THE YUGOSLAV LABYRINTH

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Prologue:

In October of 1991, at the beginning of the Yugoslav Civil War, I had a letter from an old friend in what we used to call Yugoslavia, indeed from Belgrade itself. It was a deep and anguished account of the situation there, and it brought me face to face with issues of legitimacy and morality that I had until then been able to avoid as a professional ethnographer among my hosts. The conflict affected me as it has others who have worked in Yugoslavia, tapping deep wellsprings of history and emotion, and I have tried to understand these as well as the war itself. I responded to my friend as best I could, and the outgrowth of that reply is this essay. It has a title now that (presumptuously) calls up the closest historical analogy I can find, Gerald Brenan's classic on the similar situation in Spain. The title is peculiarly appropriate. Not only is the Yugoslav reality as twisted as the tunnels that held the Minotaur, but the observer keeps coming face to face with himself, seeing his own image spring out from what he thinks are the events of history, unable to separate projection from observation, fact from reflection, self from the other. Because this confusion cannot be resolved, I make no apology for it or for the personalism of the account. There is of course no lack of other accounts. I should also make clear my conviction that there are no clean hands in this conflict, there are no guys in white hats. The delicts range from the trivial to the horrendous, although they differ in their timing. Human frailty is everywhere evident, and in some quarters greed and savagery reign. In this essay I first try to lay out my own biases and the limitations of my experience. Then I try to give an objective account. Finally, I try to summarize. Throughout, as much as possible, I try as anthropologist to tell the reader what my informants have told me, speaking with their quarreling voices, translating them for a wider audience. I talk a lot about the past, because my informants continue to live in it symbolically. Especially for the extremists among them, whether perpetrators or victims of violence, or both, the past is the present, as nativistic revivals overwhelm struggling remnants of the Enlightenment. I sometimes come away from my conversations or observations with the feeling that I have been talking to Sioux at the Ghost Dance, Mahdists in Khartoum, or to Christian fundamentalists picketing an abortion clinic.

Subjectivity:

The larger part of my personal experience in the Balkans, which goes back about forty years, and especially my field experience as an ethnographer, has been in Serbia and Montenegro. I was initially uncomfortable with Croats, partly on account of the history of the Second World War and the association of many Croats with the Nazis, and partly on account of having absorbed by osmosis some of the frequent Serbian antipathy toward them. My identification was mostly with Serbia and Serbs, and I counted a number of Serbs among my friends (and still do). Neither can I deny that I encountered others for whom I had a profound dislike. For the past half-dozen years, however, I have worked mostly in Zagreb and central Slavonia on problems of demographic history. In this I came to have colleagues and friends as close as those I had among Serbs. But neither can I deny that I found some Croats that I profoundly disliked. Apart from some discomfort at speaking Serbian rather than Croatian and having to learn to code-switch when I could manage it, I have felt equally at ease (or ill at ease) in both environments. I was familiar with a certain distance, even dislike, between some Serb and Croat intellectuals, with rather more distinct but still flexible barriers between the emigre communities in the United States, and with the bitterness expressed (especially abroad) by those who had lived through the Second World War and its aftermath in Yugoslavia. But never, in the streets of Belgrade, Zagreb, or Sarajevo, or the villages of western and southern Serbia, or Montenegro, or Macedonia where I worked, had I encountered hatred of the virulence that is now expressed. My closest friends in the countryside, men for whom I had both personal and intellectual respect for their humanity and acuity, were in villages like Gornja and Donja Borina, overlooking the Drina, from which, God forbid, may have come the irregulars who murdered and raped in Zvornik on the other side in May of 1992. I helped pay for a new roof on the church in Donja Borina, bowed my head and crossed myself properly at religious feasting in Gornja Borina, and spent some pleasant afternoons across the river. I do not use this position of intermediacy to claim objectivity in the current crisis; I am not sure that objectivity exists. Only horror exists. Like most Americans of centrist political orientation I had admiration for the construction of a Yugoslavia that was
not based explicitly on the Germanic identity of Blut und Boden but that attempted to create a civil society on objective grounds, as that word is understood in the Marxist lexicon. But Marxist economics is in my view largely nonsense. Most Marxist states have also been totalitarian and repressive, including the Yugoslav state. One can attempt to tolerate voodoo economics and political repression until a functioning political entity is constructed, and of course the Marxists have words for that, too, in the ‘end justifying the means’. But the state, once established, never does wither away, although it may be blown up or simply collapse, as this one has. I must say that in the work I have done for human rights organizations, I was disturbed by evidence of abuse of those rights in Yugoslavia -- and the cases of which I had direct knowledge were those of the repression of Serbs, not even of Croats or Albanians or Macedonians, of which there were probably many more. The human rights record in Yugoslavia was a bad one, but for a long time I ignored it and avoided the issue. That the inhumanity and viciousness of personal repression have emerged in this region under regimes as different as the Ottoman, the Austrian, the Nazi, the Communist, and now, if I may use the expression, the democratic, invites analysis.

One of the reasons for my general support of the Yugoslav regime was that I detest ethnicity as a political force, favoring a multi-ethnic state with presumed equal rights for all, with individuals permitted to rise to the extent that their personal abilities permitted. I had in earlier years been disturbed by the obvious ethnic prejudice I saw directed in Yugoslavia at Gypsies and Albanians and put this down as redneck behavior. But one could not continue to excuse that behavior when it became an official attitude of the Serbian republic in Kosovo. That repression made the exclusion of the Chinese or the repatriation of Mexican immigrants in the U. S. seem benign. It was more like the view toward the Blacks that was enshrined in official segregation before the civil rights movement. You could see the definition of the Albanian as Nigger. Understanding the cultural and symbolic dilemma of the Serbian people as they saw their ancient heartland occupied by others, or their political discomfort under the efforts of the central Communist bureaucracy to displace them from it and to undermine their political influence as the chief competitor to the Party, does not persuade one to condone the repressive actions of their government. They could have done no better had they hired Ariel Sharon as Minister of Housing in Kosovo. The subsequent events in Bosnia in the summer and fall of 1992 make Kosovo (to date) look like a Sunday school picnic.

On the other side, I had had some misgivings at the phenomenon of the Croatian Spring, in which I saw more than the anti-imperialism that emerged in Prague but the potential for internecine strife. I thought the insistence, especially by Croats, on the separateness of the Croatian and Serbian languages to be divisive. The discussions of secession and later their implementation in Slovenia and Croatia were to me like playing with matches in an ammunition depot. Indeed, I felt the Slovenian and Croatian actions to be distinctly provocative, a dangerous taunting with potentially enormous consequences. These trends recalled to me the insanity of VMRO, of Gavrilo Princip. I thought the third Serbian uprising in Knin in the 1990s distinctly less noble than those of 1804 and 1815 against the decaying Ottoman regime and just an example of the bandits coming out of the woods again. My vision of Yugoslavia was being violated. Yugoslavia, of course, has been the graveyard of American liberal ideas for a long time -- perhaps almost as much as Israel, or in an earlier period the Soviet Union. In these expectations and my frustration at their failures I have shown the usual error of technocrats, the assumption that a rational world is possible. It is no different in the United States, as a careful reading of its history shows. It is just that by accident of history we, with a few other European countries, happen to have constructed political institutions that diminish (but of course do not completely eliminate) the kinds of eruption of violence that we have seen in Croatia and now see repeated in Bosnia. The essence of good political institutions is that they make political idiocy more difficult (but not impossible) to achieve.

I can find but one encouraging feature of the current crisis, and that is the emergence of open political discussion. More than once, under the old regime, when I was engaged in vigorous discussion with a friend in Zagreb or Belgrade, I saw a look of alarm if an unexpected knock came at the door. More than once I heard contempt for the controlled media. For the past year I have been linked to electronic mail networks coming out of Zagreb and Belgrade. These networks bring news from Danas, Slobodna Dalmacija, and Vreme faster than I can
been my observation of late that it is simple to tell the
difference between a biased and an unbiased account. If
you give a biased account, either the Serbs or the Croats
are angry with you. If you give an unbiased one, they are
both angry with you. The most succinct expression of my
view came from an old Sephard from Serbia whom I met
at the time that hostilities were first beginning. He said,
from the perspective of the perpetually marginal, Poludili
su. se They have gone insane. He was right. They have
gone insane, but I here seek the logic in it.

Objectivity:

What Yugoslavia has been experiencing since 1918 is a
process of the centralization of government and
hegemony of cultural symbols that has characterized most
European states since the 16th century or perhaps even
earlier in some regions. In the U.K. it was the rise to
dominance of the English and particularly of the southeast
of England over other regions, notably the Celts of
Scotland, Ireland, and Wales, and the standardization of
the dialect of that region as the national language. In
Spain it was the emergence of Castille over other regions,
especially Catalonia (not to mention the Basques) and the
emergence of Castillian as the standard for Iberian
Spanish. In France it was the developing hegemony of the
Paris Basin over other regions, especially Brittany,
Normandy, Occitania, and Provence and the
establishment of Parisian French as the standard. In
Germany the developments came late, with Bismarck and
the ascendency of Prussia. In what was the Soviet Union,
the expansion of the Russian Empire and the ascendency of
Moscow over Kiev and other regions began very early
but was perhaps not really solidified until after the
Revolution and had many drastic interruptions, even
though it can be seen as a single process, sometimes
colored White, sometimes Red. The expansion of
Northern industrial hegemony over the agricultural South
in the United States can be taken as another example. The
process began very late in the Balkans, and the
standardization of centralist national languages is much
more delayed than in other European regions (except in
Scandinavia, where several separate dialects of North
Germanic have been maintained as such by locating them
in different nation-states). In the Balkans we see only the
beginnings of centralist domination of tribal
configurations, perhaps because they were for much
longer under foreign imperial dominion.

If we can identify an original political landscape it is in
the 10th and 11th centuries with the development of a
feudal aristocracy in Croatia and Serbia, as well as in
Bosnia and other areas. In the 12th and 13th centuries the
Croatian aristocracy and their peasantry then came under
the Hungarians about the same time that the Nemanji
dynasty was attempting to compete with and replace the
decaying Byzantine Empire. But the Serbian Empire,
along with Bosnia, fell to the Ottomans, beginning with
the battle on the Marica in 1371, the famous defeat at
Kosovo in 1389, the fall of the Serbian Despotate in 1459,
and finally the loss of Belgrade in 1521. An important
part of this story is that of the krajina, a kind of movable
border, a no-man's-land pushed ahead of the Ottoman
advance. It was peopled largely by the Vlachs of the
Serbian Empire and later by other Christian, usually
Orthodox, refugees from the Ottomans. These refugee
streams had two consequences. First, they moved large
numbers of Orthodox into areas that had been Catholic.
Second, they extended the area of tokavian dialects deep
into previously çakavian regions and of jekavian into
ikavian regions. The northernmost limit of this expansion
occurred in the Ottoman occupation of Slavonia after the
battle of Mohacs in 1526, in which the Turks defeated the
Hungarians and moved on toward Vienna. The direction
was reversed after the Turkish defeat before Vienna in
1683 and the reoccupation of Slavonia by Hapsburg
armies and their allies. The Austrian counteroffensive
failed deep in Bosnia-Hercegovina in 1689, and there was
a resumption of the refugee movement under Arsenije.
These movements, and of course the Croatian feudatories'
invitation to Orthodox to serve as military colonists that
had already begun by the time of Mohacs, established the
tribal map of Yugoslavia up to 1914. Especially after the
treaties of Karlovci (1699) and Porec (1718), the
movement of Serbs also established eastern ekavian as
well as jekavian areas in Slavonia. Thus the stage was set
by the scrambling of ethnicities for a centuries-long
contest over the krajina, including the Slavonian krajina.

Mixtures of these tribal groups within and outside the
krajina lived with few exceptions either under the
Hapsburg or the Ottoman Empire. The Serbs were
partially independent after 1804 and 1815 but not truly so
until 1868. The Montenegrins never capitulated entirely,
although they were surrounded and largely neutralized.
Dubrovnik was similarly independent. The Croats
throughout their history as feudatories of the Austrian or
Hungarian Crowns retained their institutions of leadership
(the Ban) and of an assembly (the Sabor). They had some
additional degree of local autonomy in the complex
Austro-Hungarian politics after the Ausgleich of 1867.
The Venetians played an imperial role along the Adriatic,
and Dalmatia and some parts of the adjacent krajina had a
complex history involving foreign domination by Venice,
the Habsburgs, and France. Ethnic mixture at the micro-level reached its peak in Bosnia, as did personal integration, at least among intellectuals.

The primary distinguishing characteristics of ethnicity in the Balkans are religion and language. Religion is a presumably discontinuous variable since people have to belong to a congregation or not belong to it. But there are degrees of membership and modifications to the discrete quality of identification. One is that the perceived distance between Muslims and either Orthodox or Catholics is greater on purely religious grounds than that between Orthodox and Catholics, even though on other cultural grounds the Orthodox Serbs and Muslims share more in attributes of the eastern Mediterranean. Under some circumstances (as currently in Bosnia) the Muslims and Catholics form a political bloc on the issue of independence. Under some other circumstances, the Orthodox and Catholics can be seen as sharing more in still other general cultural precepts of Mediterranean civilization. Another anomaly is that some persons who deny religious affiliation (such as Communists) can still classify themselves ethnically. They may do so on the grounds of earlier familial religious affiliation, or on grounds of language. Language is under some circumstances a discontinuous variable, as in the differences between Greeks, Albanians, Turks, and Slavs. But in much of the area the issue is mutual intelligibility along a dialect continuum, and at a finer level, whether other people sound like you yourself do, on scales of potentially very fine differentiation. Considerable effort has been expended by ethnic politicians to erect symbols of difference through linguistic usage, when speech was otherwise uniform. There is an apocryphal story about how to determine the ethnicity of prisoners during the civil war of 1941-45, by forcing them to recite the Lord's Prayer at gunpoint. Ethnic identification is, thus, essentially fluid, and the characteristics used in description are often not necessary and seldom sufficient. The difficulties of classification are even greater in historical context.

It is politics and politicians who clarify the criteria of ethnic assignment as a way of mobilizing support and allocating both demands and benefits. In the medieval Serbian state, the primary distinction among the common people was between serfs and Vlachs, and intermarriage between them was forbidden. Yet although Vlachs were a single category, some Vlachs may very well have been Catholic. In the medieval Croatian state and its Hungarian and Habsburg successors after 1102 and 1527 some Vlachs were Orthodox and some were Catholic. In Bosnia the Habsburgs, and France. Ethnic mixture at the micro-level reached its peak in Bosnia, as did personal integration, at least among intellectuals.

The critical and determining political facts for the present political situation were established at Versailles. The Allies were determined to destroy the German and Habsburg Empires. The Serbs had been on the Allied side, the Croats on the German side. Critical to the destruction of these empires was the creation of independent (especially Slavic) nation states in the path of the Drang nach Osten, such as Czechoslovakia and...
Yugoslavia. It is interesting that the Allies used ethnicity and language as the criteria for nationhood -- a German idea of the *jus sanguinis* to begin with, an idea that led to the linguistic reforms and national consciousness that we see in the efforts of Karadžić, Gaj, Reljinković, and others. The Allies could have located the center of this new country in Zagreb, but Zagreb had been in enemy territory. On the other hand, Serbs were the largest ethnic group, Serbia was already an independent political entity, and the Allies accepted a definition of a state centered on Belgrade. The intellectual contributions of Cvijić to this process should not be underestimated; he was an advisor at Versailles and is the grandfather of the intellectual tradition that most recently culminated in the Memorandum of the Serbian Academy on the vision of a Greater Serbia.

The inevitable consequence of locating the center of this new state in Belgrade was that its natural direction was to establish Serbian hegemony and to begin the process of language standardization based on the *ekavian* of the umadinci. The localization and autonomy of dialects envisaged by early reformers such as Karadžić fell victim to natural political processes. It is not hard to understand why the Serbs of the *krajina* would have welcomed this development, since from the time of Maria Theresa and before they had been under intense Austro-Catholic pressure to abandon Orthodoxy (for example as some there and others in other Slavic lands did submit in some degree by becoming Uniates), to abandon Cyrillic, to adopt German as their language. We should also not forget that this last uprising is one in a long series going back to the 16th century, in which the Orthodox under Austrian or Croatian control rebelled violently and were put down with equal violence. The emerging Serbian hegemony after 1918, for them, was a liberation from oppression. So in a curious sense, the best allies of the expanding Serbs of Serbia were their former enemies, the Germans, for they had created a population of Orthodox bordermen eager to join with the motherland that now lay at the center of the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes and later Yugoslavia.

On the other hand the Croats, and I think especially the Dalmatian Croats, who had a complex succession of foreign dominations, felt the heavy hand of occupation by a foreign power and a centralist autocracy no more benign than that of the Austrians or Hungarians. At least in the later stages of the Hapsburg Empire, after the Ausgleich and then the unification of the *krajina* with Civil Croatia in 1881, there had been some feeling of autonomy within the Triune Kingdom. You can see this in the relatively equal status of Croatian and German in many official documents and publications in the late 19th and early 20th century. These feelings of oppression began to emerge with the dictatorship of Alexander, the politics of the Croatian Peasant Party, and the events leading to World War Two. The growth of Serbian hegemony was pushing the Croats back into the German camp despite the basic Croatian desire for autonomy from both Austrians and Hungarians, a desire that they pursued by attempting to reach a compromise with the Serbs on cultural union, essentially accepting the Karadžić linguistic standard. There is a strong parallel with Ukraine. The rise of centralist regimes has pushed minorities into the arms of the enemies of those same centralists. It is instructive to remember that the nationalist tendencies of the Croatian linguistic reformers were restrained, and their acceptance of linguistic commonality with the Serbs was driven principally by the threat of Germanic or Hungarian domination rather than by pan-Slavic conviction, and despite the temporary exhilaration of French rationalist influences after the Napoleonic Wars. The Croats were between two millstones, one German, one Serbian.

When World War Two opened, the Germans were seen by some Croats as liberators. Just the same phenomenon occurred in Ukraine. It is also very clear, for example, that for the same reasons there was a strong pro-German movement in Ireland and in the islands of the English Channel, and to some extent in Brittany and southern France. There was of course some similar inclination among the Muslims of Yugoslavia, adroitly exploited by the Nazis. And so from this came the other uprising leading to the puppet Independent State of Croatia. Out of these events comes the butchery of which the Ustaše stand rightly accused, despite Tudjman's attempts to place genocide in historical perspective. This genocide by the Ustaše is particularly disturbing to a liberal student of the Balkans because it reveals not only an ethnic hatred of the Serbs but a strong underlying anti-Semitism in Austrian and Croatian culture, one that is also shared in Russian culture. This is an important point because the immediate comparison point for Tudjman's book is the similar downplaying of the Holocaust. On the other hand we must remember that the Serbian record under Nedić is not outstanding, and that the Orthodox church did not distinguish itself any more than the Catholic church by its humanity.

The viciousness of World War Two in Yugoslavia has its parallel in the Spanish Civil War, but I see a difference. In the Spanish Civil War, giants fought, the great forces of fascism and communism were at sword point: this was the
drama of our age in microcosm, to be played out later on a larger stage. It also gave rise to a great literature of Lorca, of Hemingway and others, so that it has become mythic; it has the proportions that one finds in the Dinaric epics. I fail to see that epic quality in the First Yugoslav Civil War of 1941-45. It seems to me that that First Yugoslav Civil War was more like that of Lebanon: the snarling of local warlords, a battle fought by ideological dwarfs. There is some failure of objectivity in this view, for the events in Spain were in fact as vicious (especially as far as the Communists were concerned, perhaps especially in Catalonia), and in fact there were some great figures and men of conviction like Tito, who like Lenin, Mao, Roosevelt, Ben Gurion, and others had some general goals that transcended mere hatred and personal ambition (of which they doubtless had no lack). But nowhere is that intellectual and moral dwarfism more intense than in the current crisis, in which either sheep are led by fools or wolves by devils.

A notable feature of the first civil war was the kind of genocide that occurred. Genocide was of course in the air; it was not new in history, as Tudjman has pointed out in his book, nor was it restricted to a few perpetrating groups or a few victim groups. The definition of traitor or potential traitor on ethnic grounds had its history in the United States, with the actions against Germans in World War I, and the incarceration of the Japanese in California. But few places outside of direct Nazi control reached the excesses of Jasenovac under the Ustaše or the massacres elsewhere, for example of Muslims by Chetniks or of krajina Serbs by Croats and Muslims. At the end of the war and the victory of the Partisans there occurred other massacres of the losers. In order not to focus too closely on the immediate combatants, it is worthwhile to remember the role of the British, who turned back the fleeing anti-Communists at the Austrian border to the tender mercies of the Partisans.

The situation has parallels to that in China, in which a guerrilla resistance and a bloody civil war were fought at the same time. In China, the Communists won, and their opponents were driven into a new political state in Taiwan. The Yugoslav situation is more complicated because there were four major players: the occupiers, the Communists, the Chetniks, and the Ustaše, while in China there were three: the occupiers, the Communists, and the Nationalists. And of course it is great mistake to assume an identity of Croats with Ustaše, of Serbs with Chetniks. It is likely that a greater proportion of Serbs and Croats fought and died with the Partisans fighting the Germans than with either the Chetniks or the Ustaše fighting each other. At least until recently there were interminable arguments about who were the true first fighters for Communism and the independence of the Slavs from the Germans.

But I do not want to lose the point. We are not just talking about ethnicity as a kind of social or personal characteristic, or of a warrior mentality, or about some kind of romantic tribalism; we are talking about ethnicity with a specific political history and subject to political manipulation in a context of the collapse of civil order. It is exactly the consciousness of the need to maintain a civil order in the presence of ethnic strife that has led to the totalitarian excesses seen under the Hapsburgs, under the Ottomans, under the Nazis, and indeed under Alexander (of Serbia, but for all we know, perhaps also of Macedon). For the Germans, the Ustaše were a convenient source of reliable, cheap police, just as the Scots-Irish Protestants were and are a source of reliable, cheap force for the English to keep the Catholic Irish contained. I recall even from my own field work in Peru how the white hacienda owners would use the descendants of Black slaves as foremen to manage the Indian laborers, exploiting ethnicity as a tool of control. I continue to wonder that the Serbs and the Croats cannot see this manipulation. Does it take the gobbledygook of Marxism to communicate a broader view of exploitation? Is it possible that the only natural resource in short supply in the South Slavic lands is political intelligence?

Concurrent with hegemonic centralization was an increasing domination of the Yugoslav organs of government and especially of the police and the armed forces by the Serbs and Montenegrins. In considerable degree*this was a matter of ethnic cultural preference; Slovenes and Croats do not pursue glory as much as money. We find a similar phenomenon in our own country where the officer corps of the armed forces is dominated by southern Whites. But the outcome of this process of Serbianization of the organs of power and control simply pressed home to the Croats their view that they were once again under the control of a foreign occupier.

As the economic situation in Yugoslavia worsened through the 1970s and 1980s, partly because of failures to achieve economic reform, partly because of debt burden, partly because of the decline in the western European economies that diminished opportunities for working abroad, the perceived burden for the Slovenes and Croats became not only heavier but symbolically more important. They rebelled. They had the impending
collapse of the Communist system before their eyes, not only from internal evidence but from the Soviet Union. If the USSR had been strong, the fear of Russian intervention might once more have solidified Yugoslavia; Tito used that threat often enough. It seems unlikely that a Communist Yugoslav federation had any chance of continuance, given the implosion of the economy and the collapse of the world's principal example of a Communist empire. The Slovenes and Croats could not mentally disentangle federalism from communism from Serbian hegemony. Unfortunately, the political mechanisms for a smooth transfer of power were not in place; they seldom are after a period of totalitarian control. If democracy is to flourish, it must do so from the beginning of a revolution, not after a centralist government has achieved stability.

The question became not how this Communist Yugoslav entity could be preserved but how it could be deconstructed in the most constructive way. American foreign policy pinned its hopes on a stable federation, not understanding the centrifugal forces, and hoping that continuance would provide a beacon for the disintegrating USSR. European policy was no less naive, imagining that a graceful divorce was in the offing, and the Germanic members saw no more than the restoration of ancient influence. No one imagined how rapidly the body of the state would collapse when the crutches of raw force and Party domination had splintered under the weight of events. No one thought to offer the bait of E.C. membership on the conditions of stability and civil rights for minorities.

The idea of secession first put forth by the Slovenes and the Croats, and later joined by the other republics was a direct threat not only to the legitimacy of the Yugoslav government and its army, it was also a direct threat to the positions and pensions of the bureaucrats and professional military. Most of the latter by this time were Serbs and Montenegrins, who were at least nominal Communists, and whose support consumed as much as three quarters of the national budget. They saw looming the breakup of a state whose preservation was their profession, and they acted against that dissolution. The military coup that failed in the Soviet Union almost succeeded in Yugoslavia. It failed because the Serbian agenda within the armed forces had funneled arms to Serbian irregulars, to guerrillas the Army found later it could not control. The command structure collapsed; even regular local commanders became locked in isolated local battles, unresponsive to general directives. Finally, the senior hierarchy was purged by junior officers, and the Army is retreating into its Serbian cave, leaving well armed remnants behind under the control of co-ethnic bandit warlords.

The popular idea that the major issue in this Yugoslav civil war was the safety and civil rights of the krajina Serbs is like the idea that the major issue in the American Civil War of the 1860s was slavery. Slavery was the issue to the Blacks and to the abolitionists. The civil rights of the krajina Serbs is the issue to them and to ultra-nationalists in Serbia. Just the same issues arise now with the Bosnian Serbs. The overriding issue in both the American and Balkan instances is and was political and economic domination and the politics of centralism. This conflict has all the appearances of a revolution in a banana republic; the players change but the roles do not. The royalists put on Red clothes for a time and are now wrapping themselves in the flag.

The Serbs of Serbia, apart from their membership in the organs of power, came to play a role under the guidance of their President, Slobodan Milosevic. Milosevic's principal competition for the maintenance of his job were the Croatian and other Communists, and the same kind of rotation of power and privilege that had achieved stability among the apparatchiki for over four decades could have continued. But as the Slovenes and Croats began to press for independence, Milosevic found himself threatened by Serbian nationalists such as Dra kovi and others even more extreme, such as e elj. His position as a crypto-advocate of the Great Serbian position under the guise of a Communist federation had to become a more direct advocacy of Serbian hegemony in order to maintain his political base. He had to move to the right.

Part of this pressure was created by the virtually complete Albanization of Kosovo, a process that began in the 14th century under Turkish direction but which certainly accelerated during and after World War Two, partly because of the higher Albanian birth rate, partly because of continual emigration out of Albania, and partly because of the politics of the Communist Party and its attempts to reduce Serbian influence and balance ethnicities in a way that left the Party as the real holder of power. The issue of Serbian-Albanian relations in Kosovo was the vehicle Milosevic rode to power. But even before the escalation of that conflict, Tudjman was skillfully exploiting ethnic oppositions to unite disparate Croatian factions, especially in the old Military Border, and cultural and political pressure against Serbs in Croatia was intensifying. The uprising of krajina Serbs in Knin not only consolidated the Croats but was convenient for central Serbian policy and as consequential as the shot fired at Fort Sumter in
1860. Milan Babi was a useful tool, but as he becomes less useful and indeed an embarrassment because the EC and the UN bring more pressure to bear, he is being discarded. The same fate awaits Radovan Karadzic if international pressure against Serbian and Army aggression in Bosnia is effective.

I do not try to account for Slovene behavior except to observe the much longer and more profound Germanization of that region. The Slovenes, perhaps not remembering what it means to be Windisch, seem to prefer to be at the bottom of the Austrian (or Italian) ladder than at the top of the Yugoslav one. With the failure of the Yugoslav Army to subdue Slovenia, and with the acknowledgement that Slovenia could not be held in a Yugoslavia, the Croats were fatally exposed. The Army could concentrate on them especially, and did.

In Croatia the old thirst for independence re-emerged. The practical rationality of this striving is obscure. It is hard to see how, in the absence of firm guarantees of incorporation into the EC trading network, the tiny internal markets of Slovenia and Croatia could be expected to survive. It was difficult enough when these two republics had the assured markets to the east and south. Their expectations seem economic idiocy. The standard bait that to be democratic meant to be capitalist meant to be rich was swallowed hook, line, and sinker. What will these mini-states do, take in each other's washing?

With these developments Franjo Tudjman emerged as leader of the Croatian Democratic Union. He was described in a letter to the editor of the NY Times as a moderate. He is of course a moderate in the same sense as Milosevic, namely that there is someone to the right of him. Let us grant Tudjman the legitimacy of the struggle for Croatian independence even if only in the spirit of recognizing a fait accompli; the issue is now not the maintenance of a Yugoslavia but the management of its dismemberment. No sensible observer of the Yugoslav scene could have failed to anticipate the reaction of the krajina Serbs to the Croatian declaration of independence, accompanied as it was by erosion of Serbian cultural privileges and autonomy. Some more clever diplomacy and symbolic management might have prevented the outbreak of vigilante violence that occurred in Knin. This confrontation of ethnic identities reached a symbolic flash point through the necrophiliac exercises of exhumation of the bones of martyred ancestors from the pigeon caves. By offering immediate concessions and reassurance to the krajina Serbs, Tudjman would have lost some political support to Paraga and others to his right. His base was weak; he was still emerging. But guarantees of local autonomy, which would have cost nothing to the left even if something to the right, might have prevented the uprising at Knin, the bandits on the roads, the killing at Borovo Selo, and what followed as the Serbian-controlled Army swept in to rescue their brethren. Those guarantees have in fact now been made -- if not too little, certainly too late, and only under intense international pressure. Tudjman's book was no help. His public gratitude that his wife was neither Serb nor Jew was no help. His expressed willingness to divide up Bosnia was no help. His comment that there were Jews among the Ustaše was no better. His supporters claim that he was misinterpreted.

**Interpretation:**

This clumsiness was part of a general mishandling of world opinion. The Civil War, like the Gulf War, is fought only partly by armies. It is fought in a major way by images given to the world press. There is a central gambit that Tudjman did not play. He did not stand up and say, God forgive us for the inhumanity of the Second World War, of the crimes against the Serbs, the Gypsies, the Jews, and others, and thus the crimes against our souls. The Germans have done it, the Austrians have done it (Waldheim notwithstanding), and most amazingly the Ukrainians have done it. If the epitome of a fast-moving apparatchik like Kravchuk can sense and take this opportunity to disarm opponents, how could Tudjman have let it slip by? His greatest PR asset now is the bloody-mindedness of the Serb irregulars; every massacre of civilians, every loss of control over local military units is a plus achieved at no cost to him.

Indeed, one can take the profoundly cynical view that Tudjman knew exactly what was going to happen as he steered closer to starboard. He could have known that until enough Croatian blood was spilled he could not neutralize Paraga and unite the Croats behind him. Most of all he could by this gambit of blood force the Yugoslav Army and the Serbs into excesses that would brand them before the world as the aggressors they truly were. It is not the first time that radicals have incited the police to riot in order to turn pleading hands to the world. In this game, Tudjman could hope that the pawn of Croatia would lure out the Army knight and Serbian rook from the other side, so that checkmate would be achieved by the bishops of the EC and the UN.

It is not the first time that a Balkan people will have called on surrounding great powers to solve by imposition
what should have been arranged by local negotiation in
the first place. Even now some Croats are calling for a
Desert Storm operation to drive the occupiers from their
soil, followed by the Bosnians who want air strikes on
Serbian gunners and an end to the arms embargo that
limits their capacity to fight the Serbs. It is also not the
first time that intellectuals have vaporized, to be replaced
by patriots. It is this sense of inevitability, of course, that
politicians must have. They must create crisis so that the
choice is to be loyal or disloyal, to be patriot or traitor, in
order to achieve their own ends.

So much unwelcome attention to Tudjman is certainly not
to praise Milosevic, whose behavior has been disastrous
to the interests of peace and of Serbia. He shows signs of
turning from a lion into a lamb as the other nations of
Europe show disgust with his posturing and intransigence.
A recent joke relates that with a little more help from
Radio-TV Belgrade he could probably turn into Mother
Teresa. A more bitter one, after he was involved in a
serious automobile accident, was that his driver was the
only man who could save Serbia. His style is clear. It is
the style of Yitzhak Shamir, of Saddam Hussein, and
toughing it out may carry him a long way against the
impotence of the West.

It will be a blessing if the horror of this civil war will not
simply advance the cycle of death in the tradition of
Balkan blood feud, leaving us, regardless of the formal
political solution, with another Northern Ireland, another
Lebanon. It will be a blessing if the costs will quickly
become so great that the contestants will stop, and come
exhausted to the negotiating table, having advanced their
politics and their territory as far as they can.