

Muddy Waters

A Short Background to the Yugoslav Wars of 1991-95

In this short background, I have tried to bring some clarity to a situation that, many people could not begin to understand, concerning the break up of Yugoslavia. I have tried to sift through some of the dishonest, prejudiced, and self serving information disseminated on this terrible event. It is only with time that much of the information given out as fact and truth has been seen for what it is. It is also testament to how powerful and insidious are the systems that strive to convince us that black is white and white is black. The whirligig had done its job, the mechanical device, sometimes called the mass media, designed to imitate simple motions, mind numbing in its repetition, comforting in its simplicity. Deadly in its outcome. When I arrived in Yugoslavia in July 1992, to take art activities in a refugee camp, gut feeling and common sense were my main defences against the plethora of expert opinions and self serving governments and politicians.

Firstly, to a large degree, we can do away with overly complex six hundred year old history lessons on the Balkans. Apart from confusing the situation, which seemed to be the aim of many commentators and politicians in the West and Serbia, it cannot contribute to any contemporary and coherent understanding of the resultant wars in the FRY *Former Republic of Yugoslavia* in 1991-1995. If I do use ancient history, it is only to rectify some of the misrepresentations or falsehoods used to portray the Serbians as having legitimate claims historically upon lands they have seized by brutal military conquest.

The main ethnic groups, or states, who constituted the main players in the break up of FRY are Serbian, Croatian, Bosnian and to a lesser extent Slovenes. These players make up four of the largest six states that made up the SFRY *Socialist Federal Republics of Yugoslavia* before the break up in 1991 - 1995. The smallest two states that played more minor roles are Macedonia and Montenegro. The states of Slovenia, Croatia, Bosnia – Hercegovina and Macedonia all voted internally for sovereign independence from SFRY. Of the six states that made up the SFRY, only Serbia and Montenegro remained to make up what is now known as Yugoslavia.

Religion and the awakening of ethnic hatreds by extreme Nationalists from the main ethnic groups were initially used to foment fear and violence in a post communist Yugoslavia. The tools in the Nationalist toolbox to achieve these aims were fear via the television, printed media, violence, bullying, and intimidation. During the periods of 1991 -1992, any serious attempts to show the peoples of Yugoslavia a balanced picture had been all but abandoned by the small independent press and TV stations. The mainstream media in Belgrade, Serbia was controlled by the State and Slobodan Milosevic. Croatian state manipulated media became influenced by its President, Franjo Tudjman. A diet of sensational reporting, often false, and misleading, promoted by the Nationalists, left the people with the impression that their particular group was being singled out, persecuted, and murdered. Often the footage of burning houses and corpses would be used by the same side claiming they were ‘Serbs’ or ‘Croatian’. Also, a proportion of film footage came from the period of WWII. It could be dangerous for editors on all sides not to follow the party line. The Serbian media probably became the worse of the two main protagonists with independent journalists, editors and anyone else not following President Milosevic’s line being sacked, beaten up, or assassinated. The majority of the TV media and press had fallen under the control of state, or the indirect control of Milosevic and his SPS, *Socialist Party of Serbia* and President Tudjman’s HDZ, *Croatian Democratic Union*. Having encouraged Serbian Nationalism for his own purposes, as did Tudjman to some extent, in Croatia with Croatian Nationalism, Milosevic would ramp up the fear factor as needed in the already propagandised Serbian population. The media

would often refer to Croatian politicians as the “Ustasha” and the Ustasha government of Croatia. In turn, the Croatian media and government would refer to the Serbian government and people as “Fascist” and “Chetniks” The names “Chetnik” and “Ustasha” refer to WWII period armed extremist groups. In the early 1990s, Serbian Nationalists would talk of the Ustasha building concentration camps for the Serbs. Both Chetnik and Ustasha groups will be covered in more detail later in this chapter.

When it came the turn of the Bosnian “Muslims” the Serb politicians and media would hysterically refer to Bosnia’s Muslims as Islamic Fundamentalists and Mujahdeen. These Mujahdeen, the Serbian people were told, were roaming the Bosnian and Kosovan countryside massacring whole Serb villages. Serbs were also told that the Bosnians were planning the creation of an Islamic Fundamentalist state in Bosnia. It seems that similar propaganda on the part of the Bosnian Government in the conflict was absent of extreme Nationalist rhetoric and far less rabid than Serb or Croatian indulgences. After the onset of the ethnic cleansing and destruction of the Bosnian infrastructure by the Serbs, and later by the Croats, the Bosnians had no real access to a fully functioning organised media. It seemed that the Serbs were the ones planning for a greater Serbia, but if the situation presented itself, Tudjman would also jump on the bandwagon and create a Greater Croatia. The Nationalist grave diggers in Serbia and Croatia were both exhuming the corpse of hatred and fear, reinventing it for their own grisly purposes.

The Bosnian Muslims were demonized by the Serbs from the period of the Ottoman Empire right up to WWII and beyond by recounting the Handzar divisions, set up by the Nazi’s to accommodate Bosnian Muslim volunteers who sided with the Germans. At the time, some Bosnian Muslims thought they had a better chance at nationhood with the Germans. This was a biased oversimplification of an event that had comparisons in both Serbian and Croatian history in WWII. The extreme and induced hatred on the part of the Serbs towards the Bosnians and Croats would simmer throughout the 1980s. All of the peoples of this particular region in fact share a South Slav heritage. The Muslims of the region could be classed as South Slavs who converted to Islam during the rule of the Ottoman Turks. In the 1380s, the Ottoman Turk Empire started to move in on the Balkan region. Serbia fought back aided by troops provided by King Tvrtko of Bosnia, to fight with Serbian Prince Lazar at Kosova Polje in 1389. It is conveniently forgotten by Serb historians that Croatian and Bosnian forces also fought in the action. Roughly a third of the forces that faced Prince Lazar that day consisted of Serbs, turncoat nobles who had accepted Ottoman suzerainty in order to hold on to their lands. This was yet another fact conveniently forgotten by Serb historians. Serbia fell to the Ottoman Turks at Kosova Polje (Field of Blackbirds) but Bosnia fought on until finally defeated by the Turks in 1463.

Over hundreds of years, the Ottoman Empire and the religion of Islam became dominant in Serbia and Bosnia. With the slow disintegration of the Ottoman Empire in the 1800s, the Eastern Orthodox Church of Russia and Greece started to play a role in Serbia. In the 1870s, the Catholic Austro-Hungarian Empire started to cut a deal with the Ottomans to rule Bosnia. Croatia and Slovenia were already incorporated into the Austro- Hungarian Empire. Bosnia being sandwiched between Croatia and Serbia became a fertile hunting ground for the Catholic and Orthodox churches. The mountainous and inaccessible terrain of Bosnia is probably one of the reasons why the Catholic and Orthodox churches never gained much ground in Central Bosnia. Even in the 1990s, due to Serb propaganda, Bosnians were labelled as being Muslim. This misrepresentation was quickly seized upon and repeated by the western politicians and media. Although for the majority of Bosnians, this related more to their Turkish culture rather than practising strict Islamic religion. Although there are Mosques all over Bosnia, it does not make the entire population practising Muslims. Just as there are Christian churches all over England, the fact remains that only 7% of the entire

population are practising Christians. The churches in England are historical religious legacies that are used for services such as Marriages, Christenings, and Funerals; this is similar to the use of Mosques in Bosnia.

By the 19th century, the Serbs had eliminated and driven out the large Muslim presence in Serbia and destroyed all of the Mosques. To the present day Serb, it is the Bosnian Muslim who has been reinvented as an enemy, by extreme Nationalist politicians and criminals for their own agendas. In propaganda, they become the same “Muslim Turks” who defeated them on the battle field at Kosova Polje in 1389. Serbia has been seeking an irrational and perverse retribution on the Bosnian “Muslim Turks” right up to the present day.

Psychiatrists call a significant event that unites a group of people a “chosen trauma” a term coined by Doctor Vamik Volkin. This chosen trauma becomes almost mythic, historic events, enshrined in imagery and collective memory. It is something so serious and severe that it humiliates the group and its members who either have to live with that humiliation for the rest of their lives or seek to avenge it. If the humiliation or desire for revenge is carried through to future generations, the descendants of the original group take up the torch, and the chosen trauma becomes an ethnic or a national marker for the group. Just as the Holocaust is a chosen trauma for Jews, or September 11 for Americans, so the defeat at Kosova Polje has become the chosen trauma for Serbs. And even though these events can in no way be compared or equated, Kosova Polje is nevertheless a critical element in the Serbian sense of being”.

In 1918, after the First World War, the imperial powers of Europe created the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes. But not long after, the Serbs had started to move in on Croatia and other regions in the area. In 1941, the Germans invaded Yugoslavia. During the period 1941 - 1945, various Croatian and Serbian politicians and opportunists allied themselves to, or co-operated with, the occupying Germans to some degree or other.

In 1941, the Croatian dictator Ante Pavelic formed the fascist NDH *Ustasha state* under the protection of the Nazi's. Pavelic engineered a three pronged policy towards the Serbs living in Croatia. The policy consisted of deporting one third of the Serb population and converting another third to Roman Catholicism. His Ustasha units would exterminate the remainder. Some historians would put the eventual death toll at between 500,000 and 750,000 although Croatian and other historians would dispute these figures. In his recent book “*Bespuc'a*” (Wilderness) Franjo Tudjman, in an attempt to remove some of the guilt associated with the NDH put the death toll at around 100,000. The still disputed figures include the deaths of Serbs, who made up the majority, Jews, Gypsies, and Croats who objected to NDH rule. It must be remembered that not all Croats supported the fascist NDH or its policies.

Meanwhile the Serbian fascist regime of Milan Nedic in Belgrade, also supported by the Nazi's, declared itself to be “*Judenrien*” meaning, clean of Jews, apparently the first country in the world to do so. The mass killing of Jews by the Serbian Nedic regime is suspiciously absent from many history books and the media blitz on the Yugoslav conflict. What was presented by western politicians and its media seems to be selective histories that mask and aid there own biased and dithering policies towards Yugoslavia. Many governments and politicians in Europe supported Milosevic and his aim of holding together the Federation of Yugoslavia under Serb domination. To many in the corridors of European power such as France and the UK, Serbia had been an ally in two World Wars and still held certain affections or allegiances, not to mention links to the Monarchy.

When war broke out between Serbia and Croatia in the summer of 1991 and later in Bosnia in 1992, the West declared that the three sides bore equal responsibility for the conflict. This suited western politicians, especially the British, as this interpretation confused the majority of the public in being able to draw any conclusions as to who the guilty parties really were.

They stated that all sides were guilty; that the conflict was a civil war, ignoring the obvious organised aggression by Serbia and later to some extent Croatia. And that the democratically-elected multiethnic Bosnian government was in fact just a “Muslim” “warring faction” on a par with the Bosnian-Serb leader Radovan Karadzic and Bosnian-Croatian leader Mate Boban. Western governments and diplomats consistently pressurised the Bosnian government to negotiate with the aggressors, and tried to impose peace-plans upon Bosnia which would sign away half the country to Serbia and Croatia. Most British papers in fact opposed the recognition of Croatia and Slovenia but for totally the wrong reasons. The UK and US media along with so called military experts waxed lyrical about the formidable, much feared Serb guerrilla fighters who once took on 27 German divisions (*disputed*) and that their forebears had been instilled with the same super human prowess. Regarding the 1991-95 conflict, nobody seemed to point out that the majority of the Serb forces initially engaged in the fighting were rag tag bands of criminals, Football Hooligans, Nationalists, and looters calling themselves “Irregular Forces” and “Paramilitaries”.

After the Nazi occupation of WWII Yugoslavia a Serbian army officer named Draza Mihailovic formed a group of fighters called the Chetniks, vowing to fight the Nazi's. Loyal to the Serbian Monarchy, the main Chetnik aim was to fight for the return of a monarchist Serbia. Although the Chetniks did on occasion fight, the Nazi's, the Ustasha, and a third group called the partisans. Josip Broz Tito formed the partisans in 1941, and attracted all ethnic groups. Mihailovic had instructions from the royal government in exile to take to the hills and, wait for an allied victory. The lack of Chetnik activity against the Nazis was, claimed Mihailovic, because of a Nazi policy of executing 100 Serbs for every German soldier killed. It has to be noted that this Nazi policy was not exclusive to the Chetnik Serbs. With the Chetniks proving to be an ineffective fighting force, the allies eventually switched their backing to the Partisans who incidentally, had many Serb volunteers.

Partisan historian *Jozo Tomasevich*, writing in the early seventies, has provided documentary evidence that the Chetniks also received weapons and political protection from the Croatian Ustasha authorities. Thus on 28 May 1942, it is claimed, the Bosnian Chetniks signed a treaty with the Ustasha, Article 5 of which ran as follows: As long as there is danger from armed Partisan bands, the Chetnik formations will co-operate voluntarily with the Croatian military forces in fighting and destroying the Partisans and in these operations they will be under the overall command of Croatian armed forces. In these operations Chetnik commanders will be in command of their own detachments The Chetniks formations can engage in operations against the Partisans on their own, but this they have to report, on time, to the Croatian military commanders. The agreement also provided for the supply of ammunition to the Chetniks, the caring for of wounded Chetniks in Croatian hospitals, the granting of financial assistance to the Chetniks' widows and orphans equivalent to that given to those of Croatian soldiers and the guarantee of civilian life for Serbs in Chetniks-controlled areas. This agreement was favoured by the Germans, and on July 15, 1942 General Glaise proposed that a central office be established in Zagreb for its implementation. On 20 December 1941, the Chetniks leader Draza Mihailovic sent a directive to his commanders in Montenegro, describing Chetnik war aims. These included “the creation of a Great Yugoslavia and within it of a Great Serbia which is to be ethnically pure and is to include Serbia [meaning also Macedonia], Montenegro, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Srijem, the Banat, and Backa”; “the creation of contiguous frontiers between Serbia and Montenegro, as well as between Serbia and Slovenia by cleansing the Moslem population from Sanjak and the Moslem and Croat populations from Bosnia and Herzegovina. This policy on the part of the Chetniks resulted in the Moslems losing an even higher proportion of their population during World War Two than did the Serbs. According to the Serb demographer Bogoljub Kocovic, 8.1% of all Moslems were killed, compared to 7.3% of all Serbs. In January 1942, the

Partisans called upon all Serbs, Croats, and Moslems in Bosnia and Herzegovina to take up a “common struggle against the Germans, Ustasha, and Chetniks”. The call was heeded: by the end of 1942 the Partisan struggle had become a mass movement; by the mid-1943 Croats and Moslems outnumbered Serbs among the Partisans operating on Ustasha territory, where most of the fighting was taking place (though it should be remembered that the Serbs still formed a larger percentage among the Partisans than among the population of the Ustasha state at large); by the end of 1943 there were eleven Croatian, seven Bosnian and five Slovenian Partisan divisions; by the end of the war the Croatian Partisans numbered 150,000, *Jozo Tomasevich*.

After the end of World War II, Josip Broz Tito ruled Yugoslavia until his death in 1980. Promoted to Marshall Tito he had held the many states of Yugoslavia together with what amounted to a balancing act between the federal states. This was accomplished by various means both oppressive, to start with, then political and social. Tito made sure that no one ethnic group or state held an unequal amount of power. With Serbia being, the largest republic with ten million people Tito felt that Serbia had too much power within the federation. To compensate for this he gave autonomy to two regions of Serbia. He created the autonomous regions of Vojvodina and Kosova. Vojvodina consisted of a large percentage of ethnic Hungarians, and Kosova on the Albanian border consisted of 90% ethnic Albanians. This had the effect of cutting the Serb population down to six million and restricting its power within the state of SFRY. Each of the six states and the two autonomous regions had a vote on matters concerning the SFRY. Even though, the Serbs held more than a fair share of positions in the police, army, and government. Tito tried to shift the focus of Nationalist identities with both policy and rhetoric. His rallying cry for all Yugoslavs became “Brotherhood and Unity”. This meant that the ethnic groups of Yugoslavia should only think of themselves as Yugoslavs and to unite for the benefit of the state.

Before his death, Tito laid plans for the continuation and survival of SFRY. After his death in 1980, a rotating presidency came into force whereby an elected member from each of the six republics would take a turn at holding the presidency in Yugoslavia.

Throughout the 1980s, the Serbs would start to manipulate the system and edge towards a greater Serbia through the propagandised upsurge in Serbian Nationalism. Croatia too started to play around with the idea of a resurgent Croatian Nationalism. Other states within the federation would start to feel uneasy with the Serb trend for power gathering. In late 1980 the leader of the Serbian communists, Slobodan Milosevic would put into place the last details of his plan to gain control of the SFRY and create a greater Serbia.

In 1989 Milosevic revoked the autonomy of Vojvodina and Kosovo he also gained control of Montenegro, which gave the Serbs four out of the eight assembly votes. The Muslim Albanians of Kosova would suffer brutal police and army repression as the Serbs started a re-Serbianisation of the region. Milosevic also started a drive to promote more Serbian officers within the army and recruit more Serbian soldiers. Because the Serbs held a large proportion of the powerful positions within the SFRY, their task was made easier. The Serbs held 70% of senior officer positions in the JNA. In Croatia, fearful of Milosevic’s intentions, Tudjman started to redress the imbalance of these Serb held positions. Milosevic presented it as proof of the anti Serb Nationalism, portrayed in his rabid propaganda. In fact, there was an element of truth in Milosevic’s propaganda offensive in that Tudjman’s HDZ did have a policy of tacit persecution of the Serbs living within Croatia. It must also be remembered that just like the policies of Ante Pavelic and the NDH not all Croats supported all of the policies of Tudjman’s HDZ.

Courtesy of Serb historians and intellectuals, propaganda in the form of six hundred year old history lessons on how most of the Balkans historically belonged to the Serbs would be used by Serb politicians. The argument at its Nationalist extreme ran that, wherever a Serb

lived, or had lived, even in medieval times, that should and would be claimed as Serbian territory. That they had probably taken it off another people by force, did not figure in the equation. With this child like logic, because one of my brothers lives in Kentucky USA, I can lay claim to a part of that state. I am also covered by the simple Serb argument of; I have a right because three hundred years ago the US was a British territory, before it was taken away by force. I do find it amusing, and sad, when nations through their so called intellectual historians, often via their politicians conveniently package their history with a full stop when it suits their purpose.

In 1986 the Serbian Academy of Sciences, produced a Memorandum defining the areas and proposals for a greater Serbia. This Memorandum is almost identical to a similar document written in 1941 by the Chetnik ideologist, Dr. Stevan Moljevic. Moljevic's document was also similar to one written in the 1800s. The following is a quote from Moljevic's book "Our way", "... to create and organize a compact Serbia, which should include the entire ethnic territory on which Serbs (Serbian people) live, and to assure the necessary strategic and transportation lines and networks, as well as economic regions in order to make possible and secure free economic, political and cultural life and development once and forever. Those strategic and transportation lines and networks necessary for the safety, life and survival of Serbia, which today in some places do not have a Serbian majority, must serve Serbia and the Serbian people in order to prevent further hardships for the Serbs caused by their neighbours every time they have a chance. The movements and exchanging of population, especially the Croats, from Serbian territories and Serbs from Croatian territories, is the only way to carry out the division and make better relations between them, and by that to remove the possibility of repeating the terrible crimes that occurred in the last war in the entire areas where Serbs and Croats were mixed and where Croats and Muslims were systematically exterminating Serbs." Here I find it hard not to think of the Israelis concerning this quotation.

Of course, after the presentation of this document the Serbian Chetniks assisted by the JNA would wipe out entire Bosnian "Muslim" villages with a death toll running into the tens of thousands. The Serbs endlessly portray themselves as victims, suffering at the hands of Croats, Turks, and Nazis throughout their history. If any of the six states should have the edge on victim status, it is surely the Bosnians or 'Muslims' as the Serbs and the West preferred to call to them.

Croatia and Slovenia both declared independence on June 25 1991. Both states had the support of the Catholic Church via the Vatican and, Austrian and German governments. A European commission set up to look at independence recognition said that only Slovenia and Macedonia fulfilled the requirements for independence. Croatia failed on two counts, it did not control all of its territory, the Serbs had seized one third of the country, and it had not guaranteed the rights of the minorities living within Croatia, visa vie the Serbs in the Krajina region of Croatia. However, the German government of the time forced through the recognition of both states. The Germans managed to compromise the British and French governments into accepting the votes for independence. Some say that a deal had been concluded over the issue at the time, of the European Union, and that a certain amount of horse trading was done over the matter.

After a brief war with the JNA, Slovenia was allowed to secede from Yugoslavia. Milosevic said he had no interest in Slovenia, mainly because there were no Serbs living there. His map of greater Serbia did not extend that far. It has been alleged that the ten day war had been staged by Milosevic and the JNA to carry on the pretence of trying to hold Yugoslavia together. This is what he had told the western powers. This was the pretext with which he created the conflict in Croatia, to protect the Serbs that lived there, from the Croatian Ustasha. Undoubtedly, this had some truth in it but the western governments did not

pursue this matter that had dangerously laid the ground for a ripe intervention by Milosevic's Serbian irregular gangs. Serbs in Croatia were genuinely fearful and open to all manner of suggestion from the extreme Nationalist self appointed thugs from Serbia proper.

This was exactly the so called reason that Hitler invaded Czechoslovakia, to protect the ethnic Germans in the Czech region of Sudetenland. Or so he said. The Czech situation could be used as a reasonable comparison on certain levels with Yugoslavia. Europe did not want to upset Hitler and embarked on a Neville Chamberlain led policy of appeasement. Political pressure and arm twisting came to bear on the Czech government to give up Sudetenland to Hitler. Looked at another way almost 20% of Ukraine's population are Russian. Croatia has a Serbian population of less than 12%. The Nazis set up a puppet state in the Ukraine just as they did in Croatia under the Fascist state of the Ustasha. Russians suffered the same in the Ukraine as the Serbs in Croatia under the puppet Fascist Ustasha state. There is a very large population of Russians living in the Ukraine. When the Ukraine declared independence from Russia, the Russians did not march into Ukraine and start shelling Yalta like the Serbs shelled Dubrovnik or Vukovar or Sarajevo. Looked at from any angle the Serbian response to the break up of Yugoslavia could not be justified in any shape or form. There almost undoubtedly had to be an ulterior motive, such as a greater Serbia. As far as the Croatians were concerned, why should the Serbs, making up only one eighth of the Croatian population get one third of their country.

That western politician's wilfully repeated the Serb mantra of "ethnic war" and "warring factions" has to be looked upon in a very suspicious light. Milosevic's claims that, the JNA had only acted to separate the factions and, that Serbia was not involved in the Bosnian conflict, were patently false. An eye witness report from *Philip Sherwell of the Daily Telegraph* April 16 1992, goes some way toward proving this, "the Federal Army has this week strung a massive presence of men, artillery, and tanks along the road from Serbia as it surges into Bosnia". The point that the JNA should have been surging *out* of Bosnia, did not seem to concern western politicians. Milosevic repeated the mantra that, "I am preserving the Yugoslav Federal State".

When war broke out between Serbia and Croatia in the summer of 1991 and later in Bosnia in 1992, the Western and European nations declared that the three sides bore equal responsibility for the conflict. This suited western politicians, especially the British, as this interpretation confused the majority of the public in being able to draw any conclusions as to who the guilty party or parties really were. It did seem that the British Government did not want to get involved in this war. They stated that all sides are guilty and that the conflict is a civil war, ignoring the obvious aggression by Serbia and, to a small extent Croatia; and that the democratically-elected multinational Bosnian Government was in fact just another "warring faction". Other factions being Bosnian-Serb warlord Radovan Karadzic of the self proclaimed Republika Srpska who had seized part of central Bosnian territory and the Croat Mate Boban of the self proclaimed Herzeg-Bosnia who had also seized part of Bosnia on the Dalmatian coast side of Bosnia. The west consistently pressurised the Bosnian government to negotiate with the aggressors, and tried to impose peace-plans upon Bosnia which signed away half the country to Serbia and Croatia via the two self proclaimed regions Herzeg-Bosnia and Republika Srpska.

The British media seemed to me to be doing their utmost to whitewash over what was happening in the FRY. This did much to muddy the waters and seemed to work in Serbia's favour. They described the conflict as essentially tribal and inter-ethnic, so not amenable to solution or the taking of sides, which suited Karadzic and Milosevic. It sometimes seemed that the media was printing and presenting exactly what Karadzic and Milosevic wanted. The media also indulged themselves with insidious pro Serbian propaganda concerning 600 year old history lessons on the Balkans. Some British papers in fact opposed the recognition of

Croatia and Slovenia but for totally the wrong reasons. The UK and US media and so called military experts waxed lyrical about the formidable, much feared Serb guerrilla fighters. Nobody seemed to point out that the majority of the forces initially engaged in the fighting were rag tag bands of Serbian criminal Nationalist gangs, Paramilitaries, looters and Irregular Forces, some with glorious sounding names such as the “White Eagles” and the “Tigers”

The head of the UN, Boutros - Boutros Ghali stated in a report that, ‘the Yugoslav army and Bosnian-Serb irregulars were independent and had no control or support from Milosevic in Serbia. All that could be deduced from this statement is that the UN was playing the western politicians ball game of non intervention at any cost, or he was a very naive and stupid man. Given some of his later utterances during the conflict I would tend go with the latter spiced by limitations placed on him by the more powerful nations of the UN itself.

Exactly what US, and European politicians were aiming for in SFRY will probably be argued over for years to come. But the notion that some skulduggery was afoot, but where it stemmed from and when it started would be hard to pin down.

A year before the breakup of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, on Nov. 5, 1990, the U.S. Congress passed the 1991 Foreign Operations Appropriations Law 101-513. This bill was a signed death warrant. After this law was passed, the CIA issued an unusual public report described in the New York Times in which it “predicted that the Federated Yugoslavia will break apart most probably in the next 18 months and that civil war is highly likely.” The legislation further required U.S. personnel in all international financial institutions such as the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund to enforce this cut-off policy for all credits and loans. There was one final provision. Only forces that the U.S. State Department defined as "democratic forces" would receive funding. This meant an influx of funds to small right-wing nationalist parties in a financially decimated region suddenly thrown into crisis by the overall funding cut-off. The distribution of these funds would be through the NED *National Endowment for Democracy*.

US State Department sources confirmed that the statements of the former US Secretary James Baker, who said in his visit to Belgrade on June 21, 1991, that it is important to preserve the old Yugoslavia, practically gave a green light to Serbian President Slobodan Milosevic to launch the aggression on Slovenia and Croatia. This statement by Baker seems to contradict 101-513, which encourages elections that would, in all probability increase the drive towards separatism by legitimizing the Nationalists within SFRY. There are also many other examples of these policy inconsistencies by the US and Europe throughout the conflict.

The Croatian independence vote gave Milosevic the excuse he needed. Using the JNA as his tool, he plunged what was left of SFRY into a bloody conflict that would last for four years. Milosevic had no intention of letting the whole of Croatia or Bosnia gain full independence. Some western politicians even blamed Croatia and Slovenia for the ensuing conflict after they themselves had recognised their independence in far from satisfactory conditions or terms. In fact, the whole situation progressed far too quickly. The west had spent the previous few months lamely trying to hold SFRY together under the iron fist of Milosevic. At the time World attention was focused on the international coalition, the Bush administration was assembling to destroy Iraq. With Milosevic in the driving seat of the Serbian steamroller the Slovenes, Croats, and Bosnians had little choice but to vote for independence. It must also be noted that both Slovenia and Croatia did some pushing of Milosevic’s steamroller for their own ends.

Aleksa Djilas, a Fellow of the Russian Research Centre at Harvard University writes, “Milosevic seems to have allied himself permanently with the politics of fear. He thrives on it and is always on the lookout for the hostility and conflict that produce it. This is one of the deeper causes of the Yugoslav civil war: Milosevic counted on the war, the ultimate condition of fear, to unite Serbs around him. That is why he refused to look for political

solutions to the persecution of Serbs in Croatia after Franjo Tudjman came to power in May 1990, and to the erosion of the Serbs' position in Bosnia-Herzegovina, after the Muslim leader Alija Izetbegovic became its president in November 1990. Milosevic welcomed the Serbs' increased sense of insecurity and was only too glad to plunge them into a war in which they would have only him for protection”.

All the same, the Croatians could have been a little more understanding of the sensitivities of the Serbs in the Krajina region of Croatia. The Croatians knew about all the rabid propaganda the Krajina Serbs had been fed. In some areas of Croatia right wing Nationalists were dishing a similar diet to the Croatian people. Milosevic had started the steamroller of propaganda and the Krajina Serbs had been encouraged to jump on. Once on board the Krajina Serbs were in no mood to listen to “the fascist Ustasha” President, Franjo Tudjman and his HDZ.

In the mid to late eighties extreme Croatian Nationalism started to rear its ugly head again. Under Tito, all Nationalist groups were banned and it was even illegal to fly the red and white chequerboard flag of the old Ustashe, NDH *Independent State of Croatia*. In 1991, the old Ustasha would return to haunt the Serbs in the guise of the extreme right wing group HSP *Croatian Party of Right*. The HSP was re-formed in 1991 by Ante Paradžik who was later assassinated and replaced by Dobroslav Paraga. The HSP were a marginal party that had no chance of overall success in an election. The party had a paramilitary wing called HOS, *Croatian defence Force* headed by General Blaz Kraljevic. Early in the war the HOS had tacit support from Croatian President, Franjo Tudjman the leader of the ruling Croatian HDZ, *Croatian Democratic Union* government. Local Croats and Muslims, Croatian émigrés and foreign mercenaries and volunteers all fought for the HOS. Many Muslims joined the HOS because its leaders pledged to keep the territory of Bosnia- Herzegovina intact.

It is ironic to note that in the 1980s Dobroslav Paraga, was adopted by AI, *Amnesty International* as a “Prisoner of Conscience” He was jailed by the SFRY for campaigning for human rights for all ethnic peoples of Yugoslavia! It is a shame he forgot the road that he had travelled.

Milosevic would use the emergence of the HOS to convince the Serbian people that if Croatia gained independence it would be the “Ustasha nightmare” all over again. There were still Serbs who had memories of the awful killing sprees of the Ustasha “Black Shirts” in the Second World War. In reality, the HOS had no mainstream support in Croatia at that time, but this made no difference to Milosevic and his media machine. With plenty of propaganda, he would instil and use the fears of the Serb people for his own political ends. Using the Police and JNA, he would arm and encourage Serbs living in Croatia to seize up to one third of Croatia. Mostly the areas seized had a large Serb population but, not always. After the insurrections he would hopefully annexe them to his greater Serbia. By doing, this Milosevic indirectly garnered support for the HOS and other right wing groups within Croatia and could eventually justify his rhetoric.

In towns like Vukovar near the Serbian border armed groups of HOS were quick to mobilise, along with the newly formed ZNG, *Croatian National Guard* when the town was attacked and surrounded by Chetnik paramilitaries, supported by the JNA *Yugoslav National Army*. Even before the fighting erupted in Vukovar there had been skirmishes between local Serb and Croat Nationalist groups in nearby towns. In fact, the JNA and Serbian paramilitary forces had surrounded the town and were bombing and shelling it two months before Croatian independence. Vukovar became a rallying cry for the Croatian people. Because Croatia had no army in 1991 apart from the ZNG, Tudjman initially gave his support to the HOS, but only while it suited his purpose. With Tudjman’s backing, the leader of HOS Dobroslav Paraga would later use these units along with the Bosnian-Croat HVO *Croatian Defence Council* to foment right wing extremism in areas of Western Bosnia.

The HVO, once strong enough, on the orders of Tudjman, would disarm and later arrest the leaders of HOS. In an effort to maintain unity, the HVO and the HOS signed an agreement in August 1992, which officially linked the two forces under the banner of the HVO. General Blaz Kraljevic was killed in August 1992 in mysterious circumstances. Other members of HOS would die in unclear circumstances and others would disappear. The HOS had outlived its usefulness. Initially the HOS had gained a reputation as a hard fighting unit who would undertake daring raids on both Serbian militias and the JNA. Under alleged pressure from the US, Tudjman arrested the HOS leaders and suppressed the organisation. His full support would now be concentrated on the HVO.

HVO and HOS both had different agendas when it came to Bosnia. The HVO wanted to partition certain parts of Bosnia which Tudjman would later incorporate into a greater Croatia. HOS - HSP on the other hand fought to keep Bosnia intact and at a later date incorporate the whole of Bosnia into a greater Croatia. Fighting alongside and, sometimes against these two main armies were numerous independent militias, and armed local gangs. This situation was reputed to be at its worst in the Herzegovina region of Bosnia where mafia gangs and other independent units fought for land money and power.

Tudjman and Bosnian President Alija Izetbegovic signed a defence pact in July 92 with the Serbs in mind. But to Tudjman, like the HOS, the Bosnians were expendable allies in his quest for a greater Croatia. It is also alleged that Tudjman and Milosevic had a secret deal to divide Bosnia between Croatia and Serbia. By the end of 1992, Tudjman had turned the HVO against the fledgling Bosnian army. The Bosnians found themselves fighting on three fronts. The forces ranged against them included the JNA, Serbian backed Croatian-Serbs, Serbian backed Bosnian-Serbs, and the Bosnian-Croatian HVO backed by Tudjman and his fledgling HV *Croatian army*, and the HOS.

On March 1 1992, with the backing and advice of the western powers the people of Bosnia voted to secede from the remnants of Yugoslavia and become an independent nation state. 99.4% of the votes opted for full independence with a 63% turnout. In the referendum only the Croats and the Bosnians voted. On March 3 1992, the Republic of Bosnia declared itself independent. The Serbs in Bosnia boycotted the vote on the 'advice' of their leaders and were instead led into along the road to war and violence. On the night before the vote for independence, they declared their own state of Republika Srpska. The breakaway state would be headed by Radovan Karadzic reputed intellectual and psychiatrist. "You Muslims are not ready for war," he said. "If it comes, it will mean your extinction." This statement can hardly be construed as anything but a threat of Genocide. He had been given overwhelming military superiority by Milosevic via the JNA. The strength of Karadzic's "Bosnian Serbs" came from their receipt of 80,000 troops and heavy weapons from the JNA. To the horror of the Croats, the UN had allowed the JNA to remove massive amounts of weaponry and supplies from Croatian territory. Many of these weapons would be given to Karadzic and his newly formed BSA *Bosnian Serb Army*. Bosnia had nothing but local police forces and the TO *Territorial Defence Force* with which to defend itself.

In fear of a Russian or Western cold war invasion all constituent republics of the old Yugoslavia had their own TO. This system required universal military service and training in warfare. This ensured that cadres of soldiers, trained in guerrilla warfare would be available nation-wide. They would also be able to operate minus a central command. Weapons caches and supplies were placed throughout the country. The military also organised reserve TO units around workplaces to ensure the wide distribution of manpower and weapons. Before the war had even started in Bosnia or Croatia Milosevic had ordered the JNA to disarm the Croatian, Bosnian, and Slovenian TO. Milosevic reportedly tricked Izetbegovic by claiming all of the TOs, including the Serbs were being disarmed. Only a token disarmament of Serbian TOs took place.

Within a matter of weeks, the Serbs had seized by force 70% of Bosnian land and, the people were forcibly removed from the land in their tens of thousands. Bosnians and Croats were massacred in the thousands and those lucky enough to escape death were held in Serb detention camps. Many Serbs also suffered but not in the same numbers or extent to which the Bosnians did. The Bosnians being the most populace bore the brunt of the attacks. Thousands of men would be interned at detention camps in barbaric and degrading conditions, for no other reason than their ethnicity.

The true horror was not made public until July 92 when an American journalist named Roy Gutman collated information from fleeing refugees to reveal what the Serbs were up to. Journalists such as Ed Vulliamy and Penny Marshall managed to film Serbian run camps such as Omarska, Keraterm and Trnopolje. A new horror surfaced into the public's psyche. The Serbs initially denied that these camps existed, but then alleged they were voluntary hostels for Bosnian men.

Apparently, western governments had been supplied with information on what had been going on for several weeks, but chose to downplay the whole issue. The Bosnian government had informed them twice as to what the Serbs were doing regarding the camps and many other issues. George Kenny, a US State Department official resigned in protest at American policy in Bosnia. State Department policy he said amounted to "Let's pretend this is not happening".

Radovan Karadzic of the Bosnian-Serbs even used this to his advantage. He told western governments that the prisoners would be freed if the UN removed them from Serb Territory. This strategy would implicate the UN in ethnic cleansing. It would also create a huge refugee problem that western countries would be obliged to deal with. Which, they were very reluctant to do.

The Australian prosecutor, Grant Niemann, of the war crimes tribunal at The Hague said, "Omarska was, an integral part of the ethnic cleansing policy of the Yugoslav president, Slobodan Milosevic. This is about a government policy of persecution and ethnic cleansing. It was a crime committed on a massive scale".

The Serbs also had special places for Bosnian women where rape and sexual abuse was perpetrated on a massive scale. These so called rape camps were usually located in cafes, hotels, cellars or other similar unobtrusive buildings. Groups of Bosnian women and young girls would be held for the gratification of Serbian soldiers from the frontlines. In some cases, the women would be killed during or after the assault. In other cases, they would be released once impregnated with a Serb baby. The European Community commission estimated that 20,000 Bosnian and Croatian women were raped by Serb forces.

This is not to say that the other forces did not commit any similar crimes. But on the part of the Serbs, the process seems to have been a well organised policy. The list of wanted war criminals is certainly headed by the Serbs for some of the most outrageous atrocities of the whole conflict. The Croats come second on the list for atrocities and detention camps but an overall policy did not seem to be present. At the bottom of the list come the Bosnians who did not start the sequence but certainly did emulate some of the behaviour committed on them by the Serbs and Croats.

This is also not to say that any soldier of any armed force in the world will not and has not committed crimes of this nature. What the British policy toward to the families of Boers in South Africa at the turn off the century makes a good comparison. This can also be applied to the Russians, after Stalingrad in WWII or, the Americans in Vietnam and more recently Iraq and Abu Ghraib. This is nothing new and has a precedent throughout most military history. But concerning the Serbs in Bosnia and Croatia, as in any modern day psychological warfare operation, terror, and fear became tools with which to fix the vital planks in the building of the stage of pure ethnic areas.

Most of the Serb irregular paramilitary units in Bosnia had been redirected from Croatia once they had served their purpose there. Milosevic had also released hundreds of violent prisoners from jails in Serbia if they were willing to go into Bosnia and join the ethnic cleansing. These men, along with units such as Arkan's *Tigers* and Seselj's *White Eagles* would, as intended, gain a reputation for some of the worst in human behaviour such as rape, torture, mass murder, and looting. It is also claimed that Arkan recruited many of his *Tiger* members from the ranks of the renowned *Red Star Belgrade* football supporters club, of which, he was the "Boss". The forces of Seselj and Arkan have been accused of committing some of the most serious violations of the Geneva Conventions and other international humanitarian law.

The *Tigers* were probably one of the most feared units. Not because of any military prowess but because of the sheer level and scale of brutality they inflicted upon innocent civilians. Arkan, real name Zeljko Raznatovic, was himself a convicted bank robber, pimp, and police spy. He was wanted in several European countries for crimes ranging from robbery to murder. Arkan was also alleged to have worked for the SSUP *Yugoslavian Federal Secretariat for Internal Affairs*. The SSUP existed to track down and assassinate Yugoslav dissidents for the old communist regime. Arkan's first reported involvement in the conflict in the SFRY came in November 1990, when he travelled to Knin in Croatia for a meeting of the council of war of the Knin uprising. In 1992, Arkan sought election in Serbia's southern province of Kosovo. His political party, which was backed by Milosevic, was no more than a ruse to convince the west of Serbia's political diversity in Kosovo and, would be used purley as a political tool by Milosevic.

Vojislav Seselj began organising and arming his paramilitary forces in late 1990 and early 1991. The first reported activity of his 'soldiers' was on 1 April 1991. There is substantial evidence that Seselj, like Arkan had direct links to, or the support of the Serbian government and the JNA. In June 1991, Seselj was elected to the Serbian Assembly in a special election. Seselj's campaign was said to be tacitly supported and funded by President Milosevic.

A microscopic example of some of the behaviour of these paramilitary groups was an incident in the summer of 1992 in the Bosnian town of Celopek. A group of paramilitaries called the *Yellow wasps*, named after a cheap alcoholic beverage sold in Belgrade, took over the town. The Bosnian men were detained in the town hall. For three weeks the Wasps, including one of the senior members, Dusan Vuckovic indulged themselves in an orgy of murder, violence, and sexual abuse, on both men and women. Vuckovic had already been certified by doctors in Belgrade as an alcoholic and psychopath. But, this was exactly the sort of man that Milosevic needed to spread terror throughout parts of Bosnia. These well armed but poorly disciplined rabble, backed up by the JNA, conducted "experiments" in atrocities and terror which became quasi official military procedure that helped to set the standard of terror in the four year long war. The aim of the campaign of ethnic cleansing was to expel the Bosnian and Croat populations from areas crucial to the survival of the new Greater Serbia and create a pure Serb state by linking Serb areas of western Bosnia and Croatia with Serbia.

Indeed, it would not be an exaggeration to say that the mechanics of this system of terror were used as a tactic to destroy not only the morale of an entire people but also to destroy an entire culture. Modern military and political culture has now refined this tactic into an art form called Psywar operations or Psychological warfare. Since World War II, the US government has devoted more time and resources to this particular study than any other government in the world. The CIA even produced a manual detailing the process. It was distributed in Nicaragua and other areas of Central America to be subjugated by the US. The manual detailed how to create fear amongst the population, advised terror tactics, and ways to "neutralise" (elected) state officials.

The atrocities and acts of terror committed in Yugoslavia were not the result of a few

drunken rampaging soldiers after a battle. It became an orchestrated campaign that was designed to fulfil a political necessity. Few of the people, who either ordered the atrocities or committed them, in SFRY or elsewhere, would ever be brought to justice and in most cases would be hailed as heroes in their homeland.

In the case of Vuckovic and his *Wasps*, they were arrested by Serbian border guards while attempting to leave Bosnia in a convoy of stolen vehicles. The cars were loaded with looted Bosnian and Croat (and sometimes Serb) property. The booty consisted of twenty kilos of gold, 6000,000 Deuchmarks, artworks, and precious stones. Vuckovic was put on trial by the Serbian leadership as a war criminal. But, this was a ploy by Milosevic to stave of criticism by the west of Serb involvement in war crimes. Vuckovic and the Yellow Wasps had been a sacrificial lamb.

Arkan, like Seselj, had regularly transported plundered goods from Bosnia and Croatia into Serbia, with the apparent permission of Serb authorities. Arkan would become one of the richest men in Serbia and one of the most feared and powerful warlords and gangsters, oh yes, and eventually he became a politician.

At this point, it should be pointed out that the type of violence now engulfing SFRY is not unique to Yugoslavs or the Balkans. Conflict in the Balkans is historically no more or less than in any other part of Europe. The majority of wars in the Balkans have been instigated and pursued by ruthless European and Turkish Imperial powers, while using the Yugoslavs as pawns in their great power games. The French and the Germans fought dozens of times too, and people today don't say the French and Germans just can't live together. There have been centuries of peace in the Balkans, too. Tadeuz Mazowiecki, former UN special human-rights investigator said, "It would be wrong and dangerous to consider these crimes as a specificity of the Balkan Peninsula only. They are possible in all regions in the world. The Balkans is only an alarm call and the scene of a tragedy that can be repeated anytime, almost anywhere.

Personally, I would even go so far as to say that widespread violence on a similar scale could ensue in England or other European nations given the right conditions. There are plenty of people in our own societies who would be more than willing to take up the banner of extremism, death, and destruction. Human nature and how people are so easily conditioned is one of the main factors. Propagandise them for five years, fill their heads with untruth and absurdity, wind them up and off they go. Some already exist in our inner cities such as the murderers of black or Asian people, and the mindless thugs and football 'supporters' that spend their weekends wandering the streets looking for violence and trouble while operating on a $2 + 2 = 5$ logic. The Red Star Belgrade Football Club is testament to that. In any of our UK, inner cities on a Friday and Saturday night can be found people who will beat your brains out and even kill you for no reason at all. Dish out weapons and tell them it is their right, a duty, and their destiny to fight and kill a certain target group. Make their fantasies come true, to loot and rape and kill with impunity. Add some alcohol. Tell them they are the law, the law is no more. Once the satiation and adrenalin come, there will have to be a war to stop it. Others will see and jump on the bandwagon spilling over with stolen loot, some with glee, and others out of fear, or self preservation. The wagon careers out of control, the frenzied drunken passengers shooting and bombing anything that moves, including fellow passengers so as to make more room for their own loot. The devil and the deep blue sea but self preservation deems the wagon to be the safest place to be right now. All the time the siren song of the politician's propaganda calls your name, it's the right thing to do, listen to us, the wagon is your only choice, your destiny, and we know best, $2 + 2 = 5$.

It must also be pointed out that the highly militarised nature of the defence structure of FRY could also have had a critical effect concerning the speed and ferocity with which the conflict escalated. The fireworks were already on the ground and the rabid untruths of Nationalist propaganda and fear lit the touch paper.

People like the British Minister of Foreign Affairs Douglas Hurd did not help matters. In a BBC radio programme, according to him “instability was built into the history and geography of this region”. Also, former peace mediator Lord Peter Carrington said in the same program “since Roman times there have been problems in the Balkan region”. Well I do not know which history books they have read, but it seems to me that Europe and the UK have seen just as much conflict in that same time span, probably more.

The media and western governments daily reflected on the mad and barbarous peoples of Yugoslavia. For any western government to engage in this type of labelling and finger pointing is sheer hypocrisy. The true history of the western nations and their foreign policy adventures is far worse in deed and number than what happened in Yugoslavia. Some of the worst finger pointing came from the American and British politicians and media, both countries built on persecution, slavery and the Genocide of millions of native peoples around the world.

“The Nationalist not only does not disapprove of atrocities committed by his own side, but he has a remarkable capacity for not even hearing about them.” *George Orwell*, “Notes on Nationalism”, 1945.

The saddest part of this whole story is the conclusion by the leader of the British liberals, Paddy Ashdown, who stated that” it is very possible that the situation would have developed differently and finished sooner if the historical facts had been analysed differently. And had Western politics not been based on myths. Maybe then, the air strikes would have happened before 1995 and thousands of lives would have been saved. This way, three years were spent...”Three years that were filled with the suffering, agony and tragedy of losing so many lives all so that we could finally come to the conclusion that we could have figured all this out a long time earlier, when the Gulf crisis was happening”

For nearly five years before the outbreak of war, the Serbian people had been completely overwhelmed by Milosevic’s Serbian propaganda machine. They had been effectively cut off from all outside media influences. Milosevic controlled news media dished up a daily diet of old massacre and atrocity footage with fictitious stories about the Croatian Ustasha building huge concentration camps. Wild stories of barbarous Islamic Mujahdeen roaming the country side massacring whole Serbian villages also featured. On and on and on it went. Very slowly, the propaganda pressure cooker did its work. At the same time, the Ultra Nationalists such as Seselj and Arkan had prominence on Serbian TV as the only people who could be relied upon to help save the Serbian peoples.

Probably another reason for the complete success of the propaganda is the make up of the Serbian population. Apparently, Serbia had an illiteracy rate of 30%. Combine this with the majority of the population being farmers living a simple rural existence. The success of any lies or dogma is almost ensured especially when it comes from the TV or radio. The prospect of analysis or multiple causation do not exist, there are no restraining shades of grey, only the simplistic world of black and white.

Geoff Ryan’s article for an ISG/Socialist Outlook pamphlet, *the murder of Bosnia*, notes, “It is the backward, reactionary nature of the rural populations that explains why war in both Croatia and Bosnia has been so savage and why there has been destruction of cultural and historical symbols on a scale far surpassing that of the Nazi occupation. The rural populations tended to be less ethnically mixed than the cities. Hence the driving out of whole populations from villages. Thus, war was not only waged by the JNA against Croats, Hungarians and Czechs were also forced to flee their villages. By contrast, in the cities many Serbs in Croatia fought against the JNA. In Dubrovnik, the whole of the Serb community remained to defend their city. In Vukovar, a third of the defenders were Serbs, Hungarians, or Ruthenes. Similarly, in Bosnia ‘ethnic cleansing’ has been at its worst in the countryside. In the cities,

the mixed populations continue to fight alongside one another. It is simplistic, therefore, to see the wars in Croatia and Bosnia as purely nationalist in character”.

In 1997, the book “Burn this house” compiled by Serbian, Croatian and Bosnian journalists and historians states in its chapter “The Media Wars”... “For two months, TV Belgrade showed no footage to go with its reports of the shelling of Sarajevo. At TV Novi Sad, written orders were displayed on the walls that reports should not be accompanied by film. Archive footage and static maps were used instead, and the side doing the shelling was not identified”.

So, it cannot be said that all Serbs agreed with what had been perpetrated in their names, a large proportion were just brainwashed by Milosevic and his propaganda machine. Most didn't even have a true picture of what was going on in the rest of Yugoslavia. Others set about the task of ethnic cleansing with a rabid hatred for anything non Serb. The brutality of the Serb machine in Bosnia and Croatia even forced unwilling Serbs to participate out of fear for their own lives and the safety of their families. Many were press ganged into service of the Nationalists quest for a Greater Serbia.

A small incident recorded by Nenad Canak, from Vojvodina in 1993 gives an idea of Serbian aggression, even towards other Serbs. ”In Sarajevo, members of a self-proclaimed Serbian paramilitary formation entered a block of flats at the beginning of the war and drove all of the tenants into the street. On the street, they divided them into two groups “Serbs” and “others”. In the group of Serbs, there were three young men who were invited to join the armed unit. When they refused, they were transferred to the other group. Before the eyes of their Serbian neighbours, they were shot with the others” on the spot. I heard of this incident from one of the Serbs who survived”.

We cannot pretend that Croatian Nationalists did not engage in a similar albeit much less violent process against their own kinsmen. In Osijek, Croatian Eastern Slavonia near the Serb border it is claimed that Croatian extreme Nationalists hired a contract killer to eliminate the local Croatian Police Chief Ante Čičin-Šejn, who was trying to calm the extremely intense situation between Serbs and Croats in and around Osijek. He was attempting to apply the brakes of reason in the face of the Nationalist rush to war. For this, he had to go.

In extreme and violent situations, it is sometimes safer to kill and oppress other people rather than run the risk of being killed oneself or losing your own family. As the three young Serbs found out choosing morality and ethics in the face of terror can have extreme consequences. Morality and ethics can be overshadowed by the dark spectre of extreme fear and imminent death. It can sometimes be far safer, but morally loathsome, to be on the bandwagon than to run the risk of being run over by its wheels!

Leading Nazi leader, Hermann Goering, at the Nuremberg Trials before he was sentenced to death said: "Why of course the people don't want war. Why should some poor slob on a farm want to risk his life in a war when the best he can get out of it is to come back to his farm in one piece? Naturally, the common people don't want war, neither in Russia, nor in England, nor for that matter in Germany. That is understood. But after all it is the leaders of the country who determine the policy, and it is always a simple matter to drag the people along, whether it is a democracy, or a fascist dictatorship, or a parliament, or a Communist dictatorship ... Voice or no voice, the people can always be brought to the bidding of the leaders. That is easy. All you have to do is to tell them they are being attacked, and denounce the pacifists for lack of patriotism and exposing the country to danger."