

Chapter 3: The Road to Vocin

When the Soviet Union failed to protest the fall of the Berlin Wall or the mass exodus from East Germany, which had been the bastion of communism, other captive nations including Croatia and Slovenia suddenly realized the impotence of Russia's monolithic power. Because these nations no longer feared the threat of Russian intervention, they stopped suppressing long-held desires for self-determination. Although European communism wasn't quite dead, it was in its last agonies. Slovene, Croatian, and other Eastern European sentiments seemed to echo Richard Nixon's proclamation that "someday historians will look back on the defeat of communism in the Cold War and recognize it for what it was, one of the most magnificent achievements of free people in the history of civilizations."

In 70 short years, communism had damaged more lives than any other philosophical force in history. But as practiced in Yugoslavia, Marxism was more along the lines of 50% Karl and 50% Groucho. Its leaders performed a never-ending comedy of corruption and mismanagement, indulging themselves in decadent extravagances financed by the West. The Western media called Yugoslavia the "America" of communist countries and treated it as their darling. Meanwhile, the Yugoslav government brutally policed its own citizens, showed no mercy to dissidents, and held more political prisoners than all the Eastern states of the Soviet Bloc combined. Helsinki Watch and other human rights organizations branded Yugoslavia one of the worst human rights violators in the world.

Despite Yugoslavia's abominable human rights record, the United States was enamored by Tito's regime. No less an expert than America's last ambassador to Yugoslavia, Warren Zimmermann, said that this one-sided love affair persuaded the U.S. to look the other way on human rights violations.

The seminal event that precipitated the conflict in former Yugoslavia occurred when the Slovene Communist Party delegation walked out of the Yugoslav Communist Party Congress in January, 1990. Apparently their sudden exit caught everyone off guard. Doctor Slobodan Lang, one of the Croatian delegates, approached the head of the Croatian delegation, Ivica Racan, grabbed him by the arm and said, "If you don't get up and leave, I'll leave on my own." So the entire Croatian delegation walked out as well.

The Communist Party was the supposed glue that bound Yugoslavia together. But instead of having the strength of Krazy Glue, the party was as weak as water-soluble paste. So the concept of Yugoslavia essentially died after the Party Congress. As a result, the first multi-party elections were held in Slovenia and Croatia. Monitored by international bodies experienced in election protocol, Croatia and Slovenia's populace voted into office parties that represented their own national interests rather than those of Belgrade. The results of the early 1990 Croatian and Slovene elections were more triumphs over Serbian hegemony than victories over communism.

The democratic movement in Yugoslavia started in Slovenia. During the early 1980s, the Yugoslav federal government steadily came to look upon Slovenia's involvement with movements such as feminism, environmentalism, anti-nuclear protests, and (that horror-of-horrors for communism) pacifism as violations of Yugoslav communist dogma. The movements coalesced in early 1988 after journalists from Mladina, a youth magazine, were arrested for printing documents stating that the federal military establishment had organized forces to suppress Slovenia's nationalist movement. As a direct consequence of their arrests, a call arose among Slovenes for free elections and the formation of multiple political parties, both illegal according to the Yugoslav constitution.

Nevertheless, the Slovenes voted into office essentially the same cast of characters who had ruled from the old Communist Party. But now these politicians had clearly switched allegiances. The dogmatic Communist

Party itself won only 38 seats out of the 240.

Although the Croatian elections also resulted in a seemingly decisive victory over Communist Party rule, the electorate voted in mostly ex-Communists who had been purged from the party in the aftermath of the so-called Croatian Spring, Croatia's self-determination attempt of the 1970s. I should emphasize that most of the dissidents of that era came from within the Communist Party and that the average Croatian citizen didn't participate in the attempt.

In the 1970s, Croats in the Yugoslav Communist Party hierarchy had thought the time was ripe for Croatia to gain some degree of autonomy because the main enforcer of Serbian aspirations, secret police head Aleksandar Rankovic, had fallen from grace in 1967. But the Croatian Communist Party had misread Rankovic's purging. Belgrade's hard-liners still held control. As a result, the majority of Croatian dissenters, which included present Croatian President Franjo Tudjman, went to prison. The Croatian Spring turned into the Croatian Silence. For the next two decades, organized Croatian opposition collapsed, and Serbian power in Croatia became even more rampant.

The dossiers and the true numbers of dissidents who went to prison in the aftermath of the Croatian Spring are still buried deep in the archives of the secret police. After the dissidents had served their sentences, the "rehabilitated" ex-prisoners were forbidden to write, to take part in public activities, and in most cases even to work. Twenty years later, these same Croats became the main force behind a more successful self-determination movement. For example, General Janko Bobetko, Croatia's present Army Chief of Staff, had been a career military officer in the Yugoslav Army. But as punishment for his role in the Croatian Spring movement, the authorities denied Bobetko all civil rights and stripped him of his position and rank.

The Slovene and Croatian election results of early 1990 weren't well received in other parts of Yugoslavia because they carried undertones of self-determination. The Slovene Assembly's passage of a constitutional amendment transferring its defense forces from federal to local control especially aggravated those opposed to self-determination. Non-commissioned conscripts, who came from all the republics, made up the bulk of the infantry in the Yugoslav Army. Slovenia's announcement that it would no longer permit its citizens to serve outside the boundaries of its republic and would ally itself with Yugoslavia's defense only with Slovenia's unilateral consent directly challenged Yugoslavia's federal rule.

For all practical purposes, only one federal institution, the Yugoslav Army, remained intact after the elections. Tito had left the constitution of 1974 as his legacy to guide the transition from his personal rule and to maintain Yugoslavia's unity. But its precepts were a nightmare to implement. More than any other factor, the constitution directly accelerated Yugoslavia's demise. The constitution established a collective presidency with a president to be appointed yearly and rotated among each of the member republics and provincial states. Obviously, under this system no strong leader could emerge, nor could one have the time to nurture a power base. Additionally, the yearly rotation weakened the president's ability to run the country effectively. But it offered each republic, even the weaker ones, the opportunity to fill the position. This provoked animosity from Serbia, Yugoslavia's strongest state, despite the fact that the presidential seat remained in Belgrade.

In December, 1990, several months after the Slovene and Croatian elections, the renamed Communist Party captured four out of five seats in the Serbian Parliament, a victory that heightened the already rampant fear of Serbian aggression among the non-Serbs.

Most importantly, the 1990 Slovene and Croatian elections gave the republics the means to openly address their fundamental grievance with the Yugoslav federation, economics. Slovenia, with a population of two million and 10% of Yugoslavia's work force, produced one-third of all Yugoslav exports and 20% of the country's gross national product. But the Slovenes paid four-and-a-half times more in federal taxes than they received in federal benefits.

The disparity was no better in Croatia. In 1971, Croatia contributed 51% of Yugoslavia's hard-currency earnings while Serbia earned 18%. Over the next 20 years, the Croatian economy grew steadily, but Croats perceived Serbia as reaping most of the federal financial benefits. Croatia's leaders, and to a lesser extent Slovenia's, thought that the most equitable solution was to reorganize Yugoslavia into a confederation.

Before a Croatian referendum on confederation with Yugoslavia was voted upon in late 1990, the Serbs orchestrated a series of staged provocations against the Croats. Serbian political leaders in Croatia refused to participate in the new political system. Instead, they set about establishing an illegal Serbian autonomous area that comprised 2.4% of Croatia's population and 8.8% of its territory. The Serbs committed their first overt act on August 17, 1990, in the Knin area when separatists blocked the main roads and the only rail line that connected the coast, particularly Split, the second largest city in Croatia, from the Croatian heartland. By cutting off the flow of goods and people, the rebel Serbs threatened the very survival of the Croatian state.

The Serbs then began a nine-month siege of an isolated town north of Split. Violence broke out on May 2, 1991, when nine Croatian policemen were ambushed and killed in a village predominantly inhabited by Serbs. The Serbian rebels launched a three-pronged attack in widely separated locations. Between March and June of 1991, the Serbs ambushed and killed 12 Croatian policemen at Pakrac, Plitvice National Park, and Borovo Selo near Vukovar. Each time the JNA intervened, but instead of backing the legitimate government, it openly allied itself with the Serbian rebels.

Belgrade ordered the JNA to prevent the referendum on confederation from taking place. Both Belgrade and the rebel Serbs preferred a centralized, Communist Party-controlled Yugoslavia that would continue to be financed largely from the wealth generated by Croatia and Slovenia. Serbian leaders and the army feared that confederation would cut their budgets and bankrupt both entities because the new union would have meant full economic sovereignty for the individual republics.

Shortly after the referendum votes and the collapse of negotiations by Slovenia and Croatia with Serbia, Serbian activities intensified. Using the pretext of protecting its "endangered" minority, Serbia tried to reestablish control over Croatia's infrastructure and natural resources. From the onset, the confederation idea had been doomed to failure. Croatia was the only republic that seriously considered it. From April, 1990, to the very eve of the conflict in June, 1991, Croatia, ever naive, expected a resolution. Slovenia, ever realistic, placed little credence in negotiating. Serbia, ever pragmatic, was totally unyielding.

Slovenia opted for independence on June 25, 1991, after it became clear that confederation was a dead issue. Not to be outdone by Slovenia, Croatia seceded from Yugoslavia earlier that same day. Two days later, after Slovenia took control of the border and custom posts with Italy and Austria, the JNA launched an attack on Slovenia. The federal army derived substantial funds from custom fees.

When the JNA tanks crossed Croatia into Slovenia without hindrance, Tudjman reneged on Croatia's mutual defense pact it had with Slovenia. Tudjman's decision, which overrode his chief general, Martin Spegelj who wanted to honor the pact, produced a near rift at Croatia's command level. J.P. Mackley, an ever astute political analyst, said Tudjman's decision was based on his clinging hope for confederation. Even at that late date and after his constituency had overwhelmingly rejected it confederation was still in his mind.

But it was the U.S. who really opened the door for the JNA's attack. Apparently the JNA heeded Secretary of State James Baker statement that Yugoslavia must be held together at all costs.

From the very onset, Belgrade's effort to subjugate Slovenia was doomed to failure. Slovenia had no indigenous Serbian population to assist the JNA and the Slovenian Alps' terrain was not conducive for mechanized warfare. The conscripts in JNA once came from all the republics that comprised Yugoslavia. But once self-determination had a chance of being realized, some republics refused to supply conscripts.

Consequently, the JNA had no infantry to support an effective mechanized force. Given these factors, the JNA withdrew. To pacify Serb chauvinists they said Slovenia wasn't in the plan for creating a Greater Serbia. Slovenia's self-determination effort cost them nine lives, whereas the JNA lost thirty-seven.

Following the Slovene campaign, the JNA hierarchy instituted an ideological cleansing of its officer cadre. Although the Yugoslav armed forces had always been overwhelmingly Serbian, the purge effectively turned the military into an ethnically pure entity of Serbs.

The Slovene campaign may have been an effort to intimidate Croatia without resorting to a Serb-Croat war. But Croatia's self-determination efforts continued, and the JNA attacked. Regardless of how Belgrade justified its assault on Croatia, the invasion led to the deaths of over 12,000 people, most of them Croatian civilians.

When the Yugoslav Army confronted Croatian forces, they found nothing more than a bunch of auxiliary policemen. But the Croats, all volunteers indigenous to the area, exhibited remarkable resilience against a trained, technologically superior, and larger army. They were motivated by that most one of basic of human needs--to protect their families and homes. They would rather die than allow the same horrors perpetrated by Serbian extremists on their brethren in neighboring villages to be visited upon their loved ones.

Although Zagreb's government was willing to offer plenty of political advice, at the time of the first attacks it wasn't in a position to help anyone, let alone provide meaningful military help. The high command in Zagreb was exactly what the term implied, a high command only, with neither lower echelons nor an army to command. Zagreb's government had little influence outside the buildings they were sitting in.

The concept that Croatia had a viable central government was a figment of the imagination rather than a reality. Mayors of cities like Zadar or Sibenik often thumbed their noses at Zagreb's authority. General Raseta had 20,000 JNA soldiers in Zagreb walking around with fixed bayonets, one kilometer away from where the Croatian Sabor (parliament) were putting the finishing touches on the Croatian constitution.

The Zagreb government should burn candles in thanksgiving that Washington didn't have anyone on the ground in Croatia to provide hard intelligence. Washington instead relied on the hard intelligence reports that U.S. Ambassador Warren Zimmermann gathered at Belgrade's cocktail parties, where Croatia was projected, because of its "super-nationalism," as having a well armed disciplined army and a cohesive government. If the pro-Serbian cabal in the State Department knew just how vulnerable Croatia really was, I'm certain Deputy Secretary of State Lawrence Eagleburger and company would have taken measures to tilt that precarious balance.

The Croatian defenders, mostly armed with weapons no larger than hunting rifles, were loosely controlled by commanders whose communication with Zagreb was non-existent. This lack of chain of command made the defenders more effective. Their knowledge of the tactical situation enabled them to mount defenses without Zagreb's political interference, which often seemed self-serving and counterproductive. But the lack of communication also severely hindered Croatia's ability to logistically coordinate its sparse military ordnance to where it was most needed.

The overwhelming Serbian aggression wasn't simply a military operation. The Serbs systematically set about destroying Croatian communities, historical monuments, churches, and birth, death and property registers. Destroying the registers would effectively confuse property ownership issues and give the Serbs legitimacy when arguing about demographics at international tribunals. The conquerors tried to remove any trace of Croatian presence and culture in the Serbian occupied areas. Furthermore, the Serbs intimidated and coerced remaining Croats to leave. After noting the destroyed churches, hospitals, and graveyards that the Serbs had left in their path, human rights advocate Dr. Slobodan Lang aptly described the Serbian army actions as "The War

Against Three Crosses."

Civilians made up 84% of the casualties in Croatia. But the Western response to attacks on mostly unarmed civilians was negligible. Following the slaughter that took place in Croatian cities like Vukovar and in the siege of Dubrovnik, the Western media finally came to question Serbian justifications for the war. Reporting became more objective. But prior to those awakenings, Serbian propagandists had convinced the international media that the casualties and the destruction of churches, historically meaningful structures, and villages were appropriate responses to the Croatians' alleged propensity for violence.

When the Serbs first attacked Croatia, the defenders had to create an army from scratch. Weapons and ammunition had been almost non-existent. Despite the paucity of weapons, the Croats held their own once the shock of the initial JNA attacks wore off.

President George Bush inherited the final chapter of the fall of communism from President Reagan. Unfortunately, Bush didn't know how to react. Although some political pundits applauded Bush's foreign policy, he wasn't any better at foreign policy than he was at the domestic policy that cost him the election. A major objective of foreign policy is to prevent war, an objective Bush failed to achieve in both Iraq and Yugoslavia.

A remarkable parallel exists between the Iraqi and Yugoslav conflicts. A week before Saddam Hussein invaded Kuwait, U.S. Ambassador April Glaspie assured Hussein that "the U.S. has no opinion on the conflict regarding [Iraq's] border disagreement with Kuwait." Likewise, in June, 1990, Secretary of State Baker made a pivotal speech in Belgrade concerning Yugoslavia's territorial integrity. He stated that Yugoslavs should use "all means possible to preserve the stability of the country." Thus Baker gave the Belgrade regime carte blanche to proceed with a five year pattern of genocide.

Although Yugoslavia didn't have enough oil to interest the United States, the country's geo-strategic position was vitally important to the U.S. during the Cold War. After Yugoslavia's split with Russia in 1947, the U.S. based its Balkan policy on Tito's supposed resistance to Moscow. When the Russian military threat disappeared in 1989, the integrity of Yugoslavia was no longer strategically significant to U.S. national interests.

The fall of the Berlin Wall foreshadowed the collapse of European Communism and transformed fear of the Russian monolith into bravado. One-party rule broke down throughout Eastern Europe as long-suppressed desires for self-determination began to energize nationalistic forces. Caught up in the euphoria, Croatia and Slovenia opted to secede from Yugoslavia. Remaining tied to Serbia would've meant remaining chained to the anachronism of an ineffective Communist past because the Communist Party was reasserting itself in Serbia. But a Croatian-proposed loose confederation of former Yugoslav republics was flatly rejected by Serbian President Milosevic. Instead, Serbia advocated a strong central government with majority control of a renewed federation.

Milosevic rekindled Serbian nationalism by whipping up myths that inflamed a pathological and hysterical hatred of the Croats. This hatred was a direct result of an effective brainwashing campaign. Disinformation convinced the Serbian population that Croatia had built concentration camps where the Croats were slaughtering thousands of their Serbian minority. The Serbs claimed to have uncovered a Vatican plot against Orthodoxy and an Austrian-German-Croatian conspiracy to form a Fourth Reich. The Serbs also claimed that the Croatian government was a reincarnation of the Ustashe. By stirring up anxiety and paranoia among Balkan ethnic groups Milosevic had begun to implement the tenets of the SANU Memorandum.

In 1987, Milosevic denounced the leadership in the autonomous region of Kosovo and subsequently installed a Serb-led police state there. Milosevic's Kosovo speech brought him out of relative obscurity and into the limelight of Yugoslav politics. The speech also laid the groundwork for the spread of nationalistic

chauvinism and the campaign to create a Greater Serbia.

During 1988 and 1989, Milosevic organized numerous nationally televised Serbian demonstrations to protest supposed Croatian fascism. The demonstrations panicked Serbs into believing that they were victims of discrimination. Conversely, the demonstrations were shrewdly designed to intimidate non-Serbs throughout Yugoslavia. Milosevic proclaimed Serbia the undisputed master of post-Tito Yugoslavia, while he and his cronies used Balkan Stalinism, deception, corruption, blackmail, demagoguery, and violence, to fulfill the slogan "All Serbs in one state."

Milosevic sabotaged the economic reforms of Yugoslav Prime Minister Ante Markovic. Markovic, a non-elected party apparatchik in whom the Bush administration had placed a great deal of trust, resigned on December 20, 1991, after rejecting a newly proposed federal budget that earmarked 75% for the Yugoslav National Army.

His resignation was a blow for those Americans who had based their approach to Yugoslav policy on Markovic. Although Markovic had neither real power base nor a constituency, Zimmermann presupposed this quintessential apparatchik to be the savior of Yugoslavia. As Markovic was no longer on the scene Milosevic misappropriated billions of dollars from the individual republics' foreign reserves held in Belgrade banks, which he used to further his political ambitions.

In May 1991, after Milosevic blocked the scheduled rotation process of the presidency, Yugoslavia became a country without a legitimate president. The Serbian pretense that Yugoslavia was still a federation collapsed in October, 1990, when Serbia imposed import duties on goods from Croatia and Slovenia.

Prior to the Croatian and Slovene declarations of independence in June, 1991, the Serbian media devoted a disproportionate amount of its coverage to criticizing the secessionist republics. The Serbian press also stressed that the Serbs would be defenseless against the genocidal urges of the Croats. The Serbian government accused the leading political party in Croatia, the Croatian Democratic Union (Hrvatska Demokratska Zajednica: HDZ), of planning to revive Ustashe terror.

The assertion that the conflict has its roots in ancient ethnic hatreds is a historical inaccuracy. Certainly the area had witnessed numerous battles as the fault line between Christian Europe and the Islamic Ottoman Empire. But contrary to media and Western politicians' allegations, prior to 1918 there had been a remarkable symbiosis between Serbs and Croats. In the Summer 1991 issue of *Foreign Affairs*, V.P. Gagon wrote: "From a historical perspective, this area experienced little ethnic violence prior to the twentieth century and never witnessed the vicious religious wars as seen in Western Europe."

Many of the myths carefully propagated by governments with a stake in the conflict break down when history is studied. The 1990-1995 fighting wasn't caused by inherently violent ethnic traits that manifest themselves every second or third generation. Rather, forces beyond the control and borders of everyday Croatian and Serbian citizens have fueled the violence. World Wars I and II can't be blamed on Balkan genetics.

Diplomats and British and American pundits added to the public's confusion by using Rebecca West's 1941 novel, *Black Lamb and Grey Falcon*, as their primary reference for understanding the causes of the conflict. The problem with West's book was that her extraordinary literary style overshadowed the historical facts. West's contemporary, John Gunther, said at the time of the book's publication: "[It's] not so much a book about Yugoslavia as a book about Rebecca West." The book was a purely subjective travelogue that romanticized the Serbs as racially superior beings.

West hated the Croats as much as she admired the Serbs. She considered the Croats pretentious for wanting to be associated with Western and not Slavic ideals. And she negated Croatian and Bosnian self-determination efforts because she felt that the Croats and Bosnians should've accepted their lot, including

the murders or imprisonment of dissidents, in gratitude for having been saved from the Turks. West's pre-World War II era ideas continue to be spewed by the pundits of the 1990s. Although the book never professed to be historical, it nevertheless influenced the thinking of several generations of readers about Yugoslavia. The State Department made the book its bible for the region. Diplomats assigned to the former Yugoslavia who had been prejudiced by West's "history" severely handicapped the non-Serbian positions. Warren Zimmermann, one of the highest ranking American diplomats, acknowledged West's influence when he mentioned her a number of times in his 1996 book, *Origins of a Catastrophe*.

The republics of Croatia and Slovenia countered Serbia's chauvinism with nationalistic agendas of their own. After their first free elections the republics refused to recognize Serbia's self-proclaimed seniority status within Yugoslavia. A few days before Croatia and Slovenia formally voted for independence, Yugoslav Prime Minister Markovic, forever the naive optimist and Zimmermann's great hope, said, "The federal government will counter unilateral secession with all available means."

In the meantime, Chetnik and Belgrade-sponsored groups had infiltrated Serbian communities within Croatia and began supplying them with weapons. Violence rose exponentially in Croatian regions heavily populated by ethnic Serbs following Croatian and Slovene independence. Serbian provocations escalated into a cold and calculated ethnic cleansing program. But contrary to media reports, there were very few substantiated incidents of Serbs having fled Croatia because of terrorism.

In many instances Serbian antagonists used stratagems reminiscent of Mao Tse Tung to promote fear among the Serbs of Croatia against the legitimate government. After Serbian rebels seized the police station in Pakrac (a village in Slavonia) in Spring 1991, the Croatian government sent in reinforcements. When the Croatian police arrived, the Serbian rebels fled and found refuge in the local JNA base. Serbian provocateurs then went house to house warning the indigenous Serbs that the Croats were coming to kill them. Panicked, thousands of Serbs fled by any means available. The media then depicted those fleeing as victims and prime examples of Croatian terrorism despite the fact that none of these so-called refugees ever saw any Croat lift a finger against them. Banner headlines lamented the "Bloodbath at Dawn" and "Massacre of Innocents." Yugoslav Army tanks were called in to keep the peace.

The situation in Croatia exploded in July and August of 1991, when Serbian irregulars, aided by the JNA, initiated a series of incidents. Thousands of innocent civilians died, and entire cities and villages were wantonly destroyed. The war in Bosnia would follow a similar pattern, though on a much grander scale.

The Serbs instituted and organized a systematic policy meant to destroy the non-Serbian population, cultures, traditions, and religions. In Croatia, violence was primarily aimed at Roman Catholic churches, hospitals, and historical structures. Twenty eight of the latter were designated by UNESCO as cultural monuments. Although of no military value, medieval Dubrovnik was under siege for months.

The Serbs made a cardinal mistake when they besieged Dubrovnik in the beginning of October, 1991. The Yugoslav conflict might have remained a backwater civil disorder in the eyes of the media if the Dubrovnik attack and siege hadn't drawn international attention. For the first time the media became skeptical of Serbian justifications for their war.

Unfortunately, this change in perception didn't include the Western governments. Alone among its allies, only Germany was outraged that an army was attacking a purely civilian target and condemned the Serbian actions. With each passing day, the siege of Dubrovnik became increasingly desperate. The city's population began to panic, especially when they saw how the civilized world ignored their plight.

For many of the inhabitants of Dubrovnik, the bombardment was their second experience living under siege. Approximately 55,000 refugees thought they had found a safe haven Dubrovnik after escaping from

Serbian onslaughts in other parts of Croatia. Expensive hotels, once playgrounds for the rich and famous, where many of the refugees were housed, were within Serbian mortar range. In his pathetic attempt at shuttle diplomacy, Lord Carrington urged the citizens of Dubrovnik to surrender.

As the siege intensified press headlines read: "Shell shocked Croat soldiers abandon the last hilltop fort protecting the ancient city." The victims of the siege were in such dire straights that French Minister for Humanitarian Relief Dr. Bernard Kouchner called for surrender. Dr. Kouchner, the founder of *Medecins sans Frontieres* and *Medecins du Monde*, which is a Non Governmental Organizations (NGOs) that sends doctors to catastrophes throughout the world, was aware of what the Serbs were capable of doing because he had seen the aftermath of Vukovar. Kouchner naively tried to broker a unilateral cease-fire with the Serbian forces. Without Croatian consent, he offered to demilitarize Dubrovnik. The Croatian forces would surrender what arms they had and leave by sea; the EC or U.N. would monitor and guarantee the peace.

The last stage of any siege is when the defenders consider evacuating the women and children. This situation was fast approaching in Dubrovnik. The Croats knew they couldn't defend the city against a well armed, well trained army with only a few shotguns, hunting rifles, and two 1942 vintage 76 millimeter artillery pieces. After the Serbs cut off the water supply, the reservoirs emptied, and the situation appeared desperate. Miraculously, though, it rained. Not only did the rain water replenish the bodily needs of the besieged, the rain also gave the city's defenders a tremendous psychological boost. Even one particularly terrible six hour period on Saint Nicholas Day, December 6, 1991, when 600 Serbian artillery shells exploded in the old historic district, couldn't deter the steadfast resolve of Dubrovnik's citizens.

The West assumed Dubrovnik's fall was imminent. The Serbs allowed humanitarian organizations to send three ships to evacuate 1,700 women with their children. Once accomplished, the next step would've been for the Serbs to take the city. Instead, the women refused to leave their sons, husbands, and fathers. The women of Dubrovnik evoked what Lang called the Masada strategy. The citizens of Dubrovnik felt that the only way to confront the Serbian strategy of generating refugees as tools of genocide was for every member of society to refuse surrender. The Dubrovnik crisis dissipated after the Croat forces mounted a counter-offensive, and the Serb forces retreated from the high ground.

In a January 14, 1992 full-page ad in the *New York Times*, as the mayhem increased in Croatia, 104 Nobel Prize winners spurred by Linus Pauling called upon world governments to stop the wanton destruction by the Yugoslav Army and save the Croatian people from extinction. Never before had so many awardees concurred on a common cause. But even this gesture didn't affect the Western governments' policy of appeasing the Serbs.

The Serbs were undeviating in their military campaigns. Prior to any offensive maneuver they forewarned the indigenous Serbian population. Once those people not having a death wish were safely removed, incessant, coordinated tank and artillery bombardment followed. Most of the terrified non-Serbian population fled and in marched the Serbian irregulars. Those remaining non-Serbs were beaten, murdered and raped, only to wish they had fled with the first wave.

Before overt hostilities erupted, the outside world found it difficult to see that a bloody conflict was brewing. President Bush ignored highly credible CIA warnings in 1990 that Yugoslavia would break up spontaneously within 18 months, with a strong likelihood that this process would be accompanied by acts of violence and civil war. European diplomats were also unconvinced. During the Slovene war the foreign ministers of the European Community supported diplomatic negotiations that, in their view, had already sorted out the entire problem. The West either didn't understand the nature of the conflict or it didn't care to understand.

Bush abandoned what had been the linchpin of U.S. policy, the destabilization of communism, because of an inordinate devotion to geo-political stability. Bush ironically first abandoned these tenets in Russia, the

country that originated the need for this policy in the first place. Enamored with Communist leaders Mikhail Gorbachev in Russia and Ante Markovic in Yugoslavia, Bush was unable to comprehend *realpolitik* and continued supporting the status quo and survival of the Soviet Union. Bush listened enthusiastically to Gorbachev's persistent warnings about an impending catastrophe if the Soviet Union broke up. Gorbachev had a fear of new leadership, and his distrust of emerging, freely elected parties apparently influenced the American president. Instead of promoting democracy, free elections, and respect for human rights, Bush chose to maintain the existing state of affairs. The U.S. and Western European nations looked at Yugoslavia through the prism of the Soviet Union. As armed conflicts commenced, support was given to the political anachronism prevailing in Serbia for fear that an outbreak of secessionist movements among constituent republics would provoke similar outbreaks in the Soviet Union and have a destabilizing effect there too.

The Western right of self-determination seemed only to apply to the Eastern European countries that wished to leave the Soviet bloc. In December 1991 Bush reiterated his policy that states should neither be created nor destroyed. Condemning "suicidal nationalism," he begged the Ukrainians to remain in the Soviet Union and stick with reliable Gorbachev. Reinforced by the advice of Ambassador Zimmermann, Secretary of State Baker notified Croatia and Slovenia that they shouldn't expect U.S. recognition. The democratic aspirations of Croatia and Slovenia were vilified in some Western political circles as the real cause of the war.

Zimmermann also actively spread disinformation about Croatia. In early 1991, in an interview in the Serbian periodical *NIN*, Zimmermann stated that America was concerned about dangers Serbs and Jews were facing in Croatia, despite a lack of any verifiable instances of Jews or Serbs perceiving themselves in jeopardy. By raising the suspicion, he created an issue out of a non-issue and aided and abetted the Serbian propagandists.

Zimmermann influenced policy makers when he articulated the pro-Serbian cabal's agenda in the State before the Yugoslav Economic Council meeting on September 19, 1991 Department in Washington D.C. He disingenuously characterized the events in Yugoslavia as merely a conflict between two narrow-minded nationalisms. The only difference between the Serbs and the Croats was that the Croats weren't expansionistic. Because the Croats forced Serbs living in Croatia to take loyalty oaths, fired them en masse from their jobs, and burned and looted their homes, he said the Serbs had justifiable reasons to be angry with the Croats. Furthermore, although Serbs comprised a sizable percentage of the population in Croatia, the Serbs didn't have the power that their numbers dictated. Zimmermann's half-truths and lies might as well have been written by Serbian propagandists.

The Balkan policies of the United States, Britain, and France were based on outmoded balance-of-power politics. These self-appointed Western godfathers had an almost pathological attachment to their hybrid, Yugoslavia, an entity they had created after World War I. They looked upon their noble experiment, with its imbedded Serbian ethnic and civic nationalism hegemony, as sacrosanct--but never considered the non-Serbs' civil rights. After the eruption of the conflict, these countries tried to appease radical Serbian chauvinism because they saw that policy as the best way to keep Yugoslavia intact. History has shown that appeasing aggression only encourages a conflict to continue. So when countless Western negotiated cease-fires were disregarded by the Serbs, the only response the Western powers could come up with was to wring their hands and make statements of protest.

After a number of governments encouraged Croatia and Slovenia's self-determination aspirations, Secretary of State Lawrence Eagleburger did everything in his power to sabotage those efforts. Old wounds reopened and continue to fester amongst the allies. Following the reunification of Germany, European states took sides on the Balkan issue exactly as they had in 1914. In a Los Angeles Times editorial, the self-styled pundit Martin Walker presumptuously branded the German reunification as the "Fourth Reich" and claimed that Germany's breaking ranks over the Balkan issue "provoked the first European war since it plunged us into the last one." Undaunted by criticism, Germany decided to play a more forceful role in European affairs. But the

German Constitution forbids deployment of its military other than in defense of German territory or outside of NATO's jurisdiction. So a military response to the crisis in former Yugoslavia was precluded.

Germany officially recognized Croatia and Slovenia in January 1991, despite almost hysterical posturing by France and England, strong U.S. objections, and a vigorous campaign by Eagleburger. U.N. peace negotiators Cyrus Vance and Lord Peter Carrington argued that recognition would only escalate the war. But diplomatic recognition brought with it the first lasting cease-fire in Croatia, after 58 previous peace agreements had been broken by the Serbs. Germany's decision was its first unilateral pronouncement since World War II. Despite having the world's third largest economy and being the second largest exporter, Germany's external political voice has been muted by its competitors because of Germany's role in World War II. But Germany's economic dominance in Central and Eastern Europe has led to political influence in the region.

Germany's moral stand on the conflict in former Yugoslavia didn't sit well with its NATO allies, particularly the Bush administration. American officials forecast that this "new German assertiveness" would be "difficult to stomach" because it thrusts Germany back into a leadership role and condemns the United States to secondary status in Europe. Germany bluntly criticized the refugee policies of its Western neighbors who were far less generous in offering asylum. As of August 1992, Germany had accepted 240,000 refugees from former Yugoslavia, while France and England together had taken less than 2,000.

Looking for a convenient scapegoat for their inertia, the other Western governments chastised Germany for prematurely recognizing Croatia and Bosnia-Herzegovina. Yet Britain and France, who had been the loudest critics of Germany, voted in the affirmative in the European Community's (EC) unanimous decision to support recognition. Germany, was the only Western country to take a moral stand when they protested the barbaric atrocities, indiscriminate shelling of non-combatant civilians in cities like Dubrovnik, and the leveling of Vukovar. Ignoring Germany's position, the United States continued to support an indivisible Yugoslavia, a policy that encouraged and contributed to the aggressiveness of the Serbian-led JNA.

The schism between the Western allies over the Balkan issue has been blamed for slowing down European integration by some pundits. But the main rationale for integration had been the threat of the Soviet Union's monolithic Communism. As a result of its disintegration, European integration has slowed to a snail's pace. Political lines have emerged based on economic spheres of influence. Germany is the prevailing economic influence in most Eastern European countries. Its economic power blocked France and Britain from competing in those new markets. France and Britain's only partners in the old Eastern bloc are Romania and Serbia. Perhaps one of the reasons for the delay until April 27, 1993, of economic sanctions on Yugoslavia was that France and Britain didn't want to jeopardize their future economic relationships with Serbia. And England's complicity with Yugoslavia has recently started to pay off. A March 1996, article in the Greek weekly *Ependitis*, titled "The Secret Major-Milosevic Agreement," claimed that British Foreign Minister Malcolm Rifkind had entered into a gentlemen's agreement with Milosevic to advance credits of five billion dollars for the purchase of British weapons. In addition to a number of high ranking British officials, several representatives of British companies and banks, including Midlands and Barclays, participated in the negotiations. As a reward, British interests will apparently control Yugoslavia's banking system and markets. The British justified their deal with Milosevic as an effort to combat Germany's ever-widening influence in the Balkans.

Another reason for the British' government's obvious complicity with Serbia may have resulted from successful influence peddling by the Serbs. According to the *Guardian* (December 23, 1996), shortly before the 1992 general election in England, the Tory Party, with John Major's full knowledge, received an enormous amount of funds from Serbian sources. As witnessed by the Clinton administration, apparently accepting campaign funds from foreign sources is common practice among Western democracies. The only harm caused by Indonesia and China funding Clinton was to its own people and opposition parties. But the harm caused by the Serb funding the Tories added to the death and destruction of the non-Serbs. The Labour Party questioned the

ethics of the Tory Party accepting funds from forces that had placed British subjects in harms way while serving in the armed forces in former Yugoslavia.

After the disintegration of the Soviet Union, European governments deluded themselves into believing that their new trading bloc would be endowed with political unity and power. The EC still reflects the objective economic and social interests of its members. Yet the EC's decision-making procedure allows only the lowest common denominator to work. Greece's implacable opposition to Macedonian recognition has caused severe embarrassment to EC members. Greece's intense lobbying on Serbia's behalf made a coherent EC approach to the Balkan crisis very difficult.

President François Mitterand of France made an unannounced visit to Sarajevo on June 28, 1992, to show solidarity with the besieged city. Although his trip was a minor gesture, it met with a great deal of criticism from European leaders. His visit particularly piqued the British because the French president had grabbed the limelight on the eve of the British takeover of the EC presidency. Clearly the EC is composed of members with independent agendas. Military involvement in the Balkans by EC members was highly unlikely because a consensus on the make-up of the intervening force would be politically contentious and ultimately an unsolvable issue.

The EC erroneously embarked on a policy of localized solutions to the war that neither stopped the violence nor resolved any of its underlying causes. Milosevic, whose regime was responsible for supplying the Serbian insurgents with weapons and other support, disappeared into the background during the seemingly endless peace discussions that had taken place in such varied spots as London, Paris, Geneva, and Greece.

The West struggled to find a solution to the crisis in former Yugoslavia and was stymied for many valid reasons. The collapse of the Soviet Union and the Gulf War absorbed considerable Western attention, so other hot-bed regions paled in strategic significance. Because Serbia posed no military threat outside of former Yugoslavia, the West found the Balkans uninteresting. But the West's assertion that military involvement would've immersed its forces in a quagmire with no discernible enemy was nothing more than a weak excuse.

Those who feared that United States or NATO air-strikes against Serbian positions or commitment of ground troops would result in a deeper Western involvement in the war were wrong. After the conflict had already caused 250,000 deaths, NATO finally employed air strikes. Although those first attacks were anemic, they did get the Serbs' attention.