

Chapter 7: The Media Deception

"All successful newspapers are ceaselessly querulous and bellicose. They never defend anyone of anything if they can help it; if the job is forced upon them, they tackle it by denouncing someone else."

-- H. L. Mencken

On the third anniversary of Vukovar's fall, a spate of articles lamented the dreadful living conditions that the Serbian conquerors had to endure in the rubble of a once vibrant Croatian city and praised the Serbs' courageous efforts to rebuild and adjust. The articles never mentioned that the destruction of Vukovar had resulted from Serbian military tactics. Rather than inquiring about the surviving Croatian victims who were forced to live in refugee camps and desired to return to their confiscated homes, the media's maudlin reports worried about how the Serbs would be especially inconvenienced if the Croats attempted to take back their territory.

While the conflict was limited to Croatia, a majority of journalists received their briefings in Belgrade, so their reports reflected the Serbian agenda. The media invariably stated that all sides were guilty and excused the conflict as just another episode in a long history of atrocities committed among the Serbs, Croats, and Muslims. The press made it clear that outside intervention couldn't mitigate such ancient ethnic rivalries.

The media inaccurately characterized the conflict as a civil war. Journalists cited the nefarious deeds of the Ustashe, a German puppet state in Croatia during World War II, as justification for the Serbian actions of the 1990s, yet failed to mention the Serbian government's collaboration with the Nazis or Chetnik crimes during the same period.

The British press was guilty of blindly quoting Serbian sources without regard to accuracy. One such example appeared in a November 22, 1992, Daily Telegraph article. The article accused Croatian gangs of plundering supplies and money and, most severely, of maltreating defenseless Muslim refugees. The Croats supposedly said that racial superiority excused their mistreatment of the Muslims. Yet after a long diatribe about Croatian improprieties, the article finally made it clear that no evidence had been found to substantiate the allegations. The article also failed to cite the source of the racial slur. In essence, The Daily Telegraph reported a non-event.

Former President Richard Nixon said, "The judgment of history depends on who wrote it." As victors in the Balkan conflict, Serbian revisionists were able to write a version of history that the media accepted without challenge. The Serbs had 70 years to practice their propaganda skills while they ruled and exploited Yugoslavia's entire political and economic infrastructure. They eventually became better at manipulating facts and history than even the ominous Soviet regimes.

Astutely aware of the value of public relations, the Serbian leadership nurtured an extremely effective propaganda apparatus. The predominantly Serbian diplomatic corps of Yugoslavia had been the voices of Serbia's agenda in the international community. Their seeds of disinformation eventually reaped a bountiful harvest when the international media reacted to the present conflict.

Following the Watergate debacle, the media in the U.S. skeptically scrutinized every Republican Party pronouncement. Yet American journalists blindly accepted Bush administration characterizations of the Balkan crisis as an insoluble ancient ethnic conflict in which all sides were equally guilty. Although the Clinton administration made every effort to distinguish its domestic agenda from the previous administration, Clinton wasted no time maintaining Bush's ill-conceived Balkan policy. Both presidents successfully articulated the futility of involvement, and by doing so also achieved their goal of limiting debate.

The American public received background information from news programs such as the McNeil-Lehrer Newshour and Nightline, but always from the perspectives of guests like Lawrence Eagleburger, Lord David Owen, and Cyrus Vance. Because these experts were intimately involved with the crisis and part of the problem, their assessments were couched in the official language of double-speak and self-service. None spoke frankly or gave honest analyses. The interviewers allowed their guests to pontificate without scrutiny. So these news programs became pulpits for the status quo rather than forums for the truth.

For example, on March 25, 1993, the McNeil-Lehrer Newshour devoted an extremely long segment to Lord David Owen. Instead of answering questions, Lord Owen delivered a contrived monologue strewn with disinformation. Owen's interviewer accepted his pronouncements as gospel.

News programs are commercial. Powerful newsmakers bring higher ratings. So if interviewers probe too deeply, they risk losing the newsmakers as future guests. Because programs like the McNeil-Lehrer Newshour avoided analysis and contrary views, they were, in fact, propagators of the Bush administration's agenda. President Bush's policy concerning Croatia had been to publicly ignore it. News coverage reflected his policy.

When the JNA attacked Slovenia in July 1991, the McNeil-Lehrer Newshour reported the assault twice. While the JNA laid waste to Croatia for six months, an attack that resulted in a massive flight of refugees, the slaughter of defenseless civilians, and the destruction of cultural monuments including much of the city of Dubrovnik, the Newshour broadcast only eight segments about these events. Without exposure to accurate information, the media's passive audience readily accepted persuasively reported misconceptions about history, ethnic rivalries, and blame for the atrocities.

President Clinton based his policy on Robert D. Kaplan's book, *The Balkan Ghosts*, rather than hard intelligence reports. Although publishers produced many books about the crisis, no book was as influential as Kaplan's was. Kaplan's reportage was excellent, but whenever he wandered away from straight observation and into analysis and history, which was often the case, his book lost all credibility. Kaplan's well-written half-truths soon became accepted as dogma by the uninformed. Echoing Rebecca West, Kaplan's theses were based on generalities about national character. He pontificated that primordial forces kept the conflict beyond anyone's control. *The Balkan Ghosts* offered Croatia no sympathy for its self-determination efforts and greeted atrocities committed against the non-Serb population with nonchalance. In a McNeil-Lehrer Newshour interview, Professor Fouad Ajami of Johns Hopkins explained that Clinton reneged on his campaign promises and stopped criticizing Bush's policy in Yugoslavia because he believed Kaplan's half-truths and myths about Serbian military prowess.

The Bush and Clinton administrations were successful in manipulating the media and keeping the Croatian situation off the front pages. The British and French governments found evasiveness more difficult to sustain because the crisis was occurring in their backyards. So in order for the British and French to maintain the status quo, they had to more blatantly propagate Serbian myths. British journalist Nora Beloff remained loyal to her government's agenda when she cleverly duped the public by juxtaposing certain facts about the Balkan crisis and selectively omitting others.

In democratic and open societies journalists should be the first to question governmental pronouncements. The more emphatic the pronouncements, the louder the questions should be asked. For most of us, the media is our primary source of information about governmental shenanigans. Yet during the crisis in former Yugoslavia, editors and news directors blindly perpetuated Serbian-generated disinformation while ignoring a spate of evidence that unequivocally refuted the myths. Hypocrisy has pervaded this conflict; the messenger failed to examine the message and therefore became part of the problem. News coverage reflected the conscious or unconscious agenda of the reporters and editors rather than accurately portraying important

events.

Whenever journalists claimed that the causes of the conflict were too complicated to explain, the reporters were confessing their own failures. Many journalists deviated from the tenets of classic reportage by resorting to analysis and editorializing when they were unable to get hard facts. Lacking any valuable insight, the reporters were clearly working out of their depth.

Between 1990 and 1995, over 180 books and countless monographs and articles were published about the conflict. The tragedy is that most of the authors were enamored with former Yugoslavia and what it stood for -- especially its politics. Many were products of an era that denied the realities and excesses of any communist regime. They did little more than project the sentiments of policy makers like Lawrence Eagleburger, Brent Scowcroft, and John Scalon. While mourning the demise of Yugoslavia, these authors conveniently forgot that the glue that once held Yugoslavia together was Tito's totalitarianism. Professor Thomas Fleiner, Chairman of the CSCE Human Rights Commission, who has studied the media's responses to the Balkan crisis in depth, concluded: "The more power the media obtain and are able to influence, through public opinion, political decision-making on important foreign policy matters, the greater is their responsibility. As far as the war in Croatia and Bosnia is concerned, it is suspected [the] local [and] international media helped the division of peoples and incitement of hatred."

Whether knowingly or not, Senator John Warner participated in spreading disinformation when he said, "My own research...indicates that...these people have fought each other for not hundreds of years, but thousands of years for religious, ethnic, cultural differences... There is certainly a history, going back, at least into my study of the problem, as far back as the 13th century, of constant ethnic and religious fighting among and between these groups (my emphases added)." Americans should pity their country and those who voted for Senator Warner if he researches the problems facing the U.S. in the same way he researched the background of the Yugoslav crisis. Learning Senator Warner's sources would prove illuminating.

This conflict doesn't fit Webster's definition of war: "A state of usually open and declared armed hostile conflict between states or nations." In this case, an army possessing weapons of modern warfare -- tanks, planes, artillery, cluster bombs -- attacked people who lacked those weapons and had no intention of fighting except to defend their homes. Contrary to the rhetoric, the Serbian invasions of Slovenia, Croatia and Bosnia can't be considered battles in a civil war. Slovenia, Croatia and Bosnia had declared independence in accordance with the Yugoslav constitution before the invasions.

Ethnic rivalries between Serbs and Croats aren't ancient. The Croats and Serbs had a remarkable symbiosis until they were cobbled together with other Balkan peoples into a kingdom in 1918. Animosity ignited when the Serbs commandeered all the political, military, and economic infrastructure of the country and imposed draconian measures on non-Serbs. The first armed ethnic conflict between Croats and Serbs occurred during World War II. But pundits such as Robert W. Tucker (contributing editor of *The National Interest*) and David C. Hendrickson (associate professor of political science at Colorado College), in their article "America and Bosnia" in *National Review* (Fall 1993), helped perpetuate the myth that the ethnic feuding was ancient. Without citing evidence, they ascribed the war to "notorious tribal hatreds and the violent propensities of the Balkan peoples."

The Balkans has been the scene of numerous bloody battles because the area was the fault line between Christian Europe and the Islamic Asia. But none of the battles was between the indigenous groups. Anti-interventionists cleverly limited the options for peace by implying that the problem found its genesis in the violent tendencies of the Balkan people. The usually astute former and present editors of *Foreign Affairs*, William Hyland and James Hogue, nonetheless trumpeted this erroneous message.

The JNA attack on Slovenia in June 1991 caught the international media off-guard. Because few

reporters covering Yugoslavia had been briefed by anyone, most had to resort to their own devices and inherent skills. As a consequence, that initial battle produced some of the most objective reporting of the conflict. Yet between July 1991, when the JNA invaded Croatia, and March 2, 1992, before Serbian paramilitary forces set up barricades in Sarajevo, the majority of the international media avoided the action and descended on Belgrade instead. Reports from the Serbian capital were invariably distorted. Although skilled articulators, most journalists aren't exceptionally bright. With few exceptions, those reporting from the Balkans were ignorant of the region's history and sheepishly bought into the notion that the Croats deserved the carnage.

A study of British editorials of the period is instructive. Most condemned the Croats for daring to defend themselves against the right and might of the Yugoslav forces. Only after the JNA besieged Dubrovnik and Vukovar was there any semblance of objectivity.

While the majority of the British press was vitriolic toward Croatia, the American media remained largely ambivalent. But some U.S.-based opinion writers such as Peter Brock, Alexander Cockburn, and A.M. Rosenthal filled their commentaries with factual errors, half-truths, and historical revisions. Their articles were simply thinly disguised attempts to support the Serbian agenda. Brock's lack of objectivity is not surprising since he is a member of the Serbian Unity Party.

Besides using their own propaganda apparatus, the Serbs contracted a number of independent firms. In Britain the Serbs hired Saatchi and Saatchi, the world's largest public relations firm. SerbNet, an official Serbian lobbying group in the United States, retained Manatos & Manatos for its Washington, D.C. operation. McDermott/O'Neill & Associates, the largest American public and government affairs strategic advisory firm, created a joint venture with David A. Keene & Associates to further enhance the Serbian image in the United States. Thomas P. O'Neill III headed the team that worked on the SerbNet account. O'Neill is a former Lieutenant Governor of Massachusetts, former head of the Office of Federal-State Relations, and a member of the U.S. State Department Ambassadorial Selection Committee. He is the eldest son of former Speaker of the House of Representatives, Thomas "Tip" P. O'Neill.

Roy Gutman of Newsday reported that General Lewis Mackenzie, who had been the highest ranking U.N. officer in former Yugoslavia, was paid \$15,000 by SerbNet at the time he testified before the U.S. Armed Service Committee, met with congressional representatives, and spoke before the influential think tank, the Heritage Foundation. But Mackenzie disingenuously failed to mention his financial ties to the Serbian apparatus during these engagements.

The worldwide public relations campaign helped blunt the facts about Serbian atrocities, created the impression that the conflict was nothing more than an insoluble ethnic battle, and equated Croatian morality with Serbia's. Although the Serbs never presented themselves as innocents, they portrayed the Croats and Muslims as their moral equals. The more complicated the Serbs made the crisis seem, the less likely the West was to intervene. Serb propaganda successfully clouded every issue related to former Yugoslavia.

Some Western media overtly helped Serbian propaganda. Reuters made world headlines after one of its reporters said he had seen 41 Serbian children slaughtered by Croats. He reiterated the gory details on Belgrade television. The next day the reporter admitted the story was a lie, but his retraction never appeared in Serbia. His false testimony continues to foment hatred of Croats among Serbs.

In another case, the press reported that Croatian forces had slaughtered a number of innocent Serbian civilians around the Croatian town of Pakrac. The reports described the condition of the mutilated bodies and listed the names and ages of the victims. The international media described the incident as typical of the bloodthirsty Croatian character. But an investigation soon revealed that the incident was a hoax perpetrated by Serbia's state-run media. The fact that the international press was duped wasn't too surprising. After all, the press' function is to report. But what made the reporters culpable in this case was their failure to investigate the

story's source or print a retraction.

After the Serbs had blocked the major highway linking Croatia and Serbia in May 1995, Croatian forces broke the blockade and went on an offensive that resulted in the retrieval of approximately 10% of Croatia's lost territory. The State Department chastised Croatia's counter-offensive as "threatening a key objective" of Clinton's policy in the Balkans. Until 1995 the Clinton administration had never articulated an objective. The U.N. shrilly blamed the Croatian action for ruining a chance for a negotiated settlement despite the fact that the U.N. had failed to successfully negotiate with the Serbs for five years. U.S. Ambassador to Croatia Peter Galbraith warned that the Croatian offensive in Western Slavonia would rekindle another war and would have "all the civility of Bosnia and ten times the firepower." His projections, like so many others by Western diplomats, proved to be entirely unfounded.

The U.N. Security Council was angered by Croatia's retrieval of territory that could not be returned through inept negotiations. Without substantiating his charge, the British delegate to the Security Council accused Croatia of widespread inhumane treatment of Serbian civilians and prisoners taken in the Pakrac offensive. But in this case the media actually contradicted a U.N. official's pronouncement. An overwhelming majority of the reporters, particularly those on the scene, stated that the conduct of the Croatian troops toward the vanquished Serbs had been exemplary. European Union observers agreed with the media's assessment. Contrary to the U.N.'s public accusations that the Croats had forcibly expelled the Serbs, a June 9, 1995, internal U.N. report (s/1995/467) from the Secretary General of the Security Council stated that the Serbian leadership had encouraged the exodus of Serbs from Western Slavonia.

In retaliation for Croatia's counter-offensive, the Serbs fired a series of missiles containing anti-personnel cluster bombs at a number of Croatian cities, including downtown Zagreb. Although cluster bombs are banned by international law, no British, French, or American official government communiqués condemned the attacks. For unknown reasons, the media remained focused on the status and treatment of the Serbs who had remained in the recaptured territory of Slavonia.

In the May 1, 1994, issue of the Catholic newspaper *The Tidings*, a front page article about Professor Daniel Smith-Christopher's opinions reiterated all the favorite Serbian theses and excuses for their aggressions. Clearly Smith-Christopher's field of expertise wasn't Balkan history because his statements were loaded with errors. Moreover, he chastised Catholics for their lack of involvement in former Yugoslavia. Apparently he wasn't aware that Catholics have been involved in the events in Croatia from the onset. Catholic humanitarian organization Caritas was one of the first to supply aid and comfort to victims. The Vatican was one of the first states to officially recognize Croatia. In January 1994, Pope John Paul II, alone among world leaders, castigated the international community for acting in a criminally negligent manner. Because Smith-Christopher's article was one-sided and loaded with half-truths, it provoked a number of letters to the editor in rebuttal; but none was published. Unfortunately, *The Tidings'* readership was indelibly etched with the impression that the Serbs were victims.

Terms that were bandied about in media and government pronouncements about the Balkan crisis like "quagmire," "civil war," and "ancient ethnic rivalry" immediately clouded the facts and warned outsiders to keep out, while terms like "war of aggression" or "genocide" encouraged outsiders to act. By the time the latter terms became popular, the conflict had already caused the deaths of at least 250,000, the wounding of untold numbers, the rape of at least 25,000, and the flight or displacement of over three million people. The former terms, "quagmire," "civil war," and "ancient ethnic rivalry," has proven to be seeds planted in the vocabulary of the international media and diplomatic corps by Serbia's propaganda machine.

The long list of inaccurate media buzz-phrases includes "ethnic blood feud" and "rebel" or "secessionist republics." Despite the existence of experts in the field (none of them in government circles) and accessible

information about the background and history of the conflict, the international media elected to ignore those sources and, instead, stick to the text the Serbs provided.

The press consistently justified the Serbian invasion of Croatia as a heroic attempt to keep Yugoslavia intact. The 1990-1991 Yugoslav census revealed that the percentage of citizens who acknowledged being Yugoslav was formidable in Croatia, Bosnia-Herzegovina, and Slovenia. But no one from Serbia proper elected to call himself a Yugoslav.

The press also claimed that the Serbs were trying to protect the minority Serbs of Croatia. But the majority of Serbs in Croatia was urbanized and had been integrated into Croatian society. If Serbia had annexed the Croatian land they occupied in 1991, 70% of the Serbs who had lived in Croatia would still have remained outside Greater Serbia.

Soon after Croatian independence, the international media began lamenting that Serbs had been unmercifully purged from Croatia's police force and state administrative posts. The new government did purge many from its ranks. One of the government's first acts was to dismiss Communist functionaries, regardless of ethnicity. Because government appointments had previously required Communist Party affiliation, and 40% of the party members in Croatia were Serbian, a disproportionately high number of government bureaucrats had been Serbs. For example, in 1980, 75% of Yugoslav federal bureaucrats were Serbs, while 8.6% were Croats. Ljubljana's Daily Delo reported, in 1987 that out of 2,900 foreign ministry employees only 120 were Slovene or Croatian. Although the Serbs dominated in raw numbers, their percentages in the upper echelons of the party, secret police, and administration were even greater. The 1980 Yugoslav census revealed that Serbs made up 11.5% of the population in Croatia, but held more than half of all key administrative positions, and that 56.5% of the uniformed policemen in Zagreb were Serbs. The significant number of Serbian dismissals by the new Croatian government wasn't especially surprising because many Serbs refused to swear allegiance to the new state. But reports of large-scale discrimination and sacking of the Serbian minority workforce were unsubstantiated.

Serbian propagandists claimed that the Cyrillic script used by some Serbs, as opposed to the Roman script used by the Croats, was banned by the new government in Croatia. The charge was untrue. The Serbs were led to believe that they had lost the right to publish newspapers and magazines. But the only hindrance to publication was financial; the choice of script wasn't the problem. A perverse patronage system ruled every aspect of the economy under the old regime. Every enterprise of any consequence was subsidized by the state. The press was no exception. Because the new Croatian government was committed to free enterprise, government patronage and subsidies were slowly phased out. The Serbs had been the primary beneficiaries of the old system, so they had difficulty relating to the new ways of doing business. They felt threatened when money stopped flowing from Zagreb because the idea of raising capital privately to set up publishing houses was foreign.

When the theater of war shifted to Bosnia-Herzegovina, the reporting was mostly fair and accurate about Bosnia. Nevertheless, the media continued to describe conditions and events in Croatia as if they were taking place on another planet. The press claimed that the war in Croatia was over and all but ignored the almost daily shelling of Croatian cities and towns from Serbian positions behind the U.N. peacekeeping curtain. The stories that came out of Croatia tended to dwell upon the alleged reemergence of Ustashe symbols. More editorials were directed toward these symbols than toward the very real Serbian crimes against humanity.

A favorite story bandied about in the media regarded the similarities between the Croatian and Ustashe flags. Both flags were decorated with a checkerboard shield. But the press failed to note that the centuries-old Croatian national flag had also been decorated with a checkerboard. And in Zagreb, the tiled roof of an intact medieval church bears the same coat of arms. The Ustashe flag also differed from the present and medieval flags

because it was emblazoned with a large letter "U."

Whenever the Croatian government announced the renaming of streets or city squares the announcement provoked a media outcry. But most of the changes applied to streets named by the Communist regime. Names such as "Lenin" or "Socialistic Revolution Street" sounded repugnant to the new order. Most often streets simply reverted to pre-World War II names that were many centuries old. Yet the media shrilly denounced the new names as proof that the Croatian government was a reincarnation of the Ustashe.

The press also complained when Croatia converted its currency from the dinar to the kuna. The controversy revolved around the fact that the kuna was the name of the monetary unit under the Ustashe regime. The worthless dinar had been associated with Yugoslav economic inequity for seventy years, and Croatia wanted to distance itself as much as possible from the Belgrade regime. The kuna is named after an animal similar to a marten whose pelt had been used for centuries in Croatia and Russia as means of exchange. The Italian lira and the German mark were currencies of fascist regimes, yet they continue to be used today without criticism. Why then should the kuna be associated with the Ustashe?

Slavenka Drakulic, a Yugoslav writer championed by Western literary circles, has been especially aghast over the new Croatian regime's renaming of streets and its destruction of the Communist symbols and monuments that she held sacred. A thinly disguised nostalgia for the good old days of Communist privileges permeates Drakulic's writings. Her background makes her nostalgia understandable. Her father was a Yugoslav military officer and political commissar. Under the Communists, commissars were the enforcers of the party line. Party members received privileges normally denied to the general population, but the perks that the super elite, like commissars, received was even more special.

A few streets didn't revert to their pre-Communist names. Andrija Hebrang Street was one that kept its more recent name. Andrija Hebrang was a founding member of Croatia's Communist Party who was murdered by the same people Drakulic's father helped keep in power.

The outside world seemed unmoved by the destruction and bloodshed in former Yugoslavia until the media began reporting mass rapes. Suddenly feminist groups rushed to do something. Afternoon television talk shows buzzed with worry and concern. But the frenzy died as suddenly as it started. The public's attention was diverted to another circus elsewhere.

Rape occurs and will continue to occur as a by-product of war. But the Serbs instituted a rape policy in Croatia and Bosnia that is unprecedented in the history of war crimes. The Catholic charity Caritas and The World Council of Churches concluded independently that the Serbs were using rape as a weapon of war. The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees reported that one-third of 300 refugee women interviewed mentioned rape. Detailed documents available in Sarajevo in November 1992, revealed that 1,000 rape victims were between the ages of 7 and 18, 8,000 between 18 and 35, 3,000 between 35 and 50, and 1,000 over 50. In the village of Kozarac, 2,000 women were raped out of a population of 12,400.

Rape camps aren't a new phenomenon; they have been used by conquerors throughout history. But the Serbs used the camps to humiliate and destroy an entire culture's values. In July 1992, international authorities verified the existence of 17 Serbian rape camps. By April 1993, 43 camps had been identified.

Typically victims were raped repeatedly until they showed overt signs of pregnancy. Those not killed were expelled and told to return to their Muslim communities so they could bear Serbian children. Rape has been perceived by many as the most humiliating form of genocide. These stigmatized women were reluctant to return to their families and communities because the difficulties inherent in reintegration compounded their humiliation. The cultural obstacles present in Muslim culture made their situations even more difficult. Many rape victims claimed to envy the dead.

According to articles in the Croatian Medical Journal, all the pregnant rape victims referred to the University of Zagreb's Psychiatry Department showed signs of post-traumatic stress disorder. Symptoms included attempted suicide and depression. Usually the victims would come with a female member of the family who knew her "secret." None of the married patients wanted her husband informed. They all negated their physical condition of pregnancy and considered the fetus an alien or unnatural body that they wanted to abort. Not one rape victim accepted her infant upon delivery.

Most of the stories are too shocking, too clinical, and too painfully graphic to be restated openly. Many of the victims showed extraordinary signs of trauma in the genital, anal, throat, and mouth areas. Most of these women refused to talk about the terrible ordeal they had suffered, but readily talked about different forms of physical maltreatment and abuses they had witnessed happening to other women.

One story told by a witness vividly sticks in my mind. After four Serbian soldiers gang-raped a woman, she begged to breast feed her crying infant. One of the soldiers cut off the infant's head and brought it to the mother's breast. After a hysterical outburst precluded her use as an instrument of rape, she was taken out and executed.

The archbishop of Zagreb, Cardinal Franjo Kuharic, proclaimed, "Raped women have not lost their dignity...They are worthy of our deepest admiration and must be treated with respect by the family, society, and the Church." These are words the world should heed.

Proponents for the Serbian cause downplayed the rape issue. But what made the victims' stories credible, objective clinical findings and pregnancies, can't be faked and few women have any motive to make up stories that are so stigmatizing.

Despite the powerful influence of Western and Serbian political disinformation, the web of deception finally began to unravel. Reports and editorials became more objective after July 1995. Stephen Kinzer may have been the first journalist to acknowledge Serbia's decisive role in disinformation when he wrote in a July 10, 1995, International Herald Tribune article: "The pro-government Serbian press played a crucial role in whipping up nationalist fervor and hatred of non-Serbs.

"Newspapers were full of vivid stories, many of them exaggerated and others completely false, recounting gruesome atrocities committed against Serbs in Bosnia and Croatia," Kinzer continued. "Television news programs broadcast propaganda daily, never missing a chance to show a destroyed village, a sobbing widow or a distraught refugee."

Kinzer concluded that after the press stopped serving Serbia's political goals, President Milosevic was forced to reverse his political course. Whipping up pan-Serbian fervor no longer served Milosevic's interests and he abandoned all talk of a Greater Serbia.

The Serbs' manipulative role of the media was understood by serious students of the region as early as 1991. What they couldn't understand was why the media took so long to reach the same conclusion. There were, however, some exceptional reporters who were not misled and got the story right. Egon Scotland of *Suddeutsche Zeitung* died in the attempt. But the overwhelming majority were either too lazy to investigate or followed the Janet Cooke tradition of journalism. Far fewer innocents would have died had the media heeded journalist emeritus Walter Cronkite's advice: "Journalists must ultimately have a peripheral role because their job is not to educate but to convey facts, not to proselytize, but be objective brokers of information."