom became a reality when Serbian troops were sent and stationed in Zagreb. The Western powers envisioned a loose confederation as one of President Woodrow Wilson's Fourteen Points. The Serbs formulated a constitution favoring themselves instead. Thereafter all political and economic infrastructure was controlled by the Serbs. Tax inequities blatantly favored the Serbs. To further enhance their control in Croatia and Slovenia they often established the jurisdiction of military code over civil cases. Adding insult to injury, an army edict viewed non-Serbian areas of the kingdom as "enemy territory." Taxes were several times higher in the non-Serbian areas for similar types of property.

The era between the World Wars was devastating for non-Serbs. Human rights were non-existent. Knowledge of the rampant abuses soon extended far beyond Yugoslavia's borders. Albert Einstein, among other

prominent figures, lodged a number of protests against the Belgrade government for its violations against minorities.

Yugoslavia was ripe to implode. It was only a question of time before the non-Serbs self determination efforts would be realized, as there had been movements in that direction. Outside forces, such as Italy, infused a great deal of capital to finance the non-Serbs' activists. On the eve of World War II, Yugoslavia, as a state, was on the verge of collapse and headed for the dustpan of history. Ironically, World War II saved Yugoslavia's territorial integrity.

Milosevic and the Serbs have justified their recent actions by claiming that they must recover lost Serbian territory. But their premise has no foundation. After World War II, three men emerged as the political architects of the second Yugoslavia. Mainly formulated by Tito, a half Slovene and half Croat, but with input from Aleksander Rankovic, a Serb, and Milovan Diljas, a Montenegrin, they declared Macedonia to be a separate republic and gave the region of Vojvodina the status of an autonomous province. Kosovo, despite its preponderance of Albanians, was made an autonomous region of Serbia. The historical borders between Bosnia and Serbia, drawn during the Ottoman and Austro-Hungarian periods, were left intact. Serbia was given Srem, an eastern portion of Croatia.

Macedonia, with a non-Serbian population, had been incorporated into the Serbian kingdom after it was conquered in the Balkan War of 1912-13 (The Balkan Wars were the only European conflicts that could be considered ethnic). Vojvodina, although never bound with Serbia, was incorporated into Serbia when it became part of the Yugoslav kingdom in 1918. The only republic that lost territory in the post-World War II cartography was Croatia. Yet the Serbs were led to believe that territory had been taken from them and that they were victims of discrimination.

A favorite Serbian ploy used to cast aspersions on Croatia has been the exploitation of the Ustashe's role during World War II. Serbian propagandists were extremely successful in convincing the media that the Croats relished that role because the Croats had an inherent propensity for violence. Meanwhile, the Serbs were cast as lambs led to slaughter.

Contrary to what the media espoused, the present Croatian government is neither a reincarnation nor responsible for the acts of the Ustashe. Croatian President Franjo Tudjman, although he's been frequently labeled a fascist by the media, fought the Germans as a Partisan during World War II. Ironically, when the world learned that the former French President François Mitterand had been an active Nazi collaborator, the media strangely didn't pursue the issue, even after he excused his war time activities as youthful indiscretions. This double standard is typical of the media. Nonetheless, while Tudjman apologized for the Ustashe crimes on a number of occasions, Mitterand refused to apologize for the Vichy government's excesses.

The French government and its media equated the Tudjman government with Ustashe collaborators of World War II. France's holier than thou attitude blinded it to Vichy's collaboration with the Nazis. Mitterand maintained that the Vichy government didn't represent the French republic and that Vichy's actions weren't those of the state. But Mitterand still sent a wreath, as homage, each year to the grave of Marshall Philippe Petain who headed the Vichy government.

Once Jacques Chirac was elected president, he acknowledged what a generation of French political leaders were loath to--that the French state was, in fact, an accomplice in the deportation of 75,000 Jews to Nazi concentration camps. Only 2,500 French Jews survived the Vichy regime. Chirac added that France's complicity with the Nazis was a stain on the nation. "The criminal folly of the German occupier was seconded by the French, by the French state." His statements directly contradicted Mitterand's.

Following any German conquest during World War II, the Nazis installed or kept governments that

would carry out Germany's mandates. The Germans installed a puppet government in Croatia led by the formerly exiled Ustashe. Contrary to the media's take or present day rabid ultra-national Croatians' fantasies, the Ustashe government wouldn't have come into being or lasted one day if Germany hadn't supported it. The Ustashe were an extremely small group of ultra-right Croats who came together in reaction to the intolerable measures imposed on all non-Serbs in pre-World War II Yugoslavia. They lived as exiles in Italy under Mussolini's largesse. But at times they had been incarcerated in accordance with Mussolini's political agenda and whims.

Carrying out Nazi policy to the letter, the Ustashe destroyed the synagogue in Zagreb, established concentration camps, and created terror. Unlike the Vichy and Quisling governments of that time, the Ustashe never enjoyed the popular support of the Croats at large. Credible sources, such as J. Tomasevich's *The Chetniks*, indicate that the Ustashe movement numbered less than 28,500 even at its peak.

Just as the Tito regime labeled every Croatian misstep Ustashe inspired, the international media has also equated, without a scintilla of substantiation, the Croatian government under Tadjman with the Ustashe regime of 50 years ago. But the media has never informed the public about the facts that preceded the installation of the Ustashe. In the late 1930s, Yugoslavia was on the verge of collapse due to self-determination efforts by non-Serbs who were responding to the excesses of the Serbian establishment. To save the state from disintegration, Prime Minister Dragisa Cvetkovic, who represented the legitimate Yugoslav government, entered into negotiations with Vladko Macek of the Croatian Peasant Party who represented the overwhelming majority of Croats. Macek was the political successor to the assassinated Stjepan Radic, the most charismatic Croat of this century. In order to preserve Yugoslavia as an entity, the Yugoslav government compromised by giving Croatia autonomous rule over territory where Croats comprised a majority, including Herzegovina, and appointing Macek vice president. But the Cvetkovic-Macek agreement didn't sit well with the Serbian Orthodox Church or the military.

At the time Yugoslavia was negotiating with the Croats for its survival, Mussolini was competing with Hitler in Yugoslavia. Mussolini feared that the imminent breakup of Yugoslavia would favor an independent Croatia under German protection. Despite Hitler's assurances, Mussolini was primarily concerned that Germany could control the Adriatic Sea and the Dalmatian coast, which had long been coveted by Italy. Count Galeazzo Ciano, the Italian foreign minister from 1939 to 1943, wrote in his diaries that "the Croats are anti-German but ready to fall into the arms of Berlin, if only to escape from Serbian tyranny." The Italians actively courted Macek, donating vast amounts of funds toward the Croatian struggle in order to convince him to accept Italy's terms for implementing its agenda in Yugoslavia. Meanwhile, Hitler entered into an agreement with Yugoslavia in order to protect Germany's Balkan flank and avoid tying up his troops there.

Soon after the Yugoslav military, in collusion with agents from the British government, overthrew the pro-German Prince Regent's government in Belgrade and replaced him with Prince Peter, Germany declared war on Yugoslavia. The Serbian-led Yugoslav Army didn't even offer token resistance. Within days the Prince and the Serbian political elite fled to England. The German war machine's success added a new dimension to Yugoslav politics, the installation of an occupying force.

Germany successfully established quasi-states in conquered lands to help carry out its mandates. As a prerequisite these new governments had to carry out genocide on Jews and Gypsies. The Germans offered Macek the position of heading the puppet state in Croatia. Unable to agree to the German conditions or Italian terms, Macek vacillated. So Germany accepted Mussolini's suggestion that Ante Pavelic and his 250 Ustashe members rule Croatia. Pavelic, the Ustashe leader, had witnessed Stjepan Radic's assassination in Belgrade when he was a Croatian delegate in Parliament. Macek was placed in the Jasenovac concentration camp.

The international media has long ignored Macek's refusal to cooperate with the Nazis, although his

attitude mirrored the sentiments of the Croatian majority. The media also hasn't acknowledged the fact that the Jasenovac camp continued to operate long after the war's end, functioning on behalf of the Communist regime as it had for the Ustashe.

The Jasenovac camp has long symbolized Ustashe genocide. Information supplied by Serbian propagandists and echoed by the Western media cited claims that over one million Serbs were slaughtered at Jasenovac. But objective scholarly sources estimate that the true figure was between 30,000 to 60,000, which included Gypsies, Jews, Serbs, and thousands of Croats. These excesses by the Ustashe regime drove many previously apolitical Croats and Bosnians to join the Partisan forces.

When the Ustashe were installed in Croatia, most of the Dalmatian coast and islands were annexed to Italy. Living under the Italian flag proved to be more intolerable for the Croats than living under Yugoslavia. General Mario Roatta's imposition of Italy's mandate and reign of tyranny also drove many Croats to join the Partisans. The Partisans later became the backbone of Tito's resistance movement.

A number of telling instances indicate the general lack of popular Croatian support for the Ustashe and their pro Nazi policies. In 1941, the Nazis asked Croatian youths to line up at the main soccer stadium. All Jews present were ordered to take one step forward. Much to the chagrin of the Nazis, all the youths stepped forward in a sign of solidarity. In another case of support for the Jews, the Zagreb archbishop, Cardinal Alojzije Stepinac hid the last rabbi of Zagreb, Salom Freiberger, in his residence.

In Serbia, by contrast, the Nazis installed a government headed by the former Yugoslav Minister of War General Milan Nedic. Serbia collaborated to such an extent with the Nazis that it was able to retain significant civilian authority. The Serbian Orthodox Church openly supported Nazi policy and justified the persecution of the Jews theologically. These elements, working together, caused Nazi civil administrator Harald Turner to proclaim Serbia the only country where the "Jewish Question" was solved, and Belgrade to be the first city "judenfrei." Phillip J. Cohen noted in a November, 1992, *Midstream* article, that six months before World War II, Serbia had enacted laws prohibiting Jewish participation in the economy and the university. The Belgrade Historical Archives states that out of the 11,870 Jews living in Belgrade before 1941, only 1,115 survived.

A few days after the onset of World War II, the Yugoslav king and his entourage fled to England and the pro-Nazi, Nedic, was installed. The only viable force against the Germans was the Chetniks, a pro-royalist group under the command of former Yugoslav Army Captain Draza Mihailovic. But the Chetniks spent most of their energy continuing the royalist policy of terrorizing non-Serbs. Using the excuse of war, they massacred real and imagined Ustashe allies, mostly innocent Croatian or Muslim villagers. The Chetniks unleashed their fury most particularly on the Muslims. During World War II more Muslims perished in Yugoslavia than any other ethnic group. The media's belief in Serbian resistance during World War II is yet another example of how the media was duped. The Serbian Anti-Fascist Council was founded in the last half of 1944, later than similar councils in any of the other Yugoslav republics. Historical revisionism has created the impression that the Chetniks were somehow engaged in helping the anti-Axis powers during the war. But the June 23, 1945 final report of Arthur Cox, Chief of the Office of Strategic Service, summarized the OSS's dealings with the Chetniks as counterproductive and noted that Chetnik participation "probably decreased the amount of intelligence gathered ...by half."

According to the *Encyclopedia of the Holocaust*, not only did Chetnik resistance against the Nazis come to a complete halt by early 1941, they initiated and maintained a pattern of collaboration with the Nedic government and with the Germans and Italians. Tito's Communist Partisans didn't participate in the war until Germany attacked Russia. In Walter Roberts' book, *Tito, Mihailovic, and the Allies*, the author states that an American officer attached to the Tito forces in 1943 said, "The Partisans placed less emphasis on the fight against the Germans than preparing for the political struggle at the end of the war." The Partisans became a

force only after receiving vast supplies and air support from the allies late in the war--after the fall of Italy. Tito's Partisans were mainly Croats and Orthodox Serbs who lived in Croatia and Bosnia, and had virtually no following in Serbia proper. Tito, promising cooperation against the British and Americans, actively solicited Germany with his own peace plans. But Hitler rejected the offers, saying he would not do business with a bandit.

When the Communists took over the government after the war, all political and economic infrastructures became, once again, Serbian controlled. This reversion happened even though the Serbian Communist Party formed after the end of World War II.

The Serbian military force was vastly overrated during World War II as it has been during the present conflict. In April 1941, the Royal Yugoslav Army of one million troops, led by 161 Serb, two Croat, and two Slovene generals, surrendered to the German forces after 11 days. In his book, *Britain and the War for Yugoslavia 1940-1943*, Mark Wheeler described the Yugoslav Army and how it fought the Germans as follows: "They resisted (occasionally), dispersed or mutinied (more frequently), and surrendered (eventually on an ad hoc basis)." In an Autumn 1993 *Parameters* article, M.F. Cancian claimed that the Germans suffered only 151 killed, 392 wounded, and 15 missing during their initial campaign. Historian Norman Stone destroyed another often quoted myth that the campaign in Yugoslavia "pinned down dozens of German military divisions in World War II" when he asserted that according to the German Military Research Office, the actual number of German divisions was six, including two manned by Croats. The Germans had only one division at the front lines.

Despite historical evidence to the contrary, many contemporary opinion writers have continued to perpetuate myths about the Serbian role during World War II and Serbia's fighting ability. Contributing editor to the *Los Angeles Times* Walter Russell Mead has sustained these erroneous beliefs. In a February 2, 1994 piece, Mead implied that it would be hopeless for U.S. ground forces to intervene against the Bosnian-Serb fighters because the Serbs were the best and most determined fighters in Europe. Mead's revisionist version of history stated that there had been a national resistance when Germany attacked Yugoslavia and that Serbian fighters tied down Germany's toughest and most cruel divisions.

No one source can unequivocally state how many died in the World War II Balkan cauldron. Since victors write history, the Serbs have freely used unsubstantiated figures. They claimed, without substantiation, that over 700,000 Serbs perished in the Ustashe concentration of Jasenovac alone. Probably the most accurate numbers of deaths in Yugoslavia for the period was what the Yugoslav government furnished to Germany in 1964 in order to extract war reparations from the German government. The Yugoslav government came up with a total of 346,740 Serbs who had died throughout the whole territory of Yugoslavia. The number included those who had died at the hands of the Germans, Ustashe, Partisans, Luftwaffe and Allied bombings, those killed by other Serbs or Soviets for political expediency, and those who died of endemic diseases like typhus and typhoid--which was rampant. The same report stated 83,257 Croats died.

After the war, the Communist Partisans emerged triumphant in Yugoslavia. In late May, 1945, with British and American complicity, the Yugoslav Army attacked, killed, and took prisoner 200,000 Croatian soldiers and half-a-million civilian refugees who had fled the new communist regime. Minister Resident in the Mediterranean Harold Macmillan, a man with direct contact to the British Prime Minister, Cabinet, and Foreign Office, explicitly instructed Commanding Officer General Keightley to turn over all refugees, with the exception of the Chetniks, to the Yugoslav Partisan forces at Bleiburg, Austria. Macmillan ignored Intelligence Officer Nigel Nicolson's conclusions that repatriated refugees would meet "certain death at the hands of Tito," as well as General Keightley's moral repugnance at the order.

The Bleiburg slaughter became a truly black mark for England and the United States. After the British guaranteed the safety of a large group of Croatian refugees, the Croats ran up white flags in surrender.

Apparently the flags signaled Yugoslav Army troops hidden in the surrounding forest. Despite having many ethnic Croats in its own ranks, the Yugoslav Partisan Army opened indiscriminate machine gunfire on the densely packed refugees. When they received no return fire, the Yugoslav Partisan Army slaughtered the survivors with truncheons and knives. The British and Americans had front row seats. Nicholai Tolstoy described the Bleiburg incident with painstaking detail in *The Minister of Massacres*.

The British returned the few survivors and other Croatian refugees who hadn't been at Bleiburg to Yugoslavia where they were forced into a death march and further mayhem.

Although the new Yugoslavia was led by a half-Croat/half-Slovene, Tito, all economic and political infrastructure returned to Serbian hands. Tito's ethnic origins were irrelevant to his policies, as he was committed to an international communist revolution. His iron fist dictatorship reined in the Serbian expansionistic aspirations somewhat, but not Serbia's power base.

In order to strengthen its position, the Yugoslav Communist Party exploited Nazi history in Yugoslavia in much the same way Russia exploited Nazi atrocities in Eastern Europe. The Serbian-led Communist Party, painting the Croats on the same canvas with the Nazis, successfully suppressed knowledge of Serbian collaboration with the Germans. The noun "Croat" became a euphemism for fascism to the people of Yugoslavia. Many young Croats came to feel ashamed of their ethnic roots. The public relations firms hired by SerbNet projected a fascistic image of Croats during the recent conflict.

Joseph Brodsky must've had the situation in former Yugoslavia in mind when he said, "Geography, history, and politics are a gold mine for pundits and bandits. Whoever pulls a trigger to rectify history's mistakes, lies." But history provides a justification rather than a reason and teaches us that wars start because of self-interest. Contrary to the smoke and mirrors that appeared in the media, Serbia didn't start its war to prevent Croatia and Slovenia from seceding. Stated purely and simply, the Serbs engaged in a land grab in order to create a Greater Serbia. In the process, their aggression has violated all rules of war.

Many have been critical of comparing Serbia's policy of ethnic cleansing (a term the Serbs themselves coined) to the Holocaust. The numbers are smaller, but the results are the same. Simon Wiesenthal, commenting on Serbian ethnic cleansing in an interview with Roy Gutman, author of *A Witness to Genocide*, said: "This is genocide, absolutely." Although comparing one horror to another is an odious exercise, the silence and inaction from governments that knew about the extermination of the Jews during World War II resembles the outside world's reaction to what has recently happened to the non-Serbs in former Yugoslavia. Inaction is in itself an action.

Chicago's De Paul University has the largest repository of documented evidence of atrocities committed in former Yugoslavia. Although the United Nations tried to ignore irrefutable evidence of a large number of horrific, wholesale massacres, maltreatment of civilian prisoners, and the shelling of civilians, it eventually bowed to pressure from Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) to establish the Commission of Experts. The commission's mission was to collate information about atrocities into data banks of specific cases and then separate the verified cases from propaganda and blind allegations. Compiled under the direction of De Paul Law Professor Cherif Bassiouni, the files show that 96% of the crimes were perpetrated by Serbs. Atrocities committed by Croats or Muslims were mostly spontaneous events. In contrast, the Serbian ethnic cleansing of Muslims and Croats were a national policy coordinated by the Serbian hierarchy in Belgrade.

A U.S. senators staff members fact finding mission to Bosnia and Croatia in August, 1992, concluded that Serbia's forcible removal of a population in war was a violation of Protocol I of the 1949 Geneva Convention.

In March 1995 *The New York Times* said a leaked CIA report irrefutably concluded that Serbs had

committed 90% of the ethnic cleansing and emphatically suggested that the Serbian leadership had exercised a role in destroying and dispersing the non-Serb population. The CIA conclusions should forever lay to rest statements put forward by British, French, and American leaders calling the conflict a civil war and suggesting that the guilt should be shared equally by Serbs, Croats, and Muslims. If President Clinton and Secretary of State Warren Christopher knew about the report's findings, they chose to ignore the evidence. Perhaps they thought the report wouldn't be made public, or perhaps the CIA simply failed to share it with them.

Soon after the CIA made their findings public, The *New York Times* reported that a defector, former Serbian secret policeman Cedomir Mihailovic, had turned certain documents over to the United Nations International Tribunal in the Hague. The documents provided concrete evidence of a coherent, conscious, and systematic Serbian policy to get rid of non-Serbs through murder and rape. If the documents prove to be authentic, they will directly link the Karadzic and Milosevic governments with ethnic cleansing--the Serbian euphemism for genocide. The *New York Times*, a newspaper usually not guilty of overstatement, deemed the documents so important that it devoted six columns to the story. But other newspapers, like the prestigious Los Angeles Times, buried the story in two sentences in an unrelated article.

The *New York Times* articles and the CIA report couldn't have come at a worse time for the Western allies and Russia who were in the process of lifting sanctions on Serbia, even though the Serbs were stepping up their ethnic cleansing campaign in Banja Luka and shipping new Serbian weapons into the Bihac area. The reports put on hold the whitewashing campaign to nominate Milosevic for the Nobel Peace Prize.

Serbian and Nazi perpetrators of genocide perceived their actions in markedly different ways. The Nazis tried to carry out their demonic acts in secret, while the Serbs have openly proclaimed their acts and thrived on the publicity. This seeming lack of concern about witnesses wasn't reckless. The Serbs were aware that there would be no effective tribunal to punish them. Their goal was to let the witnesses talk to their friends, neighbors, and families. Within days, every hamlet, town, and city in the country would shiver with fear.

The general population of Serbia has been kept ignorant of their leadership's activities in Bosnia and Croatia. During the first several months of Sarajevo's siege, Belgrade's television never mentioned that the Serbs were firing upon and besieging the Bosnian capital. Instead, official television reported that Muslim extremists were killing Serbs and Muslims. The Belgrade media fed its populace a steady diet of marauding Muslim fundamentalists and fascist, genocidal Croats. The only news source found on Serbian and Montenegrin television sets emanated from Belgrade. According to this source Croats and Muslims were ethnically cleansing Serbs, not vice versa. The atrocities committed by Serbian troops went unreported.

Ever quick to cast the Croats in a negative light, the international media quoted out of context, ad infinitum, Tadjman's comment that he was "thankful that his wife did not have Jewish blood." But the media disingenuously omitted the completion of his statement, "or else she would have died at the hands of the Fascists."

The triumph of Serbian propagandists has been the unqualified acceptance by many Jews and the government of Israel of the notion that the Serbs were anti-Nazi and saviors of Jews, while the Croats and Muslims were Nazis who exterminated the Jews. What was especially disconcerting to learn from Philip J. Cohen's *Serbia's Secret War: Propaganda and the Deceit of History*, were how easily the Israeli government was duped. Cohen pointed out a number of ironies in Israel's steadfast acceptance of the Serbian line. "In no other country has the Serbian propaganda campaign for Jewish sympathy been more successful than in Israel; a country uniquely founded on the ashes of the Holocaust, the public's outrage over Serbia's policy of frank genocide has been successfully blunted to the point of near nonexistence. It is further ironic that Serbia, which has a history of persecuting Jews, has courted the sympathy of Jews amid a genocidal war against non-Serbian nationalities and minorities." Cohen systematically refuted most of the widely accepted World War II Serbian

mythology that was the linchpin for the recent bloodshed in former Yugoslavia. I wonder how many non-Serb victims could've been saved had Cohen's scholarly work been published earlier.

Igor Primorac, an associate professor of philosophy at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, in a personal letter to me stated, "the situation with the Serb lobby in Israel is much worse than in the West...They enjoyed a monopoly on analyzing and interpreting the events in ex-Yugoslavia...It is still very well organized and financed, and extremely aggressive as well." In a number of his published articles Primorac articulated that the overwhelming majority of Israel's political establishment, media commentators, and ordinary citizens staunchly defended the Belgrade regime and all its actions--including ethnic cleansing. Whatever happened to the non-Serb victims was what they deserved. Moreover, the Israelis have believed that the fledgling Croatian government was comprised of resurrected Ustashe.

Croatian human rights activist Dr. Slobodan Lang said that the Serbian propaganda success was due, in large measure, to the efforts of the Jewish-Serbian Friendship Society. The Serbs mobilized and encouraged the Jews in former Yugoslavia to form the Society. Instead of fostering friendship and understanding, the Society became a vehicle for justifying hatred against Croats and for extolling Serbia's agenda. The society was particularly successful in a blanket indictment of Croatia for having a natural propensity for fascism. But Cohen's work clearly established that the Ustashe were an aberration that didn't have the support of the Croatian people.

The Society intensely publicized throughout the world real and imagined Ustashe crimes during World War II. In particular, Klara Mandic, a Serbian Jew, has successfully manipulated the thinking of many Jews in the United States. She crusaded against the new Croatian government, accusing its leaders of being resurrected fascists, and espoused a belief that the Jews had a deeply ingrained historical alliance with Serbia.

Not only has Israel failed to recognize the independent states of Croatia and Bosnia-Herzegovina, Israel has morally supported the Serbian agenda and supplied Serbia with weaponry. In a July 18, 1993, Jerusalem Post article, Primorac wrote that "during the time the Serbs were shelling Dubrovnik and razing Vukovar, and one month after the UN Security Council passed an arms embargo on all the republics of Yugoslavia, the Israeli government entered into an arms deal with the Bosnian Serbs." Primorac was so moved after he'd reported that fragments of exploded shells found in Sarajevo were clearly Israeli in origin, he commented, "After Greater Serbia's collapse, we may yet see the official representatives of the Jewish state go down on their knees at the ruins of Vukovar and Sarajevo and beg forgiveness for the mind boggling fact that the first genocide in Europe since the Holocaust was carried out, in part, with arms made in Israel."

In a seminal paper published in *International Minds*, Dr. Lang concluded that by focusing upon the plight of the Jews and history, the Serbs used anti-Semitism to cover up Serbian aggression and genocide against the Croats and Muslims. The attempt to influence Jews in Serbia and internationally by evoking their historical sufferings was a misuse of Jewish tragedy. Lang also pointed out that anti-Semitism exists in Croatia as it does in any other country in the world.

Robert D. Kaplan was particularly vitriolic about Tudjman's alleged fascism. His review of Tudjman's book, *Wilderness of Historical Reality*, read like a personal vendetta. Kaplan, quoting out of context, inserting his own additions, and deleting critical portions of Tudjman's original sentences, did a masterful hatchet job. Kaplan's bowdlerized critique bore little resemblance to the book he was reviewing.

After the Jewish Center and cemetery in Zagreb were bombed in 1990, the Serbian propaganda apparatus characterized the destruction as consistent with Croatia's Ustashe past and another example of Croatian anti-Semitism. Following the bombings, thousands gathered in Zagreb's main square in support of their Jewish brethren. President Franjo Tudjman won approval from Zagreb's city government to rebuild the synagogue destroyed by the Ustashe on the original site. Croatian artists sponsored a concert to raise funds for

this purpose.

As the result of a show trial in Belgrade, evidence surfaced that the bombing had in fact been carried out by two civilian members of the Yugoslav secret police. The former head of Yugoslav Army intelligence, General Aleksandar Vasiljevic, former Air Force intelligence officer Colonel Slobodan Rakocevic, and a host of other former top brass were indicted at the same trial. According to the Jerusalem Post (Feb. 3, 1993), the trial was an attempt to rid the army of pro-Communist commanders and replace them with Chetniks (Serbian nationalists). Other independent investigations unequivocally disproved Serbian allegations of Croatian complicity.

In an open letter titled "Appeal to our Jewish Brothers and Sisters" addressed to the World Jewish Congress and its affiliates the Jewish Community Congress of Croatia summed up its status in Croatia thus: "Even though claims are made trying to show that the Republic of Croatia is anti-Semitic and neo-fascist, the Jewish community has enjoyed all rights of a religious and ethnic minority without obstruction or any kind of discrimination. Therefore, we express our full support for the declared policies of the Republic of Croatia which desires to build a new and democratic state in which human and political rights, ethnic and religious rights, for all citizens or groups, will be honored."

Jeri Laber, executive director of Helsinki Watch, stated: "The ethnic wars in the Balkans are not, as many want to believe, the results of age-old hostilities long repressed by the communists... they are the result of a relentless propaganda campaign, aimed at stirring up old tensions engineered by Serbia's irresponsible and power-mad leader, Milosevic."