

Expert Testimony

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1. Summary

Much of Professor Donia's report represents an unimpeachable scholarly consensus and I have not attempted to repeat points of agreement. However, I disagree with key points in his argument both on the historical identity of Bosnia and on specific developments in the period leading up to the collapse of Socialist Federal Yugoslavia in 1991 and in the two years afterwards.

The thesis of a historical continuity of Bosnian identity and even shadow statehood from pre-Ottoman times (*i.e.*, before 1463) until 1991 is seriously flawed. At best it represents a benign parallel to the historical continuity theses of Serb and Croat nationalist historians usually reviled and certainly rejected by most Western scholars.

The modern northern and western borders of Bosnia-Herzegovina were not those of medieval Bosnia. They represent the geo-strategic stand-off between the Habsburg and Ottoman Empires. Boundaries in the medieval period were far from clear-cut as they became in post-Westphalian Europe. Fluidity of identities, allegiances and sovereignty were the norm until the Ottoman conquest in the case of Bosnia when an unprecedented state-system established itself in the Balkans.

Whatever peculiarities Bosnia may have possessed under Ottoman hegemony, its most obvious particularity — the conversion of a large number of its inhabitants to Islam — was wholly dependent on Ottoman conquest. This phenomenon was not specific to Bosnia but also involved Slavs and other pre-Ottoman conquest peoples elsewhere, most significantly in the neighbouring Sandžak of Novi Pazar.

Bosnian Muslim identity extended (and extends) beyond Bosnia-Herzegovina into especially the Sandžak region between Serbia and Montenegro. If it were accepted that Bosnian Muslim identity implied a common community, then Bosnia-Herzegovina would have territorial claims out-

side its internationally-recognised republican borders upon an area of Serbia whose population is about 80% self-declared Muslim — i.e., circa twice the Muslim percentage of the population of Bosnia-Herzegovina.

Of course just as it seems natural for Sandžak Muslims to form their own branch of the SDA so Bosnian Croats regarded party allegiances to HDZ in particular but to other parties with “big brothers” in Croatia as normal.

The cross-boundary fluidity of identity in former Yugoslavia, most of all Bosnia-Herzegovina makes efforts to confine political allegiances solely within the republic on the part of all ethno-religious groups unrealistic, and even undemocratic.

Although efforts have been made to emphasise the existence of a separate Bosniac language distinct from both Serbian and Croatian, these rely on exaggerating vocabulary differences and parallel the usually discredited nationalistic attempts to purify Croatian Serbian of common vocabulary.

It is difficult to avoid the conclusion that a specific Bosnian identity is primarily based on a religious criterion (even where practice of Islam has lapsed) just as Croatian identity is bound up with Catholicism.

Unlike the strong Serbian tradition of viewing the Bosnian Muslims as renegades and decrying them as traitors, dominant Croatian attitudes to Bosnian Muslims were never profoundly hostile. Indeed at least in rhetoric even the most extreme Croatian nationalists in the twentieth century, the Ustasha, emphasised the “purity” of the Croatian roots of the Bosnian Muslims. This was certainly a myth but it was hardly the most negative one in the Ustasha armoury.

Statements by President Tudjman decrying the perceived danger of Islamic fundamentalism in Bosnia-Herzegovina ought to be seen in the context of more recent developments. Several of the SDA leaders had been educated in radical Arab states hostile to the West into which Tudjman wanted to integrate. Rightly or (probably) wrongly Tudjman saw them as facilitating the influence of the mujhadeen. If we recall how many US commentators and even the CIA has warned about the potential influence of Islamic fundamentalists in Bosnia and other parts of the Balkans — a fear I regard as greatly exaggerated — then Tudjman’s attitude does not appear abnormal or particularly sinister.

Many people (both inside and outside the former Yugoslavia) may feel in retrospect that the break up of the former Yugoslavia was a mistake and worked to the disadvantage of the majority of its people(s), but neither the former Yugoslavia (in its various incarnations since 1918) nor Bosnia-Herzegovina as a republic or independent state achieved the status of a political institution which could appeal to the unthinking loyalty of the vast bulk of its population in the way that Denmark or the United States obviously do.

Imagining different futures than the dissolution of Federal Socialist Yugoslavia into its component republics as international state entities was not unnatural nor treasonable. As I have shown all participants in the break-up of

Yugoslavia, including international mediators, contemplated a variety of outcomes, including the Bosnian Muslim leadership.

Only by ignoring the multi-layered and frequently self-contradictory process of the dissolution of old Yugoslavia is it possible to see a consistent and pre-determined scheme by the Croatian HDZ to partition Bosnia-Herzegovina at the expense of its Muslim inhabitants.

To reinforce my argument that the charges of a deep-laid conspiracy linking President Tudjman, and a chain of members of the HDZ in both Croatia and Bosnia to a sinister and criminal plot to partition Bosnia-Herzegovina in collusion with President Milošević of Serbia, I have cited a number of scholarly experts on former Yugoslavia, Croatia and Bosnia-Herzegovina — Dr. Noel Malcolm, Dr. Christopher Cviic, and Professor Ivo Banac — whose criticism of other aspects of President Tudjman's policies and political activism in opposition parties and press (in the cases of Cviic and Banac) make their rejection of this charge all the more powerful.

Professor Donia seems to interpret the developments of the HDZ in Bosnia-Herzegovina in too simplistic a manner on the back of a notion of a pre-conceived plan of aggression by President Tudjman. I hope that I have shown that HDZ policy was far from mono-linear.

By neglecting aspects of Muslim policy, Professor Donia and the Prosecution put these developments in a false light.

Acknowledging that President Izetbegović and his colleagues in the SDA found themselves in a potentially tragic situation in 1991-92 in the run-up to what we now know was Bosnia-Herzegovina's declaration of independence should not blind us to the fact that several of their actions and aspects of deliberate inaction in the period of the war against Croatia by the JNA and local Serb forces July-December, 1991, and in the run-up to independence led both Croats inside Bosnia-Herzegovina and inside Croatia itself to doubt the reliability of the Muslim leadership vis-à-vis Belgrade.

Bosnian Croat preparations for self-defence take on a very different appearance when it is remembered that President Izetbegović's authorities had not attempted to inhibit the operations of the JNA from Bosnian territory against Croatia in 1991, and that they had cooperated with the JNA by ordering the territorial defence to hand in weapons to it. Such confidence-building measures failed to appease Belgrade or the local Serb leadership but they caused deep anxiety among Bosnian Croats who had witnessed the massacre of their fellow Croats in Vukovar for instance at the same time.

Of course in 1990-91 President Tudjman too had explored alternatives to the existing Yugoslav state-structure which fell short of full sovereign independence for Croatia. What is clear from the violence initiated by the JNA/Serb forces in late June, 1991, through to the defeat of the Bosnian Serb forces by joint Croat-Bosnian forces and NATO air-strikes in late summer 1995 is that only a very deep conspiracy theorist could imagine a collaboration for common purpose between Tudjman and Milošević and their local supporters.

With the recognition of the un-historical and unreasonable nature of the conspiracy charge because of its dependence on retrospective allegations by subsequent political opponents of President Tudjman or those disappointed by his failure to extend patronage or promotion, the complex nature of the origins of the conflict between Croats and Bosnians in Central Bosnia becomes clearer.

I am not competent to discuss the details of specific events on the ground in and around Ahmici on or after 16th April, 1993, for instance, but my report puts in broader context the position of the international mediation, the coincidence of the crisis over Srebrenica, and certain aspects of the media coverage of the massacre at Ahmici as facilitated by Britbat which raise questions and cast doubt on neat assumptions about the nature of the Muslim-Croat conflict.

The context of these events was one of disruption of the society by war and its consequent radicalisation. Their status as victims of Serb aggression from the spring of 1992 did not mean that Muslim forces maintained the highest standards of respect for the human rights and property of others. Sadly, in their radicalised and desperate position, Muslim forces and refugees took the line of least resistance in their embattled situation and regarded largely Croat areas of Central Bosnia as suitable places to gain compensation for their terrible losses to the Serbs in eastern and northern Bosnia.

From the standpoint of an historian considering the available evidence on the breakdown of the former Yugoslavia and the eruption of the conflict between Croats and Bosnian Muslims in Central Bosnia in 1993, any interpretation of a deep-seated Croatian master plan seems thoroughly misplaced. The background to the dreadful events suggest that the political leaders on both sides of the Croat-Muslim divide and at all levels found themselves in a conflict which neither had desired and which served the interests of their Serb enemies and helped to justify the policy of key Western states (especially Britain and France) who wished to avoid intervention or raising the arms embargo and had never wanted either an independent Croatia or an independent Bosnia-Herzegovina.

2. Historical Status of Bosnia-Herzegovina

With the outbreak of the Serbian war against Bosnia-Herzegovina in the spring of 1992, the embattled Muslim-led state enjoyed an enormous amount of international sympathy, at least among publics in Western states as well as in Muslim countries. This extended well into the academic community. However desirable and laudable as a political and moral fact this sympathy may have been (it is something which I shared), it has created myths of its own to counter the propaganda onslaught which went along with the Serbian (para-)military attack.

A benign myth was developed of Bosnia-Herzegovina as an historical entity of great antiquity, one of Europe's very few continuous civic communities within easily recognisable boundaries recurrent over centuries. A Bosnian

people — admittedly of mixed religious background but united by civic identity — had allegedly preserved their traditions into the present. Although a civic and open society (in the best late twentieth century sense) this historical Bosnia was profoundly different and separate from its neighbours.

Unfortunately, Bosnia is not an island and never was. Its frequently cited north-western border which seems to loom out of the mists of time like the White Cliffs of Dover in English history turns out to be more a mirage than a fixed geographical feature. In so far as it has been fixed, it has been by alien powers de-marking their spheres of interest or administrative convenience rather than out of deference to Bosnian feelings and loyalties.

The visual continuity of the *western* and *northern* borders of Bosnia after the Ottoman conquest is an optical illusion if it is taken to imply a continuity of a specific Bosnian statehood after 1463. Many of the geo-strategic reasons which had led to the pre-Ottoman conquest borders between Croatia and Bosnia naturally applied after 1463. But thereafter the relations between the societies on either side of the border were no longer between two Christian states sharing broadly similar political, social and religious structures, but between a continuing Croatia (as part of the Habsburg monarchy after 1526) and Bosnia as a province of the Ottoman Empire run on lines developed by the Turks over centuries elsewhere outside Bosnia certainly, and to a great extent outside the Balkans altogether.

The conversion of substantial parts of the population to Islam also marked a self-conscious break with Bosnia's Christian past. The new religious structure as well as its theology owed nothing to the pre-existing Christian churches. It could not have happened without Ottoman conquest. Whatever the validity of the unresolved controversies about how far Christian heresies — Bogomil or Patavene — had created a climate of disregard for Catholic or Orthodox Christian doctrines which facilitated conversion to Islam, without the Ottoman invasion and occupation the adoption of Islam could not have taken place. Therefore 1463 marks a dramatic caesura in Bosnian history.

That said, the formation of Ottoman Bosnia took almost 150 years.

Bihać was outside Ottoman control until 1592, when Croatia lost it. This region which was so defiantly Muslim despite its isolation during the war (1992-95) underwent in many ways a very similar process to the Krajina which enveloped it to the west and north. Just as Serbs were settled on the Habsburg "Military Frontier" (Krajina) to provide Christian military colonists who would act as a first-line of defence against an Ottoman invasion or plundering raids from the Sultan's domains, so the Muslimification of Bihać represented a strategy by the Ottoman authorities to ensure their control over and the reliability of the north-westernmost tip of the Sultan's empire.

Although Ivo Banac has argued that "The continuity of Bosnian regional consciousness was also maintained by several factors that made Bosnian society atypical of Ottoman possessions" — and he may be right to emphasise the relative autonomy of Muslim elites with their unusual hereditary fiefs and use of their own language "Bosnian" rather than Ottoman Turkish — nonethe-

less, Professor Banac cites examples which undermine the modern myth of Bosnian continuity from the pre-1463 kingdom through the Ottoman upheavals to the present. For instance, although, “unlike other conquered Balkan lands, Bosnia was not pulled asunder into a cluster of arbitrary divisions”, it was “in fact *expanded* [my emphasis] to include old Croat heartlands on the Adriatic coast, its hinterland and parts of Slavonia... the Sandžak of Novi Pazar, also belonged to [Ottoman] Bosnia, and its heavily Islamicised population thought of itself as Bosnian.” Banac also notes that Ottoman “Bosnia ... included such towns as Bihać, one of the sites of medieval Croat assemblies and *never* [emphasis added] part of medieval Bosnia.”¹

Banac argues that “The Ottoman way of dividing peoples by religious community is the key to Bosnian national mutations. The Catholics maintained links with Croatia. The... Orthodox community established ties with Serbia.”²

In other words, Bosnian identity became a specifically Slav-speaking Muslim phenomenon under Ottoman rule. It included Slav Muslims outside the traditional kingdom but incorporated by Ottoman imperial fiat into the Bosnian province, *e.g.* the Sandžak.

For Catholic Croats or Orthodox Serbs in the Ottoman period, Bosnia was a place of residence not a loyalty. Wisdom encouraged obedience to the Sultan and his local representatives to avoid the harsh consequences of defiance, but it did not engender any willing identification with the system even at a local level.

It is, however, true to say that Croatian Catholic attitudes towards Bosnian Muslims were less traumatised by the Ottoman conquest than Serbian ones. Perhaps because the Orthodox Serbs were almost entirely subject to Ottoman rule, their resentment at what was seen as the religious perfidy of former Slav Christians who had “turned Turk” was greater than among Croats, who had a hinterland under Habsburg control or in the independent republic of Ragusa (Dubrovnik) where their own co-religionists held sway.

Like many Serbs most Croats seem to have regarded the Bosnian Muslims despite their conversion to Islam as *essentially* still part of their nation. Serbs and Croats of course disputed whose nation exactly it was that the Slav Muslims really belonged to — with the Croats taking a more positive view. The Muslims however belonged to their own broader community — that of the Faithful. The Sultan was not simply their ruler he was also Caliph (spiritual head of the faithful). Even though they mainly spoke their Slavic language, the Bosnian Muslims possessed the privileged status of all other Muslims in the Ottoman Empire and took on the obligations (haj, etc.) of followers of Islam.

Of course, in local terms the Muslims of Bosnia (in today’s boundaries) had close relations with their co-religionists in the region who were naturally

¹ See Ivo BANAC, *The National Question in Yugoslavia: Origins, History, Politics* (Cornell UP: Ithaca, 1988 edition), 41.

² *Ibid.*, 41

also under Ottoman rule until the roll-back of the Empire, especially after 1804. Most particularly the Muslim converts and their descendants of the Sandžak enjoyed intimate relations with Bosnian Muslims and indeed called themselves by the same name since after all they used the same language. But Belgrade too with its 150 plus mosques (until after 1869) acted as one of the regional Islamic centres for the Bosnian Muslims.

However, Serb hostility to the architecture of Islam as well to its adherents meant that the nineteenth century saw a diminution in links with Belgrade, Niš, etc., as Serbia's growing independence coincided with destruction of mosques and (partial) ethnic cleansing of Muslims, especially from the northern parts of the kingdom.

As the Ottoman Empire declined through the nineteenth century, Habsburg statesmen and policy-makers debated the pros and cons of annexing Bosnia-Herzegovina. Already in 1869 there was a serious debate in Vienna, but a key argument against annexation was the fear that it would strengthen the Croat factor in the Monarchy. It was taken for granted that the inhabitants would share a fellow-feeling with the Croats who had a peculiar status after 1868 with their own governor in Zagreb and seats in the Budapest Parliament.

It was only the threat of Serbian expansion into the region once the war of 1876 broke out that decided Vienna and Budapest that the Dual Monarchy's vital interests were served by pre-empting any transfer of control of Bosnia to the Serbs.³

A large-scale though unquantifiable emigration of Muslims to residual Ottoman Turkey took place after Austria-Hungary occupied Bosnia-Herzegovina and the Sandžak of Novi Pazar in 1878. What is significant for any understanding of the tradition of ethnic or communal identity is that the Turkish authorities lumped all Slavic Muslims from Serbia and Montenegro as well as the Austrian-occupied territory together under the name "Bosniaks". It has been estimated that up to 350,000 such Bosniaks live in modern Turkey.⁴

The key figure, however, in the development of a specifically Bosnian identity after 1878 was the Hungarian official and expert on the South Slavs, Benjamin Kallay, who was Joint-Minister of Finance for the Dual Monarchy, 1882-1903. Kallay had warned against annexing Bosnia for fear of strengthening Croatian identity by both boosting the numbers of what were seen as Croats by up to a million and by creating a geographical space which made more strategic and economic sense than Croatia's peculiar boomerang shape.⁵

Dr. Malcolm has argued that in the Ottoman period that "many Bosnian Catholics had looked to the lands beyond the Croatian and Dalmatian border for support even liberation. But that was a matter of religion, not nationhood."⁶ This is short of the truth since it was clearly a political matter. If

³ See N. MALCOLM, *Bosnia: A Short History*, Macmillan: London, 1994, 136-37.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 140.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 147ff.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 148-49.

Catholics looked for “liberation” to the west it was a political issue of identity. They preferred a common statehood with their fellow Catholics even under Habsburg rule. As the nineteenth century went on Croats increasingly challenged the legitimacy of that rule and some argued for independence, others for independence in conjunction with the Serbs.

What failed to catch on despite Kallay’s subsidies and encouragement was a tripartite Croat-Serb-Muslim common Bosniak identity. He could not isolate Bosnia-Herzegovina from its neighbours inside the Dual Monarchy and in Serbia and Montenegro. Dr. Malcolm notes that “As Croat and Serb nationalism spread among the Catholic and Orthodox Bosnians through the very networks of priests, schoolteachers and educated newspaper-readers which Austro-Hungarian policy had helped to bring into being, Kallay’s ‘Bošnjak’ project became more and more obviously doomed to failure.”⁷ After Austria-Hungary’s formal annexation of Bosnia-Herzegovina in 1908, the Sandžak of Novi Pazar was separated and returned to Ottoman rule.

The events at Sarajevo on 28th June, 1914, illustrated two points: one that a hardcore group of pro-Serb and in Gavrilo Princip’s mind “Yugoslav” activists were prepared to assassinate the Habsburg heir-apparent and that the great majority of the population (Muslim and Croat but also many Serbs) reacted negatively to the murder — even though the Young Bosnia group had a smattering of Croatian and Muslim members.⁸

Allied military victory in the First World War decided the future shape of Yugoslavia. Wartime discussions and alternatives emphasising non-Serb national rights, even a reformed Habsburg Monarchy containing all the South Slavs, were rendered irrelevant. Serbia, led by the prince Regent Alexander I, saw itself as the victor and its forces often treated the “liberated” badly, especially the Muslims of Bosnia.⁹

After the creation of the Kingdom of the South Slavs (for convenience called Yugoslavia here), the majority of deputies elected to its parliament as supporters of the Yugoslav Muslim Organisation (JMO) chose to identify themselves as Croats (Royal Yugoslavia did not recognise “Muslim” as an identity). In 1923, for instance, seventeen out of eighteen JMO deputies and their alternates declared themselves Croats (and the eighteenth deputy, Dr. Mehmed Spaho’s brother Fehim, who became *reis ul-ulema* or spiritual head of Yugoslavia’s Muslims (1938-42) identified himself as a Croat for census purposes.)¹⁰ Professor Donia emphasises an earlier set of figures immediately after the unification of the South Slavs before disillusionment among Yugoslav Muslims with Serbian domination set in very rapidly.

⁷ Ibid., 149.

⁸ Ibid., 156-57.

⁹ For figures of alleged victims of Serbian and Montenegrin troops see N. MALCOLM, *ibid.*, 162-163.

¹⁰ See I. BANAC, *ibid.*, 375.

It is true to say that the six new administrative units into which Bosnia was divided in Yugoslavia corresponded to the six Kreise of the Austrian period. Dr. Malcolm comments in his book “Bosnia was the only constituent element of Yugoslavia which retained its identity in this way”, but even he has to admit that this continuity only went back to “final period of Ottoman rule.”¹¹ In reality the reordering of the administrative boundaries in the new kingdom was based on what the royal government in Belgrade regarded as convenient and expedient.

In 1929, Alexander I renamed the country “Yugoslavia” and reorganised its local administration. Bosnia was divided among four of the nine new *bano-vine* or administrative districts. Rather melodramatically and misleadingly, Dr. Malcolm laments, “For the first time in more than four hundred years, Bosnia had been partitioned!”¹² In fact, as we have seen parts of modern day Bosnia had not been added until 1592 while others like the Sandžak had been removed as recently as 1909.

In the aftermath of the assassination of Alexander I by Macedonian VMRO extremists working on behalf of the Croatian extreme nationalist Ustasha (with funds from Mussolini’s Italy) in 1934, the administrative map of Yugoslavia was up for grabs especially as the Regent Paul’s government felt pressured to resolve internal dissent especially among the Croats in response to the external threat from Fascist Italy and Nazi Germany who were increasingly acting together in the region.

The August, 1939, agreement — the Sporazum — between the leading Croat politician, Vladko Ma...ek and the Serbian Prime Minister, Dragiša Cvetković which effectively conceded a large share of Bosnia (as today recognised) to a new Croatian unit within a reformed Yugoslavia has a special significance because the boundaries delineated then played such a role in the thinking behind the Vance-Owen Plan and the debates about it in the spring of 1993.

Like the Regent Prince Paul, Ma...ek was anti-Nazi as he was anti-Ustasha. He was the Sporazum as a way of guaranteeing Croat rights after 20 years of Serb domination but without falling into the Fascist trap of the Ustasha. Of course the international situation worsened considerably immediately after the Sporazum was signed. Nazi Germany’s military victories — and ironically Hitler’s need to come to the assistance of Italy in Greece — put huge pressure on Yugoslavia to agree to collaborate with the *Reich*. In April, 1941, Prince Paul agreed that Yugoslavia would join the Tripartite or Anti-Comintern Pact but only after the Nazis conceded that their troops would not enter Yugoslavia and would therefore respect its sovereignty.

Instead of accepting this remarkable concession by Hitler, some Serbian nationalist hotheads in the Yugoslav Army egged on by British Intelligence staged the coup which provoked the Nazi invasion of Yugoslavia and the king-

¹¹ See N. MALCOLM, *ibid.*, 165.

¹² *Ibid.*, 169.

dom's collapse. Without the Nazi invasion and conquest, the emergence of the Ustasha as Croatia's ruling elite would have been inconceivable.¹³

The fact that the so-called Independent State of Croatia (NDH) depended on Nazi and Italian Fascist patronage and that it committed atrocities against scores of thousands of Serbs in particular has shaped foreign perceptions of Croatia down to the present-day despite the fact that many more Croats including the young Franjo Tudjman fought in the Partisans against the collaborators. This is particularly significant when we remember that service in the partisans was voluntary and of course very risky whereas the NDH used its prerogatives as a state to conscript soldiers.

Despite its savagery towards Serbs and political opponents, Ante Pavelić's regime courted the Muslims. Already on 25th April, 1941, he told Fehim Spaho that he wanted the Bosnian Muslims (now incorporated within the NDH) to feel "free, contented and possessed of equal rights." Eleven former JMO politicians were invited to join the new Zagreb pseudo-parliament.¹⁴ Like other clergy in the Ustashe state, Muslim clerics were horrified by the brutality and lawlessness of the new regime towards Serbs and Jews — though their protests carried no more weight than those from the Catholic hierarchy. In any case the main threat to Muslim well-being came from the Serbian Chetniks. Even relatively moderate Chetnik leaders who thought in terms of Yugoslav unity versus the German and Italian occupiers thought "there can be no true unity with them [the Muslims]."¹⁵

Under cover of settling scores with the collaborators with the Axis occupiers, Tito's Partisans were able to pursue a purge of all potential political opponents too.¹⁶ The combination of Communist persecution and flight into exile in the period 1945-48 stabilised the domestic situation. (After Stalin's break with him in June, 1948, Tito also annihilated disloyal Communists.)¹⁷

3. *Perceptions Of Croatian Nationalism*

Today after the NATO intervention against Yugoslavia over Kosovo in 1999, and the concomitant propaganda campaign in much of the Western media to demonise the Serbs as the "Enemy", it is hard to recall how different the media picture of Balkan heroes and villains was before 1991 and immediately after the outbreak of the post-Yugoslav wars. However, any analysis of how the international community and its agents reacted to the implosion of old Yugoslavia must take into account the stereotypes in Western minds about

¹³ For a reliable summary of these events, see Christopher BENNETT, *Yugoslavia's Bloody Collapse*, 39-42.

¹⁴ See N. MALCOLM, *ibid.*, 185.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 187.

¹⁶ See Ljubo SIRC, *Between Hitler and Tito: Nazi Occupation and Communist Oppression* (London, 1989).

¹⁷ See I. BANAC, *With Stalin Against Tito: Cominformist Splits in Yugoslav Communism*, Cornell UP: Ithaca, 1989.

how to classify the Balkan peoples on standard criteria of political correctness.¹⁸

Like the other Balkan peoples it was only in the nineteenth century that the Croats as a nation began to impinge on West European, and certainly British consciousness. Whereas the Serbs like the Byronic Greeks entered the British public mind as heroic freedom fighters struggling for their liberty against the slipshod and brutal Turk, the Croats only really came to cognisance as the loyal, not to say subservient subjects of the reactionary Habsburgs. The negative reputation of the Croats as a race was fixed from their first entry into the British public mind in 1848 when Croatian troops (by no means all ethnic Croats) led by the kingdom's Ban, Jellačić, seemed to play the role of servile foot-soldiers on the reactionary side in the struggle against the romantic liberal revolutionary nationalist in Hungary who had rebelled against the monarchy, but who had done so, at least in part, as a way of ensuring their right to tyrannise and even expel their Slav and Romanian subjects.

It was not just liberals who denounced the Croats in 1848 and after. Arguably the two most influential European intellectuals for the coming century and more, Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels launched polemics of unprecedented ferocity and racial abuse against the Croats: "An Austria shaken to its very foundations was kept in being and secured by the enthusiasm of the Slavs for the black and yellow; ... it was precisely the Croats..." According to Marx's *Neue Rheinische Zeitung*, Croats were "That horde of miscreants, rogues, and vagabonds... riff-raff, abject peasant hirelings, vomit..." Engels himself decreed a "war of annihilation and ruthless terrorism" against "this national refuse." Even in the 1880s, Engels was still "without mercy" towards the Herzegovinans.¹⁹

At the Paris Peace Conference in 1919 Lloyd George was happy to see a new state Yugoslavia come into existence on the ruins of the Habsburg Empire, but he did not oppose Italian ambitions to annex parts of Istria and Dalmatia because "It was the Croats who had been used by the Habsburgs [in 1848] to crush and keep down Italian liberty, to hunt, imprison and execute Italian patriots" Lloyd George even quoted A.H. Clough's poetry:²⁰

"I see the Croat soldier stands,
Upon the grass of your redoubts;
The eagle with his black wings flouts
The breath and beauty of your land."

¹⁸ By "political correctness" I do not necessarily mean that criteria applied by the more advanced US universities, but the standard -- usually unspoken -- assumptions of value-laden assessment of foreigners/outside by the classic insiders politicians, diplomats, generals, the higher realms of journalists and the lower reaches of psyops.

¹⁹ See M. ALMOND, *Europe's Backyard War: The War in the Balkans*, Heinemann: London, 1994, 70-71, and references to Marxist exterminism directed at the Croats and other "reactionary peoples".

²⁰ Quoted in M. ALMOND, *ibid.* 72-73.

The Second World War reinvigorated the anti-Croat sentiment in Britain. The grotesque nature of the Pavelić regime confirmed long-held stereotypes. The presence of Conservative politicians like Sir Fitzroy Maclean and Randolph Churchill, plus William Deakin one of Churchill's pre-war research assistants among Tito's Partisans acted as an endorsement of the restoration of Yugoslav unity against Quisling separatists even under a Communist. Stalin's falling out with Tito in 1948 simply reopened the Tory-Tito love-affair. In 1991, when Lord Carrington was appointed EC peace mediator, his first act was to ask Sir Fitzroy Maclean to brief him over breakfast at White's!

Britain's elder statesmen regularly endorsed seeing the post-1991 conflict as a re-run of the Second World War and Germany therefore as the big enemy pulling the strings behind its Balkan quisling. Sir Fitzroy Maclean was by no means alone in doing so, but his wartime exploits in Yugoslavia gave him unrivalled prestige and influence — not least among Army personnel. He assured viewers of the BBC's premier news programme *Newsnight* in December, 1991, that the Serbs had been "understandably... very conscious of the German danger" and he accepted the interviewer's description of re-united Germany as the "Fourth Reich."²¹

The assumption that 1990s Croatian nationalists were just lineal successors of the Ustasha collaborators and therefore as morally repulsive was commonplace in the British political and media establishment. For instance, when I interviewed Douglas Hurd, the Foreign Secretary, in late February, 1994, it became clear that he had no idea that Tadjman had been a Partisan during the Second World War and not a collaborator — a fact which one of his officials confirmed for him!

In the immediate aftermath of news of the Croat-Muslim conflict in Central Bosnia, in April, 1993, a senior figure in the British establishment Lord Healey, the former Labour Defence Secretary and Chancellor of the Exchequer, was widely interviewed. His interpretation of the geopolitical significance of the current conflict drew heavily on the argument of Ustasha-HDZ continuity.

Germany was now backing Croatia according to Healey "because Germany had been Croatia's ally during the Second World War...during that period Croats killed up to a million Serbs." Turning to current events, Healey insisted, "Don't forget that the Croat forces who are killing Muslims and Serbs... are wearing swastikas on their helmets, some of them are wearing SS uniforms and they give the Nazi salute"²¹! No evidence was cited nor any asked for: Healey was simply taking to its logical fantastic conclusion the stereotyping of Croats in the establishment media.²²

²¹ Quoted in M. ALMOND, *ibid.*, 369, note 49.

²² For Lord Healey's comments on BBC 2's *Newsnight* (28th April, 1993), see M. ALMOND, *ibid.*, 321. It is worth recalling that Lord Healey had explicitly supported Tito's repressive measures after the war in a speech to the 1945 Labour Party Conference: "If the labour movement finds it necessary to introduce a greater degree of police supervision and more immediate and drastic punishment for their opponents than we in this country would be prepared to

At the height of the siege of Vukovar, Britain's Channel Four News chose to broadcast the documentary *Ratlines* which perpetuated the stereotype of Croats as clerico-fascist collaborators with the Nazis in genocide. Presumably many of the British officers and men who went to Bosnia-Herzegovina in the coming months as part of UNPROFOR were conditioned in their expectations and attitudes by this sort of material.²³

Anti-Croat racialism could masquerade under the banner of politically correct anti-racism. For instance, the *Guardian's* columnist Edward Pearce, "Indeed so much has the slashing of neck arteries been the historic way of the Croats that one wonders if our version of the native name should not be pronounced with a diphthong to rhyme with throat."²⁴

France had seen Serbia as an ally since 1914. Anyone familiar with the geography of its major cities — Paris, Lyons, or even Cannes — will have noticed streets and bridges named in honour of Serbia or its leaders. In November, 1991, President François Mitterrand announced, "Croatia belonged to the Nazi bloc, not Serbia."²⁵

Against this media disseminated establishment picture of Croat neo-Nazis as the true villains of the Yugoslav implosion, British troops sent to Bosnia-Herzegovina were under still more potent influences to prepare their mental picture of the conflict in an anti-Croat way.

It is naïve at best and misleading at worst to talk as though the personnel of international agencies active in the former Yugoslavia were necessarily wholly devoted to their UN-mandate duties without any reference to their home governments. Quite clearly the national contingents in UNPROFOR, especially the British and French forces, as a matter of course accepted directives from their home governments and consulted them regularly. In addition to the intelligence officers deployed with these forces, there were of course a large number of undercover intelligence agents in the region, which is entirely normal and understandable given the sensitivity of the conflict-zone, but their presence as actors in and witnesses of events under false identity necessarily distorts the reliability of evidence.

It should be remembered that John Zametica in person and as an author was frequently relied upon to brief British personnel, both military and civilian, about to be deployed to ex-Yugoslavia. His 1992 Adelphi report for the International Institute of Strategic Studies continued to be disseminated among British officers even after his departure from Britain to take up the

tolerate, we must be prepared to understand their point of view." Quoted in *ibid.*, 404, note 64.

²³ Broadcast in November, 1991. The book of the same name by Mark AARONS and John LOFTUS, *Ratlines: How the Vatican's Nazi Networks Betrayed Western Intelligence to the Soviets*, Mandarin: London, 1991, presents a more complex picture.

²⁴ See *The Guardian* 31st August, 1993

²⁵ Quoted in M. ALMOND, *ibid.*, xii.

post of deputy-foreign minister in Dr. Karadžić's Pale regime. The use of Zametica's short account of the origins and meaning of the post-Yugoslav conflict in these circumstances explains the deep anti-Muslim and anti-Croat bias permeating the British officer corps *before* deployment.²⁶

Throughout this period, ministers in John Major's government repeatedly (in public and private) made their antagonism towards Croatia known. Tory Ministers briefed the British press regularly that Croatia was a puppet of Germany and its independence only recognised under pressure from Chancellor Kohl. Ministers in the Ministry of Defence like Lord Cranbourne and Sir Nicholas Bonsor were particularly hostile to Croatian independence, but also to Bosnia-Herzegovina. They took a much softer line on Republika Srpska. A prominent pro-Serb Conservative MP Henry Bellingham was made Parliamentary Private Secretary to Malcolm Rifkind when he became Foreign Secretary in 1995, despite his long-standing association with John Kennedy (Gvozdrenović). Another Conservative MP Harold Elletson was co-director of a public relations company with Mr. Kennedy (who was also Prince Michael of Kent's private secretary). Mr. Elletson acted as an MI6 informer with the approval of the Prime Minister John Major despite his election to the House of Commons. Mr. Elletson's public utterances of support for the Bosnian Serbs could only be taken at face value. Since then it has been claimed in the British press that he was pursuing an MI6 line as an informant on his contacts in Pale in the hope of obtaining valuable information for the British intelligence service.²⁷ Servicemen and public alike would only have known about his publicly expressed pro-Serb point of view.

Few politically alert and ambitious British officers in UNPROFOR hoping for promotion would have been encouraged to challenge the ministerial bias. Nor did things change with the general election defeat of the Conservatives in May, 1997. Harold Elletson's frequent travelling companion to Republika Srpska, Dr. John Reid, became Armed Forces Minister in the incoming Labour government. Dr. Reid had been an eloquent critic of the Bosnian Muslims and Croats. Like the Labour Shadow Defence Secretary, David Clark, Dr. Reid was censured by the House of Commons Standards Committee watchdog for allowing Dr. Karadžić to pay his hotel bills during a trip to meet the Bosnian Serb leader in Geneva in 1993 — the year is significant. On that visit, as on others, to Republika Srpska Dr. Reid and Mr. Clark were accompanied by the Conservative general election candidate John Kennedy (née Gvozdrenović) who acted as the Bosnian Serb leader's public spokesman in London. Harold Elletson, another of Mr. Kennedy's partners, acted as parliamentary "pair" for

²⁶ See John ZAMETICA, *The Yugoslav Conflict*, Adelphi Paper 270, IISS: London, 1992. I gained an insight into the assumptions put in British officers' minds when — at the invitation of Sir Michael Rose following a social encounter in Oxford — I lectured on the Yugoslav crisis at Staff College, Camberley on 5th April, 1993. My invitation was clearly a misunderstanding in that hostility to both Bosnian Muslims and Croats was taken for granted in the small-talk as well as the post-lecture questions.

²⁷ For these allegations before his defeat in the 1997 General Election, see "Pro-Serb Tory MP was MI6 Agent" and "Honourable member's life as a spy" in *The Observer*, 22 December, 1996.

Dr. Reid and they often travelled together. (I met them in Tbilisi, Georgia, in October, 1992, when they gave me the benefit of their vehemently pro-Serb and anti-Croat views.)²⁸

Such is the power of the negative image of the Croats as a tainted reactionary nation that even academic studies of how Westerners have created an “Orientalist” picture of the Balkans, stereotyping its peoples as cruel, untrustworthy, bigoted, etc., drop their strictures when it comes to Croatia. The author of one of the best-received critiques of Western prejudices about the Balkan peoples, Maria Todorova, for instance, suddenly adopts the posture when she criticises the *New York Times* because it “had the nerve to run an editorial” in March, 1995, suggesting “Washington’s best hope is to appeal to predominantly Roman Catholic Croatia’s longstanding desire to extricate itself from Balkan conflicts and associate itself more closely to the West as if [comments Professor Todorova] it was not precisely in the name of this Roman Catholic Croatia that some of the most gruesome crimes in the Balkans were committed during World War II...”²⁹

Titoite propaganda abroad had naturally sought to discredit all opponents of the Communist regime after 1945 as Fascists, as had other Communist regimes. Tito’s regime was unique in achieving respectability across the political spectrum in a country like Britain. This fact, combined with its logical alternative the negative picture of the Croats in particular as archetypes of collaboration and war criminality, had profound consequences after 1991.

4. *The Break-Up Of Titoite Yugoslavia*

Professor Donia is right to lay the lion’s share of the blame for Yugoslavia’s descent into violence on Slobodan Milošević and Belgrade, but to understand how and why Bosnian Muslim-Croat relations soured requires shifting attention away from the Serbs’ misdeeds (fundamental though they were) to the reaction by Muslim and Croat leaders to what was happening in Yugoslavia after 1987 (the beginning of Milošević’s ascendancy in Serbia).

The unravelling of post-Tito Yugoslavia was not primarily the work of political outsiders like Tudjman and Izetbegović. They only took centre stage in Croatian and Bosnian politics after the decay was far advanced. Other members of the Communist elite misread and mishandled the crisis created by Milošević’s appeal to Serbian nationalism over Kosovo. It was the failure of the Yugoslav Communist leaders— also over economic issues — which hastened the breakdown of the one-party system and allowed dissidents to emerge on the political stage, but only when the crisis resulting from Serbia’s actions in Kosovo and Vojvodina was far advanced. As Professor Banac noted in 1993:

²⁸ For the Tory pro-Belgrade lobby’s fate at the general election in 1997, see Tom CARTER, “Belgrade’s UK Lobby Decimated” in *Bosnia Report* 19, June-August, 1997.

²⁹ See Maria TODOROVA, *Imagining the Balkans*, OUP: Oxford, 1997, 158. Perhaps significantly, Todorova’s only two references to Karl Marx ignore his tirades against the Croats and other “reactionary peoples” as if they are not part of the imagination-problem under discussion.

“In fact, everybody was appeasing Milošević. They were prepared to grant him all the leeway to reintegrate Kosovo and Vojvodina into Serbia — and this was done by some of the best people on the Yugoslav political scene! Some of the worst things in Kosovo were done while Janez Drnovšek was the chairman of the collective presidency and Ante Marković, the premier of Yugoslavia... And while this was happening, the so-called Croat nationalists of the Tudjman type were not permitted to participate in any political dialogue. They emerged precisely because the Croat society felt tremendously threatened by Milošević, and the issue in the 1990 election was precisely what to do in order to escape from the deathly grip of Milošević’s policy. Tudjman, initially tried to resolve these dilemmas by bringing about the confederal proposal. One can argue whether independence was his principal aim all along, but one should not underestimate how popular that demand was in Croatian society... I think it is quite unfair to equate the phenomenon of Milošević with the sort of defensive mechanisms that developed in Slovenia and Croatia to try to withstand it.”³⁰

There is no need here to go into detail over the events in Slovenia and Croatia in 1991. What is important is the reaction inside Bosnia-Herzegovina to the actions of the JNA and Serbian para-militaries against Croatia in particular. To understand the tensions between Muslims and Croats in Bosnia-Herzegovina after that republic’s independence in 1992, the reaction of the SDA leaders to the war in Croatia needs to be recalled.

Even the historian, Christopher Bennett, who takes a very jaundiced view of President Tudjman and Croatian policy, offers a differentiated view of the causes of Muslim-Croat tension despite his speculation that Tudjman put the strategic and economic interests of Croatia “a poor second to nationalist dreams and the annexation of a chunk of Bosnia-Herzegovina formed a fundamental part of what he increasingly considered his historic mission of uniting all Croats within a single Croatian state.” Giving an excellent summary of the causes of the problems between the Bosnian Muslims and Croats, Bennett argues that:

“The informal Croat-Muslim alliance was hampered from the outset by Croat resentment at the way the Bosnian government had refused to acknowledge the Serbian aggression in Croatia and turned a blind eye to JNA operations against Croats in western Herzegovina during the war in Croatia. Since Sarajevo had made no preparations for war, it was not in a position to offer assistance to the rest of the country and effectively abandoned Croat-populate areas. To survive the initial Serb onslaught, Croats from Herzegovina had had to organise their own defence and to look to Croatia for supplies and Croat *emigres*

³⁰ See “Separating History from Myth: An Interview with Ivo Banac” in Ali Rabia and Lawrence Lifschultz, editors, *Why Bosnia? Writings on the Balkan War*, Pamphleteers’ Press: Stony Creek, Connecticut, 1993, 160.

for financial support. As a result, it was the HVO and HOS, not the Bosnian Army, which halted the Serb advance across Herzegovina and then began liberating territory seized in the first month of fighting. However, having incurred heavy casualties, Croat forces were unwilling to turn their gains over to the Sarajevo government and resented the way Izetbegović avoided placing the alliance on a formal footing, yet expected them to take in Muslim refugees from elsewhere in Bosnia-Herzegovina. [Emphasis added]”³¹

For Croats in Bosnia-Herzegovina, it seemed obvious that the JNA/Serb para-militaries would turn to aggressive action there. Faced by such an impending tragedy the Muslim/SDA leaders of the newly-elected democratic government in Sarajevo preferred to bury their heads in the sand or to try to appease the Serb leaders by cooperating with the JNA.

Of course, the SDA leadership was not alone in trying to avoid facing up to the impending Serb onslaught in Bosnia. The EC mediation and UN both refused to countenance a preventative deployment of peacekeepers in Bosnia-Herzegovina. To make matters worse, the UN decreed that the headquarters of the force dispatched to enforce the ceasefire in Croatia would be based in Sarajevo and Banja Luka surrounded by JNA forces. General Lewis Mackenzie comments in his memoirs: “Forcing us to put our major logistics base in Banja Luka - ... absolutely crammed with JNA units - was a dumb idea.”³²

At an academic conference held in St. Antony’s College, Oxford, in November, 1991, it was striking that even experts like Christopher Cviic and Dr. James Gow did not take a Bosnian declaration of independence for granted, nor an extension of the war there. That uncertainty left the Croats in Bosnia-Herzegovina in a very awkward position. Not to make preparations for their own defence when Sarajevo was reluctant to “provoke” the JNA and its local Serb allies could easily have left the Croats defenceless before the kind of onslaught which had in the previous six months seen the massacre and forced flight of so many Croats in Croatia itself. The siege of Vukovar and the bombardment of Dubrovnik were happening at this time.

The ambiguous public stand of President Izetbegović in the autumn of 1991 invited criticism even from sympathisers with his position. Despite his enthusiasm for Bosnia and its President Noel Malcolm admitted that “Extraordinarily, President Izetbegović had even allowed the [Yugoslav] army to confiscate the weapons supplies of the local territorial defence units: it seems he was trying thereby to assure the army commanders of his own peaceful intentions...”³³

To make Muslim-Croat relations worse, as Dr. Malcolm noted, as Sarajevo began to organise a BiH Army, “Izetbegović offended them [the Croats] by

³¹ See C. BENNETT, *ibid.*, 200.

³² See Lewis MACKENZIE, *Peacekeeper: The Road to Sarajevo*, Douglas & McIntyre: Vancouver, B.C., 1993, 107.

³³ N. MALCOLM, *ibid.*, 230.

appointing to his senior command one of the few Muslims who had risen to the rank of General in the Yugoslav federal army [JNA] - Šefer Halilović, who had commanded federal army units attacking Croatia during the previous war.”³⁴

5. *Karadjordjevo*

On 25th March, 1991, the Serbian and Croatian Presidents met at the old royal hunting lodge at Karadjordjevo. This meeting has attained mythical status in the conspiracy theory literature which equates Tudjman and Milošević as partners in crime in the demonology of the Balkan conflict. Robert Donia states in his expert report: ‘Karadjordjevo’ entered the political lexicon as a synonym for the division of Bosnia between Croatia and Serbia.”³⁵

Whatever was discussed it is clear that nothing of substance was agreed. This was not for Tudjman’s lack of willingness to make concessions to Serbia to avoid an armed conflict. The situation by late March, 1991, was that President Milošević had faced down the protests against his regime which had climaxed on 9th March, and on 16th March, the Serb National Council in Knin announced the Krajina’s secession from Croatia which had been simmering since August, 1990. President Tudjman felt Croatia was under great pressure to calm the Serbs both inside the Republic and in Belgrade. It is said that he offered territorial concessions in eastern Croatia to Serbia itself and autonomy to the Krajina in return for a limited partition of Bosnia which would have given Croatia much less than the Banovina of 1939. Milošević, however, did not accept any compromises and the clock ticked on to the explosive breakdown of Yugoslavia from late June, 1991.³⁶

Conspiracies may be thwarted, but in the case of the alleged collusion between Tudjman and Milošević nothing happened to prevent them carrying out their partition if that had really been their plan. Neither the UN nor the West (NATO and/or the EC) were prepared to intervene in Yugoslavia in the spring of 1991. It is easily forgotten today that the Soviet Union still existed and that it was President Bush’s policy to promote its continued existence. US policy towards Yugoslavia was predicated on its role as an example to the Soviet Union. Specifically, refusing to encourage secession by Slovenia or Croatia was intended to send a message to the Baltic States.³⁷

Like all good conspiracy theories, the prosecution argument that the Serbian and Croatian leaderships conspired to partition Bosnia-Herzegovina at the expense of its Muslim citizens has the backing of circumstantial evi-

³⁴ Ibid., 241.

³⁵ See page 136 in this volume.

³⁶ For a summary of the situation in spring, 1991, see C. BENNETT, *ibid.*, 147, who comes to the conclusion that “Had the issue in Yugoslavia in 1991 been the condition of the Serbs in Croatia, Tudjman certainly gave Milošević the opportunity to resolve it at Karadjordjevo... Milošević had no desire to end the conflict with Croatia.”

³⁷ See the explicit references to Yugoslavia and the Soviet Union in the same context by State Department officials quoted in my *Europe’s Backyard War: The War in the Balkans*, 44-45.

dence, but as Sherlock Holmes would no doubt have pointed out, this particular dog did not bark. Whatever Tudjman and Milošević were supposed to have agreed nothing came of it. Similarly when Mate Boban met and Dr. Radovan Karadžić in Graz on 6th May, 1992, the conspiracy theorists had them carving up Bosnia-Herzegovina between them. It may be significant that this meeting was apparently facilitated by the Cutilheiro meeting in Lisbon and so perhaps a partition would have suited the international community as a resolution to its Bosnian dilemmas. But again nothing came of the talks.³⁸

Writing about developments after the end of March, 1992, one of President Tudjman's most influential critics in the international media, Christopher Cvičić, offers a clear picture of the development of the conflict in Bosnia-Herzegovina before concluding (in my view in an illogical way) that the root of the problems in 1993 lay at Karadjordjevo:

“Fighting soon spread to other parts of Bosnia.... The Croats in the south as well as those in the north in the region of the Sava River, the historic border between Croatia and Bosnia, fought back successfully in alliance with some Moslems. But the majority of Moslems, too long encouraged by their leader, President Alija Izetbegović to believe that the JNA and Belgrade could be bought off provided that the Moslems did not rock the boat, were still too stunned and disorientated to fight back. The Croat-Moslem alliance did not last long, however. It was undermined by President Tudjman, whose opportunistic but naïve approach to developments allowed Milošević to trick him into discussing Bosnia's dismemberment by Croatia and Serbia, a fatal move which sowed mistrust and eventually helped to lead to bitter armed conflict between Bosnia's Croats and Moslems.”³⁹

Cvičić's account actually suggests that the Croats had had good reason to fear a sell-out by the Muslims though of course in reality the Serbs would not offer Sarajevo remotely acceptable terms but few Croats could be sure of that:

Even a sharp critic of Tudjman like Dr. Noel Malcolm does not argue that the Croatian President was simply the Janus-face of his Serbian counterpart. Although Dr. Malcolm has argued that “some degree of symmetry had been observable for a long time between the Serbian and Croatian positions on Bosnia: in March, 1991 Presidents Milošević and Tudjman met to discuss possible ways of dividing Yugoslavia, and the division of Bosnia had been on their agenda.” He concluded, “*But the symmetry was only partial*: Serbia had gone much further, much earlier, and whereas the Bosnian Serbs had set up ‘Autonomous Regions’ in May 1991 and a ‘parliament’ in October, 1991 (finally declaring a ‘Serb Republic’ on 27 March 1992), the Croat counterpart, the ‘Croatian Community of Herceg-Bosna’, was not proclaimed *until* July, 1992, after three months of Serbian military offensive in Bosnia.” Malcolm continues “The Croats of Hercegovina had some reason to be more hard-line, having

³⁸ See *Danas* (Zagreb), 4th July, 1994.

³⁹ Christopher CVIČIĆ, *An Awful Warning: the War in Ex-Yugoslavia*, Centre for Policy Studies, 33.

witnessed the military build-up and establishment of the ‘Serb Autonomous Region’ there... The general pattern of events, both military and political, was that the Croats were responding to Serb initiatives, and, to some extent, imitating them.”⁴⁰

Furthermore, even Dr. Malcolm (whom I regard as the best informed and most eloquent of the proponents of Bosnian statehood) admits that “After they (“Orthodox and Catholic Bosnians” to use Dr. Malcolm’s term) had been joined in the same country with Serbia and Croatia for seventy-four years, it was *natural* that many of the members of these communities in Bosnia would identify with those two ethnic fatherlands.” [Emphasis added]. Dr. Malcolm’s counter-argument is pragmatic rather than based on the natural or normal status of Bosnia as a state-always-in-waiting for rebirth: “But once Yugoslavia had ceased to exist, the very same fact which made the preservation of Bosnia difficult — its nationally mixed population — also made it imperative.”⁴¹

The problem, sadly, was that Serb leaders and paramilitaries were not prepared to accept this. More pertinently to this case, the dithering of Izetbegović’s government created insecurity in Croat minds about how reliable the Muslims would be. Croats in Croatia had already been the victims of ethnic cleansing while the Bosniac Muslims looked away. It was not unreasonable to fear that Sarajevo might yet cut a deal with the Serbs to avoid conflict, but at the cost of the Croats.

No doubt during the conflict there were occasions when Serb forces cooperated with Croats against Muslims, but on occasion the Serbs found Muslim allies — including against Muslims as when Fikret Abdić broke with Sarajevo and its representatives in Bihać. But these temporary and conditional alliances of convenience cannot disguise the fact that at crucial moments Croatia and the Bosnian Croats saved the Muslim-led side. This was not only obviously the case after the fall of Srebrenica in July, 1995, when there were good grounds for believing that UNPROFOR was actively conniving at a ruthless simplification of the map by facilitating the Serb conquest of Muslim enclaves, including Bihać as well as Gorazde. (Žepa had already fallen.) Naturally the fall of Bihać to General Mladić’s troops would have had tremendous implications for the security of the Croatian territory beyond it and the Krajina. Without Croatian intervention, before NATO bombs fell, Bosnia might have been overrun.

Yet even at the height of the Croat-Muslim conflict in 1993 as President Izetbegović told me and a group of other visitors in November, 1996, when pressed to condemn Tudjman in the same terms as Milošević as an architect of Bosnia’s destruction, the Bosnian President refused to do so saying that when Tudjman had the opportunity to strangle Bosnia in 1993 he had not done so despite all their mutual differences over Herceg-Bosna.

⁴⁰ N. MALCOLM, *ibid.*, 232.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 235.

6. *Unity Of Bosnia-Herzegovina Doubted*

It was not just Serb or Croat nationalists who challenged the right or wisdom of the existence of an independent and unified Bosnia-Herzegovina. Almost all respectable international opinion, including especially the international peace mediators, doubted the viability and legitimacy of an integral Bosnia-Herzegovina.

There was no reason to think the international community would come to Bosnia's aid and given the rhetoric of President Mitterrand, for instance, there was good reason to fear that the international community might even sympathise with a Serbian onslaught. As we have seen in November, 1991, despite his own role as a high Vichy official Mitterrand had taken sides on the basis of the wartime role of Croats and Serbs between 1941-45. As late as September, 1994, President Mitterrand was still asking "Why should a country's internal administrative borders automatically become frontiers under international law?"⁴²

Writing about the autumn of 1991, US ambassador Warren Zimmermann recalled "[Izetbegović] asked for, and got European Community monitors in Bosnia. He asked for, but didn't get, UN peacekeepers there. Cyrus Vance... took the traditional, if puzzling, line with me that peacekeepers are used after a conflict, not before. Neither the US government nor the UN supported Izetbegović's request for peacekeepers. In a cable to Washington I urged this innovative step *but didn't press for it as hard as I should have.*"⁴³ [emphasis added]

These appeals went on into the winter, 1991-92. Since the EC's sponsored Peace Conference for former Yugoslavia, chaired by Lord Carrington refused to listen to the entreaties from President Izetbegović that it devote attention to forestalling a conflict in Bosnia-Herzegovina with the JNA and local Serb nationalist forces, it is hardly surprising that local Croats were far from confident about the survivability of Bosnia-Herzegovina *even* within a continuing Yugoslavia. This is the context in which the quotations from Perica Jurić at the HDZ meeting in Zagreb on 27th December, 1991 should be understood:

"I) I think that we can do everything regarding integration, from serious defense preparations to institutional links, to ties in the most serious sense of the word. At the diplomatic level, our people in Sarajevo can continue swearing that they are in favour of a sovereign Bosnia and Herzegovina as we have done so far.

II) I think that this sovereignty will not happen, nobody is taking it seriously anymore."⁴⁴

It must be remembered that all these discussions took place against the backdrop of the armed intervention by the JNA in Croatia since late June, 1991. Croats, on either side of the republican boundary between Croatia and

⁴² See *Le Figaro*, 10th September, 1994.

⁴³ Warren ZIMMERMANN, *Origins of a Catastrophe*, 172.

⁴⁴ Z2373.1, page 54.

Bosnia-Herzegovina, naturally felt solidarity but they were also aware that the JNA and Serb para-military forces regarded Croats as a bloc too. In the aftermath of the destruction of Vukovar and the bombardment of coastal cities in Dalmatia, it was not certain that the JNA and Serb forces would not turn on Croats inside Bosnia-Herzegovina. Nor was the *de facto* lasting cease-fire in the Serb-Croatian conflict predictable in late 1991.

In fact in late October, 1991, Izetbegović told Zimmermann, “Independence is not our goal, though it’s an option.”⁴⁵ Of course, by this time both Slovenia and Croatia had declared their own independence and both Ljubljana and Zagreb had made it clear to international peace emissaries from both EU and UN that any hopes the international community had of shepherding them back into a Yugoslav confederation had died with the bloodshed since the end of June. That bloodshed was of course intensifying in late October, 1991, and so the Bosnian President’s equivocal stance towards Yugoslav institutions including therefore the JNA did not encourage confidence on the part of the Croats in his republic. He told the US ambassador that he supported the continued presence of the JNA in Bosnia-Herzegovina because “there are too many armed civilians around here.”⁴⁶

In conversation with the US ambassador Izetbegović himself was prepared to discuss the possibility of partitioning Bosnia between its three main constituent peoples, though he doubted the viability of such a solution: “It might be a good idea if it were possible, but it’s not possible because the populations are too mixed.”⁴⁷

Even after the end of the conflict the former High Representative, Carl Bildt, raised the question of alternatives:

“I asked him [Izetbegović] the question which I had been on the verge of posing so many times before: would it not have been possible to avoid the war? Look what happened after two million people were driven from their homes, I said, with hundreds of thousands killed and a country in ruins. Would it not have been possible to agree at the negotiating table in 1992 on something that might have been better than this?... Was there not a window of opportunity in 1992 when the Serbs had been ready to accept an independent Bosnia in exchange for some sort of internal autonomy? Hadn’t there been such a deal in Lisbon in the first months of that fateful year? He didn’t really reply.”⁴⁸

President Izetbegović told me in November, 1996, that as late as February, 1992, during a conversation *à deux* with Slobodan Milošević, the Serbian President had offered him constitutional guarantees and the number two slot in a revised Yugoslavia if he would agree to oppose Bosnian independence. The fact that President Izetbegović rejected this particular offer does not alter

⁴⁵ See W. ZIMMERMANN, *ibid.*, 173.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

⁴⁸ Carl BILDT, *Peace Journey. The Struggle for Peace in Bosnia*, Weidenfeld & Nicolson: London, 1998, 365-66.

the fact that very late in the day, he was still prepared to discuss some alternative to the declaration of a sovereign and independent Republic of Bosnia-Herzegovina. It would have been irresponsible to do otherwise, but certainly to envisage alternatives to the actual outcome was not inherently treasonable or conspiratorial.

In retrospect, Ambassador Zimmermann concluded: "I have no doubt that Milošević and Karadžić had already decided to annex the majority of Bosnian territory by force. But the [European] Community's irresponsibility, the United States' passivity, and Izetbegović's miscalculation made their job easier."⁴⁹

Influential US foreign policy analysts advocated population transfers as the solution to the Bosnian, indeed Yugoslav, problem. Charles Maynes, the editor *Foreign Policy* explicitly invoked the involuntary as well as voluntary population transfers earlier in Twentieth Century European history. Maynes endorsed both the forcible expulsion of German-speakers from Poland and Czechoslovakia (Maynes might have added hundreds of thousands of Germans from Tito's Yugoslavia too) as well as the Greek-Turkish post-Lausanne exchanges as the way peace had been secured between formerly antagonistic neighbours.⁵⁰

Some Croats like Anto Valenta, an activist in both HDZ BiH and the HVO in Vitez argued in favour of ethnically homogenous cantons on the Swiss model. These cantons would be both part of BiH and at the same time self-governing. Valenta rejected the arguments of both Serbs and Croats (including his own leader Franjo Tuđman!) who tried to see the Bosnian Muslims as *essentially* Serbian or Croatian.

Yet, as we have seen, at Karadjordjevo in 1991 even a truncated Banovina was hardly acceptable to Serb leadership in Belgrade. Nor was it later to Pale. It would give too much to Croatia at times when the Serbs felt they could gain much more for themselves by force.

Sometimes, stress is laid on the fact that in 1991-92, by no means all Bosnian Croats or Serbs supported their majority parties, the HDZ in the Croat case. There is an argument that without the violent onslaught of the Bosnian Serb forces and the accompanying ethnic cleansing, the emergence of nationalist self-identity as Croat, Muslim or Serb rather than citizen of Bosnia-Herzegovina would not have achieved the degree of polarisation subsequently seen. This may well be true. However, it is misleading to see evidence of Croatian support for Sarajevo-centred institutions as an instinctive loyalty to Bosnia-Herzegovina as a natural unit. On the contrary, it was Bosnia-Herzegovina's reality as a mini-Yugoslavia which made it attractive to such people. Most Croat (and Serb) "loyalists" were in reality nostalgics for old Yugoslavia. This point seems to be implicit in Dr. Malcolm's statement that "Once Yugoslavia had ceased to exist, the very same fact which made the

⁴⁹ See W. ZIMMERMANN, *ibid.*, 178.

⁵⁰ See Charles MAYNES, "Containing Ethnic Conflict" in *Foreign Policy*, Winter, 1992-93, 7-11.

preservation of Bosnia difficult — its nationally mixed population — also made it imperative.”⁵¹

Nostalgia for Tito’s state was not something shared by the majority of Croats in 1991-92 who had backed the HDZ. In their eyes it was a suspicious if not downright treasonable emotion. The fact that many Croats who backed the Izetbegović-led government fully would be known to other Croats as nostalgics for Tito’s Yugoslavia coloured their attitude towards the Muslim majority there. After all even Muslims sometimes accused people in Izetbegović’s immediate entourage either of Yugo-sympathies or being KOS agents. The fact that Serbian media accused the same people of being Islamic fundamentalists and agents of the Green Revolution only illustrates how emotions had taken over rational insight to an even greater extent on the Serbian side.

The dominance of one-sided pro-Muslim views even in academic literature is epitomised by Professor Michael Sells claim that “By the summer of 1993, the underarmed Bosnian army fought back; as the HVO retreated, many Croats fled Travnik to HVO-controlled territory. In many cases it was the HVO that forced Croats to leave areas *controlled by the Bosnian army...*” [emphasis added]⁵² How the HVO could force people “to leave areas controlled” by their enemies is far from clear.

Croatian attitudes to Bosnian Muslims had never been as negative as among Serbs as we have seen, but it is true to say that in the later twentieth century fear of Islamic fundamentalism has been fostered far and wide not least by the government and media of our contemporary classic civil society, the United States of America.

A narrow focus on words attributed to President Tudjman for instance overlooks how far late twentieth century hostility towards perceived Muslim fundamentalism was by no means confined to the Balkans. US media, for instance, are notorious for their stereotyping of Arabs/Muslims as terrorists and the classic modern “Other”. Like all prejudices, it is invisible to the holder of the preconception. It is a matter taken for granted. (Of course anti-Croat prejudices function in a similar way.) British ministers in this period (1990-95) uttered anti-Bosnian sentiments taking it for granted that they were allies of Islamic extremism from Iran and Lebanon. Any concerns that President Tudjman expressed about Islamic penetration into the Balkans were far from distancing him from the Western mainstream.

It is also worth recalling that Yugoslavia’s Muslims had expressed hostility to the Gulf War and the presence of Muslim forces in the US-led coalition against Saddam Hussein’s Iraq.⁵³

⁵¹ N. MALCOLM, *ibid.*, 235.

⁵² See Michael A. SELLS, *The Bridge Betrayed: Religion and Genocide in Bosnia*, University of California Press: Berkeley, 1996, 101.

⁵³ 20 January, 1991 See Francine FRIEDMAN, *The Bosnian Muslims. Denial of a Nation*, Westview Press: Boulder, Co., 1996, 234, note 106.

7. The Vance-Owen Plan

The Prosecution argues that “The Bosnian Croat leadership interpreted the peace plan as assigning certain municipalities within the Hz H-B exclusively to them...” This is seen as peculiarly criminal. Emphasis is often placed on Defence Minister Šušak’s visit to Travnik in April, 1993, as the event which precipitated Muslim-Croat fighting. Šušak apparently objected to the lack of a Croatian flag to fly alongside the Bosnian flag. He emphasised that Travnik had been assigned by the Vance-Owen Plan to a Croatian canton.⁵⁴ He was not alone in using such language.

Sadly, the cantons were regularly referred to by ethno-religious titles as Serbian, Croatian or Muslim by the authors themselves of the Plan. Locals on the ground may be forgiven for thinking that the cantons were meant to be exclusively the domain of one ethno-religious group if the elder statesmen of the world community glibly describe them that way.

Already on 3rd November, 1992, Lord Owen told British television viewers: “The idea of having provinces...is a way of ensuring that some of those provinces may be *Muslim-controlled...Obviously [sic] some will be Croatian, some Serbian ...*”⁵⁵ [Emphasis added] Given such authoritative statements it would hardly be surprising if some people on all sides took the Vance-Owen Plan as *carte blanche* for establishing their domination of “their” cantons. Lord Owen’s loose language bears a heavy share of the responsibility for the fighting once the VOP was announced.

Lord Owen routinely characterised the government in Sarajevo not as representative of a multi-ethnic Bosnia but as Muslim. For instance, on 15th April, 1993, Lord Owen referred to “the Bosnian government, the Muslims...” during a television interview.⁵⁶ In fact, both the central Bosnian government and the proposed “Croat” or “Muslim” canton administrations (to use Owen’s terms) had minority representatives high up in their administrative structure. It was Lord Owen’s rhetoric which seemed to undercut the agreed structures as much as anything else.

His official spokesman, John Mills, whom we must accept as voicing Lord Owen’s considered views, expressly sought to blackmail participants in the international mediation effort with threats of annihilation. Mills stated publicly in July, 1993: “The message to the Muslims [*sic*] is *negotiate or perish* [my emphasis]...”⁵⁷

⁵⁴ See *Washington Post* 20th April, 1993, and the *RFE/RL Research Report Supplement* (19th-23rd April, 1993), 12.

⁵⁵ Interview on Channel Four News, quoted in M. ALMOND, *Europe’s Backyard War: The War in the Balkans*, Heinemann: London, 1994, 303.

⁵⁶ Interview on Channel 4 News, Channel 4 (UK) (7p.m., 15th April, 1993).

⁵⁷ See *The Times* (28th July, 1993) as quoted, in M. ALMOND, *ibid.*, 317.

The Owen-Stoltenberg Plan was even more explicit in sanctifying a three-way ethno-religious division of Bosnia-Herzegovina. The language of both mediators was also sloppy at best.

The Plan had divisive effects even within communities. When the largely Muslim Bosnian Parliament rejected the Owen-Stoltenberg Plan on 29th September, 1993, Fikret Abdić used this as an excuse for his mini-region of Velika Kladusa to secede from BiH and to cooperate openly with Serb forces around Bihać including those in the Croatian Krajina.⁵⁸

Not all Muslims accepted even the Vance-Owen Plan. Even their President had delayed signing up until 25th March, 1993, but more significantly the Sarajevo newspaper, *Ljiljan* published a map allocating the central Bosnian municipalities of Travnik, Novi Travnik, Vitez, Busovaca, Bugojno, and Gornji Vakuf to Muslim control rather than canton 10. Whatever the authority of the *Ljiljan* line, Croats took it as a sign that the Muslims had a strategic goal to control that region as part of their ethnically-defined territory.⁵⁹

The fact that some on all sides seem to have seen the cantons — with implicit encouragement from the mediators — as their own territory raises the question of whether the Muslim forces initiated offensives in Central Bosnia just to gain territory at Croats' expense or to scupper Vance-Owen Plan even if Serbs signed up.

With the exception of the extremely unfavourable Couteilhero Plan, the Croatian side (HDZ) accepted all peace plans. Dr. Malcolm notes of the March, 1992, proposals by the EC which pressed very strongly for a modified version of the Serb map of cantonisation to be accepted, that "The plan was at first accepted by all three sides as the basis for further negotiations; then the Croat HDZ rejected it on 24 March, followed by Izetbegović's party, the SDA, on the next day. That the Croats rejected it first is not surprising, since it gave them only 17 per cent of Bosnian territory and left 59 per cent of the Croat population in non-Croat cantons."⁶⁰

8. *The False Comparison between Republika Srpska and Herceg-Bosna*

Underlying the Prosecution case is a false and misleading comparison between the status of so-called Republika Srpska and its leadership and that of so-called Herceg-Bosna. Leaving aside the irony that the Bosnian Serb vice-president, Biljana Plavsić remains un-indicted despite her rank and her racist language encouraging genocide against Muslims (language condemned even by President Milošević's wife!), the chronology of events makes the distinction clear.

Bosnian Serbs had begun to create their Unions of Municipalities in spring, 1991. The Bosnian Krajina was set up on 10th April, 1991.

⁵⁸ See C. BENNETT, *ibid.*, 201-202., for the various "unnatural" inter-ethnic permutations.

⁵⁹ See *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* reprint of 3rd August, 1993.

⁶⁰ See N. MALCOLM, *ibid.*, 233.

Croatian HZ Bosanska Posavina and HZ Herceg-Bosna were only created on 12th November and 18th November, 1991, respectively.

Unlike Republika Srpska which presented itself to the world as an independent sovereign state and established diplomatic relations with (equally pariah) statelets like Transnistria (The Moldovan Autonomous Soviet Republic) and Abkhazia, Herceg-Bosna did not secede from the Republic of Bosnia-Herzegovina. If the commonplace setting of Republika Srpska and Herceg-Bosna as equivalents had been the case, a declaration of independence and separate international status would surely have been a natural step.

Even before the Washington Agreement in March, 1994, Herceg-Bosna did not deny its status as part of Bosnia-Herzegovina. Its leaders disputed what the Sarajevo government was doing in the name of the whole republic and considered themselves as acting in the interests of the Croatian part of the population. Unlike Republika Srpska which defied Slobodan Milošević's support for international peace plans, Herceg-Bosna's leaders accepted all the plans and the US-mediated Washington Agreement to set up the so-called Muslim-Croat Federation.

Criticism of the Herceg-Bosnian entity for acting on the rights bestowed on the Croatian entity(ies) by the Vance-Owen or Owen-Stoltenberg Plans seems misdirected. The international community cannot have it both ways. If its authorised representatives proposed (usually on a take-it or leave-it basis — albeit more than once) that Bosnia-Herzegovina's integrity and unity was to be radically altered, why should it be criminal or treasonable for local communities to act along the lines proposed by the UN, EC/EU, OSCE authorised mediators?⁶¹

The changes in the leadership of the HDZ HB in winter 1991 have been attributed to a conspiracy to promote the partition of Bosnia-Herzegovina between Croatia and Serbia. Whatever President Tudjman's influence on the changes — it was probably decisive — the changes were far less productive of dramatic change than implied by the prosecution. After all, Professor Donia himself admits that "Kljuić's departure led subsequently to the selection of Milenko Brkić as head of the HDZ-BiH. *Brkić also supported an integral Bosnia and Croat loyalty to it* [my emphasis]"⁶² Why did Tudjman wait until November, 1992 to force the Herceg-Bosna HDZ to accept Boban, whom Donia describes⁶³ as a "loyal follower of Tudjman and an advocate of territorial separatism." If it had been Tudjman's intention to carry through a partition of Bosnia all along why didn't he act earlier.

⁶¹ See Prosecutor 47 on separate legislation for Herceg-Bosna: It is hard to disagree with Dr. Ribičić's general point that "The Owen-Stoltenberg plan, which satisfied the interests of both Serbs and Croats... went even further than Vance-Owen because it envisaged three distinct entities, rather than a number of cantons under a central authority...."

⁶² See page 137 in this volume.

⁶³ Ibid.

To understand the outbreak of Muslim-Croat violence in 1993 it is necessary to recall the parlous situation of the Bosnian government by spring, 1993, as the Bosnian Serb forces threatened to capture Srebrenica.

In turn, this offensive drove Muslims into Central Bosnia. Drago Hedl, one of Tudjman's fiercest critics in the Croatian press as a regular columnist on *Feral Tribune* noted that "[Mate] Boban, aware that he could get more than he had hoped for, accepted the Vance-Owen cantonisation plan for Bosnia without a moment's hesitation... forgetting that Serbian conquest and ethnic cleansing had led to mass Muslim flight from the aggressor and into HVO-controlled territory...."⁶⁴ Hedl added:

"The establishment of Croatian authority in the canton areas stipulated to be Croat under the Vance-Owen plan did not always occur without opposition. Boban could not resist the temptation of 'a little bit of ethnic cleansing' on his own territory, and this provoked a counter reaction by Muslim forces. Suddenly in a majority in places where formerly they had not been and feeling the rapid dwindling of their overall living space, *Muslims turned on Croats* [emphasis added]. The fragile alliance was broken, wide-spread atrocities occurred on both sides..."⁶⁵

Hedl argued that Tudjman had given up hope of recovering Serb-occupied Croatian territory and "may have thought that, at some future negotiations, the Croatian part of Bosnia might be considered a proper return for the lost territories of eastern Slavonia and Baranja, *which it will be very difficult to retrieve* [emphasis added]."⁶⁶

Writing in 1993 like other anti-Tudjman journalists and activists Hedl regarded the Croatian President as defeatist in his attitude to Serbian military gains in Croatia and Bosnia. In December, 1994, in Zagreb, now in opposition Stipe Mesic who had played a key role in the rise of Mate Boban as Tudjman's emissary two years earlier attacked the Croatian President's passivity in my hearing.

It is important to note that anti-Tudjman politicians and journalists in Croatia regularly denounced his feebleness in regard to reversing Serbian conquests. It was his lack of nationalist resolve that they baited — until August, 1995. Far from pursuing an aggressive policy, he was accused of appeasement.

Croatia itself continued to co-operate with the UN despite widespread unhappiness in the country at what most Croats perceived as the UN's tilting away from any enforcement of resolution guaranteeing Croatian sovereign control over territory then under Krajina Serb control. What is striking is how far President Tudjman continued to co-operate with the UN and its

⁶⁴ Drago HEDL, "The Croat Mini-State: Boban's Fortune and Zagreb's Folly", *War Report*, August-September 1993., 14.-15.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 14.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

mediator Cyrus Vance even after the successful recovery of the strategically vital Maslenica Bridge and its environs by the Croatian armed forces between 23-25th January, 1993.

Only 15% of Croats polled approved of President Tudjman's signing of an agreement to allow UN forces to police the area and supervise the reconstruction of a permanent bridge after the operation. Only 36% trusted the UN to actually carry out the repair work. 50% regarded the pact as a "failure for Croatian policy." One commentator noted that "In accepting Resolution 815 and the Geneva Agreement to implement Resolution 802, the Croatian government seems aware it has compromised itself on key national issues."⁶⁷

Even Zimmermann's negative portrait of Tudjman has to admit that when asked to make restitution to the Zagreb Jewish community for the destruction of its synagogue by the Ustashe during the war, "to our surprise, he promised to do this. *He kept that promise.* [emphasis added]"⁶⁸ "[Tudjman] listened to Western expressions of concern, and he often did something about them, even when he saw no clear interest."⁶⁹ In other words, far from pursuing a consistently defiant attitude either to the UN or Western countries, Tudjman was very cooperative.

It is constantly forgotten today how far it was the opposition to President Tudjman which demanded aggressive military action against the Serbs. Tudjman was decried for playing along with the international community and not asserting Croatian interests by force if necessary. After Tudjman's *Blitzkriegs* in May and August, 1995, which recovered Western Slavonia and Krajina his opponents shifted to accusing him of being too aggressive.

9. Central Bosnia

Though proclaimed part of Herceg-Bosna, the Croat-inhabited parts of Central Bosnia were in a very different situation from Herzegovina.

Media focus on the siege of Mostar, with all the hardships and death inflicted on the largely Muslim population trapped in the eastern quarter of the city, distorted the relative balance of power by emphasising the superiority of the Croatian forces and the relative helplessness of the Muslims (who certainly were in a grim position in Mostar). However, elsewhere the balance of power and the military initiative did not exclusively favour the Croatian side.

As a by-product of Serbian advances and concomitant ethnic cleansing, large numbers of Muslims (including troops and para-militaries) were pushed westwards into areas traditionally inhabited by Croatian majorities, especially in Central Bosnia.

⁶⁷ See Patrick MOORE, "The Shaky Truce in Croatia" in *RFE/RL Research Report* Vol. 2 No. 21 (21st May, 1993), 48 - 49.

⁶⁸ W. ZIMMERMANN, *ibid.*, 74.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 77.

These Muslim refugees were certainly victims of Serb aggression, but their response to it was not necessarily admirable. Driven from their homes, they regarded the Croats among whom they now found themselves as lucky to have escaped their fate and as possessors of property and economic means which aroused their envy and resentment.

Unlike the Muslim refugees, the local Croats had no direct experience of warfare and were less well-prepared for its outbreak than the already organised BiH forces and para-militaries who had arrived in their areas from Serb-conquered zones of Bosnia.

At Vitez, the HVO had its only significant munitions factory in Bosnia. Loss of control of the explosives manufacturing plant would have had profound political as well as military implications. The BiH Army's offensive no doubt made sense from a Muslim point of view but for Croats it was a deeply sinister development. If it had proved successful, in all probability a wave of Croat refugees fleeing south-westwards would have preceded the arrival of the Muslim refugees in the baggage train of the Army of BiH.

It has been alleged (with some basis in evidence) that the interpreters and local personnel employed by Britbat as well as other international agencies and NGOs in the area came predominantly from a Muslim background. Emotional entanglements between (male) officers and (female) locally-employed staff from one group could well have distorted perceptions of developments.

Conflict between Muslims and Croats was fortuitous for the international community, since it complicated the picture of what was happening and made the argument that the locals were incorrigibly quarrelsome and unworthy of Western assistance much more plausible.⁷⁰ The debate continued, with both Bosnian hawks and doves volubly articulating their proposals and trepidations. The extent to which one's image of the adversary and the conflict dynamics influenced policy proposals was evident in mid-April 1993, after a renewed outbreak of intense fighting between Bosnian Croats and Muslims. While Croat-Muslim clashes had been *underreported* up to that point, the April 16 massacre in the village of Ahmici received prominent coverage in the international media. Underscoring the three-way nature of the Bosnian war, the Ahmici attack *reinforced* the views of those who argued that no foreign intervention in a civil war could force three ethnic groups to live together in one state, and thus *anything but humanitarian assistance was futile.*" [emphasis added]

The Ahmici massacre was a crucial event. Its timing was highly significant. Although the BBC film of evidence of the Ahmici massacre was taken on 16th April, 1993 (as the time-codes visible on the broadcast clips showed), it was not actually broadcast until 21st April. I have seen no explanation of why it took so long for the dramatic and undoubtedly newsworthy film to reach our

⁷⁰ See Sanya POPOVIĆ, "Debating Operation Quagmire Storm: U.S. Crisis Management in Bosnia" in edited by Raju C.G. Thomas & H. Richard Friman, *The South Slav Conflict: History, Religion, Ethnicity and Nationalism*, Garland: New York, 1996, 302.

screens. The delay was particularly odd since live interviews were possible with Colonel Stewart of the Cheshire Regiment on the BBC-1 6 p.m. News on 21st April when he told viewers “It is almost impossible for us to establish” the scale and responsibility of the massacre.

In the days running up to the discovery and publicity circus surrounding the Ahmici massacre, the Serb offensive around Srebrenica had put reluctant Western governments, especially the British one, under pressure to use military force to prevent Serb gains. It was certainly convenient that more than one villain should appear on stage to muddy the Bosnian waters.

The headline writers in London linked Croat atrocities with Serb ones around Srebrenica to make the parallel clear.⁷¹ Anchorman Jon Snow began the 7 p.m. Channel 4 News: “Good evening. If proof were needed that all ethnic communities are equally capable of committing atrocities in Bosnia what has happened in and around Vitez in the last 48 hours has provided it. At least 200 civilians have been killed in cold blood... This as Muslims in Srebrenica gave up their arms to Canadian UN troops...”⁷²

Later in the same programme Mr. Snow asked Cedric Thornberry of the UN, “Now that it is so clear that all ethnic communities are perpetrating appalling atrocities and that there is no simple argument between Bosnia and Serbia or Bosnia and Croatia everybody is at it. Isn’t the Vance-Owen map providing the basic clue [clearly he meant cue] to the ethnic cleansing. People are ethnically cleansing their way through the map.”

Peter Snow introduced BBC’s Newsnight programme announcing, “Evidence that the Serbs alone cannot be blamed for the atrocities sweeping Bosnia comes tonight from the town of Vitez. British troops there have evidence of Muslims being executed by Croats in widespread ethnic cleansing... The Croats now look just as bad as the Serbs...”⁷³ The Croats are taking it out on the Muslims... right on the threshold of British military headquarters...”

Colonel Stewart told the programme that his troops saw “normally a whole family gunned down by *someone or other*...”⁷⁴ At this stage Col. Stewart made no precise charges of responsibility.

Nik Gowing talked of “drunken brawls turning into all out ethnic cleansing”⁷⁵ but then — without explanation — claimed “The presence of Croat armoured vehicles and artillery underlines how premeditated and politically motivated this viciousness is. There are summary executions and *reprisal* [emphasis added] killings. British warrior vehicles are... removing casualties of ethnic cleansing by *both sides* [emphasis added].” Although the tenor of this report was critical of the Croats it nonetheless included points and com-

⁷¹ See ITN 5.40 p.m. and BBC 1 6 p.m. on 21st April, 1993.

⁷² Channel 4 News, 7 p.m., 21st April, 1993.

⁷³ BBC 2 Newsnight, 10.30 p.m., 21st April, 1993.

⁷⁴ BBC 2 Newsnight, 10.30 p.m. 21st April, 1993.

⁷⁵ Channel 4 News, 21st April, 1993.

ments which countered the argument that the violence was premeditated and politically co-ordinated by the Croatian leadership.

“Reprisal killings” implies that Muslims had attacked or committed killings first.

Mike Smart told viewers of the One O’Clock News on BBC 1 on 22nd April, 1993, that “Evidence of atrocities in Central Bosnia where British troops can do little more than recover the bodies underlines the difficulty of identifying aggressors.” The British Defence Secretary, Malcolm Rifkind, used the Ahmici massacre to justify opposing both air strikes to lift the Serb sieges of Sarajevo and Srebrenica and lifting the arms embargo. He told the same programme: “What will be the results of arming the Bosnian Muslims because we see in central Bosnia a new conflict and a new set of atrocities between Croats and Muslims...”

Rifkind added “In the case of raising an embargo once you start supplying arms to people you have control of how these arms are going used... If in fact they were used to commit atrocities against civilians on the other side you would be in a very difficult dilemma.”

The name Ahmici was only specifically mentioned for the first time on 23rd April, 1993.⁷⁶ Col. Stewart was shown declaring, “Some swine, someone set fire to the cellar” Then he confronted a local HVO representative (as described by the reporter) and demanded to know, “Who has done it? Who is responsible?”

In the days before the discovery of the Ahmici massacre, the crisis at Srebrenica was growing. On 15th April, the Muslim authorities in Srebrenica refused to let the UNHCR evacuate more than 2,000 civilians from the besieged town for fear that any further evacuation would make it easier for the international community to abandon the town to its fate. Prime Minister John Major came under pressure from the opposition leaders John Smith and Paddy Ashdown (Liberal Democrat) and his predecessor Lady Thatcher. In a speech before the broadcasting of news of the Ahmici Massacre, John Smith said, “I believe that it is now necessary for the United Nations to issue an ultimatum to Serbia that unless a ceasefire is made effective the United Nations will authorise air strikes against Serbian lines of communication in Bosnia-Herzegovina.”⁷⁷ The UN Secretary-General’s representative on the ground in Bosnia Cedric Thornberry accused General Mladić explicitly of “genocide” and lying to the UN.⁷⁸

Even Lord Owen was talking about “a legitimate use of force” and reminded viewers of the ITN news that he had advocated air strikes in 1992 before becoming EC peace mediator.⁷⁹ The UN Security Council had just declared Srebrenica to be a “safe area”. The coincidence of the discovery of the Ahmici

⁷⁶ ITN 12.30 p.m., 23rd April, 1993.

⁷⁷ BBC 1 news 5:10 pm (17th April, 1993).

⁷⁸ See *Channel Four News* 7 p.m., 15th April, 1993.

⁷⁹ See ITN, 12:30 p.m., 16th April, 1993.

Massacre with the crescendo of international concern about the fate of Srebrenica and the dilemma posed especially to the British government as the major force provider for UNPROFOR along with France was painfully obvious at the time in April, 1993.

It is too simplistic to present the Muslims only as victims. Certainly Muslims may have been disproportionately victims, but their political and military leaders were capable of undertaking military operations which flouted the normal rules of war. Perhaps they could argue — as others did — that necessity justified their actions but on reflection outside observers should not ignore these actions by the Muslim forces.

The formation of the Muslim-Croat Federation at the behest of the United States on 18th March, 1994, did not resolve all the tensions. For instance, in March, 1995, the Bosnian Croat General Vlado Santic was kidnapped by Bosnian Muslim troops.⁸⁰ It would be wrong to attribute all the faults to the Croats. The record shows otherwise.

Any understanding of the tragic events of mid-April, 1993, cannot take at face value the assertions of any of the participants. All of them — including quite clearly the British military participants in UNPROFOR — had, and may well still have, political agendas of their own. Bias there was certainly enough on all sides. To privilege the testimony of any one set of participants as *ex officio* reliable is to fly in the face of the evidence.

⁸⁰ See the *New York Times* 17th March, 1995.