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OBSERVATIONS AND REFLECTIONS OF A VISIT TO YUGOSLAVIA

by

Raju G. C. Thomas

I. INTRODUCTION

This report is based on a fact-finding mission to Yugoslavia that was undertaken from April 8th to 11th, 1993. The mission was sponsored by the Serbian National Shield Society of Canada/Voice of Canadian Serbs. Local expenses in Belgrade were provided by the Karic Bank. Members of the mission were Emilio Benavince and Nils Jensen (both of Canada), and Raju Thomas (of the United States). Accompanying us as our guide was Mike Bojich, a Serb-Canadian.

On the night of our arrival, we had dinner and discussions with Jovan Jovicevic, Special Adviser to the President of Karic Bank. The agenda--whom we wanted to meet or interview, the places we wanted to visit--were set by the three of us. At no time did the Karic Bank or any official of the Yugoslav government compel us to do anything that we did not want to do. It was irrelevant to me whether the Karic Bank was pro- or anti-Milosevic. For example, I had indicated that I did not want to meet Milosevic or Karadzic or any other prominent government or other public figure but preferred to meet opposition groups, church leaders, and university professors. This request was accommodated to the best of their ability. A genuine and serious effort was made to arrange an audience with Patriarch Pavle, the head of the Serbian Orthodox Church. Indeed, a meeting time of 5-5:30 pm Sunday was set. But because of our late arrival from Novi Sad on Sunday evening, and that particular Sunday being Eastern Orthodox Palm Sunday, we missed meeting the Patriarch. They agreed to arrange meetings with university professors and students if I could stay a few days longer. However, I had to return to Marquette University by April 13th. Our visit to Yugoslavia was arranged over the 4-day Easter break at Marquette University so that I missed none of my academic commitments in Milwaukee.

The following were people whom we interviewed, or with whom discussions took place:

1. Luka Jelovac, Deputy Minister, Ministry of Energy and Industry.
2. Velibor Popovic, Minister for Labor, Social Policy and Health Care;
Ljubica Srdic, Adviser to Minister Popovic;
Zoran Zivucj, Chief of Cabinet;
Ivan Stojanovic, Special Adviser to Minister Popovic.
3. Dr. Milan Bulajic, Director, Yugoslav Commission for War Crimes & Genocide.
4. Dragolub Michunovich, President of the opposition Democratic Party, and Natasa Vuckovic, Chief of Staff. (Brief Meeting.)
5. Nikola Koljovic, Vice President, Serbian Republic of Bosnia (& others).
6. Drago Vukovic, Chief of Security, Town of Beljina, District of Semberia & Modevica.
7. Muslim Manager of Factory in predominantly Muslim village. This person (whose name I forgot to write down) was interviewed by Emilio Binavince. I met him alone later briefly (with Ema Miljkovic translating).
8. Urosh Vukovic, a Serb who survived the massacre of 6 members of this family.
9. Serbian Rape Victim. (Not to be identified for security reasons).
10. A Serbian inmate of a Muslim prison camp. (Not to be identified for security reasons).
11. Zora Palengic, a woman who was "ethnically cleansed" from Croatia with her family and now lives in Hvtkovci. Zora and her husband were first fired from their jobs. Her husband was later

killed.

12. Nilorad Stanojkovic (officer in Yugoslav Army), wife Nirjana and daughter Jasmina. All were forced to flee Zagreb.

We were accompanied on our various trips by Professor Vojin Dabic, and two young Serbs in their twenties, Ema Miljkovic and Zelsko Vucurovic. We enjoyed their good-hearted company as well as that of our two drivers, Nikola and Lazar.

II. GENERAL OBSERVATIONS

I sensed a general state of bewilderment and depression among the Serbs of what is left of Yugoslavia. This is only an impression based on the few people we interviewed and from the faces I saw in various parts of Belgrade. There were few cars moving in the broad boulevards of the new city, but there were several that were parked. Most gas stations were closed. In old Belgrade there appeared to be more people around and more activity. Perhaps this impression of gloom reflects my own state of mind based on my perceptions of the conditions that Serbs face today. Since I have never been to Belgrade before, I have no means of comparison with what life here was like in the past.

Western policy and the media campaign is such that ALL Serbs are being economically and psychologically destroyed. The word "SERBS" has been made synonymous with the word "EVIL". So much for the fairness and objectivity of the Western media and their leaders in addressing this conflict. Even the Jewish Anti-Defamation League has become caught up in propagating a vicious campaign of defamation against the Serbs on behalf of Franjo Tudjman. Using the Jewish Holocaust as their exclusive domain and forgetting the holocaust of the Serbs, the American Jewish Congress has gone overboard in their calls to bomb the Serbs. Most Serbs do not really understand why they have been condemned this way. The standard of living of the Serbs in Yugoslavia is being cut back drastically and dramatically through international economic sanctions. As with Serbs everywhere, they see themselves being dehumanized, demonized and punished severely for events over which they have little control. They see a situation where all sides are to blame but only they are being punished. For the actions of a few Serbs, they are all being condemned and destroyed.

The problem is not "self-pity" among the Serbs as the Western media has claimed repeatedly in several articles and commentaries. The underlying problem is the zealous self-righteousness, moral hypocrisy, and political arrogance that now permeates the Western media in the unipolar post-Cold War era. The West carry undisputed military and economic power. With that power goes the presumption that they are morally right, and that they are incapable of killing innocent civilians in the wars they undertake. Their powerful Western media has carried this message globally to the non-Christian and non-Islamic worlds, areas that do not have the resources or the interest to check their stories and interpretations.

The problem is not the indoctrination of the Serbs by Belgrade TV and Radio. Serbian media propaganda and public relations are woefully pathetic compared to that of the slick and high-powered Western media. Its a case of third-rate amateurs versus first-rate professionals. In any case, Serbs in the US are exposed to the Western media and not subject to Belgrade's propaganda. Yet, Serbian-Americans are virtually unanimous in their support for the maintenance of a Yugoslavia that will continue to enclose and protect most Serbs that lived in the old Yugoslavia. The problem is the clever manipulation by the Western, and especially US media. All pro-Serbian views have been shut out or are presented in weak form so that they may demolished later. Pictures and images presented are selective and deliberately provocative to whip up mass public emotion to justify "bombing the Serbs". Similar pictures can be presented from the Serbian side but are deliberately rejected. I heard one story where Western reporters and cameramen rushed to a place where they were told atrocities against civilians had taken

place. But when they discovered that the victims were innocent Serb civilians, they packed up and left. When pictures of Serbian victims are shown, their ethnicity is not identified so as to give the impression that these are Muslims Croats. One American newspaper had the gall to take the picture of a Serbian rape victim clearly identified in a caption in a Canadian newspaper, then reprint that picture under a caption identifying her as a Muslim victim.

This American media strategy of dehumanizing the Serbs--all Serbs--is to make bombing the Serbs more palatable to the American public. Selectivity of images to be conveyed to the American and global public is the key to this strategy. All the crimes committed against the Serbs are deliberately played down or passed off as Serbian atrocities through acts of omission. For example, the horrendous atrocities committed by Croats against Muslims in April 1993--the burning alive of whole Muslim families and the razing of houses and villages in Central Bosnia--have been played down, omitted, or portrayed as Serbian atrocities by failing to identify the killers as Croats. Some local TV channels in Milwaukee and Minneapolis, for instance, showed the horrific pictures of charred bodies of entire Muslim families without mentioning that the perpetrators of these crimes were Croatian soldiers. The next clip was about Serbian activities in Eastern Bosnia around Srbenica further crystallizing the impression that atrocities in Central Bosnia were committed by Serbs.

In a press conference that took place soon thereafter, President Clinton described these atrocities committed by Croats against Muslims in April 1993 as "qualitatively different" from those committed by the Serbs. Please tell me, President Bill Clinton, how much more "qualitatively different" could atrocities be than the deliberate burning alive of whole families, or throwing grenades into homes of innocent civilian families and then shooting them dead as they run out of their homes in terror to escape the blasts? There are no words such as "anti-semitism" or "racism" to describe this attitude of total insensitivity towards all Serbs that is beginning to permeate American society from the President of the United States down. Bill Clinton is obviously President of all of the United States except of two million whole or part Serb-Americans. This generalized hate and contempt for all Serbs that is being absorbed by most Americans is the artful and manipulative work of the American media led by the New York Times and the Washington Post.

Typical of the general Serbian character, I also sensed in Yugoslavia a mood of defiance and a willingness to accept dire hardships in pursuit of their basic goal: a new Yugoslavia which will continue to encompass most Serbs of the old Yugoslavia. Economic sanctions and the condemnation of all Serbs are actually driving most Serbs towards the Milosevic regime; not the reverse. Most Serbs may not approve of Milosevic and his nationalist or socialist causes but they see little choice for themselves. My guess is that most Serbs in Yugoslavia are prepared to suffer the consequences of their leaders' defiance of the United States and the West. Even if the Serbs of Serbia and Montenegro may buckle under Western pressure because their stakes are not high, the Serbs of Bosnia and Krajina will endure any hardship and fight to the death any international effort that would force them to live under Croatian or Muslim dominance. The price to be paid by Yugoslavia for standing by (but not necessarily approving) the defiance of the Bosnian Serbs will be very high--economically, psychologically and physically, especially if Western military action is pursued.

Americans would probably express shock and outrage if gasoline prices went up a dollar a gallon, or would go through extreme mental anguish if a single "loved one" died in war. After the experience of the Gulf War, the American media is willing to support the bombing of other states and people so long as the economic price is minimal (the Gulf War was paid for by other states), or so long as there are no casualties among US soldiers. But the American media fails to understand that we are dealing here with Bosnian and Krajina Serbs who are capable of suffering a great deal of pain, and who are willing to give up their lives in the pursuit of their cause to remain within Yugoslavia. Bosnian Serbs are largely poor peasants who are less educated than their kinsmen in Serbia. They occupied 60 percent of the countryside before the war began, and will not give up this land to Muslim or Croatian

political control without a bloody fight.

As many Serbs rally around Milosevic and his government--mainly because of the way they are all being demonized and dehumanized by the West--this will also intensify the on-going campaign of sweeping hatred and contempt for ALL Serbs by a moralistic and self-righteous Western media. In response, Serbian defiance and resistance against this Western campaign of hate and contempt against all Serbs are also likely to increase. Amidst these conditions of gloom and prospective doom, our hosts, guides, officials and other Serbs whom we encountered in Yugoslavia remained good-hearted, good-spirited and generous. They reflected Serbian independence and resolve amidst extreme psychological, economic and physical adversity. It will not be easy for the United States and the West to subdue the Serbian spirit. Turks, Austrians and Germans have tried before and failed.

III. INTERVIEWS WITH OFFICIALS

Economy

Interviews with government officials indicate that the Yugoslav economy is being brought to a standstill by international sanctions. Over the last one year, there was a drop in production of about 40 percent. In construction materials, for example, the drop in production was 70 percent. Building construction has almost ceased except for the completion of some essential projects. Yugoslavia used to produce only 20 percent of its oil and natural gas. The economy must now adjust to an 80 percent cutoff of its energy needs. Even foreign supplies of energy needed for humanitarian purposes are subject to "excuses and tricks" by the West. Although there is considerable agricultural resources in Yugoslavia, energy inputs, fertilizers and spare parts for agricultural machinery have been cut off.

About 50 percent of workers are on forced vacation on reduced salary necessary only for basic survival. Of the remaining 50 percent who come in to work, half of them have no work to do, and the other half have little work to do. Officially, the number of employed persons are only 9 percent less than last year. This is because of an official decision that nobody can be fired because of international sanctions.

However, the inflation rate is over 200 percent per month. Pensioners and the poor have been all but wiped out of their livelihood. All foreign trade has ground to a complete halt. There is some smuggling and sanctions-busting efforts, but the extent of these activities relative to the needs of the economy is minuscule. The new international sanctions may be expected to reduce the Yugoslavian economy to rubble.

Medicines, essential pharmaceutical and hospital equipment are not subject to sanctions. But the interpretation of what is or is not covered by the sanctions is determined by the exporting states. Consequently, many medical needs are subject to protracted assessments and delays, or simply denied. Even where some of these medical items are available, Yugoslavia does not have the foreign exchange to purchase them since its external trade has been cut off. Hospitals have been hit badly in some key sectors including operating theaters and medical equipment despite denials by the West. The West has simply refused to see these problems or have simply put the blame on the Milosevic regime for the suffering of the Serbian people.

Refugees

There are approximately 700,000 refugees in Yugoslavia from Bosnia and Croatia. Serbia houses 70 percent, and Montenegro about 30 percent. About 80 percent of these are Serbs, 9 percent Muslims,

3 percent Montenegrins, 1 percent Croats, and 7 percent "Others" that include Jews and Hungarians. In Serbia, refugees constitute about 6 percent of the total population. Most of these refugees (96 percent) are being accommodated in private homes and apartments. Much of this was done voluntarily and spontaneously by Serbs, but as the length of stay increases, friction is likely to increase. As a typical example, about 12 persons are now being accommodated in a two-bedroom apartment. Some subsidies are paid to the refugees to cover their expenses but none to the hosts for their trouble and inconvenience.

War Crimes Issues

We questioned Nikola Koljovic, Vice President of the "Serbian Republic" of Bosnia about Western allegations of genocide and mass rape. He admitted that some atrocities had been committed by some Serbs but not on the scale alleged by the West. Moreover, atrocities had also been committed against Serbs by Muslims and Croats. In response to our questions, Koljovic claimed that the shelling of Sarajevo and Srbenica were frequently provoked by fire from the other side. He alleged that in Sarajevo the Bosnian government was forcibly putting Serb "recruits" to the Bosnian army in the front line of Serb artillery causing large-scale deaths. These Serbs were then being buried alongside Muslim soldiers in mass graves to demonstrate massacres to Western reporters. [My impression is that this practice has occurred elsewhere in Bosnia. It amounts to the virtual execution of Serbian men in Bosnian military uniform in Muslim controlled territory.] According to Koljovic, at no time did the Bosnian Serb militia control 60,000 Muslim women of rapeable age. [My own "guestimate" is that about 5,000-7,000 women were probably raped in Bosnia of which about 15-20 percent were Serbian women.]

Earlier discussions about war crimes at the Yugoslav equivalent of the "State Department" brought forth a remark by Dr. Milan Bulajic that "A crime is a crime and should be punished, especially when committed against women and children." But the general feeling in Yugoslavia is that Serbs alone are being singled out for punishment while ignoring not only the war crimes committed against Serbs in this war, but also more atrocious crimes committed elsewhere in the world in the past. Especially troubling is the creation of an ad hoc International War Crimes Tribunal to try Serbs alone. Both Milan Bulajic and Nikola Koljovic indicated that Yugoslavia would have no objection to a permanent war crimes tribunal that would examine all the crimes committed during the current war as well crimes committed elsewhere in the past, and are likely to be committed in the future. There was a question as to why an ad hoc tribunal was necessary since the accusation of war crimes against Serbia has already been submitted to the International Court of Justice.

An observation made by Emilio Binanvince with respect to the war crimes investigation and forthcoming trial is revealing: viz., the international investigators looking into the war crimes are essentially working for the prosecution; they are only looking for evidence to convict, not to acquit. Thus, the prosecutors appear also to be the judges. There appears to be no higher court of appeal for the Serbs. In the minds of the Western and especially American media, Serbs have already been tried and found guilty. They will accept no other verdict. The international legal process is a formality.

My impression of the intended international war crimes tribunal was that it violated every principle of justice and fairplay. The system and process would be thrown out as a cruel farce in any domestic Western democratic society. What is being set up is nothing more than an "Ad Hoc International Kangaroo Court" decked with the frills of respectability to pacify the hysterical and revengeful demands of an American-led Western lynch mob. There has been for some time an array of deeply prejudiced Western news reporters collecting evidence against the Serbs who have committed war crimes. Few of them are interested in listening to (let alone discovering) war crimes committed against the Serbs.

Following our talks with the Bosnian Serb Vice President and his entourage at Bosnia House in Belgrade (as well as other Serbian officials), it was impossible for us to imagine that these men and women are the "Nazis" that the Western media has described them to be. I gathered that Vice President Nikola Koljovic is an Oxford or Cambridge Ph.D. and a former professor of Shakespearean literature. He translated the entire works of Shakespeare into Serbo-Croatian. He was a visiting professor at two of the leading Ivy League universities in the United States before he was thrust into this tragic political role. Others included professors of intellectuals in sociology, economics and philosophy, and engineers and scientists. These Serbs are anything but Nazis capable of war crimes or of giving orders to men in the field that war crimes be committed.

Brief Interview with Muslim Factory Manager

Emilio Binavince conducted a lengthy interview with this Muslim manager of a factory in a predominantly Muslim village in Serb-controlled Bosnia. I met him briefly before we were headed back to Belgrade. I only had one question for him: Was the decision of the Bosnian Muslims to secede from Yugoslavia following Slovenia's and Croatia's secessions worthwhile? This was his answer (translation):

"Our village is 70-75 percent Muslim. We are living much better than the Muslims of Muslim territories. In our village, most Muslims have cultivated their fields. Our factory is not working because of the sanctions. I cannot speak for Muslims elsewhere, but here in Janja, they prefer to remain in Yugoslavia. Yugoslavia should have suited everyone. At the end, all will see the same view. Some Muslim families from here went to Austria and Switzerland. But they did not have to do so."

IV. INTERVIEWS WITH SERB VICTIMS

I have avoided giving too much details about names and places in the following summaries of our interviews. The interviews provided details of the names of persons and places. These cases represent rape, murder, massacres, beatings of prisoners in camps, and widespread ethnic cleansing. Two victims did not want to be identified because their relatives were still in the hands of the opposing forces. Nils Jensen, a specialist in Criminal Law, was particularly rigorous in ensuring that there were no discrepancies or possible falsehoods in the information provided by the interviewees. Periodic checks always proved that they were telling the truth, and that they had not been put forward to provide propaganda for the government. Everyone of these victims were genuine cases. It did not appear that any of these victims had been interviewed before. Their answers indicated that they certainly had not been coached for our interview. [The Western media is not interested in the plight of Serb victims. In Zagreb, however, Croat and Muslim victims are trundled out in organized fashion to meet the heavy demand by Western reporters for Croat and Muslim victims of the Serb demons.] My impression here is that the victims we encountered appear to represent widespread abuses and atrocities against Serbs.

Rape Victim

We interviewed a woman (born 1953) who had been beaten, raped and sodomized. At the time of the rape, her husband had already been arrested and taken to a prisoners' camp. He still remains in some jail in central Bosnia.

She, her husband and two sons aged 10 and 12 lived in a house next to her in-laws house. Because she was afraid, she and her sons slept in her in-laws house next door. On June 20th, 1992 at about 3 AM, three men in uniform broke into the house. Two of them were Muslim soldiers of the Territorial Defense Army and a third was a regular Croat soldier of the Croatian Defense Forces (HOS).

She knew of their military affiliations from their uniforms and the location of their insignia on their shoulders (Muslims) and on the chest (Croatian).

First they beat her and pulled her hair and pulled off her gold earrings. She told them that her children were sleeping. They asked if they were girls or boys. They checked that they were boys. With a knife at her throat, they asked her to take off her clothes. They threatened to kill her children if she did not. First, the two Muslims raped her one after the other in the bathroom while the Croatian soldier stood outside. Then the Croatian soldier entered the bathroom and sodomized her ferociously. Her buttocks bled severely from this attack. This atrocity took place while her two sons aged 10 and 12 huddled in fear in the adjoining room. When she was taken out of the bathroom, she found her two sons trembling and crying. She found that her father-in-law had been beaten severely. This incident took place between 3 AM and 4 AM.

Later that morning, she went with her father-in-law to the local town hall to complain to the Croatian Defense Council (HVO) and to ask for first aid. The HVO took the father-in-law back to his house, and then collected all her medical records and medicines. They came back to the Town Hall and took her to the hospital. A gynecologist examined her and she was returned to her house.

She met her husband briefly while he was being transferred from one prison to another. He advised her to leave for Serb territory. Already several of the Serbs had been driven out and their houses taken over by Muslims. Her Muslim neighbors told her that she should be slaughtered. We asked her whether she would ever like to go back to her town. She replied with tears streaming down her face that "I would like to go away far from this place and all of this." (Translation.)

The rape victim provided us with much more detail (which I have decided not to go into). She had satisfactory responses to interrogations by the two lawyers, Emilio Binavince and Nils Jensen, to convince us that she was telling the truth. She frequently broke down and cried while she narrated her story. She told us that she still suffers medical problems from the sodomizing, finds herself constantly breaking down and crying, and feels out of breath most of the time.

I believe this woman represents several hundred Serbian women who were raped by soldiers and militia of the other side. A rape victim is a rape victim. The tragedy and the trauma are the same whether this happens under conditions of war in Bosnia, or in the streets and apartments of the United States where about 50,000 rapes take place every year. It is no consolation to the several hundred/thousand Serbian women who were raped to know that several thousand Muslim women were raped. Raped Serbian women have to suffer both the trauma and humiliation of being raped, as well as the pain of neglect and condemnation by the West.

Former Prisoner of a Muslim Camp

Born in 1952, this man was a moderately well-to-do person with his own electrical repair business and a small plot of farmland which his wife cultivated. He has three teenage daughters. In June 1992, Muslim forces came and arrested him. All the men of his village between the age of 15 and 65 were arrested and taken away in groups to the local primary school. His group had about 15 men. Women and children were taken to another destination. The village, which was entirely Serb, had a total population of about 3,000 people.

At the school, they were all beaten and kicked severely. About 20 to 30 men were kept in each classroom, and they were taken one at a time to the bathroom to be beaten. There were about 6 to 7 men beating them with their guns and kicking them with their boots. When he was brought in to the bathroom, the last man was still being beaten. It was supposed to be an interrogation, but they were

not interested in the answers. He was given more severe beatings because (as he was told) he had more property than others. He was nicknamed the "Chetnik Duke." He was accused of providing money to Serbian forces for the purchase of guns. Although the beatings did not result in any broken bones on him, he was bleeding from the mouth, nose and ears, and was vomiting blood. His glasses were broken so that he could not see properly.

After the beatings, they were taken in the closed freezer containers of trucks to the prison in the main town nearby. About 500 to 600 of them were thrown into the basement of the prison which was sufficient space for all of them to stand but not to lie down. The prison had a cement floor. They were given no food only access to water and a bathroom. One group that did not include him was taken out again and beaten. After three days, they were taken to the police for more interrogation. He was interrogated by a judge who was the chief of the military court. The interrogators were both Croats and Muslims. They were then transferred to larger cells in the prison with beds. Periodically, the guards would deliberately mess up their beds and beat them up for not having made their beds. He remained in this prison from June 6th 1992 to February 19th, 1993 when he became part of a prisoner exchange of Serbs and Muslims.

He has been reunited with his family but has no work to do. Two of his three daughters had already finished school and also have no work to do. The third is now back in school. They all live on food packages given to them once a month by the Red Cross. In response to our questions, he said that he could not go back to his village because all the Serbs were driven out. Other members of the village had informed him that all their houses had been burned. His wife and three daughters managed to escape in a convoy of Serbs to Serbian controlled territory on July 12th, 1992. The journey took them 7 days.

Survivor of a Family Massacre

UV (born 1952) was a Serb who came from a town in central Bosnia which is now completely under Muslim control. He was a sales manager of an industrial plant there. He had graduated as an economist from Sarajevo University. He grew up in a nearby village which only had a few Serbs, most of whom were members of his extended family. They owned about 150 acres of land. Surrounding villages were mainly Muslim.

Problems began with the creation of national parties in the villages along ethnic lines, Muslims, Croats and Serbs. Before that everything was normal. There were no tensions among the three groups. They celebrated each other's birthdays, marriages and festivals. Mixed marriages were common. Two of his extended family members were Muslim and Croatian. We lived in complete peace and harmony.

First the Croatian national party was created and then the Muslim party. All the Serbs were fired from their jobs including himself. Muslims declared all Serbs to be snipers. Since hunting was his hobby, he had three hunting guns. And because he travelled extensively as a salesman, he also kept a pistol which he took on his sales visits. One of his office colleagues accused him of being a sniper. He offered to give up all his guns. He was told that they knew what he was, so why was he pretending to return his guns.

In June, his cousin was arrested at the family's house in the village at 1 AM. The river Bosna runs along their building. He was informed by another cousin that Muslims took him down to the river only in his underwear and tied him to one of the chestnut trees. They cursed his Chetnik mother and told him that Serbs were going to be tortured and slaughtered. Before they came back, he managed to break free and escaped down the river to Serb controlled territory. At that point, our interviewee and other Serbs sent most of their women and children to Serbia. He asked the Muslim commanders to

allow Serbs to leave peacefully. He was assured that nothing would happen to his family.

On the 19th of June, he was returning from the militia's headquarters. A Croat friend of his asked him to go with him to his house in the next village to finish some business. He stayed overnight at the Croat's house and was returning to his parent's house the next morning when he heard artillery firing and gunshots. He immediately tried to reach the Muslims at the headquarters and asked them to go and protect his family. They refused and told me that because I was a Serb I could not return to the village. He returned to the house of his Croatian friend who then went with two others to find out what had happened. He came back at about 5:30 pm and was crying. After a while, he was informed that his father, mother, brother, his brother's son, and two of his cousins were all killed. (The names and ages of all the victims were provided by this man.)

One of his brothers escaped the massacre by hiding in the stable and witnessed the whole thing. The massacre was conducted by Muslims of the Green Berets. According to his account, the Muslims entered the garden and asked for his father by name. When his father came out, they asked him whether all of this was his property. He said yes. They told him that they were too rich. His father offered to give up all his property if they could just go away. They said no; they were going to kill everybody. Then they began shooting everybody. His brother who was hiding was saved later by another Croatian friend who came by to see the situation. (Croats were allowed to move freely; but Serbs were not).

Serbs "Ethnically Cleansed" from Croatia

ZP was born in 1948 and married in 1965. She and her husband worked in a wood factory in Croatia. They had lived in this Croatian town for about 27 years but spent an interval of 12 years working in Germany. They came back permanently from Germany in 1980. They had built a two-story house for themselves. Her daughter today is 19 years old and her son is 24. She has her daughter-in-law with her. According to the 1981 census, the town's population was about 8 percent Serbs. Together with the surrounding areas, there were about 12 percent Serbs in the area.

Before the Croatian Democratic Alliance (CDA) came in, the factory had a mixed managing team of Serbs and Croats, numbering about 30, with 7 Serb managers. In July 1991, the CDA fired all the Serb managers. The factory was quite large but she is not quite sure how large, perhaps about 1000-1700 worked at her factory, altogether 2,800 at all the branches. In August 1991, they were all forced to attend a rally to protest against the Yugoslavian Army. The Croats were shouting that all members of the Yugoslav Army should be slaughtered. They shouted abuses at her calling her a "Chetnik's Mother."

In September 1991, she was fired from her job although she had no problems earlier at the state factory. Several other Serbs were also fired. They told them that the factory had too many workers. But this was the first time that they had fired many people. She was fired without any severance pay. She was not allowed to take her savings out of the Zagreb bank because she was a young woman and could manage somehow. She had about 2,900 German Marks in the account. When she went to the Unemployment office, they refused to pay her anything.

Her husband was still working at the factory. But the remaining Serbs were not allowed to communicate with each other. Croats, who were once friendly, were afraid to talk to the Serbs. Some friendly Croats advised the Serbs to leave the town for their safety.

On Friday February 21, 1992, her husband to work on the 6 AM to 2 PM shift. On that day she was sick and asked her husband to pick up some bread on the way home from work. The factory is about 15 minutes walk from their house. When he failed to return home by 2:30 she called the police

who told her that everything in the town was normal. When she called again at midnight, they told her that they could nothing until Monday. With the help of a Croatian friend, she searched the hospitals all night. When her husband continued to remain missing, the police told her that he had joined the Chetniks. Four days after his disappearance, the factory had informed her that he had been fired. She contacted the Red Cross who advised her to go to the Croatian parliament in Zagreb to see the president of the Commission for national relations, a Serb. This Serb told her not to tell anyone that she had visited him but only that she had written to him. Several days after her husband was missing, she kept receiving phone calls with nobody answering at the other end. But she could hear the sound of police walkie-talkies in the background.

On April 26, 1992, it was Orthodox Easter, the police called her and said that they had found the dead body of her husband but asked her come in on Monday and see it. On Monday, she asked the Croatian policeman on duty to go with her to the place where her husband had died. The policeman declined but his eyes were filled with tears. She later heard that this Croatian policeman had a nervous breakdown. She went to the pathologist to get a license for his funeral. When she was allowed to see the body, it was dressed in the same clothes as when he left on the day of his disappearance. His socks were very white and clean. He had a bruise on his forehead. She was convinced that he was killed in April because the body was not decomposed. The factory refused to provide any money for his funeral. The death certificate that was issued claimed that it was suicide by hanging.

To our question, she informed us that her husband had no reason to commit suicide. She also saw no sign of hanging around the neck. He was not a union leader or a member of anything. He did not have any personal enemies. She is sure that the only reason he was killed was because he was a Serb. She informed us that a lot of Serbs were missing in that town that were never accounted for. She mentioned one specific instance where a Serb had driven to the next village to get something and was later found dead.

There were several Croats from Serbia visiting her town to exchange their houses. Croats from Serbia were allowed to come and look for houses to exchange in Croatia, but Serbs in Croatia were not allowed to go to Serbia to do the same thing. The Croat (in the house in which she now lives in Serbia) came and looked at her house and offered to exchange his house. He told her that it was almost as big with all the same quality of furniture, etc. He told her that he had a new color TV set like the one she had. When the exchange was finalized (the Croat had a thumb imprint on the document indicating that he was illiterate), she and her family moved to the Croat's house in Serbia to find that it was extremely small with a small and old Black-&-White TV set.

We had a brief interview with NS born 1945, wife born 1949, and daughter born 1970. This was a highly educated and urbane family. He was a Yugoslav Army officer with an apartment in Zagreb and a summer house on one of the Croatian islands. They showed us photographs of the house on the island which was quite large and beautiful. An exchange was arranged for the tiny house of the Croatian in Serbia for his large summer house in Croatia. Again, the Croatian in Serbia was allowed to leave and visit Croatia to negotiate house exchanges, while the Serb officer could only make a one-way trip out of Croatia and accept blindly whatever was exchanged in Serbia. However, all three members of the family said that they were just grateful to get out of Croatia alive to any place in Serbia.

V. CONCLUDING OBSERVATIONS

Serbian Attitudes Towards Western Policies

This is not a tragedy where only Muslims and Croats have suffered. It is one where all ethnic groups have suffered in one way or another. After Minister Velibor Popovic provided the facts and

figures illustrating the economic devastation of Yugoslavia and the suffering of its people, I pointed out the far greater suffering of the Muslims of Bosnia. Thousands of Muslims have been killed, and hundreds of thousands have been rendered homeless and penniless. The Serbs of Yugoslavia do not face the same level of agony. Popovic's answer was that there is a war going on in Bosnia, there is no war going on in Yugoslavia. He suggested that it was not possible to explain to the Serbs in Yugoslavia why the civil war in Bosnia justifies the imposition of extreme penalties on them. Popovic's implication was that the wars in Bosnia and Croatia were caused by declarations of independence against the will of Serb minorities in these republics. Serbia and Montenegro did not secede from Yugoslavia.

Indeed, the tragedy of Yugoslavia was generated and compounded from the outside by an anti-Serb German media and leadership. Germany is not paying any price for the war in the former Yugoslavian territories although it was Hans-Dietrich Genscher's encouragement and push to recognize the independence of Slovenia and Croatia that created this bloody mess. Instead, Germany is being praised in the American media for having warned the world of the evil Serbs. This American gratitude towards Germany for its perceptive analysis of the problem in Yugoslavia is strange. Germany's push for recognition and the disintegration of Yugoslavia constituted a case of diplomatic aggression. A new method has been introduced whereby powerful Western states can dismember other sovereign states through the strategy of diplomatic recognition. Most British historians and specialists in the region would have pointed out that historically the Germanic peoples of Austria and Germany were part of the problem of the Balkans. They cannot be expected to be objective and should not have been asked to lead Europe. Asking Germany to make policy for Europe on the Balkans would be as bad as asking the Klu Klux Klan to make civil rights policy for the Blacks in America.

Cuddling the Croats

There may be no war in Serbia, but Serbs have been, or are at war in Croatia and Bosnia. In Bosnia, Serbs have also experienced the tragedy of massacres, rapes and ethnic cleansing even if it is not as much as they have inflicted on the Muslims. However, the earlier war in Croatia was far more even in the level of atrocities committed by both Serbs and Croats against each other. Franjo Tudjman triggered the Serbian revolt by arousing the passions of Croatian nationalism with the symbols of the genocidal Ustashe regime--the flag, the marital music, the rehabilitation of former Ustashe members scattered worldwide, the renaming of streets with Ustashe names. There were other Croatian demands that set light to the powder keg: the declaration that Serbs would have no automatic rights in an independent Croatia, the demand that they take on loyalty oaths, the banning of the Cyrillic alphabet, the firing of most Serbs from their jobs.

It is very difficult for me to understand why Croatia and all Croats are not being punished the same way as Serbia and all Serbs. Croatia has already accomplished its "Greater Croatia" in Bosnia quietly and efficiently while the Serbs continue to fight for their "Greater Serbia" in messy and bloody fashion. The Croatian territories of Bosnia are contiguous with Croatia, about 40,000 regular units of the Croatian armed forces operate in this region, the Croatian flag flies everywhere, Croatian currency is in use, Croatian license plates are attached to all their vehicles--but there is no international hue and cry about this. The horrendous atrocities committed by Croats against Muslims may be limited but it is only because they do not have to undertake much "ethnic cleansing" themselves to achieve their ethnically pure state. Croats have been getting a free ride on the backs of world sympathy for the Muslims.

The Question of Ethnic Cleansing & Genocide

Much has been made about Serbian "ethnic cleansing." It has been equated with genocide.

Actually, no more so than "Zionism is Racism." The Jews were the victims of that Arab hate propaganda. The Serbs are now the victims of this new American-Jewish hate propaganda despite protests by Simon Wiesenthal, the Jewish Nazi Hunter, that the two conditions are not the same thing. If it were, the creation of Israel must also have been a case of genocide since 800,000 Palestinians were "cleansed" out of Palestine to make room for the settlement of European Jews from another continent. At least the Bosnian Serbs are from Bosnia and belong in Bosnia. Let us also not forget that immigrants from Europe "ethnically cleansed" the native Indians to create the United States of America. Indeed, this was probably closer to genocide as native Indians were driven towards extinction by European settlers over a period of 400 years. This process is still taking place in Brazil in the Amazon rain forests. Some of the "loudest voices protesting the "genocide" by the Serbs in the Balkan conflict are those of the Turks, Germans and Croats. Ironically, members of these three nationalities were responsible for the worst genocides in the 20th century.

There is almost a craving to discover genocide by the Serbs on the part of the American media and American Jews. Massacres committed by Serbs is genocide; but not massacres committed against the Serbs. Ethnic cleansing by the Serbs is genocide; but not that committed by the other side against the Serbs. Figures of Muslims and Croats killed are not just inflated but amount to lies. The American media is not going to be cheated out of their "genocide." The projected figures of the number of people who died in Croatia and Bosnia are deliberately intended to mislead. Of the 10,000 or 16,000 who died during the war in Croatia (the figure fluctuates), at least 40 percent were Serbs. The number of Muslim civilians who died in Bosnia was first projected at 17,000 in late Fall, 1992. By early January 1993, this figure was increased to 20,000 dead. But suddenly the figure ranged between 150,000 to 500,000 under a new category "dead or missing." This missing did not imply "presumed dead" but is deliberately intended to convey that impression to substantiate claims of genocide. Indeed, without any evidence, the "missing" have all now been converted to "dead" by respectable newspapers such as the Christian Science Monitor. Thus, "dead" Muslim civilians increased in a matter of weeks from 18,000 to 150,000.

Inter-ethnic strife everywhere in the world invariably leads to "ethnic cleansing" of greater or lesser degree. When Pakistan was created in 1947, 8 million Hindus and Sikhs from West Punjab and Sindh fled to India, 5 million Muslims from East Punjab fled to Pakistan. The Muslim uprising in Kashmir has led to the "ethnic cleansing" of all the 300,000 Kashmiri Hindu Pundits of the Valley, a high caste and highly educated Hindu community that had lived there since about 1000 B.C. Racial segregation in the United States could well be renamed "Inter-Ethnic Contamination Prevention" or "The Maintenance of Ethnically Cleansed Areas." Jews in Israel are not anxious to live next door to Palestinian Muslims especially when both sides still hate and kill each other. Bombing the Serbs will not make Serbs want to live peacefully with Croats and Muslims after all this violence bloodshed. The solution to inner city crime would not be to impose sanctions against all Blacks and Hispanics or to bomb the inner cities of America. There can only be political and social solutions to such problems, not military ones.

Bombing the Serbs

As I write this report today (April 23rd, 1993), there was leaked information to the New York Times indicating that twelve State Department officials and the US Ambassador to the UN have recommended military intervention even if its European allies do not concur. Senator Joseph Biden earlier, following a visit to Bosnia and Croatia (hearing only one side of the story as usual) declared that the Serbian military assault against defenseless women and children could be stopped through American bombing. Senator Robert Dole, who has always carried a personal pathological hate for the Serbs long before this crisis erupted, has called for bombing the Serbs and for lifting the arms embargo on the Muslims. He fears the "annihilation of the Albanians" otherwise.

The deaths of innocents are the usual casualties of war, and bombing will not reduce the level of killing of innocents. For example, according to a Fall 1992 report of the New England Journal of Medicine, the American strategic bombing of Iraq may have led to the direct or indirect deaths of about 47,000 Iraqi children under the age of five. The Chicago Tribune syndicated columnist, Mike Royko, attempted to demonstrate what this actually meant: Imagine, he said, if 47,000 American children and babies under the age of five were all wired to their seats in a baseball stadium, and then an electric current was sent through the seats suddenly killing all of them. That's how many children were slowly killed in Iraq as the direct or indirect consequence of America's conduct of the Gulf War. During the war, I recall one American bomb being dropped on a shelter where American intelligence thought Saddam Hussein was hiding. It turned out that about 400 Iraqi women and children were sheltering there from American bombs. They were all killed. There were no American cameras to record the tragedy, and there was no American grief or remorse for their deaths of these women and children. It was all Saddam Hussein's fault and Americans did not have to feel guilty.

The American atomic bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, and conventional bombing of Vietnam--all to achieve strategic objectives--did not spare killing of women and children. Israeli bombing of Palestinian terrorist hideouts in the Palestinian refugee camps in Lebanon have always led to the deaths of many more innocents than that inflicted by Palestinian terrorists on Israelis. Israeli policy has been "Ten eyes for an eye." However, killing many more innocent civilians with bombs from American and Israeli war planes appears to be moral so long as the targets are strategic even if the bombers know in advance that many innocent civilians will be killed. There is no denying that several innocent Muslim civilians are being killed by Serbian shelling. But there is a Serbian strategic objective in the shelling of Srbenica and other towns in Bosnia. It is part of a plan to carve out contiguous territory where all Serbs can continue to live in Yugoslavia--something which was denied by the secessions of Croatia and Bosnia, and by the Vance-Owen Plan.

American military intervention may only postpone that objective. More likely, it will lead to a full-scale Balkan war where there will be no winners. It will alienate Serbs everywhere including the one million Serbs living in the US and Canada, and perhaps another million part Serbs whose passions may also be aroused. Blind and deaf to the Serbian side of the story, the American media and political leadership have been wallowing in their own self-righteous morality. But they do not understand the Serbian character and their history. American Serbs have listened to the systematic vilification of ALL Serbs--men women and children--by the American media and American leaders. Their character, self-esteem and basic psyche have been decimated through the depiction of ALL Serbs as pigs, vultures, other animals, and criminals in the American media news cartoons and news reports. "Bombing the Serbs," as a hysterical and hateful American media has demanded, could lead to several unforeseen consequences in the region and abroad that could prove to be much more messy than the simple policy of avoiding external military intervention in the Balkans.

The Problem of Boundaries and Minorities

The solution to the Balkan conflict is not American military intervention. You cannot bomb ethnic groups who now hate each other so much into living together in tolerance and goodwill. The preferred solution now would be to redraw the boundaries of Croatia and Bosnia so that most Serbs remain part of Yugoslavia. If the external sovereign boundaries of the independent state of Yugoslavia can be dispensed with so easily, so can the boundaries of these two new states.

Contrary to assertions made by the new self-trained American media historians, the current boundaries of Croatia and Bosnia-Herzegovina did not exist for centuries. Under the Austro-Hungarian empire, Dalmatia, Krajina and Slavonia were separate from the Croatian province. Bosnia-Herzegovina was switched from the Ottoman empire to the Austrian empire in 1878. Bosnia was not recognized as a

separate province in the unitary state of Yugoslavia during the inter-war years. It was made part of the Ustashe Croatian state during the Second World War. There have also been precedents for separating parts of provinces that secede from the main state. When Ireland seceded in 1921, Northern Ireland was separated and retained by Great Britain. When Pakistan seceded in 1947, the eastern part of Punjab and the western part of Bengal were separated and retained by India. It is also important to note that before the extermination, conversion and expulsion of the Serbs by the Ustashe during World War Two, the Serbs were the majority ethnic group in Bosnia (about 43 percent Serbs and 8 percent "Yugoslavs"). This point should be taken into account in redrawing the boundaries, or while partitioning Bosnia into its ethnic divisions.

The Krajina area must also be separated and retained by Yugoslavia. If second-generation Croatians in the US do not socialize or communicate with second-generation Serbians (a situation that appears to be true in the cities of Milwaukee and Chicago that I am familiar with), I see little hope that Serbs will be treated fairly in Croatia. Croatia appears interested only in the territory that Serbs occupy, but not the Serbian population. Referring to the Krajina Serbs as "aggressors" merely accentuates the fact that Serbs are not part of Croatia, and that Serbs cannot live in Croatia as first class citizens. The problem is compounded by the fact that Franjo Tudjman has virtually declared that the Ustashe holocaust against the Serbs did not happen. The restoration of Ustashe symbols in the new Croatia will hardly persuade the Serbs to live as citizens of Croatia.

What Can and Should be Done

Since it was a German-led Europe that decided that Croatians, Slovenians and Muslims could not and must not live in a Serbian-dominant Yugoslavia, the Serbs have every right now to refuse to live in a Croatian-dominated Croatia or a Muslim-dominated Bosnia. As in a children's quarrel, the Serbs are saying: "If you won't live with us, then we ain't gonna live with you. So there!" Its too late to have it any other way. The objective now should be to separate the ethnic groups as civilly as possible (more "ethnic cleansing" unfortunately), redraw the international boundaries through negotiations, and then bring this horrendous civil war to an end.

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