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The Rhetorical Assault: American Reportage and Propaganda in the Wars of Yugoslav Secession

by

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DEDICATION

To the peoples of the former Yugoslavia –
may every inquiry bring a greater sense of justice and peace to the region

ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS

The Rhetorical Assault: American Reportage and Propaganda in the Wars of Yugoslav Secession

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The contemporary political paradigm for democratic states is precariously balanced on the metaphoric scale of public opinion. As such, policy consensus is, in theory, influenced and guided by the public; however, publications like *The Crisis of Democracy* poignantly illustrate the reluctance of political elites to relinquish control over the state agenda, especially with respect to foreign affairs. To curb resistance to official policy projection, the narrative of current events is manipulated in a way to ensure that public opinion will correspond to the will of Washington. While this does not always indicate nefarious manipulation, it does act to create and perpetuate a docile domestic support base. This is advantageous for policy makers as it allows for resources to be dedicated almost solely to the foreign point of interest as opposed to being divided between campaigns of intervention and quelling public unrest at home. A prime example of this attempt to sway opinion in a specific direction is the reportage of the Balkan wars of succession at the close of the 20th century which used the rhetoric of humanitarianism to validate a policy of intervention under the guise of R2P.

Balkanization, the idea of territorial splintering as a result of irreconcilable cleavages, has plagued both the peninsula after which the term is named for the greater part of the modern historical narrative. From medieval kingdoms and centuries of foreign occupation to collective attempts at nation-building, the Balkan region is best known for devolution and destruction despite its undeniable legacy of perseverance and strength. In her monumental tome documenting her travels through the Balkan Peninsula in the decade following the assassination of King Alexander in 1934, Rebecca West notes the proclivity of those who travel through the

region to adopt a preference and general defense for a specific people, area, or culture. Such an intimate and private creation of an in/out group dynamic for a population in which the observer does not traditionally belong easily lends itself to a discourse of victim and aggressor which has further exacerbated the popular perception and internalization of Balkanization. This form of allegiance might be a justifiable way for a layperson to digest a complex region with a complicated history, as mental-mapping is a necessary part of cognition; however, as the 20th century came to a close, it became apparent that the reportage surrounding the wars adopted a model of state personification where the Yugoslav republics were inserted into a dichotomous victim/aggressor framework. The coverage of the Yugoslav conflict by Western news outlets utilized this form of mental shorthand, complete with tantalizing and emotive headlines to direct sympathy towards Bosnian Muslims, and to a lesser degree Croats, while unconditionally defaming Belgrade. Once a victim had been established and a public outcry for intervention had mounted, the United States was able to carry out its policy of intervention in the quickly disintegrating state. One cannot deny the horrific violence that resulted from the implosion of the Yugoslav state; however, in order to serve justice to the region and uphold the integrity of the historical narrative, a sincere analysis must be conducted as to the journalistic devices employed to serve the United States' policy platform and not the Yugoslav people that it was allegedly aiming to protect.

I. Introduction: Media Spin at the Sochi Olympics

“Global security experts have called this the most dangerous [Olympic] Games ever, based on the location of the competitions, the seriousness of the threats..., and the capability of terrorist groups to carry out their plans... The Sochi Games are different.” – Julie Macur in The New York Times, 4 February 2014¹

Long before the athletes arrived at Olympic Park for the 2014 winter games, the world was already receiving, absorbing, and internalizing messages questioning Russian competence as host of the prestigious international event. Once again, Americans were treated to poignant reminders that Cold War animosities and antagonisms are still very much alive in most mainstream media outlets. Indeed, before the games even began controversy erupted over a litany of topics including oligarchic corruption, budget overrun, unpreparedness, LGBT and security concerns.^{2 3 4 5} The mistreatment of Sochi’s dogs even made its way to primetime coverage.⁶ Various publications ran articles which shifted focus away from the athletic component of the event and structured a narrative in a fashion that bemoaned Russian peccadilloes – a thinly veiled metaphor for Washington’s general disapproval of Moscow in recent years. While the Cold War is typically thought to have ended in 1991 with the dissolution of the Soviet Union, the reportage surrounding Russia’s first nonpolitical venture in the global spotlight made a clear statement – Russian power must be checked in order to preserve the status quo of American hegemony.

This type of media spin is commonplace in the American journalistic tradition, but the negative coverage of Russia’s handling of the Olympics serves as just one of the most recent, if

¹ Macur, Juliet. (2014, February 4). Terrorism and Tension for Sochi, Not Sports and Joy. *The New York Times*.

² Yaffa, Joshua. (2014, January 2). The Waste and Corruption of Vladimit Putin’s 2014 Winter Olympics. *Bloomberg Businessweek*.

³ Segal, David. (2014, February 3). First Event of Sochi Olympics: The Hotel Construction Sprint. *The New York Times*.

⁴ Fierstein, Harvey. (2013, July 21). Russia’s Anti-Gay Crackdown. *The New York Times*.

⁵ Knowlton, Brian. (2014, January 19). Olympics Security Worries U.S. Officials. *The New York Times*.

⁶ Herszenhorn, David. (2014 February 5). Racing to Save the Stray Dogs of Sochi. *The New York Times*.

superficial, examples of how the media has poisoned the well of public opinion towards an articulated antagonist. When put in perspective, all of the claims leveraged against Russia are also problems experienced within the United States. America is hardly immune from corruption, terrorism, and discrimination of minorities, which reduces most of the negative coverage to mere hypocrisy. This also raises the question of whether other countries would have garnered the same level of criticism if hosting the Olympics or if the publicity surrounding Sochi was, at least partially, the result of a political platform being carried out through the press. Needless to say, Russian President Vladimir Putin's stance on topics ranging from Syria to Ukraine has caused considerable consternation among circles in Washington, so it stands to reason that the negative press was just another way to challenge Russian credibility on the international stage. Some politicians in Washington went so far as to advocate an Olympic boycott over what was perceived to be Russia's political transgressions; a parallel to the American boycott of the 1980 Olympic games hosted in Russia after the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan.⁷

Furthermore, the Olympic Games generally draw more viewers than even the most sensational international event, so the coverage of the games was a prime outlet for a wide-spread smear campaign.⁸ In the case of the Olympics, it appears as if the negative narrative won

⁷ Senator Lindsey Graham (R-SC) was responsible for proposing the Olympic boycott should Moscow grant Edward Snowden asylum. He contended that the visibility afforded Russia by means of hosting the games would grant Russia "a propaganda platform to promote itself at a time when... the Russians are responsible for enabling Iran's nuclear program, threatening Israel and supporting Bashar Assad in Syria". He went on to draw a parallel between Putin's contemporary Russia and Nazi Germany – saying "if you could go back in time, would you have allowed Adolf Hitler to host the Olympics in Germany? To have the propaganda coup of inviting the world into Nazi Germany and putting on a false front?" and then goes on to state that he is not referring to Russia as Nazi Germany; however, the rhetorical parallel had already been made and the image of totalitarianism and a serious conflict of values were presented to the American public.

Hunt, Kasie and Kelly O'Donnell. (2013 July 17). Graham: US Should Consider Olympic Boycott Over Possible Snowden Asylum." *NBC News*. Retrieved from <http://www.nbcnews.com/news/other/graham-us-should-consider-olympic-boycott-over-possible-snowden-asylum-f6C10659602>

⁸ Greg Hughes, Senior Vice President of Corporate Communications at NBC Sports Group was quoted in *Forbes* as saying "we're averaging 23M viewers over the first 11 nights of the Games" which is a sizable viewer turnout when compared to the Pew Research Center survey noting a considerable decline in viewership of network news.

the gold medal. Forbes stated that the ratings for the 2014 Olympic Games depict a 12% drop from the Vancouver Olympics in 2010, with a spike in the ratings coinciding with the U.S./Russian hockey rivalry.⁹ This drop in ratings might have been partially the result of the negative coverage before the Olympics even began. On 4 February 2014, Pew Research Center released statistics on American confidence in whether Russia could successfully host the games. The research found that 44% of those surveyed thought that it was a poor choice to host the Olympics in Sochi with fears of a terrorist attack being the top-cited reason for the lack of confidence.¹⁰ Two *Gallup* polls echo this lack of confidence. The first concludes that Americans' perception of Russia has taken a negative turn in general.¹¹ The second poll concludes that: "as host nation Russia dominates the world stage at the Winter Olympics in Sochi, Americans clearly do not think highly of the country or its president, Vladimir Putin. Putin and Russia score the highest unfavorable ratings – 63% and 60%, respectively – that Gallup has recorded for them in the past two decades".¹² The outcome is evident, American public opinion surrounding Russia has been critically damaged, partially due to actions

Heitner, Darren. (2014 February 19). NBC Universal Disputes Reports of Poor Winter Olympics Ratings. *Forbes*. Retrieved from <http://www.forbes.com/sites/darrenheitner/2014/02/19/nbc-universal-disputes-report-of-poor-winter-olympics-ratings/>

Suls, Rob. (2014, January 9). Who is this Man? Many Americans don't Recognize Top News Anchor. *Pew Research Center*. Retrieved from <http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2014/01/09/who-is-this-man-many-americans-dont-recognize-top-news-anchor/>

⁹ Heitner, Darren. (2014, February 1). Can U.S. Hockey Win a Face-Off Against Poor Winter Olympics Ratings?. *Forbes*. Retrieved from <http://www.forbes.com/sites/darrenheitner/2014/02/18/can-u-s-hockey-win-a-face-off-against-poor-winter-olympics-ratings/>

¹⁰ Pew Research: Center for the People & the Press. (2014, February 4). Public Skeptical of Decision to Hold Olympic Games in Russia. Retrieved from <http://www.people-press.org/2014/02/04/public-skeptical-of-decision-to-hold-olympic-games-in-russia/>

¹¹ This also constituted the largest shift in American public opinion on Russia in the past 15 years.

Gallup Politics. (2013, September 18). For First Time, Americans' Views of Russia Turn Negative. Retrieved from <http://www.gallup.com/poll/164438/first-time-americans-views-russia-turn-negative.aspx>

¹² Gallup Politics. (2014, February 13). Americans' Views of Russia, Putin Are Worst in Years. Retrieved from <http://www.gallup.com/poll/167402/americans-views-russia-putin-worst-years.aspx>

emanating from Moscow and partially from the stereotypes and stigmas used by Western media and reportage.

Even the competitions themselves were not impervious to the anti-Russian bias. The initial hockey game between the United States and Russia read more like a diplomatic chess match than a hockey game between two rivaling teams as the game went into the eighth round of shootouts with the American team securing the winning goal. A riveting story for any sports fan, but the victory was published in the papers as if American-Russian relations had been decided by a slap shot. Saccharine stories about the triumphant American team included such lines as the players “lumbered toward their respective locker rooms to begin trying to digest the contents of a game that did full justice to this storied rivalry”.¹³ A narrative of hometown victory is an acceptable element in Olympic game coverage, but an antagonist was needed to balance the story and the press found just the right fit in the defeated Russian team and their high-profile supporter, Vladimir Putin. Despite future successes, the Russian team’s image was tainted by that initial blow dealt by the Americans. After winning a match 4-0 against Norway a few days later, ESPN made the assertion that the “Russians knew they barely survived another tense afternoon at the Bolshoy Ice Dome [as] Russia [clung] to a 2-0 lead before doubling it in the final 1:07”.¹⁴ Evidently a 4-0 win constitutes a slight victory. It might appear to be a trivial expression of media bias, but it is important to recognize that perception is not solely manipulated for large-scale purposes; subtle manipulation takes place at seemingly inconsequential steps along the path to cementing a choreographed opinion.

¹³ Sheinin, Dave. (2014, February 15). U.S. Hockey Team Tops Russia, 3-2, on Shootout Heroics by T.J. Oshie. *The Washington Post*. Retrieved from http://www.washingtonpost.com/sports/olympics/us-hockey-team-tops-russia-3-2-on-shootout-heroics-by-tj-oshie/2014/02/15/8164d466-9672-11e3-ae45-458927ccedb6_story.html

¹⁴ Associated Press. (2014 February 18). Russia Survives Norway, Advances to Face Finland. *ESPN*, Retrieved from <http://sports.espn.go.com/oly/winter/2014/icehockey/men/recap?gameId=1210>

Americans tend to view media as a passive lens through which the world is transmitted to the individual, but media are often a much more active agent in attempting to influence public opinion in the sphere of international affairs. For example, the wars of Yugoslav secession erupted as the Cold War was ending. The amalgamation of American media outlets were influential in manipulating the narrative of Yugoslav implosion in a emotive way that generated public support for intervention at a time when the public was clamoring for a peace dividend. Intervention, masked in the guise of humanitarian relief was contributing to the creation of a powerful example of leveraging popular opinion in the advancement of political agendas. Thirty years before the Sochi games, the 1984 winter games were held in Sarajevo, less than a decade before the region was plunged into bitter civil war. That is where this analysis begins – Yugoslavia and how the same type of negative coverage, used to recently smear Russia, was implemented to influence public opinion and justify America’s foreign policy of intervention masked as humanitarianism in the region.

II. Propaganda: A Theoretical Approach

“The conscious and intelligent manipulation of the organized habits and opinions of the masses is an important element in democratic society. Those who manipulate this unseen mechanism of society constitute an invisible government which is the true ruling power of our country.” –

Edward Bernays in *Propaganda*, 1928¹⁵

Propaganda and the meticulous sculpting of what messages the public consumes have had both a nefarious and relatively benign history. Before a historical chronicling of the evolution of propaganda can take place, it is essential to define propaganda. Much like nationalism, socialism and a host of other -isms, propaganda has acquired a pejorative connotation due to the cynical manipulation of facts; however, that value must be extracted in order understand what propaganda is and how it is harnessed for good as well as deceitful intentions by political elites. Dr. Randal Marlin, a professor of philosophy with a specialization in propaganda, argues that most definitions contain a negative inference revolving around such elements as “lack of concern for truth, failure to respect the autonomy of those with whom one communicates, promotion of self-serving ends, seeking control over others, etc.” which, he claims, is because propaganda has become an emotive term in itself.¹⁶ Neutrally speaking, propaganda is simply the dissemination of certain information over other available data.¹⁷ Due to limited time and resources some information must take precedence over other allegedly less important information and it is this selection process that functions as the underpinning of propaganda. Moreover, different disciplines analyze the role and impact of propaganda in various ways. In this study an effort is made to “examine the practices of propagandists as events and the subsequent events as possible effects of propaganda” as well as attempt to “understand how news management or ‘spin’ shapes information, emphasizing positive features and downplaying negative ones [as well as] casting

¹⁵ Bernays, Edward. (2005). *Propaganda*. New York: IG Publishing. 37.

¹⁶ Marlin, Randal. (2003). *Propaganda and the Ethics of Persuasion*. Peterborough: Broadview Press, LTD.. 18.

¹⁷ Jowett, Garth S and Victoria J. O'Donnell. (2013). *Propaganda and Persuasion*. Los Angeles: Sage Publishing. 2.

[certain] institutions in a favorable light” while maintaining a narrative suitable for mass consumption.¹⁸

A discussion on the various forms of propaganda is imperative in establishing a solid foundation for being able to distinguish what constitutes propaganda. Garth Jowett and Victoria O’Donnell assert that there are three types of propaganda concerning the source and the precision of information presented which they have been defined as white, gray, and black propaganda.¹⁹ White propaganda is considered to have “come from a source that is identified correctly, and the information in the message tends to be accurate”.²⁰ The source attempts to build a repertoire with the audience based on a notion of credibility and legitimacy while also instilling the idea that it is morally sound and ideologically superior.²¹ Black propaganda attempts to obscure the true source or credit a “false authority and spread lies, fabrications, and deceptions” in order to instill fear, hatred, or animosity.²² Gray propaganda is a mixture of both black and white, as the color indicates. Sources might be unreliable or just vague, leaving the audience unsure as to the validity of the information.²³ In conjunction with these three distinctions, Dr. George Szanto argues that propaganda can be further broken into two camps – integration propaganda which aims to keep the audience passive in favor of the status quo and agitation propaganda which is designed to facilitate action from the audience.²⁴ Therefore, for the purpose of a media analysis, propaganda can be subdivided into classifications of white-integration (accurate and aimed at ensuring audience passivity); white-agitation (accurate and aimed at arousing action); black-integration (deceitful and aimed at ensuring audience passivity); black-agitation (deceitful and

¹⁸ Ibid., 1.

¹⁹ Ibid., 17.

²⁰ Ibid., 17.

²¹ Ibid., 17.

²² Ibid., 18.

²³ Ibid., 20.

²⁴ Szanto, George. (1978). *Theater and Propaganda*. Austin: University of Texas Press. 10.

aimed at arousing action); gray-integration (vague and aimed at ensuring audience passivity); and gray-agitation (vague and aimed at arousing action).

Propaganda in a Contemporary Conceptual Context

The man credited with turning propaganda into a discipline of study and inquiry is Edward Bernays. In 1928, Bernays published his seminal work on the role of propaganda in modern society – both how it is employed to reach certain goals and how it is consumed and internalized by the audience. This text has become a blueprint for subliminally altering the perception of the masses. As noted earlier, propaganda currently elicits a pejorative connotation; however, that has not always been the case. In fact, propaganda can be a useful form of cognitive shorthand to expedite decision making and compartmentalize the world around us. As Bernays outlined nearly a century ago, “we [as a modern society] have voluntarily agreed to let an invisible government sift the data and high-spot the outstanding issues so that our field of choice shall be narrowed to practical proportions.”²⁵ In essence, we nominate actors to function as informational intermediaries, sorting through the vast numbers of products and topics that are deemed to be of the most importance and relevancy to everyday life, which is a reasonable element of any modern society. Since it is impossible to become educated, in detail, on every subject, societies need experts to interpret and relay information to the layperson. However, what happens when information is intentionally distorted, misrepresented, or embellished? In his book *PR! A Social History of Spin*, Stuart Ewen relays an interview he had with Bernays who implied that democracy hinged on “a highly educated class of opinion-molding tacticians [who are] continuously at work, analyzing the social terrain and adjusting the mental scenery from

²⁵ Bernays, Edward. *Propaganda*. 38.

which the public mind, with its limited intellect, derives its opinions”.²⁶ The notion that the public does not have the intellectual wherewithal to competently dispose of raw information is a dangerous trend that has gained momentum within the field of public relations during the 20th century. In fact, the sentiment was echoed in *The Crisis of Democracy: A Report on the Governability of Democracies to the Trilateral Commission* which illustrate the reluctance of political elites to relinquish control over the state agenda, especially with respect to foreign affairs, thereby the collective opinion of the public must be coerced into adopting the will of the decision makers.²⁷ This deviates from the idea that information selection is done from an altruistic attempt to streamline decision-making and suggests that information can be used to manufacture popular support.

Fortunately, there is not just one group comprising Bernays’ “invisible government” which dictates the information that is received.²⁸ Since different groups have different values and interests, the numbers of factions responsible for influencing what information is available is expansive. This results in each demographic subset of the population being represented in the process of information selection (i.e. American Legions represent the interests of veterans, Knights of Columbus chapters channel information dealing with Catholic issues, chambers of commerce seek out information pertinent to the companies they represent, etc.). Since information flow usually trickles from the top down, the discretion used by the elites in these organizations greatly impacts the quantity, quality, and content that the members and general population receive.

As one might imagine, the hierarchal distribution of information is not confined to the local organization; in fact, the initial preening of data takes place at the highest authority or

²⁶ Ewen, Stuart. (1996). *PR! A Social History of Spin*. New York: Basic Books Publishing. 10.

²⁷ Crozier, Michael J., Samuel P. Huntington, and Joji Watanuki. (1973). *The Crisis of Democracy: Report on the Governability of Democracies to the Trilateral Commission*. New York: New York University Press.

²⁸ Bernays, Edward. *Propaganda*. 38.

representative within each demographic or institution. With respect to news media, this narrative crafting is typically first accomplished by the editor in chief – deciding what is worthy of presentation to the public on the basis that the information is either vital to the audience (directly impacts their lives) or is deemed marketable (stories that will sell the most papers or achieve the highest ratings). The sources interviewed are equally influential to the narrative, especially if they are seen as experts in their respective fields, as their credibility often goes unquestioned. The journalist impacts the final product of the story through source selection, interview questions, their own knowledge or ignorance on the topic, and word choice (use of emotive or leading verbiage). Finally, the copy editor or production manager influences the way a story is perceived by the public in how the information is laid out. For instance, a front-page story garners much more attention than one tucked away on page A-7. All of these actors greatly influence when, what, and how information is delivered to an audience. Bernays noted this hierarchal trend when he said that “the minority has discovered a powerful help in influencing majorities. It has been found possible to mold the mind of the masses that they will throw their newly gained strength in the desired direction.”²⁹ Given that a minority has immense control over the molding of collective consciousness and group thinking, it is of the utmost importance to recognize the power inherent in the creation and distribution of propaganda under the guise of unbiased information.

In his text entitled *The U.S Media and Yugoslavia, 1991-1995*, James Sadkovich stresses the limitations on reporters working outside their area of expertise and their overreliance on specific sources. With respect to working in a hierarchal field, Sadkovich claims that “news hierarchies stretch from corporate and news executives through top editors, producers, and senior

²⁹ Ibid., 47.

editors to reporters and researchers. Power is exercised through budgets, personnel decisions, general policy, and story selection”.³⁰ When it comes to story selection, news that makes headlines is equally important as what is not reported, since information availability impacts how an audience interprets and responds to events.³¹ In this sense, ignorance can be just as powerful as knowledge when harnessed correctly.

Another conclusion that Bernays drew was the impact that propaganda has on group psychology. In conjunction with the works of Trotter, Le Bon, Wallas, and Lippmann, Bernays held that “the group has mental characteristics distinct from those of the individual, and is motivated by impulses and emotions which cannot be explained on the basis of what we know of individual psychology”.³² The disconnect between individual and group psychology led researchers to conclude that if the “mechanism and motives” underpinning group consciousness could be targeted, then it would be entirely possible to “control and regiment the masses... without their knowing”.³³ Modern propagandists have proven this assumption correct. With respect to war coverage, Sadkovich claims that “journalists attract audience by telling useful stories in clear, simple prose, with heroes, villains, and victims. Their stories shock and panic, but they preserve the social order by keeping certain realities from the audience. So war footage is sanitized, and politically acceptable stereotypes are common”.³⁴ This manipulation of messages allows stories to be told in a format that is easily accessible to the audience, using frames that are shared across most social and cultural cleavages in America. The average viewer may not know the historical basis for tensions in the Balkans, but when framed like an apolitical

³⁰ Sadkovich, James. (1998). *The U.S Media and Yugoslavia, 1991-1995*. Westport: Praeger Publishers. 4.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 6.

³² Bernays, Edward. *Propaganda*. 71.

³³ *Ibid.*, 71.

³⁴ Sadkovich, James. *The U.S Media and Yugoslavia, 1991-1995*. 8.

version of a Hans Christian Anderson fairy tale, the viewer can easily decipher who is the victim, who is the villain, who should be saved, and who should be punished.

Since Bernays established the basic framework from which to analyze propaganda, countless others have attempted to build upon his initial scholarship and apply it to various events ranging from wars, financial crises, political campaigns, and myriad of other topics. One important contribution to the literature is Noam Chomsky and Edward Herman's *Manufacturing Consent*. They chose to focus on how mass media are influential in molding public opinion and the complex matrix of players involved in weaving a narrative compelling enough to alter the mind of the public. They start off by making note that "mass media are drawn into a symbiotic relationship with powerful sources of information by economic necessity and reciprocity of interest".³⁵ Many of the primary news outlets in the United States are for-profit organizations and in order to meet rating goals, secure profits for investors, and increase revenue they must constantly attract a larger audience. One of the easiest ways to accomplish this is by printing enticing, emotive headlines in the hopes of drawing new readers into their publication. Chomsky and Herman note that "economics dictates that [news outlets] concentrate their resources where significant news often occurs, where important rumors and leaks abound, and where regular press conferences are held".³⁶ This has resulted in heavy competition within news media as different outlets fight to be the first to break a story in an effort to attract more viewers. However, it is virtually impossible to have reporters in every place where important events *might* take place which is why newspapers and news stations are forced to forge ties with various bureaucracies with the hope of getting residual information which can be published or broadcast

³⁵ Herman, Edward S. & Chomsky, Noam. (2002). *Manufacturing Consent: The Political Economy of Mass Media*, New York: Pantheon Books. 18.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 18-19.

with little first-hand investigation. The ensuing paradigm has been an overreliance on “government and corporate sources” due to the “great merit of being recognizable and credible by their status and prestige”.³⁷ As a result, the articles printed are considered legitimate because of the source, not because of the accuracy of the content.

Case Studies of Propaganda in the Media: The Lusitania and the U.S.S. Maddox

It is essential to note that not every piece of information that is received has a hidden subtext; in fact, a good deal of what is taken in on a daily basis can be viewed at surface level. However, an alarming trend has gained momentum since the turn of the twentieth century and that is a form of propaganda that is rooted in deception. Therefore it is essential to employ a skeptical eye when confronted with stories aimed at influencing a position or inciting an emotional reaction. One such story that requires further scrutiny is the sinking of the Lusitania on 7 May 1915 off the coast of Ireland. Editorials in various New York publications lamented the torpedoing in language along the lines of “the attack on the Lusitania was not war, it was simply attempted murder on a scale deliberately intended to inspire general consternation and fear; it was not the work of the naval force of a power bound by the conventions of law and humanity” (reprinted in *The New York Times* from *The Journal of Commerce*) and “for every American citizen, one fact will stand out clear and beyond all else this morning; in defiance, not alone of every principle of international law, but of every dictate of common humanity, American men, women, and children, citizens of this neutral nation, have been exposed to death, have, perhaps, been actually murdered by German war craft” (reprinted in *The New York Times*

³⁷ Ibid., 19.

from *The Tribune*).³⁸ Furthermore, elements of the American press viewed the German embassy's advertisement, which was published in various newspapers on leading up to Lusitania's departure from New York, and "warn[ed] Americans not to go to Europe aboard vessels flying the British flag" was thought to be an articulated threat foreshadowing the demise of liner.³⁹ Outrage surrounding the sinking of Lusitania appeared fully justifiable given the information that was presented to the public – an unarmed ocean liner carrying American civilians was torpedoed by a German U-boat. However, would public opinion have remained unaltered had evidence surfaced that Lusitania was carrying contraband? Donald E. Schmidt claims that Lusitania's manifest indicated that she was carrying "some contraband – rifle cartridges, shrapnel shells and fuses... and evidence has recently been found that the ship carried aluminum powder, a high explosive".⁴⁰ Whether or not there was in fact British-American collusion in transporting contraband on a civilian liner is not the issue at hand; rather, the significant element is that the reportage following the sinking of the ship was monumentally influential in shifting American public opinion regarding the war. It should also be said that this does not imply media complicity in publishing a potentially falsified account of the attack, but it does speak to the importance that informational gate-keepers have in influencing perception of current events.

Another, more recent, example of how media coverage resulted in a public outcry pivots on the Gulf of Tonkin incident in August 1964 which was a defining moment in the public's

³⁸ Editorial. (1915, May 8). Press Calls Sinking of Lusitania Murder – Editorials in New York Newspapers agree Torpedoing Was Crime Against Civilization. *The New York Times*. Retrieved from <http://query.nytimes.com/mem/archive-free/pdf?res=F30F16FD385C13738DDDA10894DD405B858DF1D3>

³⁹ Editorial. (1915, May 8). Disaster Bears Out Embassy's Warning: German Advertisement Practically Foretold Lusitania's Fate on Day She Sailed. *The New York Times*. Retrieved from <http://query.nytimes.com/mem/archive-free/pdf?res=F7081FFC385C13738DDDA10894DD405B858DF1D3>

⁴⁰ Schmidt, Donald. (2005). *The Folly of War: American Foreign Policy, 1898-2005*. New York: Algora Publishing. 73.

oscillating opinion about a military engagement in Vietnam. Norman Solomon goes into great detail about the media frenzy surrounding the torpedo attacks on the U.S.S. Maddox off the coast of Northern Vietnam where he notes:

“‘American Planes Hit North Vietnam After 2nd Attack on Our Destroyers; Move Taken to Halt New Aggression,’ said a *Washington Post* headline on August 5, 1964. That same day, the front page of *The New York Times* reported: ‘President Johnson has ordered retaliatory action against gunboats and certain supporting facilities in North Vietnam after attacks against American destroyers in the Gulf of Tonkin’. But there was no ‘second attack’ by North Vietnam – no ‘renewed attacks against American destroyers.’ By reporting official claims as absolute truths, American journalism opened the floodgates for the Vietnam War”.⁴¹

The official account of the attack came from the United States Navy and the State Department which omitted the fact that rather than being on routine patrol, the destroyer was “engaged in aggressive intelligence-gathering maneuvers – in sync with coordinated attacks” which would have diminished American credibility in claiming that the attack was unprovoked.⁴² The damage was done, the official narrative was printed, and the American public demanded some form of retribution for the attack. The subsequent campaign in Vietnam is lived out in the history books. However, once evidence that the attacks were misrepresented came to light, a correction should have been made, but no retraction was ever published. In an interview Solomon conducted with Murrey Marder, the *Washington Post*’s chief diplomatic correspondent during the Vietnam War, said: “I can assure you that there was never any retraction... if you were making a retraction, you’d have to make a retraction of virtually everyone’s entire coverage of the Vietnam War”.⁴³ This unsettling confession underscores the dire consequences that can come as a result of

⁴¹ Solomon, Norman. (2005). *War Made Easy: How Presidents and Pundits Keep Spinning Us to Death*. Hoboken, New Jersey: John Wiley & Sons, Inc.. 104.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 104.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 107-109.

journalisms unquestioning overreliance on official sources and how the narrative put forth might be more policy projection than fact.

III. Propaganda from Antiquity to Modernity: A Diachronic Analysis

“Words had to change their ordinary meaning and to take that which was now given them. Reckless audacity came to be considered the courage of a loyal ally; prudent hesitation, specious cowardice; moderation was held to be a cloak for unmanliness; ability to see all sides of a question, inaptness to act on any. Frantic violence became the attribute of manliness; cautious plotting, a justifiable means of self-defence. The advocate of extreme measures was always trustworthy; his opponent a man to be suspected. To succeed in a plot was to have a shrewd head, to divine a plot a still shrewder; but to try to provide against having to do either was to break up your party and to be afraid of your adversaries.” - Thucydides, Book III, 3.82-84

The origins of propaganda date back to classical Greece, where methods for shaping public opinion began to develop in Athens during the 6th century B.C.E. where Pisistratus is credited with establishing a technique that has become one of the cornerstones of contemporary propaganda. The technique has since become known as “victim hegemony” or the “description of oneself or one’s group as the victim of unjust behavior on the part of others so as to gain public support and, hence, power”.⁴⁴ This method has become a critical tool for political propagandists as it equips the state with the power of popular support which is used to justify retaliation against the offending force, regardless of whether there is any legitimacy to the claim of victimization. Dr. Randal Marlin argues that this principle has been used various times throughout history; particularly evident when “one country will invent, exaggerate, or provoke an incident involving insult or violence to some of its [and] the resulting wave of indignation will be used to support a pre-planned war effort against the offending nation”.⁴⁵ More extreme interpretations of this principle are used to justify the execution of false flag operations, or an attack by a state on its own soil under the guise of being carried out by a hostile party, in order to garner the public support needed to launch a pre-planned attack.

⁴⁴ Marlin, Randal. (2003). *Propaganda and the Ethics of Persuasion*. Peterborough: Broadview Press. 43-44.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 44.

Pericles is another influential Athenian responsible for establishing a founding principle of modern propaganda and oratorical persuasion. During a speech delivered after the first year of the Peloponnesian War (431 B.C.E.), Pericles extolled the virtue and strength of the Athenian people, honored those killed in combat, and “strengthened the resolve of survivors to continue to fight”.⁴⁶ These elements of public speaking have since become known as “propaganda of integration,” and have the effect of giving the audience a sense of belonging and group superiority while also establishing common virtues and pride in the collective mind.⁴⁷ In some ways, this early form of morale-boosting propaganda is the genesis of identity-building by means of in-group/out-group constructions. Athens and, as an extension of the state, Athenians were portrayed as superior to the rest of the world and should be defended at any cost, and any loss of life in battle should be viewed as a sacrifice for the preservation of Athenian greatness.⁴⁸ Marlin notes that the lessons learned from Pericles’s speech is a double-edged sword – “it promotes worthwhile things such as respect for law, equality, and dignity, but it also exalts Athenian society over others, providing an excuse for colonization and spreading contempt for those who do not belong in it”.⁴⁹ These messages often become intermingled in the collective mind of a people. A state-fostered narrative of national superiority inherently feeds into a perception that other groups are in need of protection or guidance, even when interference undermines the very democratic values that the state claims to be upholding. In a modern context, this translates to colonialist endeavors and interference in another state’s domestic affairs under the position of moral imperative or right-to-protect (R2P).

⁴⁶ Ibid., 44.

⁴⁷ Ibid., 44.

⁴⁸ Ibid., 45.

⁴⁹ Ibid., 45.

Early forms of oratory propaganda were not limited to Athens. Thucydides depicted one speech made by the Spartan king Archidamus in an attempt to motivate war-weary troops during the Peloponnesian War:

Peloponnesians and allies, our fathers have engaged in many campaigns both in and outside the Peloponnese, and the elder men in the army of ours are not inexperienced in war. Yet we have marched out in greater numbers than now. And just as we are in greater numbers and in better spirit than ever before, so the city against which we are moving is at the height of her power. We must not, then, fall short of our fathers' standards, not fail to live up to our own reputation. For the whole of Hellas is eagerly watching this action of ours... Remember, then, that you are marching against a very great city. Think, too, of the glory, or, if events turn out differently, the shame which you will bring on your ancestors and to yourselves, and with all this in mind, follow your leaders, paying the strictest attention to discipline and security, giving prompt obedience to the orders which you receive. The best and safest thing of all is when a large force is so well disciplined that it seems to be acting like one man.⁵⁰

Thematically, this speech has resonated throughout history – incorporating a legacy of honor, the notion of a group destiny or fate, in-group/out-group language, and unity as a prescription for a successful campaign. Throughout the Crusades, Napoleonic Wars, both World Wars, and countless civil wars, these elements have been employed to both galvanize support and rhetorically diminish the power of the adversary. This type of morale-building has been used to convince groups to engage in conflict either to maintain their supremacy or to achieve a superior status. Therefore, the status quo is only optimal when a population has achieved political preeminence; as such, the world order is always subject to being restructured as factions fight for relative improvements in perceived status.

While elements of propaganda have been in use since antiquity, the term propaganda did not emerge until the dawn of the 16th century during the Counter-Reformation when Pope

⁵⁰ Taylor, Philip M.. (2003). *Munitions of the Mind: A History of Propaganda, Third Edition*. Manchester: Manchester University Press. 30-31.

Gregory XIII founded the *Societas de Propaganda Fide* (Society for the Propagation of the Faith) with the purpose of exporting printed catechisms and establishing seminaries in foreign lands.⁵¹ At face value, this expression of propaganda has a positive connotation – a drive to unify a population under the control of a central body, in this case the Vatican. However, it is important to recognize that in instances where the audience is asked to choose a position, one group is inevitably portrayed as virtuous while the other is, perhaps unintentionally, vilified. With respect to the *Societas de Propaganda Fide*, Philip M. Taylor asserts that a “legacy of distrust against [propaganda] in Protestant societies remains to this day”.⁵² Additionally, this form of propaganda diverges from that developed by the ancient Greeks because of a marked shift in the target audience. Whereas the Greeks were focused on promoting a group identity based on a political or geographic delineation (i.e. what it meant to Athenian as opposed to being Spartan), the use of propaganda by the Catholic Church under Gregory XIII made apparent that populations do not have to be of the same geographical origin to be spurred into action. Now, individuals who identified as Catholic could be joined together for a common purpose (opposition of Protestant heretics) regardless of their proximity to one another and were equipped with the tools to share their cause with undecided parties.

The 18th century witnessed a birth of “public opinion” during the Enlightenment, French and American Revolutions.⁵³ In contrast to earlier forms of propaganda, which was largely based on an oral tradition, the medium and dissemination of information had been altered with the technological advances brought about by the printing press and increased availability to the general public. Rather than only reaching a crowd within earshot, propagandists were able to

⁵¹ Bernays, Edward. (1961). *Crystallizing Public Opinion*. New York: Liveright Publishing Corporation. xvi.

⁵² Taylor, Philip M.. *Munitions of the Mind: A History of Propaganda, Third Edition*. 3.

⁵³ Bernays, Edward. *Crystallizing Public Opinion*. xvii-xix.

share their message to a larger audience through the use of printed pamphlets. This trend in written propaganda coincided with periods of political unrest and calls for liberation which made the wider distribution of ideas all the more powerful. During this time, propaganda was utilized by both the state and dissidents in an effort to sway public opinion for a particular cause and because a variety of opinions and positions were simultaneously available, the paradigm of state-monopolized propaganda had dramatically shifted. The dramatic increase in both circulation and contribution to the type and tone of information being dispersed to the public resulted in a better educated population.

While the masses could be more easily educated about current events, the church and state now had to contend with civilian competition in the realm of public opinion-building. A poignant example of this comes from Napoleon's rule. Propaganda and censorship was used to "build up [the] publics' awareness of [Napoleon] and increase political adherence of the people where he came into contact with them"; however, this did not come without repercussion, "the man known as the most vehement of the anti-Napoleonic forces, the German Joseph von Gorres... brought about the rise of the *Rheinischer Merker*, a newspaper which sought to develop a counter-attack on Napoleon through propaganda methods".⁵⁴ This paradigm shift in propaganda resulted in an increase in information and more sources to choose from, but the fact remained that those with the resources to invest in manufacturing and distributing pamphlets dictated the type of information released.

Propaganda became a more refined tool during the shift from the second to third mode of warfare in the wake of the two World Wars and ensuing Cold War. With specific emphasis on the American war experience in the 20th century, public-opinion molding required more

⁵⁴ Bernays, Edward. *Crystallizing Public Opinion*. xix.

sophisticated packaging which explains the creation of the Committee on Public Information (CPI). CPI was an independent agency established in 1917 to regulate the image of the war and influence public-opinion regarding American engagement in the conflict in Europe through the “monopolization of information, shaping news, shaping images, [and] shaping emotions to create a reality in which President Wilson’s war emerged as not merely desirable but inevitable”.⁵⁵ The committee was charged with putting into “convincing print America’s reasons for entering the war, the meaning of America, the nature of our free institutions, and our war aims... as well as an exposure of the enemy’s misrepresentations, aggressions, and barbarities” which was a duty it carried out in the publication and distribution of 75,117,178 pamphlets on an assortment of topics ranging from “How the War Came to America” to “Ways to Serve the Nation” and “American Loyalty”, the former was also printed in German.⁵⁶ Of these publications, 61,626,352 were circulated domestically which is an impressive circulation considering that the United State Census Bureau estimates that the American population was 103,208,000 as of July 1, 1918 meaning that by the close of the war, one pamphlet had been printed for every 1.67 person.^{57 58}

While satirical caricatures and emotive visual imagery predate the World Wars by a considerable stretch of time, it was successfully harnessed by the state as a way to influence the public in the beginning of the 20th century with print cartoons and wartime posters. In his text on the art of propaganda, Robert Philippe concludes that: “prints are partisan. They espouse causes. Exaggeration is second nature to them... A print is neither historic evocation nor narrative, but

⁵⁵ Axelrod, Alan. (2009). *Selling the Great War: The Making of American Propaganda*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan Press. xi.

⁵⁶ Creel, George. (1920). *Complete Report on the Chairman of the Committee on Public Information*. Washington D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office. 15-18.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 16.

⁵⁸ United States Census Bureau. (2000). *Historic National Population Estimates: July 1, 1900 to July 1, 1999* [Data file]. Retrieved from <http://www.census.gov/population/estimates/nation/popclockest.txt>

rather a conjunction of symbols and allusions. It enlarges, shrinks, or disguises people, to reveal their many facets at a glance. The synthesizing power of the print expresses both what is visible and what is concealed".⁵⁹ Furthermore, imagery is more easily internalized by the audience because it rarely requires much analysis. Rather, the viewer picks up on general Manichean themes of good and evil, right and wrong, and civic responsibility without having to read through a pamphlet for the main message. Whether the message is delivered from orator's podium or a wartime poster, it is evident that propaganda has evolved in presentation and circulation over the course of nearly 2,500 years, but the general techniques have largely remained constant, which indicates propaganda's deep-seeded hold on the collective mind in modern society.

From here the focus shifts to a discussion on the rationale, articulated and obscured, for American interest in the Balkans. This will be accomplished through historical and media lenses to further the claim that the media was instrumental in helping to construct a narrative of moral imperative used to justify foreign intervention. More attention will be paid to the media and rhetorical frames employed than a detailed chronicling of the escalation of conflict in the Balkans and subsequent intervention, but history will be utilized when needed to present the argument for biased coverage.

⁵⁹ Phillippe, Robert. (1982). *Political Graphics: Art as a Weapon*. New York: Abbeville Press. 9.

IV. Yugoslavia a State in the Crosshairs of Public Opinion: Why the American Public was made to Care

*“Russia... remains a major geostrategic player, in spite of its weakened state and probably prolonged malaise. Its very presence impacts massively on the newly independent states within the vast Eurasian space of the former Soviet Union. It entertains ambitious geopolitical objectives, which it increasingly proclaims openly. Once it has recovered its strength, it will also impact significantly on its western and eastern neighbors. Moreover, Russia has still to make its fundamental geostrategic choice regarding its relationship with America: is it a friend or foe?” - Zbigniew Brzezinski in *The Grand Chessboard: American Primacy and Its Geostrategic Imperatives*⁶⁰*

In the 1990s, it appeared as if the world was restructuring itself for yet another time as the Soviet Union was dismantling and rapprochement between the east and west was possible. Additionally, the European Community was further strengthening and unifying the western half of the European sub-continent; Germany was reuniting; and a multitude of other states were undergoing a series of transformative events, negotiations, conflicts, and resolutions. However, amidst this peripheral glance across the general reorientation that was taking place, the American gaze fell upon Yugoslavia and its impending implosion. By the late 1980s, Yugoslavia no longer functioned within the American security infrastructure nor was it a threat to the stability or cohesion of the continent.⁶¹ However, America tuned in as the republic of Slovenia, more or less, peacefully broke away from the Yugoslav state on June 25, 1991 with Germany’s nod of approval.⁶² Shortly thereafter, Croatia attempted a similar gambit which merited a stronger objection from Belgrade, but it was not until tragedy struck Bosnia during her attempt at secession from the Yugoslav Federation that the passive attention being paid to the region shifted to vocal disapproval of Yugoslavia’s largest republic – Serbia.

⁶⁰ Brzezinski, Zbigniew. (1997). *The Grand Chessboard: American Primacy and Its Geostrategic Imperatives*. New York: Basic Books. 44.

⁶¹ Thomas, Raju G. C. (ed.). (2003). *Yugoslavia Unraveled: Sovereignty, Self-Determination, Intervention*. Lanham: Lexington Books. 6.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 6.

It is clear why democratic governments are interested in rallying support for events with which they are directly involved, but when international conflicts begin to take precedence in the media, a critical viewer should question why the conflict is of importance or significance to the American public. Most would conclude that any cosmopolitan society should stay atop current events because it directly relates to state security, resource distribution, the global economy, and a host of other important topics; however, this does little to address why some events draw the attention of politicians and journalists and others are disregarded as unimportant. With respect to the focus paid to the dismantling of the Yugoslav state and the outrage that followed the headlines and sound bites of mass atrocities – one question should have been raised: why should Americans care about the fate of Yugoslavia and not that of other post-socialist also under transitional duress? The answer to this question is rooted in a Cold War alliance forged between Tito and Truman nearly 50 years before conflict struck the Balkans.

Yugoslavia: A Cold War Companion

The relationship between the United States and the Yugoslav state and her break-away republics in the 1990s is, in many ways, predicated on the role Yugoslavia played in Washington's security architecture during the Cold War. For the first years following World War II and the subsequent installation of Josip Broz Tito as president of the Yugoslav state,⁶³ Washington maintained a reserved and nominally suspicious position on Balkan affairs, largely due to the geopolitical analysis of Richard C. Patterson, American ambassador to Yugoslavia in 1944. Patterson warned Truman that Tito posed a dictatorial threat to the region and was a likely

⁶³ Susan Woodward explains that the very creation of the Yugoslav state by the great powers was to “create regional stability... and create a buffer between Austria and Serbia, the two states that had ignited the [first] world war.”

Woodward, Susan. (1995). *Balkan Tragedy: Chaos and Dissolution after the Cold War*. Washington D.C.: The Brookings Institute. 23.

conduit for establishing a Soviet-style regime in the Balkans.⁶⁴ This indifference would change once the Kremlin reproached Tito's political initiatives, creating a fracture in what was thought by the West to be a monolithic ideological construct spanning Eastern Europe and the Caucasus.⁶⁵ Until the schism between Tito and Stalin was confirmed in Yugoslavia's expulsion from Cominform (predecessor to the Warsaw Pact), it was widely perceived by the western world that Yugoslavia was one of Stalin's most loyal satellite states.⁶⁶ This ideological dismemberment caused Gaddis to posit that "Soviet ideology did not suit the histories or circumstances of other countries" and the "repugnant methods used to keep their puppet regimes in power might generate resistance".⁶⁷ This premise conceptually defines the Tito-Stalin split and the propensity for other schisms to happen elsewhere in the communist bloc.

Under this assumption, the Truman administration developed a strategy that sought to manipulate the "fragmentation within the international communist movement" and "driv[e] a wedge between the Soviets and their allies".⁶⁸ The initial wedge had been put in place by Tito's Balkan aspirations and Stalin's aim to politically isolate Tito; therefore, it was up to the Truman administration to intensify the already present divide. At the policy level, the wedge strategy seems to counter the over-arching containment policy already in place because it entails brokering diplomatic relationships with communist regimes, the very regimes that the Truman

⁶⁴ Lees, Lorraine, M.. (1997). *Keeping Tito Afloat: The United States, Yugoslavia, and the Cold War*. University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press. 5-6.

⁶⁵ The break between Tito and Stalin was premised on Tito's desire to incorporate Bulgaria and Albania into the Yugoslav project. Jeronim Perovic argues that Tito had ambitions of turning Yugoslavia into a "regional hegemon," a policy that was expressed in 1943 when Tito proposed the formation of a "united headquarters of the Partisan movements of Yugoslavia, Bulgaria, Albania, and Greece [which] ultimately failed because of Tito's unwillingness to agree on a structure giving each member an equal voice."

Perović, Jeronim. (2007). The Tito-Stalin Split: A Reassessment in Light of New Evidence. *Journal of Cold War Studies*, 9(issue 2), 32.

⁶⁶ Gaddis, John. (2005). *Strategies of Containment: A Critical Appraisal of American National Security Policy During the Cold War*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. 66.

⁶⁷ Lorraine M. Lees, *Keeping Tito Afloat: The United States, Yugoslavia, and the Cold War*, 8.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 8.

Doctrine claims poses the greatest threat to the stability of the international community. When viewed in conjunction with one another, these policy platforms aim to co-opt and influence periphery communist states with the primary objective of crippling the most eminent threat, the Soviet Union. Ergo, in order to destabilize the protectorate of the communist bloc the United States had to forge relationships with its protégés.

Throughout the course of the Cold War, Yugoslavia enjoyed many of the benefits of having diplomatic ties with Washington while also retaining the autonomy to pursue a pseudo-nonalignment policy. The United States helped to promote Yugoslav independence from Moscow's oversight by offering a considerable aid package which came in the form of "assistance from the International Monetary Fund, World Bank, U.S. Export-Import Bank... [along with] the restoration of trade with the West".⁶⁹ From open borders for travel and trade, relative affluence, a "landscape of multicultural pluralism," "regularly negotiated loans from the International Monetary Fund" and early "decentralizing economic reforms," Yugoslavia was well positioned for a smooth transition to a market-based democracy by the time America seemed to have won the ideological war; however Susan Woodward credits this hybrid status for the demise of the Yugoslav state.⁷⁰ The initial fissures of political and social instability deepened because, Yugoslavia fit the model of most small states – "the domestic order of Yugoslavia was strongly influenced by its place in the international order: its geopolitical location, its patterns of trade and foreign alliances, and the requirements of participation in the international economy and its various organizations".⁷¹

⁶⁹ Woodward, Susan. *Balkan Tragedy: Chaos and Dissolution after the Cold War*. 25.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 1.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 16.

However, by the end of the Cold War, Yugoslavia was no longer a necessary mechanism in the ideological standoff with Soviet-style communism. As such, the loans that had been so generously doled out to Belgrade in the preceding decades were being called in and harsh austerity measures were turning Yugoslavia's relative prosperity into a scene of hyperinflation which ultimately fueled the ethnic tensions that ignited the wars.⁷² In the case of Yugoslavia, the United States pivoted from being an actor interested in the maintenance and stability of the state when it suited Washington's political and security interests but became a disinterested party once the region was engulfed in debt and social unrest. The United States remained momentarily indifferent, at least until the conflict could be spun in a way to benefit Washington and reestablish America's foothold in Russia's backyard.

Serbia: A Metaphor for Russian Dismantlement

I suspect that the reason that the Yugoslav crisis rose to prominence in America was because intervention functioned as a diplomatic metaphor for the further dismantlement of Russia. The wars of Yugoslav secession occurred at a formative time in Russia's history – she had seemingly lost the ideological fight and had been humiliated on the international stage; however, as former National Security Advisor and geostrategist Zbigniew Brzezinski outlined in the opening quote of this chapter, Russia remained a geopolitical threat to American hegemony. It was not enough that the United States won; Washington also had to ensure that a strengthened Russian state did not reemerge to challenge American preeminence. It would be political folly to abandon the peace dividend and establish a presence abroad without a justifiable cause and the dissolution of Yugoslavia presented Washington with the basis needed to show its muscles in Europe by packaging American presence as humanitarian intervention.

⁷² Ibid., 47-63.

The Balkan connection rests on the historic ties that Belgrade and other Balkan Slavs share with Moscow. As far back as the 18th century, Russia's diplomatic policy regarding the Balkan Peninsula was clear – Moscow would be the protectorate of Orthodox Slavs outside of Russian rule. A primary example of this can be found in the Treaty of Küçük Kaynarca, which marked the end of the Russo-Turkish war of 1768-1774. One particular clause of interest read: “the Sublime Porte promises to protect constantly the Christian religion and its churches, and it also allows the Ministers of the Imperial court of Russia to make representations....”⁷³ This clause is a prime example of diplomatic ambiguity, but was generally understood to mean that Russia was increasing its cultural sphere of influence in the Balkans by assigning the Russian patriarch to be the sole protectorate over Orthodox Christians residing in the Ottoman lands.

Additionally, Russians used religious continuity among Russians and the eastern Orthodox Slavs to undermine Ottoman legitimacy and “restructure the power balance in the Black Sea region” throughout the 18th and 19th centuries.⁷⁴ This Slavic solidarity emerged a number of other times over the course of modern history but became a focal point in international affairs at the dawn of the Great War when Russia vowed to support Belgrade should the Austro-Hungarian Empire mobilize in the Balkans. It was with the backing from Russia, that Serbia was emboldened enough to reject Vienna's ultimatum, an act which resulted in the continental conflict.⁷⁵

The knowledge concerning this legacy of sponsorship between Russia and Serbia along with the precarious situation that Yugoslavia found herself in at the close of the 20th century

⁷³ MacKenzie, David. (1996). *Violent Solutions: Revolutions, Nationalism, and Secret Societies in Europe to 1918*. Lanham: University Press of America. 208.

⁷⁴ Jelavich, Barbara. (1983). *History of the Balkans: Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. 69.

⁷⁵ McMeekin, Sean. (2011). *The Russian Origins of the First World War*. Cambridge: Belknap Press. 82-84.

undoubtedly weighed on the minds of policy makers in Washington. By depicting Belgrade as the sole aggressor in the conflicts and demonizing the Serbs, the United States, with the complicity of the press, was able to construct a narrative that placed public-opinion in the camp of favoring intervention on the basis of humanitarian need. This was carried out by the unilateral recognition of Bosnian independence which further undermined the sovereignty of the Yugoslav state and the bombing campaign in Kosovo which fractured not only the skeletal remains of Yugoslavia, but the Republic of Serbia by driving a wedge between Belgrade and Serbia's contested autonomous provinces – further fragmenting and isolating the historical client of Russia. The true motive was obscured by emotive headlines and tearful testimonies of mass atrocities perpetrated by Serbian soldiers while impeaching stories of crimes against Serb populations.

Washington had assistance in influencing public opinion. The high-profile public relations firm Ruder-Finn was utilized by the governments in Zagreb, the Croatian outfit in Bosnia, the government of Bosnia-Herzegovina, and the “faction of dissident Muslim Albanian secessionists in Kosovo”.⁷⁶ In fact, James Harff, the agent responsible for Balkan contracts was noted saying:

“our role is to identify the aggressor and the victim which has been obscured by either a lack of information or Serbian propaganda... The overriding objective was to develop a Croatian profile when competing against other foreign policy initiatives in Washington. Our main targets were the media, Capitol Hill and the Bush administration. There was a dearth of information among policy-makers on the Foreign Affairs Committee”.⁷⁷

⁷⁶ Brock, Peter. (2005). *Media Cleansing: Dirty Reporting – Journalism and Tragedy in Yugoslavia*. Los Angeles: GMBooks. 127.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 127.

To date, there has been no evidence that Belgrade hired a public affairs firm to manage the image of the Serbs throughout the wars in Croatia, Bosnia, and Kosovo. A factor that undoubtedly worked to the disadvantage of the Serbian peoples both in and out of Serbia proper.

Over the course of history, there have been other times when governments have attempted to improve their image, taint the image of another state, or sanitize certain elements of their past.⁷⁸ In fact, one of the catalysts of the first Gulf War was the “fictitious testimony by the Kuwaiti ambassador’s daughter before the Congressional Human Rights Caucus” about “hospitalized infants brutally murdered by Iraqi soldiers” – a hoax later found to be the work of the Washington-based PR firm of Hill and Knowlton.⁷⁹ The emotive story captivated American public opinion and the first campaign in the Persian Gulf was launched shortly thereafter. A similar schema was implemented in the Balkans with the work of a multitude of actors, some intentionally and others unintentionally, skewing public opinion away from a course of action that would have lead to a less destructive resolution. The following chapters will outline popular propaganda mechanisms and inconsistencies in the generally accepted narrative of unilateral Serbian aggression in the devolution of the Yugoslav state.

⁷⁸ Ruder-Finn consciously dealt with concerns of anti-Semitism when representing Croatia, stating “knowing about Croatian anti-Semitism during the Hitler years, our ethics committee thoroughly discussed the issue before accepting Croatia as a client. It was only after we received a statement in support of the present government from the Jewish community of Croatia, that we felt we could proceed”.

Ibid., 129.

⁷⁹ Ibid., 124.

V. Recycled Frames and Mental Shorthand: Use of Nazi Parallels in the Deconstruction of Yugoslavia

*“Slobodan Milosevic of Serbia and the Bosnian Serb leaders, Radovan Karadzic and Gen. Ratko Mladic, are gripped by hatred – psychopathic hatred, one has to think. They have no compunction in slaughtering the civilians of Gorazde because those people are of a different religion. To the Serbian leaders the Muslims are what the Nazis called Jews, untermenschen.” – Anthony Lewis in *The New York Times*, 25 April 1994⁸⁰*

In July of 1993, Henry Siegman wrote an article for *The New York Times* that in no uncertain terms predicted that the trajectory of the war in Bosnia was such that a second European Holocaust was on the horizon if the West remained inactive in the Balkans. Arguing that the Clinton administration had been too lax on Serbia, he wrote that “the West is indifferent to the fate of Bosnia’s Muslims for the same reason it was indifferent to the fate of the Jews in the 1930s. There was something in Hitler’s hatred that expressed a residual anti-Semitism in Western culture. Similarly, something in the Serbian demonization of Bosnian Muslims – the fear of ‘a Muslim state in the heart of Europe’ – finds an echo in lingering Western prejudice”.⁸¹ The idea that Europe might experience another genocide on par with the extermination of the Jews in World War II is a strong assertion; however, the implication that America remained inactive in the region because of latent Islamophobia is surely jarring to the reader. The subtext of the article holds that those who oppose intervention on behalf of the Muslims in Bosnia are essentially giving a green light to modern-day Nazis – making parallels between Serbia and Nazi Germany very powerful, and in some cases, compelling. Since few terms illicit such visceral reactions like references to the Holocaust and Nazi Germany, it is evident that a very specific emotion is being targeted in an effort to sway public opinion when terms like genocide, death

⁸⁰ Lewis, Anthony. (1994, April 25). *Abroad at Home; Crimes of War. The New York Times*. Retrieved from <http://www.nytimes.com/1994/04/25/opinion/abroad-at-home-crimes-of-war.html> (accessed March 3, 2014).

⁸¹ Siegman, Harry. (1993, July 16). *Pay Heed to Bosnia’s Parallels With the Holocaust. The New York Times*. Retrieved from <http://www.nytimes.com/1993/07/16/opinion>

camps, and Hitler emerge in coverage of a conflict. The notion that a lesson was not learned from the devastation that took place during World War II is the implication used to draw the audience into action, or at least an impassioned outcry calling for government intervention.

In the 1990s, most of the world knew very little about Yugoslavia and even fewer knew the historic, cultural, economic, and political elements which had been building throughout the previous decade and would ultimately result in the destruction of the Yugoslav state. When the general public's familiarity with a topic is limited, it is often appropriate to draw connections in order to give the layperson the mental framework for which to understand the issue. This form of cognitive shorthand gives the audience the ability to draw from their own experiences and knowledge base without having to delve too deeply into the new topic – in this case, the complex matrix of factors which led to the war in Bosnia. James Sadkovich argues that the role of the media is to “stabilize the social order by familiarizing the unfamiliar” through the selection of recognizable frames and references.⁸² However, when the parallel being drawn is to arguably one of the most heinous atrocities to have been committed in the modern era, it raises the question of legitimacy in the comparison. What conditions must be met before a leader can be compared to Hitler and what motives must governments have for making the comparison? There are two poignant cases where the Serb-Nazi parallel was especially strong and in order to understand how public opinion was manipulated to favor Bosnia and Kosovo, it is important to look at how these connections were woven into the larger narrative of the war.

⁸² Sadkovich, James. *The U.S Media and Yugoslavia, 1991-1995*. 7.

Milosevic: A Modern-Day Hitler

As the publicity admonishing Belgrade intensified throughout the campaigns in Bosnia and later in Kosovo many journalists began drawing a parallel between Slobodan Milosevic and Adolf Hitler as well as Serb forces and the *Schultzstaffel*; a tactic intended to diminish any legitimacy Milosevic might have had in the international arena. One such example of this connection drawn between the two statesmen occurred on 20 January 1999 when Boston Globe contributor David Nyhan wrote that

Milosevic was the “closest thing to Hitler Europe has confronted in the last half-century”.⁸³

While one cannot in good conscience dispute the fact that atrocities and devastation took place throughout the former Yugoslavia under Milosevic’s rule, it was not comparable to the heinous acts committed under Hitler – at least in scale. By drawing this connection, the audience was asked to view Milosevic and his actions through a lens that had been sullied with the atrocities of Hitler’s Third Reich. In order to fully appreciate the power that this correlation has, it is essential to discuss what the parallel implies.

The supposition that Milosevic’s rule mirrored that of Hitler is based on the notion that both were nationalists with expansionist aspirations, set to rid their country of any unwanted populations. While this is accurate in the case of the later, the former requires a detailed analysis and each component must be dissected before drawing a conclusion as to the legitimacy of the parallel. Nationalism, much like propaganda, has assumed a pejorative tone since 1989.

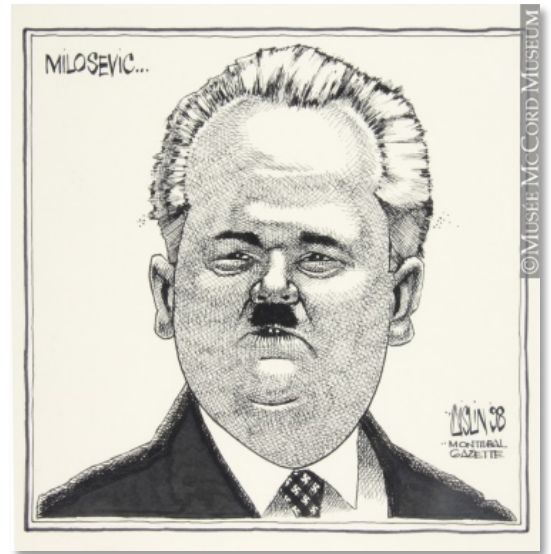


Image credit: McCord Museum, 1998.

⁸³ Nyhan, David. (1999, January 20). U.S. Enemies are Enjoying the Show. *Boston Globe*.

Historically, nationalism was seen as a way to unify populations under a common imagined or artificially-constructed identity through the use of language, education, geographic proximity, shared history and perceived destiny, religion, or a number of other variables.⁸⁴ However, a stark demarcation from this largely benign form of social grouping took place under Hitler. Norman Rich claims that the difference between the nationalism of the 19th century and that of the Third Reich is contingent on “Hitler’s identification of nation with race” which emerged under the ideology of *Herrenvolk* or a master race.⁸⁵ While race had been a component in German national identity for the century leading up to Hitler’s rise to power, he was the first to implement the concept of racial nationalism.⁸⁶ The emergence of this radical shift in ideology took place at a time when the German people were “weighed down by war reparations [from the Great War], hyperinflation, economic insecurity, territorial losses, and constitutional weaknesses” and were willing to turn to a figurehead promising a way to alleviate these hardships.⁸⁷ Under Hitler the maintenance of racial purity became a program of the state, which was articulated in *Mein Kampf* where Hitler claimed that “the state had to place race at the center of existence and care for keeping the Aryan race pure”.⁸⁸ Germany became inherently unstable as a result of this reimagined form of nationalism employed by Hitler since many of Germany’s inhabitants were still citizens but viewed as unwelcomed threats to the nation.

To determine whether Milosevic constitutes a nationalist it is imperative to go back to where the initial accusations emerge – his speech at Gazimestan on 28 June 1989. The speech received little attention outside of the Balkans before Yugoslavia began to collapse two years

⁸⁴ Hobsbawm, E.J.. (1990). *Nations and Nationalism*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

⁸⁵ Rich, Norman. (1992). *Hitler’s War Aims: Ideology, the Nazi State, and the Course of Expansion (Volume 1)*. New York: Norton and Company. xlii.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, xlii.

⁸⁷ Motyl, Alexander J.. (2001). *Encyclopedia of Nationalism: (Volume 2)*. New York: Academic Press. 190.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 190.

later; however, by the mid-1990s, it was heralded as a vile expression of pro-Serbian nationalism. In 1992, Misha Glenny wrote this about the Gazimestan speech:

“The Field of Blackbirds, as the Serbian settlement of Kosovo Polje is known in English, was turned into an infinite expanse of Serbia’s imagined glory dominated by one image over all others – Slobodan Milosevic. The gross display of Serbiana, in the heart of an area populated largely by Albanians, did not go unnoticed by the rest of Yugoslavia... His message to the Slovenes, Croats, Moslems, Albanians and Macedonians was clear: ‘Look with what ease I can mobilize over 1 million Serbs.’”⁸⁹

If Milosevic’s Gazimestan speech was so threatening, why did it register on the international radar only after the situation in Yugoslavia begin to disintegrate? Moreover, it is very difficult to find a written record of the speech, which makes forming an informed opinion on the content almost impossible. However, in recent years the Center for Middle Eastern Studies at University of Arizona released a transcript compiled by the National Technical Information Service of the Department of Commerce of the United States.⁹⁰ In the speech, it is evident that Milosevic spends a significant amount of time discussing Serbian history; however, since the speech was given to commemorate the 600th anniversary of the Battle of Kosovo, an engagement which placed Serbia under Ottoman suzerainty for nearly 500 years, Serbian history is a reasonable topic of discussion. It should be kept in mind that patriotism is not always synonymous with nationalism. Further down in the text of the speech he says:

“Yugoslavia is a multinational community and it can survive only under the conditions of full equality for all nations that live in it. The crisis that hit Yugoslavia has brought about national divisions, but also social, cultural, religious and many other less important ones. Among all these divisions, nationalist ones have shown themselves to be the most dramatic. Resolving them will make it easier to remove other divisions and mitigate the consequences they have created. For as long as multinational communities have existed, their weak point has always been the relations between different nations. The threat is that the question of one nation being endangered by the others can be posed one day --

⁸⁹ Glenny, Misha. (1996). *The Fall of Yugoslavia: The Third Balkan War*. New York: Penguin Books. 35.

⁹⁰ Milosevic, Slobodan. (1989). St. Vitus Day Speech: Gazimestan – June 28,1989. *The Center for Middle Eastern Studies at the University of Arizona*. Retrieved from http://cmes.arizona.edu/sites/cmes.arizona.edu/files/SLOBODAN%20MILOSEVIC_speech_6_28_89.pdf.

and this can then start a wave of suspicions, accusations, and intolerance, a wave that invariably grows and is difficult to stop. This threat has been hanging like a sword over our heads all the time. Internal and external enemies of multi-national communities are aware of this and therefore they organize their activity against multinational societies mostly by fomenting national conflicts.”⁹¹

If this speech is to be cited as the genesis of Milosevic’s nationalist campaign to resurrect a strong Serbian state tantamount to Hitler’s variety of German nationalism, then one would expect a tone predicated on instilling fear and hate, not continued unity. This is not to say that nationalist sentiments were not employed by Milosevic’s government and ethnicity was not used as a scapegoat to advance political objectives, they absolutely were; but if his nationalist tendencies were misrepresented or exaggerated from the very onset of the conflict, then that alters the perception of future events and influences public opinion in favor of claims of self-determination and independence out of the presupposition that non-ethnic Serbs were facing discrimination. Again, this is not to insinuate that Milosevic was an innocent victim in the reportage of the war, but if the public is to believe that he is the modern-day nationalist tantamount to Hitler, than he should have been standing on a balcony calling Serbs to defend their nation and race, not standing in a field admonishing the dangers of national and ethnic tensions in a multi-ethnic state.

With respect to expansionism, Hitler set out a clear plan to expand his influence throughout Europe, particularly to the east where perceived cultural and societal inferiority threatened to amass ever larger populations and threaten the German way of life.⁹² Hitler adopted a Malthusian attitude, fearing that the supply of natural resources could not adapt to a rapidly increasing population. He was convinced “that in his own era only those nations would be in distress which lacked the will to secure for themselves the soil they required of the world;

⁹¹ Ibid.

⁹² Rich, Norman. *Hitler’s War Aims: Ideology, the Nazi State, and the Course of Expansion (Volume 1)*. 5.

[and] should the Germans out of mistaken humanitarianism restrict their own expansion and thereby be forced to limit their population, they would be overwhelmed in the future by the sheer weight of numbers of inferior races who had space to reproduce without limit”.⁹³ This fear of geographic natural selection combined with political hubris resulted in Hitler’s invasion into Czechoslovakia, Poland, Austria, Yugoslavia, and Russia to his east and southeast. As such, Hitler’s expansionism was predicated on the need to acquire a greater land mass to support the German people.

Again, if one is to accept the premise that Milosevic was the next Hitler, he would have needed to demonstrate a desire to expand his territorial borders to either accommodate the needs of the Serbian population or create a greater unified state. By the fall of 1991 when the territorial integrity of Yugoslavia was disintegrating, Stephen Engelberg wrote an article for *The New York Times* entitled “Carving Out a Greater Serbia” – the title alone employs a sense of national ambitions aimed at targeting the weaknesses of neighboring states. In the article, Engelberg references Milosevic as saying: “We must secure unity in Serbia if we wish, as the largest and most populous republic, to dictate the further course of events...; these are the questions of borders, essential state questions. The borders, as you know, are always dictated by the strong, never by weak ones”.⁹⁴ The tone of the article is reminiscent of a political demagogue intent on claiming his rightful place in history beside Serbia’s historic leaders from the Medieval Empire. Unquestionably, borders were a paramount issue in the wars of Yugoslav secession but not in the same capacity that they were in Hitler’s time. The territorial issue in Yugoslavia was whether states had the right to claim independence on the basis of self-determination or the territorial

⁹³ Ibid., 5-6.

⁹⁴ Engelberg, Stephen. (1991, September 1). Carving Out a Greater Serbia. *The New York Times*. Retrieved from <http://www.nytimes.com/1991/09/01/magazine/carving-out-a-greater-serbia.html>

integrity of the sovereign Yugoslavia was inviolable under international law. The current political landscape has a number of regions vying for independence from a state with which they feel they do not belong – the Basque and Catalan regions in Spain, Bavaria in Germany, Sardinia in Italy, Chechnya in Russia, and the Kurdish population in Turkey, along with a score of other examples – but to date, none of these populations have received the recognition of independence from the international community that Slovenia, Croatia, and Bosnia received in the 1990s. It is up to the individual to decide whether the deployment of JNA (Yugoslav People’s Army) troops into the breakaway republics constituted a policy of Serbian expansionism within the confines of the Yugoslav state or whether it was an attempt to maintain territorial cohesion in a state plagued with secessionist movements. While it is possible that a mental bias might have been created in the aftermath of the Velvet Revolution which led to the amicable split between the Czech Republic and Slovakia by means of a plebiscite and the reunification of Germany the following year, concluding that a reorientation of the political landscape was to be a natural process after the fall of the Soviet Union.

As is the case with any controversial topic, arguments can be made to justify either position. Do disenfranchised populations have a right to carve out a portion of land for the purpose of creating a nation-state and, if so, how much fracturing can the international system handle before devolving into a microstate paradigm reminiscent of feudalism? Who has the power to recognize the legitimacy of claims of independence and are states the sole arbiters and guarantors of territorial stability and legitimacy? With respect to the Yugoslav question, the answers to these questions were less clear than in the cases of Czechoslovakia and Germany reunification, but regardless of whether Milosevic’s presence in Slovenia, Croatia, Bosnia, and later, Kosovo represented expansionism, it was not comparable to that of Hitler. At no time did

Milosevic look to occupy areas beyond the Yugoslav borders created in 1946, unlike his predecessor and ally of the American State Department, Josip Broz Tito, who showed ambitions of extending his influence into Greece, Albania, and Bulgaria.⁹⁵ Milosevic was content ruling a unified Serbia, not amassing more territory in either the Balkan Peninsula or elsewhere in Europe, which represents a stark contrast to Hitler's variety of expansionism. Finally, the American audience has been asked to accept a contradictory account of the Bosnian war – that the Balkans is a backwards, technologically and socially stunted region while also having the influence and resources necessary to threaten all of Europe. Milosevic cannot be both a tyrant capable of laying claim to European lands beyond the Yugoslav border if he is also merely a leader of an allegedly underdeveloped state.

The final piece of the Hitler comparison pivots on an articulated policy of exterminating unwanted populations. A detailed analysis of Hitler's success in this capacity need not be outlined as his legacy of genocide reverberates throughout history books worldwide. Therefore, it is up to investigative journalists, ambassadors, members of intelligence organizations, and humanitarian organizations to corroborate with a reasonable burden of proof that Milosevic set in motion a state program to rid Yugoslavia of non-ethnic Serbs. This does not have to mean that a high death toll did not amass during the years of conflict – no one can question the amount of destruction and devastation that ravaged the region – but it needed to be the result of an articulated policy to cleanse the area for Serbs in order to draw the parallel with Hitler. There was wide speculation that such a policy platform existed but, to date, primary documents detailing a systematic ethnic sanitation have yet to emerge. In fact, discrepancies still abound as to the final death total in the Bosnian war. In their book *The War in Bosnia-Herzegovina: Ethnic*

⁹⁵ Perović, Jeronim. (2007). The Tito-Stalin Spit: A Reassessment in Light of New Evidence. *Journal of Cold War Studies*, 9(2), 34.

Conflict and International Intervention, Steven Burg and Paul Shoup outline the contradictory estimates that various news, government, and humanitarian sources released. Burg and Shoup claim that the most widely cited statistic as of late 1994 was 200,000 or more casualties; however, numerous sources estimate the death toll as significantly lower.⁹⁶ As late as 2007, the BBC released a study by the Research and Documentation Center in Sarajevo which estimated the figure of dead to be 97,207 with 65% of the dead Bosnian Muslims and 25% Serbs.⁹⁷ The specific casualty rate of the war need not be agreed upon to note that it does not compare to the number of deaths carried out by Hitler's Final Solution.

The incongruities between Hitler and Milosevic are such that a rigid parallel does not exist. Both are deserving of being admonished for their respective roles in the destruction wrought by the wars they helped fashion, but Milosevic should be assessed on his own actions, not the legacy of the most disreputable tyrant of the modern age. This raises the question of why the comparison was employed in the first place. Susan Woodward claims that a trend has emerged in the post-cold war period where obstreperous states are being referred to by American officials as "rogue or renegade states headed by 'new Hitlers' ... who def[y] all norms of civilized behavior and had to be punished to protect those norms and to protect innocent people".⁹⁸ Woodward goes on to claim that this narrative is implemented by the intervening state in an effort to "reduce their military advantage" and "discourage others from emulating it" while also instituting a package of sanctions used to politically and economically isolate the aggressive state in order to maintain a sphere of influence over the region of conflict.⁹⁹ It is

⁹⁶ Burg, Steven L. & Shoup, Paul. (1999). *The War in Bosnia-Herzegovina: Ethnic Conflict and International Intervention*. New York: M.E. Sharpe Publishing. 169.

⁹⁷ BBC News. (2007, June 1). Bosnia War Dead Figure Announced. *BBC*. Retrieved from <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/6228152.stm>

⁹⁸ Woodward, Susan. *Balkan Tragedy: Chaos and Dissolution after the Cold War*. 7.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 7.

important to note that there is always a purpose for employing such rhetorical devices. Norman Solomon argues that “the widespread media likening of Milosevic’s tyranny to Hitler’s seemed to burnish the evil of the Serbian president into the public mind [and when] overlaid on such narratives was a story line that presented war as an extraordinarily selfless option for NATO”.¹⁰⁰ In one fell swoop, public opinion was co-opted in way that placed responsibility on the audience, a clear example of agitation propaganda, because it spurred the reaction for some form of intervention so that the tragedy that befell the Jews in the 1930s and 1940s would not be imposed on the Bosnians in the 1990s.

TIME Magazine and the Recrudescence of Holocaust-style Death Camps

Photographic evidence is one of the most difficult types of propaganda to refute because it appeals to one of our basic senses. A level of skepticism can be employed when one reads an article about a concentration camp, but it is more difficult to dispute an image of what appears to be individuals in settings reminiscent to World War II concentration camps. *TIME* used this emotional ploy in conjunction with visual legitimacy to expedite the turning tide of American public opinion regarding the crisis in Bosnia when it ran its sensational August 1992 cover featuring an emaciated man



Image credit: TIME, 1992.

standing behind a barbed wire fence with the bold caption “MUST IT GO ON?”. The tone of the cover story, entitled “Atrocity and Outrage: Specters of Barbarism in Bosnia Compel the U.S. and Europe to Ponder – Is it Time to Intervene?,” sought to mirror the deplorable conditions depicted in the photo. In it J.F.O Mcallister wrote:

¹⁰⁰ Solomon, Norman. *War Made Easy: How Presidents and Pundits Keep Spinning Us to Death*. 66.

“The shock of recognition is acute. Skeletal figures behind barbed wire. Murdered babies in a bus. Two and a half million people driven from their homes in an orgy of ‘ethnic cleansing.’ Detention camps, maybe even concentration camps. Surely these pictures and stories come from another time -- the Dark Ages, the Thirty Years' War, Hitler's heyday... Not here; not now. Europeans were supposed to have learned from the last terrible war on their soil not to murder their neighbors.”¹⁰¹

This level of imagery combined with a glaring narrative suggestive of Auschwitz is sensational to say the least. However, the legitimacy of this photo has been brought into question by Thomas Deichmann, a German journalist and expert witness to the War Crimes Tribunal who made the assertion that the *TIME* photo was intentionally misrepresenting the conditions of the camp in Trnopolje. Deichmann contends that the British television team captured the footage of Fikret Alic (the man in the forefront of the picture) from an enclosure behind the camp, not on the outside of a Nazi-style concentration camp. The basis for this conclusion is as follows:

If Fikret Alic and the other Bosnian Muslims were imprisoned inside a barbed wire fence, why was this wire fixed to poles on the side of the fence where they were standing? As any gardener knows, fences are, as a rule, fixed to the poles from outside, so that the area to be enclosed is fenced-in. It occurred to me then that perhaps it was not the people in the camp who were fenced-in behind the barbed wire, but the team of British journalists.

My suspicions were heightened by a conversation I had with Professor Mischa Wladimiroff, Dusko Tadic's Dutch defense advocate at the War Crimes Tribunal in The Hague. The main witness against Tadic, Dragan Opacic... had told the court about the barbed wire fence surrounding the camp at Trnopolje and had even made a drawing of where it was. But when Professor Wladimiroff went to Bosnia to investigate for the defense, it became clear to him that Opacic had lied in the witness box; he could find no evidence of a barbed wire fence surrounding Trnopolje camp.¹⁰²

¹⁰¹ Mcallister, J.F.O.. (1992, August 17). Atrocity and Outrage: Specters of Barbarism in Bosnia Compel the U.S. and Europe to Ponder – Is it Time to Intervene?, *TIME*. Retrieved from <http://content.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,976238,00.html>

¹⁰²Deichmann, Thomas. (1999, November 10). The Picture that Fooled the World. Reprinted in *Living Marxism*. Retrieved from http://web.archive.org/web/19991110185707/www.informinc.co.uk/LM/LM97/LM97_Bosnia.html

The veracity of Deichmann’s allegations of journalistic dishonesty resulted in a libel suit which was ruled in the favor of the British team of journalists.¹⁰³ However, in a phone interview conducted with Ben Works, former president of Strategic Issues Research Institute and military affairs analyst for Fox News and CNN, Mr. Works corroborated Mr. Deichmann conclusion. Mr. Works claimed to have toured the Trnopolje camp and noted that the conditions were not that of Nazi-style concentration camps and “many of the inhabitants were refugees fleeing duress from the war and had the freedom to come and go as they pleased”.¹⁰⁴ It should be noted that the existence of refugee camps and holding facilities is not what is being questioned in this argument. Camps were established throughout Bosnia including Trnopolje, Omarska, Vojno, Celebici and a handful of others. What is being drawn into question is whether the operators of these facilities took a page out of Hitler’s playbook, or rather, whether these camps were established with the intent to exterminate a subset of the Yugoslav population. Atrocities were committed throughout Bosnia and needless to say heinous events were carried out within the walls of these holding facilities, but the parallel between these camps and those under the Nazi administration is not wholly accurate.

At this point in time, it is difficult to say with certainty whether the TIME Magazine cover photo was intentionally misleading, but the controversy surrounding it adds another layer to the narrative – the possibility of manufactured images to intentionally misguide viewers. Concerning propaganda, the alteration of visual accounts of war serves to intentionally victimize one group while vilifying another. In the case of Bosnia, depicting the treatment of Bosnian Muslims as equivalent with that of the Jews in the Holocaust commands an outrage towards the

¹⁰³ BBC News. (2000, March 15). ITN Wins Bosnian War Libel Case. *BBC*. Retrieved from http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/uk_news/677481.stm

¹⁰⁴ Works, Ben. (2014, April 3). Telephone interview.

aggressors. Whether conscious or not, it also cements in the group mind a notion of collective guilt – Fikret Alic became the face of all Bosnians and Slobodan Milosevic became the face of evil inflicting suffering on the Bosnian masses. This form of mental shorthand – using one figure or image to explain the actions or motives of a greater group – has been commonplace in understanding foreign conflicts and history, but can have dangerous consequences. When faced with a complex situation, it is easy to reduce it to its least common denominator, but often results in a general disregard for the nuances inherent in any conflict. Since this form of thinking is rather simplistic, propagandists use it to advance their agenda and curtail a sophisticated discussion about alternative approaches. Once emotions are capitalized on, it becomes increasingly unlikely that reasoned and rational discourse will ensue.

Furthermore, the question of faked photos is not exclusive to the Bosnian war. Back in 2006, Adnan Hajj, a Lebanese freelance photographer was found to have manipulated some of his images of the Israel-Lebanon conflict.¹⁰⁵ Then, as recent as early 2014, stories about altered photos from the conflict in Syria were beginning to emerge. In January of this year, the Associate Press cut ties with freelance photographer Narciso Contreras after it was confirmed that he “used editing software to eliminate a colleague’s camera from his photograph of a Syrian opposition fighter”.¹⁰⁶ Contreras is not the only photojournalist accused of altering images. After the death of a local freelance photographer for Reuters, Molhem Barakat, *The New York Times* published an article questioning some of the journalistic practices taking place in war zones. The argument was made that supervising freelance photographers and establishing completely

¹⁰⁵ Laurent, Oliver. (2014 April 2). Reuters Maintains Dogged Silence on Allegations of ‘Staged Images. *British Journal of Photography*. Retrieved from <http://www.bjp-online.com/2014/04/reuters-maintains-dogged-silence-on-allegations-of-staged-images/>

¹⁰⁶ Fitzpatrick, Alex. (2014 January 22). AP Fires Photographer Who Altered Syria Photo. *TIME*. Retrieved from <http://world.time.com/2014/01/22/ap-fires-photographer-altered-photo/>

legitimacy in a conflict is difficult but given that “Reuters has been the most active over the past year [in] providing images to hundreds of worldwide subscribers – newspapers, magazines and news websites” they should ensure that their photographs are legitimate and not altered or staged.¹⁰⁷ The article goes on to state that in interviews with photographers in Syria, three admitted to providing Reuters with photos that had been “staged or improperly credited”.¹⁰⁸

Most recently, Reuters has come under scrutiny for publishing what appear to be staged images intended to elicit an emotional reaction from viewers. Reuters released a photo series depicting a 10-year-old Syrian boy named Issa who is thought to work in a munitions factory for the Free Syrian Army, and while the photos capture the imagination of the American people about what youth in a



Image credit: Reuters, 2014.

conflict zone would entail, the pictures have come under attack for being too meticulously structured to the point of being nearly surreal.¹⁰⁹ The British Journal of Photography along with Bag News (a blog focused on photographic accuracy and visual politics) questioned whether a young boy was capable of working in a munitions factory, apparently unsupervised, making various artillery pieces. Brought into question is the degree of specialization needed to manufacture a piece of artillery from start to finish, the physical strength it would have taken to move pieces he is photographed behind, and the clarity of images which suggest that Issa was

¹⁰⁷ Estrin, James & Shoumali, Karam. (2014 March 13). Questions About Photographers in Syria Arise After Freelancer’s Death. *The New York Times: Lens*. Retrieved from http://lens.blogs.nytimes.com/2014/03/13/questions-about-news-photographers-in-syria-arise-after-freelancers-death/?_php=true&_type=blogs&_php=true&_type=blogs&_r=1

¹⁰⁸ Ibid.

¹⁰⁹ BagNews. (2014, March 25). Were the Reuters ‘Boy in A Syrian Bomb Factory’ Photos Staged?. Retrieved from <http://www.bagnewsnotes.com/2014/03/were-reuters-boy-in-a-syrian-bomb-factory-photos-staged/>

posing as opposed to moving or working.¹¹⁰ While this might appear to be an unimportant story in the grand scheme of the Syrian narrative, it suggests that some, but certainly not all, journalists are willing to sacrifice integrity for a story or image that will sell. Furthermore, this can be directly tied into the *TIME* case – ever slightly shifting the perception of reality, whether it is taking a photo from the wrong side of an enclosure or placing a small child behind a large piece of weaponry, a lie is being propagated.

¹¹⁰ Ibid.

VI. Sanctions and Safe Areas: Antagonistic Aid

“The Serbian model began with economic sanctions, then political and social dismemberment and, ultimately, military attack and occupation” – Peter Brock¹¹¹

Not all warfare is carried out with troops and artillery; in some cases, an impartial position can be the most political one. Yugoslavia experienced this first hand through the UN-approved arms embargo of 1991 which was used to stabilize the region and protect the people of the war-torn state; but in reality, both functioned to conceal American efforts to supply Bosnian forces with necessary supplies to launch an attack against the Bosnian Serbs. The legality of these actions is not the point under scrutiny, but rather the narrative of unbiased sanctions – equally impacting all republics and ethnic groups. In the popularly espoused and generally accepted account of the conflict, the JNA (Yugoslav People’s Army) was thought to be synonymous with Belgrade’s authority so by imposing an arms embargo, the JNA would expend all their resources thus putting the Serbs in the position needed to carry out effective negotiations. However, these allegedly altruistic policies were little more than sanctimonious ploys to administer aid to the factions of Washington’s choosing, a scenario that fueled the ethnic fires as opposed to creating an environment for amicable resolution. The tale of journalistic deceit is a bit more ambiguous in this instance – it precariously balances on the official report from Washington misguiding the press into the assumption that all sides were at an equal advantage, or disadvantage, from the embargo, while at the same time arming Bosnian forces. This allowed for attacks on Serb populations and the stories of Serbian attacks of retribution made headlines further demonizing the Serbs, and as an extension, Belgrade. Both the Bosnians and Serbs were guilty of odious acts and antagonism, but it was the covert shipment of arms that exacerbated the already violent conditions.

¹¹¹ Brock, Peter. *Media Cleansing: Dirty Reporting – Journalism and Tragedy in Yugoslavia*. xiv.

In an effort to penalize Belgrade for its role in the chaos in the Balkans the United States and many Western European states sought to isolate the already dismantled state through a series of economic sanctions and embargos.^{112 113} The most powerful and crippling for Belgrade was UN Resolution 713 which was adopted on 25 September 1991 by the Security Council and held that:

“under Chapter VII of the United Nations, that all States shall, for the purposes of establishing peace and stability in Yugoslavia, immediately implement a general and complete embargo on all deliveries of weapons and military equipment to Yugoslavia until the Council decides otherwise following consultation between the Secretary-General and the Government of Yugoslavia”.¹¹⁴

Reneo Lukic notes that the purpose of the embargo was to “reduce the intensity of the fighting by preventing an influx of arms into the country and thereby avoid a further escalation of the war”.¹¹⁵ It should be made clear that the embargo applied to all parties, not just the Serbs, to ensure that no group received a military advantage. However, exemptions were later imposed to accommodate the UN Protection Force mission (UNPROFOR) and ensure that “international police forces had access to weapons”.¹¹⁶ Furthermore, a cease-fire was ordered by the Security Council to help deescalate the violence crippling Bosnia.¹¹⁷ This seems like a perfectly reasonable response from the international community – if you have a grease fire, do not add more heat or grease – however; not all members of the UN’s Security Council adopted the

¹¹² Gibbs, David. (2009). *First Do No Harm: Humanitarian Intervention and the Destruction of Yugoslavia*, Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press. 133.

¹¹³ Additionally, in May 1992 the UN Security Council approved resolution 757 which entailed a complete economic embargo on Yugoslavia including “all scientific, cultural, and sports ties, and cut diplomatic ties to Belgrade” in the hopes of minimizing support for Serbs outside of Serbia proper and create an environment where negotiations would result in an end to the conflict.

Bromley, Mark. (2007). *United Nations Arms Embargoes – Their Impact on Arms Flows and Target Behavior, Case Study: Former Yugoslavia, 1991-96*. Stockholm: Stockholm International Peace Research Institute. 7.

¹¹⁴ Bedjaoui, Mohammed. (1994). *The New World Order and the Security Council: Testing the Legitimacy of Its Acts*. Dordrecht: Martinus Nijhoff Publishers. 51.

¹¹⁵ Lukic, Reneo & Lynch, Allen. (1996). *Europe from the Balkans to the Urals: The Disintegration of Yugoslavia and the Soviet Union*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. 295.

¹¹⁶ Charron, Andrea. (2011). *UN Sanctions and Conflict: Responding to Peace and Security Threats*. New York: Routledge. 44.

¹¹⁷ Woodward, Susan. *Balkan Tragedy: Chaos and Dissolution After the Cold War*. 180.

embargo uniformly. Diana Johnstone notes that “the arms embargo on Yugoslavia was to the arms trade what prohibition was to bootlegging: the opportunity for enormously lucrative deals”.¹¹⁸ Most of the arms were smuggled in through Slovenia and redistributed to Croatian and Bosnian Muslim forces. The source of the influx in weaponry is credited to Israel, Britain, Austria, Germany, Iran, and the United States.¹¹⁹ Exact figures on just how many arms were shipped into the Balkans from all of these parties is difficult to ascertain, but a declassified CIA estimate concluded that while violating the arms embargo could result in a backlash from the international community, supplying the Bosnian government with “a steady flow of light weaponry and munitions would enable Bosnian Government forces to inflict heavier casualties and regain modest amounts of territory.”¹²⁰ This explicitly outlines the claim that some American political and intelligence communities were interested in militarily aiding the Bosnians in order to surreptitiously undermine the Bosnian Serbs.

In 1993, the United States attempted to politically circumvent the arms embargo through a proposed “lift and strike” policy of intervention.¹²¹ This platform entailed two steps which David Gibbs outlines as:

“First, the United States would seek Security Council authorization to lift the UN arms embargo for the Muslim and Croat soldiers in the Bosnian army (while maintaining the embargo against the Serbs). The US role was to use its influence in the United Nations in order to alter the terms of the embargo, and thus enable the creation of an arms pipeline. The second aspect of lift and strike entailed US and NATO arms raids against Bosnian Serb positions. The basic idea was simple: a rearmed Bosnian army would serve as America’s ground troops in the war, while NATO planes would furnish air cover”.¹²²

¹¹⁸ Johnstone, Diana. (2002). *Fool’s Crusade: Yugoslavia, NATO and Western Delusions*. New York: Monthly Review Press. 140.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 141.

¹²⁰ Central Intelligence Agency. (1994 August). *Special Estimate – Ending US Compliance with the Bosnian Arms Embargo: Military and Political Implications*. Retrieved from http://www.foia.cia.gov/sites/default/files/document_conversions/1817859/1994-08-01.pdf.

¹²¹ Gibbs, David. *First Do No Harm: Humanitarian Intervention and the Destruction of Yugoslavia*. 149.

¹²² *Ibid.*, 149-150.

The policy was unable to garner enough support to be put into action, but it succinctly the narrative of which group was perceived as the victim, or at least the pawn in the advancement of an American presence abroad. This also lends credibility to the claim that the president of the Bosnian Republic, Alija Izetbegovic, and his military factions were covertly provided with the necessary arms to combat the Bosnian Serbs. Peter Andreas notes that “external intervention [thus] contributes to the criminalization of a conflict, creating an economic opportunity structure for clandestine commerce and making the competing sides more reliant on cross-border smuggling channels”.¹²³ As a result, racketeering was added to the plight of the people of the former Yugoslavia.

However, by 1994 the United States faced some scrutiny when officials were credited with turning a blind eye, and perhaps even encouraging, arms shipments from Iran to Bosnia. Allegations of American complicity were disputed by Washington, but an article in *The Chicago Tribune* noted that “the shipments [of arms from Iran] were being conducted at a time when the U.S. had pledged to uphold the multilateral embargo imposed by the UN and had labeled Iran as a rogue regime that supported terrorism. The arms helped Croatian soldiers as well as Bosnian troops fend off Serbian attacks”.¹²⁴ The article also makes note that one U.S. official indicated that “there were shades of facilitation” which indicates that some actors might have had a more active hand in the exchange of arms.¹²⁵ This accusation resonated in Congress when on 25 April 1996 Representative Christopher Cox from California went on the record by stating:

¹²³ Andreas, Peter. (2004). The Clandestine Political Economy of War and Peace in Bosnia. *International Studies Quarterly*, 48(1), 30.

¹²⁴ Neikirk, William. (1996, April 6). Clinton Winked at Iran Arms to Bosnia: U.S. Denies Skirting Weapons Embargo. *The Chicago Tribune*. Retrieved from http://articles.chicagotribune.com/1996-04-06/news/9604060096_1_united-nations-arms-embargo-shipments-arms-pipeline

¹²⁵ Ibid.

“The President assured not only Congress, but the American people and allies, like Britain and France, that he was staunchly opposed to lifting the arms embargo. And without telling even our own Joint Chiefs of Staff, it now develops the President secretly let it be known in Iran that the United States would not oppose huge, illegal arms shipments to the Bosnian Moslems.

Huge quantities of weapons, accompanied by Iranian intelligence agents and mujahedin rebels, were thus shipped into Bosnia, by a regime that the Clinton administration publicly was branding as the financier, the armorer, the trainer, the safe haven, and inspiration for terrorists. These are the people that the secret Clinton policy, that Bill Clinton himself, secretly was introducing to Europe.

As the U.S. Assistant Secretary of Defense was using those exact words I just quoted, the financier, armorer, trainer, safe haven, and inspiration for terrorists, the description of Iran, he was using those exact same words in his testimony to Congress. His boss in the White House, Bill Clinton, knew that up to eight cargo jets each month were taking off with Iranian arms bound for Bosnia. There can be no question that this was duplicitous”.¹²⁶

While the precise role of the United States in arming the Bosnians will likely be a subject of debate for some time to come, it is apparent that while official hands might not have been explicitly dirty, they were also far from spotless.

Given that some discussion did surface regarding American involvement in procuring and facilitating arms shipments for Bosnian Muslims, it is interesting that the public did not seem to voice a formidable objection to the abandonment of the UN embargo. In many ways, this is because the reportage of the war was inundated with stories of Serbian aggression so little attention was paid to the transgressions of other actors.¹²⁷ Susan Woodward notes that by the summer of 1992, less than a year after the embargo was put into place, “televised pictures and firsthand accounts of the horrors sought to shock international public opinion into taking a

¹²⁶United States House of Representatives. (1996, April 25). Arms Embargo in Bosnia – Deposition by Representative Christopher Cox. *Congressional Record 104th Congress(1995-1996)*. Retrieved from <http://thomas.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/D?r104:21:./temp/~r1041UkSao::>

¹²⁷ During this time, Bosnian Serb offensives garnered a great deal of press attention, including but not limited to the Markale attacks in Sarajevo and attacks on U.N. established safe areas in Gorazde and Srebrenica.

principled stand against the reappearance of genocide in Europe”.¹²⁸ A narrative was being constructed to vilify the Serbs and the misgivings of most others went unpublished. This is not to say that all publications omitted coverage of violations of the embargo, but it took a backseat to more emotive and unambiguous stories.¹²⁹ Furthermore, the narrative was, in part, accentuated by Ruder Finn’s renewed contracts in 1991 with the articulated purpose of implementing a lobbying effort regarding “diplomatic recognition, sanctions and embargoes”.¹³⁰ Either as a result of journalistic laziness, overreliance on official reports from Washington and other sources, ignorance of the region and relevant actors, or editors under the impression that emotive stories were easier to pitch to the public, most of the coverage about the war made little attempt to generate an enlightened discussion but rather consolidated public opinion under the impression of Serbian aggression.

¹²⁸ Woodward, Susan. *Balkan Tragedy: Chaos and Dissolution After the Cold War*. 296.

¹²⁹ Jehl, Douglas. (1995, April 15). U.S. Looks Away as Iran Arms Bosnia. *The New York Times*. Retrieved from <http://www.nytimes.com/1995/04/15/world/us-looks-away-as-iran-arms-bosnia.html>

¹³⁰ Johnstone, Diana. *Fool’s Crusade: Yugoslavia, NATO and Western Delusions*. 68.

VII. Lies by Omission: Case Studies of Victimization in Krajina and Kosovo

“I have a feeling that the whole world hates the Serbs” – Krajina refugee, Nada Vojnic, quoted in *The New York Times*, 10 August 1995¹³¹

“For every horror story advanced by Croatians, the Serbs have an equally grisly tale of violence, massacre or death of their people at the hands of Croatians or, perhaps, Bosnians” – Bill Maynes, editor of *Foreign Policy*, 16 February 1995¹³²

If one is to believe the narrative of unilateral Serbian aggression largely espoused by the mainstream coverage of the wars, then it is necessary to disregard or justify mass atrocities perpetrated against Serb populations throughout the region. By devolving multifaceted conflicts into a straightforward Manichean dichotomy of victim and aggressor, it is easy to systematically omit details that contradict the overarching storyline in order to maintain the logical consistency of the narrative. In order to ensure that popular opinion favored intervention on behalf of the Bosnian Muslims and Kosovo Albanians, stories regarding discrimination, execution, and widespread removal of Serbs from their homes had to be down played in order to keep the public's attention focused on the groups deemed to be the true victims. This form of media representation is inherently dishonest – it implies that the faction framed as the antagonist is immune from the hardships of war – they don't experience loss, devastation, pain in the same capacity as their victims have. As such, a value was placed on the losses experienced by the Bosnians and Kosovo Albanians, but the Serbs were not afforded the same consideration in the general reportage. While the Bosnians did experience the most casualties, ignoring examples of Serbian loss is antithetical to bringing about reconciliation and justice in the region. Two stark examples elucidate the plight experienced by the Serbs, that of the Krajina region and northern Kosovo.

¹³¹ Bonner, Raymond. (1995, August 10). Frightened and Jeered At, Serbs Flee from Croatia. *The New York Times*. Retrieved from <http://www.nytimes.com/1995/08/10/world/frightened-and-jeered-at-serbs-flee-from-croatia.html>

¹³² Quoted in: Brock, Peter. *Media Cleansing: Dirty Reporting – Journalism and Tragedy in Yugoslavia*, 63.

Krajina

Krajina represents an interesting geopolitical construct with respect to demographic composition and military history. Positioned on the present-day border of Croatia and Austria, the stretch of Balkan land was historically used as battleground where numerous Austro-Ottoman conflicts were carried out. The implications of prolonged fighting by imperial factions in the Balkans are extensive, but two primary consequences are large-scale migrations and the legacy of a military frontier. Population displacement is a common result of armed conflict and Srdja Trifkovic outlines a mass influx of Serbs to the military border throughout the 16th and 17th centuries as a means of escaping Ottoman retribution and the possibility that alliance with the Austrians might result in liberation.¹³³ Therefore, the process of ethnic comingling was augmented in the Balkans by the establishment of a military border which constituted “a band of territory stretching along the border with the Ottoman Empire, [and] was under the direct administration of Vienna.”¹³⁴ Susan Woodward explains that this region, often referred to as Krajina, provides a poignant example of how imperial actions created ethnically mixed communities because “areas were settled by political initiative to establish defensive buffers or to repopulate areas decimated by war.”¹³⁵ Therefore, the inorganic boundaries and population transfers strategically imposed by the empires significantly altered the ethnic landscape of the region, a legacy which would prove pivotal in the creation of a South Slav identity and political unification.

¹³³ Trifkovic, Srdja. (2010). *The Krajina Chronicle: A History of Serbs in Croatia, Slavonia and Dalmatia*. Chicago: The Lord Byron Foundation for Balkan Studies. 36-37.

¹³⁴ Jelavich, Barbara. (1999). *History of the Balkans: Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. 139.

¹³⁵ Woodward, Susan. *Balkan Tragedy: Chaos and Dissolution After the Cold War*. 32.

For centuries, an enclave of ethnic Serbs resided in northern Croatia. It is beyond the purview of this analysis to delve into the various tensions that arose between the ethnic groups throughout the 19th and 20th centuries, but suffice it to say that over the course of history animosities were sparked and extinguished by political blocs looking to accrue greater control of the region. By the early 1990s the political landscape of the republic of Croatia had experienced another shift which would lead to a resurgence of animosities between the ethnic groups. President Franjo Tudjman's ascent to power ushered in a revival of discriminatory acts towards citizens of Serbian descent which began with mass termination of employment or being forced to sign "declarations of loyalty" to the Croatian government.¹³⁶ Trifkovic notes that by the summer of 1990 it was common practice for discriminatory slogans to be painted on Serbian homes and "nocturnal shots fired at the windows of Serb apartments" the combination of these types of acts resulted in "over one-hundred-thousand Serbs, mainly women, children, and old people" leaving their ancestral home in Krajina to find refuge in Serbia.¹³⁷

The Serbs that remained in Krajina took the position that was eventually echoed in the Serb-majority enclave of Bosnia, *Republika Srpska*, that if the Croatian state had the right to self-determination and secede from Yugoslavia, then the Serb-majority in Krajina had the same right to hold a referendum to determine whether it could break from Croatia and remain a part of Yugoslavia.¹³⁸ The first referendum in August of 1990 was considered illegal and invalid by the Croatian government which quickly launched a counter-attack through the approval of a new constitution in December abrogating the status of Krajina as a "constituent nation of the republic

¹³⁶ Trifkovic, Srdja. *The Krajina Chronicle: A History of Serbs in Croatia, Slavonia and Dalmatia*. 212.

¹³⁷ *Ibid.*, 213.

¹³⁸ *Ibid.*, 213.

of Croatia”.¹³⁹ By May of the following year, Croatia had passed a referendum seeking independence from Yugoslavia, a move that cemented the Krajina Serbs inferior status within the political paradigm.¹⁴⁰ In December of 1991, “Krajina proclaimed itself the *Republic of Serbian Krajina*” (RSK) which consisted of a significant portion of the historic military frontier and by Trifkovic’s account “strategically vulnerable, politically unconsolidated, and economically weak”.¹⁴¹

Conflict ensued between Croatian forces and the RSK until 1995 when Operation Storm was launched against Serbian forces, ultimately inflicting a crushing blow to the declining population. Norman Solomon makes the assertion that amidst the “huge quantities of U.S. media coverage about the Balkans... scant mention of what happened in August 1995 when the Croatian government – with a bright green light from the White House – sent in troops to inflict grisly ‘ethnic cleansing’ on large numbers of Serbs living in the Krajina region”.¹⁴² To corroborate the claim of misrepresentation by underrepresentation, Misha Glenny, a vocal advocate for the Bosnian cause made the claim that the assault from Zagreb “triggered a hurried mass exodus of 150,000 Serbs from Croatia, the largest single movement of refugees in Europe since the expulsion of the Sudeten Germans from Czechoslovakia in 1945”.¹⁴³ Furthermore, Washington appeared to approve removal of Serbs from Krajina, Glenny goes on to say that “President Clinton himself welcomed Operation Storm... suggesting that it would open the way to a solution of the Yugoslav conflict... [while] the rest of the international community was

¹³⁹ Ibid., 213-214.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid., 214

¹⁴¹ Ibid., 215.

¹⁴² Solomon, Norman. *War Made Easy: How Presidents and Pundits Keep Spinning Us to Death*. 67.

¹⁴³ Glenny, Misha. (2001). *The Balkans: Nationalism, War, and the Great Powers 1804-2011*. New York: Penguin Books. 646.

visibly shocked by American's encouragement of Croatia".¹⁴⁴ It was not enough to drive the Serbs out of their homes; David Binder notes that in conjunction with Croatian attacks, "four U.S. Navy warplanes bombed two Krajina Serbian surface-to-air missile sites... [which] eliminated danger to Croatian attack planes and helicopters".¹⁴⁵ Additionally, Binder posits that "up-to-date U.S. intelligence from overhead reconnaissance and radio intercepts was made available to the Croatian leadership" courtesy of the CIA and U.S. Ambassador to Croatia, Peter Galbraith.¹⁴⁶ This gave Croatian forces the technology and intelligence needed to launch an aerial attack while Serbian defenses were down, exacerbating the chaos of the exodus.¹⁴⁷ Additionally, as an addendum to the section on Milosevic's nationalism, it should be noted that Belgrade showed considerable indifference to the attack on the Krajina Serbs, a stance antithetical for a devout nationalist. Nearly half a million Serbs resided in Krajina at the turn of the 20th century and now only a few thousand are left, making the expulsion of Serbs in 1995 one of the largest mass migrations in the Balkans as a result of war.¹⁴⁸

As the quote from Solomon alluded to earlier, the American press paid little attention to the plight of the Krajina Serbs. Even in the minimal coverage of the migration, the Serbs are portrayed as disgraced combatants that chose the wrong side of the ethnic disagreement. In an article in *The New York Times* from 10 August 1995, Raymond Bonner noted that "some of the fleeing Croatian Serbs said they had been fired on, but there was no evidence of anyone in the procession having been killed".¹⁴⁹ In article by David Reiff in *World Policy Journal*, he praised Zagreb for resolving the conflict with a "swift and effective use of Croatian military power" to

¹⁴⁴ Glenny, Misha. (1996). *The Fall of Yugoslavia (3rd ed.)*. New York: Penguin Books. 284-285.

¹⁴⁵ Binder, David. (1997). The Role of the United States in the Krajina Issue. *Mediterranean Quarterly*, 8, 85.

¹⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 85.

¹⁴⁷ Trifkovic, Srdja. *The Krajina Chronicle: A History of Serbs in Croatia, Slavonia and Dalmatia*. 220.

¹⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 220.

¹⁴⁹ Bonner, Raymond. (1995, August 10). Frightened and Jeered At, Serbs Flee from Croatia. *The New York Times*. Retrieved from <http://www.nytimes.com/1995/08/10/world/frightened-and-jeered-at-serbs-flee-from-croatia.html>

overpower “secessionist Croatian Serbs” while admonishing the Krajina Serbs for being a source of rebellion for the agreeable and accommodating Croatian government.¹⁵⁰ However, journalists can hardly be held solely to blame for this, when that was the story being espoused by Washington. David Johnson, spokesman for the State Department gave the official position on Krajina in a briefing held on 9 August 1995 where he responded to questions of ethnic cleansing in Krajina:

“I think what’s going on in the Krajina area now looks to be a departure of refugees. We don’t have any direct evidence that the Croatian Government has sought to rid that area of its Serbian population... I think what has been called ethnic cleansing in the past is where it’s the government policy and where the people are driven, whether they want to remain or not. I think there is some distinction between that and refugees leaving because of their belief that there might be a lack of safety there, as distinct from being driven from their homes as a government policy”¹⁵¹

David Binder holds that this misguided narrative helped to disguise U.S. involvement “technical and professional” in Krajina because without foreign aid, it is likely that Croatian forces would have had at their disposal the tools needed to drive out the Serbian stronghold.¹⁵² Diana Johnstone takes the informational bias one step further and credits the selective coverage to “foreign reporters need[ing] an interpretive framework [which] was obtained in Zagreb, where Tudjman’s information agency staffed by helpful English-speaking Croats from Canada and the United States offered a clear interpretation and reports on events”.¹⁵³ Peter Brock corroborates this bias in information gathering by noting that “most Western media newcomers did not stray very far from the security of their hotels and international press centers in Zagreb and

¹⁵⁰ Rieff, David. (1995). The Krajina War: Endgame for the United Nations. *World Policy Journal*, 12(3), 71.

¹⁵¹ Johnson, David. (1995, August 9). State Department Briefing, Washington D.C. Retrieved from http://dosfan.lib.uic.edu/ERC/briefing/daily_briefings/1995/9508/950809db.html

¹⁵² Binder, David. (1997). The Role of the United States in the Krajina Issue. *Mediterranean Quarterly*. 8. 86.

¹⁵³ Johnstone, Diana. (2002). *Fool’s Crusade: Yugoslavia, NATO and Western Delusions*. New York: Monthly Review Press. 27.

Belgrade”.¹⁵⁴ This rhetoric blatantly undermines the severity of the situation and acts to place value on victimization – Bosnians could be justified as victims because they had the body counts on their side; Serbians were unable to garner the same sympathy because the narrative of Milosevic as the new Hitler tarnished their credibility as viable victims.

Kosovo

The Kosovo saga received considerable more publicity than Krajina, but once again the Serbian populations were unable to get a fair representation from the American press. However, unlike Krajina, where press was limited and biased, the reportage concerning a Kosovo accomplished an unprecedented about-face in stance on the ethnic tensions in the autonomous province. The reason for this is rather simple – recall that during the Cold War, Yugoslavia functioned as a litmus test for Soviet expansion, therefore the cohesion of Yugoslavia was of interest to Washington because a fracturing of the state might result in a reorientation back to Moscow, giving the Soviet Union a foothold in the Balkans. Based on this foreign policy, Washington and, by logical extension, the press ran articles that sought to strengthen Belgrade and diminish activism by Kosovo Albanians. At least this was the narrative until Yugoslavia was no longer a vital mechanism for American foreign policy and then the strategy turned to one that instigated a discourse calling for the further dismemberment of the Serbian state – again, a metaphor for Russian dismantlement and a way to ensure Moscow’s passivity during this transitional period. Furthermore, it should be stressed that the legitimacy of territorial claims are beyond the purview of this discussion, rather the focus is on the media coverage of who constituted the victim and who the aggressor in Kosovo.

¹⁵⁴ Brock, Peter. *Media Cleansing: Journalism and Tragedy in Yugoslavia*. 41.

A cursory survey of articles that ran in *The New York Times* in the 1980s depicts a much different ethnic climate than the world became purvey to during the Kosovo war. In July 1982, an article ran detailing the migration of Serbs out of Kosovo, which stated that 57,000 Serbs had left Kosovo since the mid 1970s a trend that the Commission on Migration credited to four causes: “social-economic, normal migration from this underdeveloped area, an increasingly adverse social-political climate and direct and indirect pressures” which has resulted in a 5.2% decrease of Serbs in the overall population of Kosovo between 1971 and 1981.¹⁵⁵ In another article, this one published in November of 1982, David Binder wrote “there have been almost weekly incidents of rape, arson, pillage and industrial sabotage, most seemingly designed to drive Kosovo's remaining indigenous Slavs – Serbs and Montenegrins – out of the province”.¹⁵⁶ Half a decade later, in 1986, an article entitled “In One Yugoslav Province, Serbs Fear Ethnic Albanians,” Henry Kamm discusses the belligerence of Kosovo’s Albanian leadership and the continued migration of the Serbian minority.¹⁵⁷ In 1987, an article described how “Slavic Orthodox churches have been attacked and flags have been torn down. Wells have been poisoned and crops burned. Slavic boys have been knifed, and some young ethnic Albanians have been told by their elders to rape Serbian girls”.¹⁵⁸ David Gibbs corroborates this trend in his book *First Do No Harm: Humanitarian Intervention and the Destruction of Yugoslavia* where he notes that “an analysis of Western press reporting on Kosovo found that during the 1980s the term

¹⁵⁵ Howe, Marvine. (1982, July 12). Exodus of Serbians Stirs Province in Yugoslavia. *The New York Times*.

Retrieved from <http://www.nytimes.com/1982/07/12/world/exodus-of-serbians-stirs-province-in-yugoslavia.html>

¹⁵⁶ Binder, David. (1982, November 28). Wars of Territory by Albanians in Yugoslavia Strains Unity. *The New York Times*. Retrieved from <http://www.nytimes.com/1982/11/28/weekinreview/war-of-terror-by-albanians-in-yugoslavia-strains-unity.html>

¹⁵⁷ Kamm, Henry. (1986, April 28). In One Yugoslav Province, Serbs Fear the Ethnic Albanians. *The New York Times*. Retrieved from <http://www.nytimes.com/1986/04/28/world/in-one-yugoslav-province-serbs-fear-the-ethnic-albanians.html>

¹⁵⁸ Binder, David. (1987, November 1). In Yugoslavia, Rising Ethnic Strife Brings Fears of Worse Civil Conflict. *The New York Times*. Retrieved from <http://www.nytimes.com/1987/11/01/world/in-yugoslavia-rising-ethnic-strife-brings-fears-of-worse-civil-conflict.html>

‘ethnically clean’ or ‘ethnic cleansing’ were first used with Serbs as potential victims and Albanians as potential perpetrators [and] a 1989 survey, later published in the *American Journal of Sociology*, indicated that ethnic Albanians had ‘the greatest intolerance toward other groups of any national group in the former Yugoslavia’.¹⁵⁹ The picture is clear, before Slovenia, Croatia, and Bosnia attempted secession, the narrative of ethnic intolerance in the mainstream press pivoted on aggression of Kosovo Albanians targeting Serbs and other Slavic minorities.

From a governmental perspective, Diana Johnstone, argues that the 1980s represented a time when western states were actively supporting “modernizers (such as Milosevic)” and the need to “reduce Kosovo’s autonomy in order to enact economic reforms”.¹⁶⁰ Recognizing the dire situation Kosovo had turned into and the potential the province had for igniting and spreading social and political unrest, Kosovo’s autonomous status “was effectively ended in 1989” and replaced with “martial law directed by the Republic of Serbia”.¹⁶¹ The attempt to quell the secessionist movement in Kosovo registered surprising returns for Belgrade – Kosovo Albanians shifted to a policy of non-violence which made Belgrade’s crackdown look all the more authoritarian.¹⁶² However, this was just the calm before the storm. The grand irony is that Western states favored Milosevic and his plan to modernize socialism and initiate marketizing reforms while rooting out “communist bureaucrats” – however, the implementation skewed as it might have been, laid the groundwork for future action against the Serbs.¹⁶³ It is during this transition in power – from Albanian separatists to Belgrade – that David Gibbs attributes the

¹⁵⁹Gibbs, David. *First Do No Harm: Humanitarian Intervention and the Destruction of Yugoslavia*. 117.

¹⁶⁰ Johnstone, Diana. *Fool’s Crusade: Yugoslavia, NATO and Western Delusions*. 219.

¹⁶¹ Gibbs, David. *First Do No Harm: Humanitarian Intervention and the Destruction of Yugoslavia*. 177.

¹⁶² Johnstone, Diana. *Fool’s Crusade: Yugoslavia, NATO and Western Delusions*. 223.

¹⁶³ *Ibid.*, 219.

shift in narrative, but one-sided accounts disregards “major historical grievances and reasons for fear” that both sides could point to as justification for provocation and retribution.

Fast forward to the mid 1990s and the tone surrounding Kosovo had switched – now, the Serb minority was pushing out the Kosovo Albanians and they needed to be stopped before the small province turned into another Bosnia. It was not out of the ordinary to see articles entitled “Albright Warns Serbs on Kosovo Violence,”¹⁶⁴ “Inquiry Estimates Serb Drive Killed 10,000 in Kosovo,”¹⁶⁵ and “Massacres by Serbian Forces in Three Kosovo Villages.”¹⁶⁶ This discourse unquestionably impacted the American public opinion, especially after Belgrade and the Serbs had received such poor publicity during the Croatian and Bosnian wars. However, despite the general shift towards non-violence on the part of the Kosovo Albanians, there were still some nefarious acts being carried out against Serb populations. Michael Parenti credits the targeted attacks to the rise of the Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA) throughout the 1990s. The KLA was founded in 1993 and carried out a few “sporadic attacks”¹⁶⁷ but they emerged on the political scene in 1996 when a letter was sent to the local press outlining the group’s separatist ideology and claimed responsibility for the death of “Krajina Serb refugees who had resettled in Kosovo” in February of that year.¹⁶⁸ Knowing that the KLA had accrued significant political pull in Kosovo, Roger Peterson claims that the question of violence was framed as such: the Albanians could “attack Serbs who are most likely to strike back in an indiscriminate fashion and...

¹⁶⁴ Erlanger, Steven. (1998, March 8). Albright Warns Serbs on Kosovo Violence. *The New York Times*. Retrieved from <http://www.nytimes.com/1998/03/08/world/albright-warns-serbs-on-kosovo-violence.html>

¹⁶⁵ Kifner, John. (1999, July 19). Inquiry Estimates Serb Drive Killed 10,000 in Kosovo. *The New York Times*. Retrieved from <http://www.nytimes.com/1999/07/18/world/inquiry-estimates-serb-drive-killed-10000-in-kosovo.html>

¹⁶⁶ Perlez, Jane. (1998, September 30). Massacres by Serbian Forces in 3 Kosovo Villages. *The New York Times*. Retrieved from <http://www.nytimes.com/1998/09/30/world/massacres-by-serbian-forces-in-3-kosovo-villages.html>

¹⁶⁷ Peterson, Roger D.. (2011). *Western Intervention in the Balkans: Strategic Use of Emotion in Conflict*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. 150.

¹⁶⁸ Parenti, Michael. (2000). *To Kill a Nation: The Destruction of Yugoslavia*. New York: Verso Publishing. 98.

following this indiscriminate violence by Serbs, the West will have to intervene” on the side of the ethnic Albanians.¹⁶⁹ However, as late as 1998, Robert Gelbard, U.S. special envoy to Bosnia referred to the KLA as a separatist-minded terrorist group, which begs the question, why would the United States go to such great lengths to intervene on behalf of the Kosovo Albanians and create a renewed narrative of Serbian aggression when there was a known terrorist group calling the shots in Kosovo.¹⁷⁰

The summer of 1998 was the defining moment for the continued escalation between Serb and Albanian forces which ended in the 1999 NATO bombing campaign. Parenti asserts that in the few years between the KLA’s inception and the NATO’s intervention, the KLA also targeted Albanians “who opposed the violent secessionist movement or... in any other way professed a loyalty to Yugoslavia or the Republic of Serbia” which significantly skews the notion of victim and aggressor.¹⁷¹ In the summer of 1998 Serbian forces were dispatched into the more remote areas of Kosovo in hopes of extinguishing the KLA which resulted in a conflict that claimed “about two thousand lives altogether from both sides according to Kosovo Albanian sources” while Yugoslav sources place the casualty rate at around 800.¹⁷² Parenti goes on to note that it is around this time when mass expulsions and violence began to escalate between both populations; however, he goes on to state that it seems likely that the KLA instigated much of the unrest as “it was in Yugoslavia’s interest to observe a cease-fire, deescalate the conflict, maintain status quo, and avoid the destruction NATO military action would bring”.¹⁷³ Conversely, it was in the interest of the KLA to “escalate the political conflict into a military one by acts of violence and

¹⁶⁹ Peterson, Roger D.. (2011). *Western Intervention in the Balkans: The Strategic Use of Emotion in Conflict*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. 151.

¹⁷⁰ Parenti, Michael. *To Kill a Nation: The Destruction of Yugoslavia*. 99.

¹⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 99.

¹⁷² *Ibid.*, 102.

¹⁷³ *Ibid.*, 103-104.

terrorism” which would trigger retaliation from Belgrade.¹⁷⁴ Once Serb forces took the bait, their actions were quickly labeled revanchist in light of loosing much of the western Balkans, and the pretext for Western intervention was established.¹⁷⁵

David Gibbs notes that American involvement in the Kosovo conflict is “widely remembered as a humanitarian war motivated by altruistic considerations” but goes on to argue that it actually served as a “substitute for the Cold War” which gave the United States a renewed purpose in Europe.¹⁷⁶ Gibbs makes the assertion that tensions were mounting between industrialized nations as the monetary unification the European Union sought to achieve through the Euro was perceived as a “serious threat to U.S. financial power... and the role of the U.S. dollar as the world’s reserve currency”.¹⁷⁷ This was a challenge to American supremacy especially since Washington and Berlin already engaged in a power struggle in the western Balkans.¹⁷⁸ Keeping this in consideration, Kosovo marked a way to renew and reinvent the ties forged through NATO, altering the alliance’s initial function from that of mutual support and protection to “an alliance with global responsibilities” and legitimize “NATO as a new world-wide police force” with Washington at the helm.¹⁷⁹ This reinvented image of NATO was accomplished through a U.S. proposed “New Strategic Concept” which held that “NATO should protect Western interests in virtually any part of the world,” a power shift that undercut “European efforts aimed at foreign policy and financial independence”.¹⁸⁰ Furthermore, for all intents and purposes, the West had the option of settling the Balkan question in 1995 through the

¹⁷⁴ Ibid., 104.

¹⁷⁵ Ibid., 104.

¹⁷⁶ Gibbs, David. *First Do No Harm: Humanitarian Intervention and the Destruction of Yugoslavia*. 172.

¹⁷⁷ Ibid., 172.

¹⁷⁸ Thomas, Raju G. C. (ed.). *Yugoslavia Unraveled: Sovereignty, Self-Determination, Intervention*.

¹⁷⁹ Gibbs, David. *First Do No Harm: Humanitarian Intervention and the Destruction of Yugoslavia*. 173.

¹⁸⁰ Ibid., 173.

Dayton Accords, but there was “absolutely no mention of Kosovo” in the final resolution which left the door open for future intervention.¹⁸¹

One of the most influential stories that swayed public opinion was partially engineered by U.S. diplomat, William Walker, who “led a troupe of journalists to view the bodies of forty-four men and one woman allegedly executed by Yugoslav police” in the south central town of Racak.¹⁸² The story was quickly picked up by the international press and headlines denouncing Serbian brutality ensued. The Yugoslav authorities contend that they had nothing to hide – it was a filmed battle between Serbian police and the KLA and the Associated Press had footage of the Serbian forces removing heavy artillery they had confiscated from the KLA outfit.¹⁸³ Officials from Belgrade countered the accusation that Serbian forces executed civilians with the footage from AP and the fact that few expended cartridges and “almost no blood [was found] near where the executions were supposed to have taken place”. The Yugoslav story was later corroborated by “independent autopsy reports by Byelorussian and Finnish forensic experts” which concluded that “wounds had been inflicted from a distance... there was no evidence of mutilation, and thirty-seven of the corpses had gunpowder residue on their hands” which suggest that they were combatants engaged in armed conflict.¹⁸⁴

By the time that the Serbians had been largely acquitted by the facts, the story was already spun and the American public opinion shifted in favor of the Kosovo Albanians. Gallup Polls from early 1999 indicate a public acceptance to increased defense spending (up 9% from

¹⁸¹ Peterson, Roger D.. *Western Intervention in the Balkans: Strategic Use of Emotion in Conflict*, 150.

¹⁸² Parenti, Michael. *To Kill a Nation: The Destruction of Yugoslavia*, 105.

¹⁸³ *Ibid.*, 106.

¹⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 106-107.

1993)¹⁸⁵ and support for humanitarian or R2P missions in Kosovo (“54% of those polled [in February 20-21 1999] favored participation by U.S. troops in a peacekeeping role”)¹⁸⁶; and in April of 1999 support for “U.S. involvement in the NATO air and missile actions” reached 58% as well as an increase in support for the possibility of introducing ground troops to mediate the conflict in Kosovo.¹⁸⁷ By the end of March 1999 NATO was in the troughs of an aggressive bombing campaign called “Operation Allied Force” to drive Serbs back to submission at the partial behest of the American people.¹⁸⁸

As is the case in most armed conflicts, atrocities were carried out by all sides but the mainstream media pandered to the claims of the Croats and Kosovo Albanians over those of the Serbs. This was done through a systematic selection of stories, emotive rhetoric, diplomatic fabrications, and a general ignorance about the complexities of the region, all combined to victimize one group and excuse their transgressions while demonizing the offending group largely without exception. By ignoring the atrocities carried out against Serb population the American policy platform of biased intervention to diminish Serbian legitimacy was brought to fruition.

¹⁸⁵ Gillespie, Mark. (1999, January 30). American Public More Receptive To Increased Defense Spending. *Gallup*. Retrieved from <http://www.gallup.com/poll/4087/American-Public-More-Receptive-Increased-Defense-Spending.aspx>.

¹⁸⁶ Gillespie, Mark. (1999, February 22). New Poll Shows Support for Peacekeeping Role in Kosovo. *Gallup*. Retrieved from <http://www.gallup.com/poll/4060/New-Poll-Shows-Support-Peacekeeping-Role-Kosovo.aspx>.

¹⁸⁷ Newport, Frank. (1999 April 8). Despite Skepticism, Support Increases for U.S. Involvement in Kosovo Crisis. *Gallup*. Retrieved from <http://www.gallup.com/poll/3940/Despite-Skepticism-Support-Increases-US-Involvement-Kosovo-Crisis.aspx>.

¹⁸⁸ Gibbs, David. *First Do No Harm: Humanitarian Intervention and the Destruction of Yugoslavia*. 196-198.

VIII. Coverage of the Balkans – A Renewed Paradigm for Media and Conflicts

The case of media misrepresentation in the Balkans during the Yugoslav wars of secession represents just one example of how media shapes public opinion and popular perceptions of international affairs. Yugoslavia was not the first victim of this bias nor will it be the last, but it does constitute an important and informative case study of how to view the coverage of international events and conflicts. As can be seen in Yugoslavia, reports can be manipulated to advance a certain agenda or ideological position. Furthermore, this form of bias does not always indicate an orchestrated attempt to deceive – sometimes it is simply the result of journalistic laxness, overreliance on official sources, and eagerness to break the story before all pertinent information has been collected – but the demise of Yugoslavia should act as a warning that a critical eye should be paid to narratives that pivot on a trope of good and evil. The world is much too complex to be reduced to simple dichotomies, and it is typically these derivatives of reality that are committed to collective memory.

Nearly twenty years after the Dayton Peace Accords were signed, the American recollection of the wars are still weakly predicated on the vague and unquestioned acceptance of unilateral Serbian aggression devised and carried out by the tyrannical Slobodan Milosevic. As is the case in all conflicts, atrocities were committed and pain was felt on all sides. Minimizing such an event to a discussion of victim and aggressor, within a framework of collective guilt, does little to help the region reconstruct and rebuild, nor is it an appropriate place to find justice for those who have been aggrieved. Even contemporary coverage of the war crimes tribunal continues to obscure an enlightened understanding of the conflict by underscoring the rulings with ethnicity – Serbian convictions are examples of upholding justice while Bosnian and Croatian convictions are often portrayed examples of misguided leaders who fought off Serb

aggression too forcefully. The narrative continues to be written using this type of language and appeals to emotions that have long been forgotten.

The foundation was laid in the fourth segment of this paper that Yugoslavia served as a metaphor for Russian dismantlement and a tactic for ensuring that Moscow remained a docile actor in the international system. During the 1990s, Russia was rebounding from economic ruin and a political reorientation, but things are vastly different in the Kremlin now. Regardless of his personal appeal, Putin has in many ways helped reinvigorate the Russian state and put it back on par with becoming a world player – accentuated by the political and economic visibility and viability of the BRICS countries and the increasing possibility of a Eurasian embrace. As such, the relationship between Moscow and Washington is drastically different than it was during the Yugoslav wars, but some of the same journalistic tactics are being revived in the coverage of the Crimean conflict.

The drama continues to unfold in Ukraine and it is beyond the purview of this analysis to delve into the implications of this conflict within a wider context, but it can already be viewed through a lens of media bias. Thus far, the conflict has been framed, in the most basic sense, as a strategic maneuver by Russia to reclaim its control over eastern Ukraine in what is perceived to be opposition of Western influence over the region, which has since erupted into an ethnic clash between those favoring a reorientation to Russia and those looking to forge alliances with the West. As such, much of the rhetoric is rooted in the same Manichean dichotomy that helped dismantle Yugoslavia – a battle between democracy and authoritarianism. Everything has been presented in a pro-Russia and pro-Western dichotomy which seeks to resurrect public animosity towards Russia. Even the democratic action of a referendum was denounced as illegitimate because it did not have the desired outcome. This harkens back to the Irish referendum on the

ratification of the Treaty of Lisbon; the initial referendum did not pass in Ireland and another was held the following year so that Ireland could have the opportunity to overturn the initial will of the people and ratify the treaty.¹⁸⁹ If the point of contention is a matter of fraud, then contention is understandable, but if the result is just not the optimal choice for foreign actors, that does not make the decision illegitimate. However, framing choices that coincide with Russian interests as illegitimate undermines the autonomy and agency of those peoples and places the Western audience in the position of moral superiority which, as was seen in Yugoslavia, can result in misguided intervention.

Some have even gone as far to draw a parallel between Ukraine and Yugoslavia – focusing on uncompromising and obstreperous leadership and ethnic tensions which might lead to explosive fissures within society. In fact, an article that recently ran in *The New York Times* said “the referendum has been a catalyst for disintegration. Different cultural and ethnic identities that used to coexist peacefully already appear to be mutual threats... [and] completing the Balkan parallel is a group that fears that Russian control may usher in outright oppression, just as the Bosnians feared Serb rule”.¹⁹⁰ This runs the risk of plaguing Ukraine with the same rhetorical problems that helped to undermine Yugoslavia – use of historical frames to draw a parallel, omitting certain voices from the narrative, and misrepresenting Western motives when making emotive pleas.

It remains to be seen how the conflict in Ukraine will be played out on the pages of newspapers, airwaves, and in public opinion; but it should be noted that these representations should come with a warning – each account, whether pro-Western, pro-Russian, pro-Bosnian, or

¹⁸⁹ McCormick, John & Olsen Jonathan. (2013). *The European Union: Politics and Policies*. Boulder: Westview Press. 130-132

¹⁹⁰ Bittner, Jochen. (2014 March 17). Is Crimea the Next Yugoslavia?. *The New York Times*. Retrieved from <http://www.nytimes.com/2014/03/18/opinion/bittner-is-crimea-the-next-yugoslavia.html>

Pro-Serbian comes with an inherent bias. Conflicts are complex beyond comprehension and attempting to make sense of the chaos always leaves some of the story untold. In an attempt to create a sense of structure in an ever-changing world, we internalize the messages we receive and rarely pause to question who the narrative benefits and what agenda it could be justifying. It is the responsibility of a society to be both informed and inquisitive so that we can find the closest version of the truth.

EPILOGUE

Anecdotes are an important and powerful tool in the creation of a historical narrative; however, relying too heavily on them creates an emotive subtext that can overpower the tangible and quantitative evidence. That being said, I was recently confronted with the residual legacy of the Yugoslav wars of secession. On a trip during the holiday season of 2013 I quickly noticed that a sizable percentage of the wait staff was of south Slavic descent and given my academic undertaking at the time I often inquired as to their home state which seemed like a friendly way to make my research a bit more humanistic.

Each encounter consisted of a common element – an initial surprise by the interest paid to their country of origin followed by an unmistakable sense of pride. I would like to stress that this was not a manifestation of nationalism, but rather a sense of cultural pride, possibly enhanced or heightened by a bit of homesickness. One young man from Macedonia relished in describing the cuisine of the region while another woman entertained a conversation about the transition Romania has experienced since the ousting of Ceausescu. Another feature present in each of these micro-conversations was the duty these individuals felt to correct the conventional narrative or, at the very least, how the West appeared to perceive their home states. The most telling account was produced by a young Serb, three years older than myself which would make him 29, from Belgrade. I asked if he was in the capital during the outbreak of the war and he hesitated, during which time I could see the suspicion grow in his expression. I attempted to ease the tension by telling him that I was in the process of looking at depictions of the different Yugoslav population within various media representations of the war and without further hesitation he lively said “about time someone tried to get the story straight – I was 9 in 1993 and if you believe what the media told you, I received my first gun when I was 5 and killed my first Muslim by the time I was 7.” He went on to make the comment that some (he didn’t specify whether this was a position held by Serbs or westerners, but I suspect that it is the former) believe that the reputation that Serbia received from the wars with Bosnia and Kosovo was essentially Serbia’s fate for its dealings with Hitler during the Second World War. His candor was unexpected but also quite telling.

It is not my place to attempt to analyze his experience or put it into a sociological context; however, I think sentiments like this need to be addressed. Two decades after the Dayton Accords were signed and Serbs still feel as though they have been rendered villains by means of collective guilt or, as the initial surprise by the recognition of their country suggests, that history has left them insignificant contenders on the international stage. The latter is largely inaccurate and the former should be brought under further scrutiny. After these encounters, I heavily reflected on the increasingly pervasive nature between western privilege and authority and the subservience of the rest of the world, but I hope that I might be able to bring some service to their stories and experiences.