

Insurgency as directed political violence: Serbian insurgency in Croatia in the 1990s

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Abstract

The article examines the political violence and insurgency led by the Serbian population in Croatia during the 1990s, which developed under the influence of Slobodan Milošević and a historical, ideological framework advocating for a "Greater Serbia." This article outlines the insurgency's ideological roots in Serbian nationalism, which date back to 19th-century doctrines advocating territorial expansion and Serbian unity across the Balkans. With the dissolution of Yugoslavia imminent, Milošević leveraged Serbian grievances to incite the Serbian minority in Croatia, leading to an armed rebellion that escalated into widespread violence. The Croatian leadership, framing the conflict as a defensive struggle for national survival, mobilised against what it saw as both Serbian insurgency and broader Yugoslav military aggression. The analysis highlights how Serbian nationalists strategically used misinformation, political mobilisation, and support from the Yugoslav People's Army to escalate the conflict, ultimately destabilising the region. This work emphasises that the resulting war was rooted not merely in ethnic divisions, but also competing nationalisms and the instrumentalisation of historical narratives.

Keywords

insurgency, nationalism, Great Serbia projects, Milošević, political violence, ideology

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Introduction

The Croatian Homeland War narrative is based on the thesis of an external enemy threatening Croatian territory, which is primarily defined as the Yugoslav leadership attempting to carry out a Greater Serbian policy by inciting Croatia's Serbian population. The power to incite insurgency by the Yugoslav leadership stems from the support gained from the Serbian population in Croatia through incendiary rhetoric and calls for retribution. Serbian nationalism started to manifest prominently in the figure and actions of Slobodan Milošević, who, shortly before the outbreak of the insurgency, served as the President of the Presidency of the SR Serbia. Milošević's ability to incite insurgency is not rooted in ideological principles but rather in the interests of specific groups, which, consequently, will have devastating consequences for the Serbian population in Croatia. The Greater Serbian idea is not publicly mentioned in Milošević's (Yugoslav) narrative because it was not the driving force behind the Serbian insurgency, but rather its political goal. (Žunec, 2007).

The insurgency, which later escalates into the Serbian side's aggression against Croatia, cannot be based on the concept of "freedom of the Serbian people" because it does not require freedom. On the contrary, it undermines freedom. The rebellious side seeks acknowledgment of the fact that freedom has limits where human beings are concerned because the boundary itself is the power of insurgency of that being (Camus, 2000). On the Croatian side, the intensifying insurgency fueled patriotic sentiments, motivating them to wage a defensive war against a larger and better equipped adversary. Croatian and Serbian public opinion differed in their perception of the Croatian-Serbian conflict. Croats identified the conflict with an individual who directly affected them, while Serbs saw it as someone else's war (Milošević). In such a case, one can theoretically trace the causes of subsequent outcomes.

The Croatian public required time to adjust to the fact that the country was at war and to define that war. Understandably, the political public was unwilling to accept the claim that it was a civil war. In the summer of 1991, President Tuđman stated that "The Republic of Serbia, through its representatives, was waging an aggressive war against the Republic of Croatia. We are

forced to fight for life or death for the survival of the Croatian people and Croatia" (Engelberg, 1991:2). Defining the war as an inter-state aggression was essential for identifying the enemy and their motives and intentions within the Croatian public and subsequently organizing defense. The nature of insurgency, in this specific case, was conditioned by the existing state of political reality, which is a result of historical changes, and it is defined as a response to the conflicting reality of the political situation, which is the reality of human coexistence.

The paper employs a descriptive method, drawing on an analysis of both foreign and domestic literature, as well as publicly available archival materials, to explore the social, cultural, and political dynamics that shaped the conflict. In addition to the descriptive method, this paper also follows the analytical method, which involves examining the underlying causes and effects of the events and actions that led to the conflict. By breaking down complex political, ideological, and historical factors, this approach helps to understand how these elements interacted and contributed to the escalation of the war.

Definition and factors of insurgency

The Croatian Parliament stated in the Conclusions at the beginning of August 1991 that "the communist authorities of the Republic of Serbia, with the help of the JNA (Yugoslav People's Army), are pursuing an aggressive and expansionist policy towards the Republic of Croatia, inciting and openly assisting terrorists and their helpers in Croatia for the purpose of conquering the territory of the Republic of Croatia." (*Conclusions*, Narodne novine 39/91, August 3, 1991). In the preamble of the Declaration on the Homeland War (Narodne novine 102/00, October 17, 2000), it is stated that "Serbia, Montenegro, and the JNA carried out an armed aggression against the Republic of Croatia, along with the armed insurgency of part of the Serbian population in the Republic of Croatia." The importance of defining the war as aggression is evident in shaping the modern Croatian national identity and defining the political criterion for determining Croatia's post-war relations with other countries, particularly with Serbia.

The insurgency's leadership constructed the perception of the situation in 1989/90 as "a state of endangerment to the political and biological existence of Serbs and as the beginning of a new genocide" (Žunec, 2008: 35). From the constructed fact that Croats posed a threat to the survival of Serbs, the solution emerged that the territory where Serbs lived needed to be occupied and separated from Croatia, while expelling all non-Serb inhabitants. During the 1980s, Serbian politics took shape under Milošević, whom Dobrica Ćosić, the father of modern Serbian nationalism, called "the most successful destroyer of Tito's state order" and "the most deserving man for leading Serbia out of half a century of subordination to the anti-Serbian coalition" (Radelić et al., 2006: 68). By the end of the 1980s, the communist governance model collapsed, and new ideological concepts based on nationalism emerged. The Serbian discourse was shaped by a nationalist ideology stating that Serbs in Croatia were unequal, subjected to years of assimilation, and deprived of their national rights, which, in effect, was an attack on the leadership in Serbia (Žunec, 2007). The Croatian leadership was perceived as nationalist, so accordingly, Serbs in Croatia should organize themselves to preserve their national identity. In this context, the Serbian Democratic Party (SDS) was promoted as the protector of Serbs in Croatia (Pauković, 2008).

The Serbian Democratic Party, as a key factor in the Serbian insurgency in Croatia, was founded in Knin on February 17, 1990 under the leadership of Jovan Rašković, a native of Knin. Dobrica Ćosić specifically advised that the political organization of Serbs in Croatia should be led by Rašković. The party's program nominally relied on democratization and pluralism, advocating for a federative system but opposing equality among republics by advocating the principle of "one citizen, one vote" (Radelić et al., 2006). The fact that the establishment of Serbian autonomous areas in Croatian territory and the assertion of autonomy for Serbs in Croatia were not independent decisions of Croatian Serbs is confirmed by a conversation between Borisav Jović, the President of the Presidency of the SFRY (Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia), and Milošević on June 28, 1990, about plans for the Serbs in Croatia. In his records, Jović states:

"He (Milošević, ed.) agrees with the idea of 'cutting off' Slovenia and Croatia, but he asks me if the army wants to carry out such an order? I tell him that it must carry out the order and that I do not doubt it, but my problem is what about the Serbs in Croatia and how to secure a majority in the Presidency of the SFRY for such a decision. Sloba (Milošević's nickname) has proposed two ideas: first, that the 'cutting off' of Croatia should be carried out in such a way that the Lika-Banja and Kordun municipalities, which have formed a community, remain on our side, with the people there later deciding through a referendum whether they want to stay or leave, and secondly, that members of the Presidency of SFRJ from Slovenia and Croatia be excluded from voting on the decision because they do not represent the part of Yugoslavia that makes that decision. If the Bosnians were in favor, we will have a two-thirds majority. Sloba urges us to make that decision within a week at the latest if we want to save the country. Without Croatia and Slovenia, Yugoslavia will have approximately 17 million inhabitants, which is sufficient by European standards." (Jović, 1996: 161)".

It is evident, therefore, that the entire actions of the leadership of Croatian Serbs were in line with the plans of the Serbian leadership. Milošević openly supported the armed insurgency of Serbs in Croatia, stating, "They have formed and declared that they do not recognize the Croatian Republic. They formed the Autonomous Region of Krajina. (...) And if we need to fight, we will certainly fight. And I hope they won't be so crazy to fight with us. For, if we don't know how to work and prosper well, at least we will know how to fight." ¹

Already in the 1980s, Slobodan Milošević clearly advocated the view that a political crisis should be provoked if necessary to stop separatism in Yugoslavia (Radelić et al., 2006). Milošević gained support from the JNA as Greater Serbian nationalism grew. This was due to the fact that many JNA officers were Serbian and the JNA leadership's belief in Yugoslavia's need for a centralized state structure. Veljko Kadijević, the last Federal Secretary of People's Defense of Yugoslavia and the Chief Commander of the JNA in the

1 "Excerpts from stenographic notes from the meeting of the President of the Republic Slobodan Milošević and the Vice President of the National Assembly of the Republic of Serbia with the presidents of the municipalities of the Republic of Serbia, held on March 16, 1991."

aggression against Croatia, stated in his book *Moje viđenje raspada*: "For the Yugoslav army that did not want and, in my opinion, should not have acted autonomously, that is, taken power into its own hands, the biggest problem was, as I have already said several times, the lack of a real state that would conduct its part in the war and a real supreme commander in the form of the Presidency of the SFRY." (Kadijević, 1993: 53). The JNA, at the beginning of the 1990s, acted in a manner that prevented Croatian action and enabled the maintenance of the Serbian insurgency. Although the Croatian side hesitated to declare the JNA as an aggressor due to awareness of the current inferiority of its own forces and fear of open war, it is clear that from the very beginning, the Army was the most significant form of external support for the rebellious Serbs, later becoming the leader of the insurgency. Resources, training, operational, and logistical support throughout the existence of the Republic of Serbian Krajina (RSK) came precisely from Belgrade (Radelić et al., 2006).

Continuity of Greater Serbia politics

To understand the Serbian ideology during the Croatian Homeland War, it's important to understand its continuity. Vuk Karadžić's political program, *Serbs All and Everywhere*, debuted in 1836 and was published in Vienna in 1849. Karadžić refers to Štokavian Croats as Serbs of "Roman Law" because they speak the Štokavian dialect and are considered Serbs ("...and those under Roman law call themselves by the places they live in, for example, Slavonians, Bosnians (or Bosniaks), Dalmatians, Dubrovnik people, etc.") (Ćović, 1991: 83), categorizing them by regional names. In Karadžić's project, Croats and Muslims did not exist; they must gradually become Serbian because "all smart people, both from the Greek and Roman Serbs, recognize that they are one nation, it's just harder for those under Roman law to call themselves Serbs, but they will probably get used to it gradually, because if they do not consider themselves Serbs, they have no national name" (Ćović, 1991: 85).

Another one of Greater Serbia programs, *Načertanije* by Ilija Garašanin, a short document outlining Serbia's "program of external and national policies." Garašanin, who held the position of Minister of Internal Affairs of Serbia from 1843, created this secret state document in 1844. The author states in

Načertanije the goal of restoring the Serbian empire based on Serbian state and historical rights, which "find their foundation and basis in the Serbian empire of the 13th and 14th centuries and in the rich and glorious Serbian history" (Ćović, 1991: 67). Garašanin's draft can be considered the first political program of Greater Serbia, a project aiming to expand Serbian state territory and assimilate the peoples living in those territories. It states: "This foundation and these bases for building the Serbian empire should, therefore, be increasingly cleansed and freed from ruins and obstructions, brought into view, and thus on such a solid and permanent historical foundation, the new construction should be undertaken and continued...Particular attention should be paid to the military state of the people and the country: their warlike spirit, the arming of the people, followed by the readiness and proper disposition of the army; where the war depots and arsenals are located..." (Ćović, 1991: 67-69). The fact that the document was created as a secret state document is indicative that the Greater Serbia program was not an isolated idea of an individual, but a collective stance of the Serbian state leadership. *Serbs All and Everywhere* and *Načertanije* emerged roughly at the same time, presenting similar ideas of expanding Serbia beyond its existing territory, indicating a common consensus within Serbian intellectual and statesman circles. The concepts outlined in these two programs would form the basis of Serbian political ideology in the 20th century (Agičić, 1994).

The next Greater Serbian program worth mentioning was published in 1891 under the name *Ethnographic Map of Serbian Lands*, aiming to illustrate the ethnic boundaries of the Serbian people to European diplomacy. The map labeled western lands as exclusive areas of "Serbian claims," stretching from the Drina and the Bay of Kotor on the Adriatic across the Croatian Adriatic ports and islands to the Raša River in Istria. It then follows the western part of Croatia to Varaždin in the north, continuing along the northern bank of the Drava River, resulting in a new border line at Baranja, Pécs, and the Tisza, encompassing the entire Bačka region, extending over the Tamiš River into Banat towards Vršac and the Danube. All the ethnic groups living in these areas were listed, except Croats, thereby denying their existence and attempting to present their territorial claims as a unification of "Serbian lands" (Nazor, 2013).

The Act on the Name and Division of the Kingdom into Administrative Areas (1929) divided Yugoslavia into nine banovinas. Croatia received two banovinas (Sava and Littoral), but lost the entire Srijem region, along with Zemun, and the entire Dubrovnik area, including Pelješac and Korčula. (Nazor, 2013).

The signing the Cvetković–Maček Agreement (1939) and the enactment of the Banovina of Croatia marked the beginning of the process of transforming the Kingdom of Yugoslavia from a unitary to a federal state. Recognizing the political and national individuality of Croats, one-fifth of the Yugoslav state territory was exempted from many central government affairs, leading some members of the ruling Yugoslav Radical Community, as well as part of the Serbian intellectuals, to interpret this event as the beginning of the breakup of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia as a unique political and state entity of the Serbian people (Regan, 2007). In response to this political act, Serbs in Croatia demanded the creation of the "Krajina," a separate Serbian territorial and political unit, whose program was outlined in a directive titled "Krajina, Serbs in our northwestern provinces." The goal of such a demand was to prevent the unification of Croatian lands into a political and economic union and to hinder the establishment of the Banovina of Croatia and the formation of its central authority with the Parliament in Zagreb (Nazor, 2013: 40). According to the "Krajina" program, the capital of the new Serbian "region" was supposed to be Bihać. The directive also included a map of the "Krajina," outlining the new entity to encompass areas that were almost identical to the territories encompassed by the self-proclaimed "SAO Krajina" in the 1990s. The "Krajina" project led to a new project called "Serbs United" at the end of 1939, aiming to secede certain districts of the Banovina of Croatia and join them to Serbia (Nazor, 2013).

During World War II in Yugoslavia, two major Greater Serbian projects emerged. The first was *Homogeneous Serbia* by Stevan Moljević (1941), based on ethnic cleansing, with its main representatives being Chetniks under Draža Mihailović's leadership in collaboration with the emigrant government of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia in London. The central idea of the project can be summarized by the author's catchphrases –3 "Where there are Serbs, there is Serbia," and "Serbdom is in danger." Similar to the "Serbs United"

project, this one relies on the "Krajina" project (Valentić, 2010: 50-52). Milutin Nedić, a Yugoslav Royal Army general, authored *Serbs and Serbian Lands – The Ethnographic Problem of the Serbian People* (1942) and promoted it by the collaborationist Serbian government in Belgrade. It is based on the idea that the Serbian people were ethnically divided and mixed with other cultures. The author's proposed methods for reuniting Greater Serbia include violent deportations and annexation of foreign territories. (Valentić, 2010: 58-59).

According to Greater Serbian propaganda, Serbs are eternal liberators who freed Croats and other Slavic nations from Austro-Hungarian rule and liberated Yugoslavia from German-Italian occupation. After the war, Croats were accused of being fascist, while simultaneously, the creation of the the collaborationist Chetnik movement of Draža Mihailović and Kosta Pećanac serving German and Italian occupying forces were overlooked. The Serbian fascist forces (Nedic's Serbian State Guard and Serbian Volunteer Corps, Kosta Pećanac's Chetniks, and Draža Mihailović's Chetniks and gendarmerie) had about 34,000 members by late 1941, increasing to around 65,000 by late 1944 (Military Encyclopedia VI, 373-375).

In the post-war period, the Yugoslav political system rested on a party monopoly, where the factors determining the functioning of the political and legal system were rooted in the general ideological system of the communist movement (Mihaljević, 2011). With the establishment of a new government in 1945, a new legal order was created, as the previous one was considered largely unsuitable for the new social relations. Soon after, Serbian intellectual circles began "proving" how Serbia was robbed after the war, despite "Serbs bleeding in the war." As a result of these efforts, the *Memorandum of the Serbian Academy of Sciences and Arts* was created and published in 1986. The *Memorandum* emphasized the alleged endangerment of Serbs and Serbian identity in Yugoslavia, especially in Kosovo and Croatia, determining the direction for solving the Serbian issue within the SFR Yugoslavia.

The Greater Serbian expansionist policy was formed over a long period, and during this process, not only the official government but also a significant portion of the intelligentsia was engaged. Under the guise of scientific research and debates, substantial amounts of books, brochures, journals,

discussions, and newspaper articles were published with the aim of building a comprehensive system of spreading misinformation, from marginalization to open denial of the cultural and ethnic peculiarities and rights of neighboring nations. Additionally, one element of spreading the idea of Greater Serbia was the action of Serbian diplomacy, particularly in France and Great Britain, attempting to convince European public opinion that their projects were just, progressive, and noble (Ćović, 1991).

Phases of insurgency

In the first half of 1990, the Yugoslav People's Army (JNA) began confiscating the weapons of the Territorial Defense (TO) of the Socialist Republic of Croatia due to the "excess of weapons and other military equipment, posing a serious problem for TO units and headquarters in terms of accommodation, storage, and maintenance." The directive on disarming the TO stated that "weapons and ammunition will be taken over by the rear bases of the JNA in their current condition." At the same time, the raising of combat readiness of the Yugoslav People's Army (JNA) commenced, with orders given to the Command of the 5th Military Region:

Point 1: "The General Staff of the JNA – First Administration of the GS, will update the plans Golija and Radan and by March 20, 1990, deliver them to specific commands of military regions, which will elaborate on their plans and regularly maintain the necessary readiness of units to perform their designated tasks."

Point 3: "The Commands of military regions and the Air Force and Anti-Air Defense - will ensure the maximum level of combat readiness of ready battalions and special units."

Additionally, in Serbian military circles, rhetoric began accusing the new authorities in the SR Croatia of undermining interethnic relations in the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia. An announcement from the Command of the 5th Military Region to the Command of the 32nd Corps regarding the political-security situation in the SR Croatia and Slovenia highlights the following:

"Social-political events in the Republic of Slovenia and SR Croatia are very dynamic-tumultuous and complex. In otherwise conflicting relations within the country and a difficult economic situation, these events have a very unfavorable effect on the political-security situation, generally and particularly in the area of responsibility of the 5th Military Region. The constitutional crisis deepens, and measures to resolve the severe economic situation are yielding results slowly. Simultaneously, the social vulnerability of the majority of the population is rising, and interethnic relations have been severely disrupted. Attacks by the new authorities of SRH and R Sl. on the JNA, through various forms and contents, continue, which further complicates the political-security situation and causes new tensions, suspicions, and concerns among the JNA composition."

The document also presented predictions of future events: "Further escalation of socio-political relations, interethnic conflicts, and exacerbation of social tensions due to a severe economic situation are expected, with continued escalations of attacks on the JNA." The disarmament of the Territorial Defense of the Socialist Republic of Croatia, the increase in combat readiness of the Yugoslav People's Army (JNA), and the escalation of rhetoric toward Croatia and Slovenia can be considered as the prelude to the Serbian insurgency that started in August 1990 with the "log revolution."

On a political level, the formation of the Community of municipalities in northern Dalmatia and Lika can be seen as a prelude to the insurgency. The decision to secede the municipality of Knin from the Community of municipalities in Dalmatia was made during a session of the SDS held on May 21, 1990, in Knin. The new community of municipalities was supposed to include Benkovac, Donji Lapac, Gračac, Knin, Obrovac, and Titova Korenica, and the reason cited for its formation was the need for better economic and cultural integration of the Serbian population in those areas (Barić, 2005). In late July 1990, the Serbian Assembly was held in Srb, discussing the constitutional position of the Serbian people in Croatia, leading to the establishment of the Serbian National Council and the acceptance of the Declaration on the sovereignty and autonomy of the Serbian people. The declaration called for the right of the people to self-determination and secession. It also emphasized the right of the Serbian people to linguistic, educational, and cultural

autonomy, establishing the Serbian Assembly as the political representation of the Serbian people in Croatia (Daskalović, 1990; Četnik, 1990).

The onset of the Serbian insurgency in Croatia can be considered the "log revolution," which erupted in reaction to Croatia's withdrawal of weapons from the reserve police force stations in the Knin area, where the first signs of Serbian unconstitutional activities became noticeable. Soon after the withdrawal of weapons on August 17, 1990, there were mass gatherings and demonstrations of the Serbian population in the area of northern Dalmatia and Lika. Weapons from the reserve police were distributed to Serbian civilians, and Serbian-nationality policemen joined the insurgency. The placement of blockades (using stones, trees, vehicles) on roads connecting continental Croatia with Dalmatia was the first concrete subversive activities of the rebellious Serbs on Croatian territory. In response to these subversive Serbian actions, police forces, armored transports, and helicopters were sent from Zagreb to the rebel-held territory. The JNA prevented their passage to the insurgency area, openly siding with the Serbian rebels (Margetić, 1990; Luburović, 1990).

The events of August 1990 served Serbian insurgents, Serbian media, and indirectly the Serbian leadership in Belgrade to emphasize the importance of protecting Croatian Serbs from Croatian nationalism. A key method in spreading panic and inciting hatred towards Croats was the dissemination of disinformation via Radio Knin about chemical warfare, an invasion of Knin, dozens of dead in Obrovac, and the dangers of "Ustashas behind the fence" (Jureško, 1990). At an extraordinary session of the Executive Council of the Knin municipality held the day after the outbreak of the "log revolution," conclusions were reached assessing the situation as "extremely complex with the possibility of further complications." It was further concluded that "the population in the Knin municipality stands resolutely to protect the interests and identity of the Serbian people," expressing "great concern and worry among the population about the possibility of intervention by internal security forces of the Republic of Croatia." It was considered that "the population in the municipality has self-organized in defense of their own interests, and that state organs had no influence on the overall created sentiment regarding the events that occurred." Croats in the Knin area suddenly found themselves

in a threatened position, exposed to threats and property attacks, leading to significant distrust and tension between them and their Serbian neighbors (Bukša, 1990).

The further plans of the Serbian leadership in Croatia were presented during the meeting of the Executive Board of the Serbian Democratic Party (SDS) in Gračac on October 20, 1990. According to these plans, the Serbian people had the right to territorial autonomy in northern Dalmatia, Lika, Kordun, Banija, western Slavonia, and Baranja, in areas where the majority population resided. In the event of Croatia's secession from Yugoslavia, the Serbian people had the right to self-determination. In December, a proposal for the Statute of the Serbian Autonomous Region of Krajina (SAO Krajina) was adopted in Titova Korenica, marking the beginning of the existence of SAO Krajina. According to the proposal, SAO Krajina was defined as a territorial autonomy within Croatia and the federative Yugoslavia, consisting of municipalities from the Community of municipalities in northern Dalmatia and Lika and settlements and municipalities with a majority Serbian population that decided to join, with Knin as the capital (Barić, 2005).

In response to the Croatian Parliament's resolution on Croatia's secession from the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (SFRY), the Serbian National Council and the Executive Council of SAO Krajina adopted the Resolution on the Separation of the Republic of Croatia and SAO Krajina on February 28, 1991. The resolution stated that "the Serbian people in SAO Krajina and Croatia have no reason to separate from the Yugoslav state" and that "SAO Krajina remains in Yugoslavia, in a joint state with the Republic of Serbia and Montenegro, as well as with the Serbian people in the Republic of Bosnia and Herzegovina and other nations and republics that accept the joint state." As a continuation of the resolution, the Executive Council of SAO Krajina adopted on April 1 the Decision on the Annexation of the Serbian Autonomous Region of Krajina to the Republic of Serbia, making "the territory of SAO Krajina an integral part of the state territory of the Republic of Serbia." This act can be considered the end of the first phase of the Serbian insurgency in Croatia.

The initial clashes between Serbian insurgents and Croatian police signaled the beginning of the armed conflict. On March 2, 1991, an insurgency of

policemen of Serbian nationality occurred in Pakrac. (Vjesnik, March 3, 1991). Subsequently, in Plitvice on March 31, there was another clash, known as the "Bloody Easter", where the first casualties occurred: Josip Jović, a Croatian policeman, and Rajko Vukadinović, a rebel (Vjesnik, April 1, 1991). In Borovo Selo near Vukovar, on May 2, 12 Croatian policemen were killed in an attack by Serbian insurgents (Vjesnik, May 3, 1991). Although the JNA attempted to present itself as a factor preventing inter-ethnic conflicts during these clashes, it actually informally sided with the Serbian rebels, hindering the actions of the Croatian police. From Serbian side information on the events in Pakrac, we can read: "The engaged unit of the 5th Military District in Pakrac was deployed by the decision of the SFRY Presidency, and it will be there until the situation calms down, and similarly, the units of the 5th Military District will be engaged in all other cases when the situation demands it. The JNA will not allow bloodshed and a civil war" (Globus, 1991).

Goals and operational patterns of insurgency

The first event marking the beginning of political organization among the rebellious Serbs was a gathering on Petrova Gora on March 4, 1990, officially organized by the Assemblies of the municipalities of Vojnić and Vrginmost and the Yugoslav Independent Democratic Party (JSDS). According to reports, tens of thousands of people attended the assembly. Besides the official organizational committee, there was also an illegal one aiming to turn the gathering into a Serbian nationalist rally (Pauković, 2008). Dušan Pekić, a retired general and the main speaker at the event, spoke about preserving brotherhood and unity and the people's fear of nationalist parties. He emphasized, "The main actors of this tragic and dreadful policy are remnants of Ustasha, Chetnik, White Guard, and Ballist forces, as well as new nationalist, separatist forces, who have led a great hysterical anti-communist, anti-socialist, and anti-Yugoslav campaign. They cloak their dark goals with national flags and promise national happiness in new great-national states that will expand to the borders where the last settlements of their nation reside." (Večernji list, March 10, 1990). The overall narrative of the assembly, while highlighting Yugoslavism and unity, revolved around warning about

the emergence of Croatian nationalism in the form of the HDZ and Tuđman, and the endangerment of Serbs in Croatia.

At the end of August and the beginning of September 1990, a referendum on Serbian autonomy in Croatia was held, allowing the entire adult Serbian population living in Croatia, as well as Serbs not residing in Croatia but holding its citizenship, to participate (Vjesnik, August 14, 1990). The referendum took place in 23 municipalities: Beli Manastir, Benkovac, Daruvar, Donji Lapac, Dvor na Uni, Garešnica, Glina, Gospić, Gračac, Grubišno Polje, Karlovac, Knin, Kostajnica, Obrovac, Ogulin, Otočac, Pakrac, Petrinja, Slunj, Titova Korenica, Vojnić, Vrginmost, Vukovar, and in some parts of Serbia and Bosnia and Herzegovina. According to the Serbian National Council, 756,781 individuals participated in the referendum, with 99.96% declaring in favor of Serbian autonomy (Barić, 2005: 86). The results of the referendum were used by the insurgency's leadership as justification for declaring Serbian autonomy in Croatia, an attempt to infiltrate Croatian political structures and exploit them for their own purposes. Selective violence, intimidation of officials, and seeking electoral positions were methods employed to discredit the government and showcase the system's incapability. The armed forces of the SFRY, specifically the JNA, supported the Serbian leadership in applying these means.

The armed forces of the SFRY were composed of two components: the Yugoslav People's Army (JNA) and the Territorial Defense (TO). The TO fell under the jurisdiction of the republic and autonomous province leaderships, while the JNA was under the authority of the SFRY Presidency. One of the reasons for this concept of the armed forces of the SFRY was to ensure the realization of the rights guaranteed to the republics and provinces by the constitution. The unitary army leadership succeeded in 1988, through lobbying among deputies in the Federal Assembly, in pushing through amendments to the Law on National Defense of the SFRY, abolishing armies whose commands were in the republican centers and establishing military districts instead (three districts of the ground forces: Central (headquarters in Belgrade), Southeast (Niš), Northwest (Zagreb), and one military naval district (Split)). Along the command line of these military districts, they were subordinated to the Presidency of the SFRY, which, in a state of war, was also in charge of

the TO of the republics (Špegelj, 1999). The purpose of these decisions was "to mitigate the negative consequences of constitutional solutions" (Kadijević, 1993: 57), in other words, to subordinate all forms of armed forces to Belgrade.

During the Yugoslav crisis, the leadership of the JNA began to see itself as exceptionally responsible for Yugoslavia in a political and state sense, that is, for its survival in a unitary form and a return to the model that existed in the late forties and fifties, and the annulment of the 1974 Constitution (Špegelj, 1999). According to it, "Yugoslavia is defined as a federal republic of equal nations and nationalities, freely united on the principle of fraternity and unity in the realization of separate and common interests, with the right of nations to self-determination up to secession," and "the bearers of sovereignty of nations and nationalities are the republics and provinces within their constitutional competencies" (Constitution of the SFRY, 1974). With the 1974 Constitution, the Federation became an institution for harmonizing the interests of multiple nations.

According to the JNA's Armed Combat Strategy from 1983, "in a general defense war, the offensive is the basic and decisive form of strategic actions. This means that even strategic defense has an extremely offensive character. The difference between these two forms of strategic actions is more in their objectives than in the way they are carried out. Only through the offensive can the destruction, breaking, and expulsion of the aggressor's armed forces from Yugoslav territory and the final victory in the general national defense war be achieved. In conditions of unfavorable power relations, the defensive creates conditions for transitioning into the offensive" (Strategy, 1983: 221). It's notable that in this document, more space is dedicated to "offensive" actions than "defensive" ones, despite trying to create a narrative of a "general national defense war". It's also mentioned that the JNA and TO "are neither numerically nor organizationally rigid, unchanging organizations, and the almost entire capable population will occasionally be involved in the armed forces" (Strategy, 1983: 80). Civil conflicts aimed to blur the line between civilian and military participation, masking the true nature of the conflict, thereby avoiding antagonizing nationalist sentiment among the local population.

The further development of offensive operations in the "Strategy of Armed Combat of the JNA" defines the "goal of the offensive operation on the front as breaking or destroying enemy forces along a chosen direction and liberating a certain area temporarily occupied by the enemy. The operation's goal is determined depending on the conditions in which the operation is conducted, primarily its scale and the ratio of forces in the attack zone. It is most often accomplished in stages, executing a larger number of interconnected and coordinated tasks. The offensive operation on the front is usually planned and executed in two to three stages" (Strategy, 1983: 269-270).

The plan for the use of the JNA mandated tasks to be carried out in two stages: in the first, tactical counterattacks, with intense organization and preparation of Serbian insurgents in Croatia; and in the second, a unified operational-strategic offensive operation to defeat the Croatian army (Kadijević, 1993). According to Kadijević, the military objectives of the Serbian leadership were to completely block Croatia from the air and sea; direct the main forces of the JNA towards liberating Serbian regions in Croatia and JNA garrisons deep in Croatian territory, by cutting through Croatia on the Gradiška - Virovitica, Bihać - Karlovac - Zagreb, Knin - Zadar, Mostar - Split axes; liberate Eastern Slavonia with armored-mechanized units and then advance west, joining forces in Western Slavonia and progressing towards Zagreb and Varaždin, or towards the Slovenian border; block Dubrovnik from the mainland and break into the Neretva valley to connect with forces advancing along the Mostar - Split axis; after reaching certain objectives, secure and hold the border of the Serbian Krajina in Croatia, withdraw the remaining parts of the JNA from Slovenia, and then withdraw the JNA from Croatia (Kadijević, 1993: 107).

Conclusion

The political vision of "all Serbs in one state" was crucial for many Serbian political movements during the wars in Yugoslavia. Although Milošević denied the existence of that project, he created a political backdrop that implied such an ultimate goal. Indeed, Yugoslavia brought together many ethnic groups, including Serbs, but until the decentralization in the SFRY in 1974, the republics did not have complete autonomy. That constitution granted more powers to the republics, but in Serbian circles, it was perceived as a threat to Serbian interests. The borders of the republics then began to be seen as administrative, opening the possibility of demands for changing those borders. Additionally, the idea that the right to self-determination in Yugoslavia belonged to the nations, not the republics, was crucial in arguing for territorial changes.

Milošević's reform of the federation aimed to satisfy exclusively Serbian interests, strengthening central authority and the principle of "one person, one vote," and supporting an all-Yugoslav party. These reforms provided a significant advantage to Serbs, the most numerous people in Yugoslavia, over other nations, and could only be enforced through dictatorship and political violence. That exclusivist approach was a source of conflict as it worsened relations with other republics that felt neglected. The result of such an approach was extremely complex and highly problematic, as conflicts escalated into wars and ethnic cleansing that had devastating consequences for all involved parties.

Defining the nature of the Serbian insurgency on Croatian territory is a prerequisite for establishing political criteria for determining post-war relations between Croatia and Serbia. Both sides' political objectives in the war were nominally the same - avoiding the overlap of political and ethnic boundaries. However, the political nationalisms of the Serbian and Croatian sides were entirely opposite. The first was active, while the latter was reactive; Croatian political nationalism is a consequence of Serbian nationalism. Through this lens, the relationship between the leaders of the two states, Tuđman and Milošević, as they entered conflict, strengthened each other's positions in their own countries, as they validated themselves in relation to the

other. Constructing the "fact" that Croats pose a threat to the survival of Serbs, resulting in the need to separate Serbs-inhabited territories, demonstrates the rebellious nature of the Serbian movement, which is based on incitement and hostile rhetoric. This insurgency relied on spreading disinformation, armed conflict, and propagating the narrative of a civil war.

According to Serbian nationalist perspectives, the Yugoslav republic borders were merely administrative, not historical, ethnic, or political, and thus subject to change. Milošević's idea for reforming the federation was an exclusive project based on dictatorship, with main support from the Yugoslav People's Army (JNA). The JNA itself was based on the ideology of unitarism and integralism of the country and, in theory, differed significantly from Milošević's concept of destroying Yugoslavia and creating Greater Serbia. However, the JNA leadership was skillfully instrumentalized by demagogues like Milošević, and new ideas of reshaping ethnic borders were soon imposed on it. According to Serbian nationalism, those borders coincided with the "borders of Serbian graves", which completely irrationally represented active political goals. The goal of border correction sought its justification in the ethnic compensation of an expanded territory.

The Serbian ethnic community in Croatia accepted the war option imposed by Milošević as a choice in resolving their position in Croatian territory, failing to see that a political solution represented a peaceful resolution to the situation, not a Croatian victory. Involvement in the Greater Serbian project meant rejecting coexistence for Croatian Serbs, initiating armed insurgency supported by Milošević, and participating in the aggression of Serbia and the JNA. The rebel leadership's refusal to accept a political solution (Plan Z-4) in January 1995 demonstrates a lack of critical reflection on the purpose and meaning of the insurgency.

In Serbian political circles, justifying Serbia's rights to neighboring territories is based on the myth of rebuilding the medieval Serbian state, which is evident from the previously mentioned Greater Serbian projects. In the aftermath, Serbs in Croatia represent the greatest losers of Milošević's irrational project, as well as the entire Serbian nation, which would suffer a severe crisis in the years following the war. The fact that Milošević remained in power even

after leading a catastrophic war for the country demonstrates how social communities construct their reality and cannot be absolved as hostages of policies of certain individuals. The Serbian insurgency in Croatia precisely confirms the words of Carl von Clausewitz: "It is only aggression that calls forth defence, and war along with it. The aggressor is always peace-loving (as Bonaparte always claimed to be); he would prefer to take over our country unopposed. To prevent his doing so one must be willing to make war and be prepared for it. In other words it is the weak, those likely to need defence, who should always be armed in order not to be overwhelmed. Thus decrees the art of war." (Clausewitz, 2007: 167.)

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Pobuna kao usmjereno političko nasilje: srpska pobuna u Hrvatskoj 1990-ih

Sažetak

U radu se analizira političko nasilje i pobunu koju je tijekom 1990-ih predvodilo srpsko stanovništvo u Hrvatskoj, a koja se razvijala pod utjecajem Slobodana Miloševića i povijesnog, ideološkog okvira zagovaranja "Velike Srbije". U članku se iznose ideološki korijeni te pobune u srpskom nacionalizmu, prateći ih unatrag do doktrina iz 19. stoljeća koje su promovale teritorijalno širenje i srpsko jedinstvo na Balkanu. S približavanjem raspada Jugoslavije, Milošević je iskoristio srpske pritužbe kako bi potaknuo srpsku manjinu u Hrvatskoj, što je dovelo do oružane pobune koja je eskalirala u široko rasprostranjeno nasilje. Hrvatsko vodstvo definiralo je sukob kao obranu nacionalnog opstanka te se mobiliziralo protiv srpske pobune i jugoslavenske vojne agresije u širem smislu. Analizom se naglašava kako su srpski nacionalisti strateškom uporabom dezinformacija, političkom mobilizacijom i potporom Jugoslavenske narodne armije dodatno intenzivirali sukob, što je na kraju destabiliziralo regiju. Ovim se radom naglašava kako rat koji je uslijedio nije bio ukorijenjen samo u etničkim podjelama, nego i u sukobljenim nacionalizmima te instrumentalizaciji povijesnih narativa.

Ključne riječi:

pobuna, nacionalizam, projekt Velike Srbije, Milošević, političko nasilje, ideologija