

The Former Yugoslavia: The Media and Violence

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The role of the media has increasingly been emphasized as being instrumental in stirring and manipulating the conflict in the former Yugoslavia; in fact, the media are to some extent responsible for the outbreak and tragic course of the war in the former Yugoslavia. The demonization of opponents was the media's main form of nationalist and chauvinist indoctrination. The task of the war propaganda was to sever links developed during seventy years of the existence of a common state, which in spite of political tension and the violence of World War II had maintained a relative peace in the Balkans. The war in the former Yugoslavia has also proved that since the end of the Cold War the media can play a major role in psychological warfare and in the mobilization of public opinion in order to achieve political goals.

The extent, complexity, and geopolitical consequences of the war in the former Yugoslavia have confronted politicians with the most serious security dilemma in Europe since the end of the Cold War. However, the public has been more shocked by the violence of this war than by its geopolitical background; the conflicting parties have not only attempted to defeat their enemies militarily but have threatened them with and subdued them by "ethnic cleansing," the destruction of towns and villages, and mass attacks on civilian populations. Although some analysts tend to interpret religious zealotry, residual violence,¹ and even

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¹ See George Kennan's introductory essay to *The Other Balkan Wars* (Washing-

a culture of chauvinism² as the psychological background for the conflict, the media in the Balkans have increasingly become the main instruments in stirring up and managing it. The function of the war propaganda disseminated by the conflicting parties has been, by turn, to mobilize and intimidate, glorify and demonize, and justify and accuse, bearing out the assumption that the media bears a large part of the responsibility for the outbreak and tragic course of the war in the former Yugoslavia.

Creating Images of the Enemy

Unlike most East European countries, the media in the former Yugoslavia

ton, D.C.: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 1993 [a reissue of a 1914 Carnegie Report on the Balkan Wars of 1912 and 1913]).

² See Oviijeo Job, "Yugoslavia's Ethnic Furies," *Foreign Policy*, Fall 1993.

used to enjoy a considerable margin of freedom in their activities provided they did not endanger the regime of the League of Communists of Yugoslavia (LCY) and its ideology. As a result, by the end of the 1960s in cities such as Belgrade, Zagreb, and Ljubljana a number of successful media had emerged, creating the foundations of the liberal political movement in Yugoslavia at that time. Although the subsequent restoration of the communist order during the 1960s did not entirely eradicate free journalism, the new political elites soon perceived the importance of gaining control over the local media in order to mobilize the public in the growing power struggle between the Yugoslav republics.

The immediate consequence was the breakup of the Yugoslav media networks and the increasing domination of the local media, which promoted the interests and policies of the new, largely nationalist political elites. The exceptions were federal media with long traditions, such as the daily *Borba* or the news agency Tanjug, which reflected the policies of the federal leadership; a number of dailies, including Belgrade's *Politika* or Zagreb's *Vjesnik*; and newsmagazines such as *NIN* and *Danas*, which were sold throughout Yugoslavia. Thus, professional standards were successfully maintained until the mid-1980s.³

However, it was also apparent that local elites devoted much more

³ At that time the circulation of the leading Yugoslav dailies was between 250,000 and 300,000.

attention to broadcasting, primarily television, than to the printed media. Television was introduced in Yugoslavia in the early 1960s; it was expanded during the 1970s because of the desire of local elites to develop their own television networks not only as status symbols but as important elements in their struggle for power. The relatively successful economic development of Yugoslavia in the late 1960s and early 1970s also increased the number of radio and television sets, turning the broadcasting media into the main source of information for most of the population, while the influence of the printed media, with the exception of tabloids, remained limited to the educated middle classes.

Until the end of the 1980s the broadcasting media were state-owned and controlled by the republics. Because of the absence of competition from private radio and television networks (the first independent radio station in Yugoslavia, Belgrade Studio B, obtained a license to broadcast television programs only after a lengthy lawsuit and political changes in the country), the broadcasting media were easily controlled through appointed editors and editorial boards, financial subsidies, and the influence of special political bodies in the LCY and the government apparatus; rarely were they controlled through direct political intervention and censorship.

Yet during the crisis and disintegration of the Yugoslav federation in the 1980s, republican elites attempted to obstruct the flow of information from other republics and establish a monopoly over the media in their own territories. Because of language barriers, this process worked most rapidly in Slovenia (Slovenian differs considerably from the Serbo-Croatian spoken by most of the population); but over time it spread to other republics. The number of broadcasts from other republics continued to decline, and by the mid-1980s they had been limited to only the Sunday evening news bulletin (broadcast in rotation by the

studios of individual republics) and entertainment programs. The major republican television networks, such as Belgrade Television, Zagreb Television, and Ljubljana Television, which were technically better equipped and could reach most of the audience, were instrumental in this policy; local stations, however, which were poorly equipped and had less reach, were able to maintain a certain margin of freedom until the outbreak of open conflict.

The beginnings of a media war between republican elites soon followed. Since the mid-1980s they had not been satisfied with mere control but had started to exploit the media in the struggle for power. The media blockade was tightened, and republican television networks drastically reduced the number of informational broadcasts from other studios. Programs were used to convey one side's view and to censure those of its opponents. In a reversal of previous practice, in the late 1980s editorials and articles focusing on cultural differences among Yugoslavia's ethnic groups were increasingly featured, while the historic role of certain nations and their unfavorable position in Yugoslavia were emphasized.⁴ Also, in contrast to their previous tolerance of other languages, stations in Zagreb and Ljubljana started to insist on strict language standards and to refuse programs from other stations that they found unacceptable.

⁴ More developed republics complained that their federal allocations had been shifted to underdeveloped regions, where they were used irresponsibly. During the 1980s, for instance, the federation gave about \$1 million a day just to the province of Kosovo. Underdeveloped regions, on the other hand, protested unfavorable terms of trade—for example, that their raw materials and energy were underpriced, while manufactured goods from developed republics were overpriced. For many of the republics, Belgrade, the federal capital, became the symbol of exploitation and domination.

The impact of the new political leadership in Serbia in 1987 was first felt by two of the republic's leading news organizations, the *Politika* publishing house and Belgrade Television; both underwent purges of journalists, despite public protests. This became a major source of contention between the authorities and the opposition and has remained so ever since. At the same time, the mobilization of individual nations and the demonization of opponents was underway. The main topic of the Belgrade state-run media became the problem of the southern Serbian province of Kosovo,⁵ which had experienced a mass exodus of the Serbian population during the 1970s and 1980s following pressure on its inhabitants from the growing Albanian national movement and because of economic hardship.⁶ Serbian President Slobodan Milosevic skillfully exploited the media's extensive reports on the suffering of Serbs in Kosovo and their references to Serbian medieval history, particularly the so-called myth of Kosovo,⁷ to articulate his national

⁵ In April 1981 the first mass demonstrations of ethnic Albanians, demanding that the province become the seventh Yugoslav republic, broke out in Kosovo. The Serbian political elite saw this as the first step toward the secession of Kosovo from Serbia and Yugoslavia and its annexation by neighboring Albania.

⁶ In spite of the massive inflow of federal resources, Kosovo remained the least developed part of Yugoslavia, with a per capita income of some \$400 compared with \$4,000 in Slovenia, the most developed republic.

⁷ Ottoman conquerors defeated the Serbian Army in Kosovo in 1389, putting an end to the Serbian medieval state. During the centuries of Turkish occupation, national epic poetry and the Serbian Orthodox Church developed the so-called Kosovo myth, according to which the Serbian ruler on the eve of the battle chose a heavenly kingdom and defeat rather than an earthly kingdom and victory. From a culture built on this psycho-

political strategy and marginalize the liberal opposition in Serbia.

Reaction to the new political course in Serbia came first from Slovenia and then from Croatia and other republics, which interpreted such tactics as evidence of Serbia's aspirations toward hegemony in Yugoslavia. The Slovenian and Croatian media soon responded with propaganda that emphasized the Bolshevik nature of the Serbian regime and the Orthodox and Byzantine (read authoritarian) heritage of the Serbs as contrasted with the democratic and European traditions of the western republics. All three leading republics thus articulated the nationalist political stance that gradually destroyed the idea of a unified Yugoslavia. Through the deliberate manipulation of the media, republican political elites then began to build a consensus among the public that life in Yugoslavia was impossible and that a geopolitical rearrangement of the Balkans⁸ was inevitable in order to meet nationalist aspirations and create "ethnically clean" national states.

The Road to War

The changes in Eastern Europe and the USSR after 1989 spurred the disintegration of Yugoslavia. They intensified differences in the national programs and ideological orientation of Yugoslavia's political elites. The last attempt to preserve the country's unity was a set of reforms proposed by former Prime Minister Ante Markovic; however, the reforms were strongly resisted in all three major republics. In an attempt to break the information blockade in the repub-

logical rationalization, the Serbs managed to preserve their identity and restore their state in the nineteenth century. However, the Kosovo myth became the source of contemporary Serbian traditionalism and nationalism and a major obstacle to modernism in Serbian political thought.

⁸ See Christopher Cviic, *Remaking the Balkans* (London: Pinter, for the Royal Institute of International Affairs, 1991).

lics, the federal government founded its own television network, YUTEL, which employed journalists from all the republics. However, the republican media refused to broadcast YUTEL programming and news from Tanjug, which created numerous legal and technical obstacles. There are, however, a few independent media that provide a refuge for reporters with a more liberal approach. These include the daily *Borba*, the newsmagazine *Vreme*, NTV Studio B, and Radio B-92, all in Belgrade; the satirical weekly *Feral Tribune* in Split; the weekly *Mladina* in Slovenia; the daily *Oslobodenje* in Sarajevo; and the magazine *Monitor* in Montenegro.

The free elections in 1990 in the Yugoslav republics brought to power nationalist and authoritarian leaderships, and this accelerated the disintegration of the Yugoslav press. Soon after winning the elections the new administrations passed laws regulating the media. In spite of their democratic rhetoric, they imposed very strict rules governing the media. There was a real media boom during this period, with the emergence of hundreds of new papers and dozens of private television stations; but the media were dominated by militant nationalist rhetoric and attempts to revive the revanchist movements of World War II. In a new wave of purges of the state-controlled media that occurred from 1990 to 1993, many top professionals were removed. Federal and independent media and media from other republics have had to cope with numerous obstacles, such as the denial of access to state-owned printing plants and distribution networks for the production and sale of news from "foreign" and "hostile" sources; forced mergers and acquisitions, through which the authorities took control of major media organizations and then suppressed independent magazines and newspapers;⁹ the obstruction of the work of

⁹ The Croatian authorities' attitude to the media is particularly rigid; they have

correspondents; the severing of telephone and telex lines; physical assaults on "foreign" reporters; and the burning of "hostile newspapers" and newsstands by the "patriotic masses."

Most media in the Yugoslav republics have thus become the instruments of militant nationalist propaganda. In addition to the trends present since the 1970s—the media blockade, the emphasis on national rights and on the individual's underprivileged position within Yugoslavia, and the condemnation of other peoples and political movements—the republican media increasingly began to serve as instruments of war propaganda. Headlines in leading papers and peak viewing hours were reserved for editorials that invited a final resolution of the nationality issue, while reports on current events were replaced by commentaries with historical references aiming to justify nationalist programs. In addition, there were sensationalized revelations about the alleged conspiracies of other republics¹⁰ and nationalist letters to the editor in which readers (often fabricated) justified nationalist policies. In many cases the media systematically built up the image of the new leaders, including

forced through several mergers and acquisitions (for example, *Vjesnik* and *Slobodna Dalmacija*), extinguished some of the finest news magazines (such as *Danas*), and dismissed hundreds of the best journalists. Although by the late 1980s the authorities in Belgrade had gained a firm grip on Belgrade Television (now Serbian Television), resistance from the opposition and the public prevented the state from acquiring *Politika's* offices.

¹⁰ The Slovenian and Croatian press discussed a memorandum issued by the Serbian Academy of Arts and Sciences in which it saw a program for Serbian hegemony, while the Serbian media began to develop the theory of a German-Vatican conspiracy against the Serbs as the background to nationalist politics in Slovenia and Croatia.

Serbia's Milosevic and Croatia's Franjo Tudjman, as national heroes.

The state-controlled media in Serbia, Croatia, and Slovenia favored particular topics and employed similar tactics in their propaganda; all three reported that their respective republics had been economically exploited within Yugoslavia. Both the Slovenian and Croatian media argued that the only solution was to leave the federation in order to join the civilized European nations, while the Serbian media was more ambivalent about the federation. The Slovenian and Croatian media also focused frequently on Serbia's domination of the federation, referring to Yugoslavia pejoratively as "Serbo-slavia" (the Serbian view of this stereotype was that the Serbs used to win wars but lose in peacetime and that Yugoslavia was a tragic delusion of the Serbian people).¹¹ Moreover, they insisted that the creation of Yugoslavia had been a diplomatic error on the part of the allies in World War I; that the country was an artificial creation forcing people with different historic, linguistic, cultural, and religious traditions to live in an unnatural union; and that the efforts of the international community to preserve Yugoslavia were deceptions resulting from a lack of knowledge of Yugoslavia's circumstances, Serbian intrigues, or the conspiracy of France and the United Kingdom to preserve Yugoslavia against the will of the Slovenes and the Croats.

In Slovenia and Croatia the media's particular targets were the remaining federal institutions, such as the remnants of the federal government and the Yugoslav People's Army (YPA), because they were seen as major obstacles to complete independence. Media attacks emphasized the illegitimacy of institutions that had been pronounced relics of the former communist regime.

¹¹ See Nebojsa Popov, "Serbian Populism," supplement to the newsmagazine *Vreme* (Belgrade), no. 135, 24 May 1993.

The demonization of opponents was the main means of nationalist and chauvinist indoctrination. Recent Yugoslav history provides an abundance of negative stereotypes and negative characterizations of other ethnic groups. For example, Croats are seen as genocidal, religious zealots inclined to Nazism; Serbs are prone to communism, Byzantinism, and oriental despotism and do not belong in Europe; Croatia is Europe's

ganda finally to bury the Yugoslav idea and demonize opposing groups: media events capable of inspiring nationalist paranoia were needed. For example, the Slovenian and Croatian authorities exhumed and consecrated the communist victims of World War II (most of whom died fighting on the Nazi side); militant political émigrés were allowed to return; national symbols that had long been forbidden because of their associa-

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guardian against the eastern threat. For Slovenian nationalists, Serbs and other Yugoslav peoples are simply lazy and quarrelsome southerners living at the expense of hardworking northerners. When the conflict broke out the Croatian media often referred to Serbian soldiers as drunken murderers, while Croatian soldiers were frequently spoken of in the Serbian media as drugged psychopaths. During the war in Bosnia and Herzegovina both the Croatian and the Serbian media accused soldiers of the government in Sarajevo of being Islamic fanatics determined to create the first Islamic state in Europe. In all cases members of ethnic groups were portrayed by the opposing media as devoid of human characteristics, so that violence would not only be allowed but desirable.

The most difficult task in creating effective war propaganda was to sever the links developed during seventy years of the existence of a common state, which, in spite of political tension and the violence of World War II, had maintained a relative peace in the Balkans. It took something more than just media propa-

tion with the Nazis were reinstated. Serbs in Krajina and Bosnia and Herzegovina disinterred the remains of victims of the genocide perpetrated by Croatian Ustashas and Muslims in World War II (at the time the media launched the slogan "Serbia is where Serbian graves are"). In addition, all national and religious holidays, including the most obscure, were celebrated with great pomp. However, only with the outbreak of war was the nationalists' objective of burying the idea of Yugoslavia finally feasible.

By mid-1991 these events had caused the first ethnic incidents to receive immediate and extensive media coverage, and reporters openly took sides in the conflict. The minority populations in ethnically mixed areas were subject to a propaganda barrage. For instance, Serbs in Krajina saw in the Croatian media the revival of themes that had made them victims in World War II. The Serbian media aroused fear and confusion with their commentaries on the potential creation of a new Ustasha state, which it was said they would have no choice but to resist with

arms unless they were to experience genocide again. Neither side was willing or sufficiently statesmanlike to respond to the legitimate security concerns of the minority population with confidence-building measures. On the contrary, the political elites in all three Yugoslav republics perceived the civil war as an acceptable means of implementing their political programs.

The Media and the War

The outbreak of the armed conflict after the proclamation of Slovenia's and Croatia's independence not only reinforced the patterns of enmity established by the media in the former Yugoslavia but added new ones. Two aspects of the media's role in abetting the war, both of which boiled down to efforts to impose their own definitions of the conflict, deserve particular attention: first, their attempts to convince the public that the war was inevitable and justified; and, second, their efforts to win the sympathy of the international public.

As the conflict parties perceived how important it was for their relative power position vis-à-vis their opponents to have the EC on their side they embarked on a media offensive directed at public opinion in Western Europe. By doing so, they tried to influence the West European definition of the situation. The Serbs played the tune of the German-Austrian conspiracy, using the remembrance of the atrocities of the Second War to rally the non-German West Europeans behind their flag.¹²

The warring parties articulated two opposing definitions of the con-

¹² Koen Koch, "Conflicting Visions of State and Society in Present-day Yugoslavia," in Martin van den Heuvel and Jan G. Siccama, *The Disintegration of Yugoslavia* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1992), pp. 197-98.

flict, which became the cornerstones of the media war in the former Yugoslavia from 1991 onward. According to the first view, widespread in Slovenia and Croatia, Serbia bears the greatest if not the sole responsibility for the war. It has been contended that Serbia committed aggression first against Slovenia, then against Croatia, and, finally, against Bosnia and Herzegovina and that it then threatened to spread the hostilities to provinces within its territory and to other areas of the former Yugoslavia and the Balkans. Motives have been found either in the policy of the Serbian leadership or in the aggressive attitude of the Serbian people in their attempt to preserve the communist order and impose hegemony on the entire Yugoslav territory.

According to the second view, supported by the Serbs and Montenegrins, such claims are deliberate misinterpretations aimed at concealing the true motive of the secessionist Yugoslav republics and their foreign allies: to revise the results of two world wars in the Yugoslav territory, the Balkans, and Europe. This interpretation holds that the conflict in Yugoslavia is a civil war resulting from the illegitimate secession of Slovenia, Croatia, and Bosnia and Herzegovina (but not of the "Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia"), a move that has seriously violated the interests of nations willing to remain in Yugoslavia.

The media in all of the former Yugoslav republics denied as the motive for the war the right to self-determination, whether in securing the right to leave Yugoslavia or choosing to remain in it. However, the positions of individual players in the conflict differed, depending essentially on how well they were prepared for the armed conflict. Slovenia was in the best position, as it entered the war politically, militarily, and diplomatically prepared. Because of the population's ethnic homogeneity and shared political goals, at least in terms of its willingness to

secede from Yugoslavia, the media in Slovenia did not have any difficulty in winning over local public opinion. Their efforts were thus mainly directed at the international community and emphasized the brutal aggression of the "Serbian-Bolshevik federal army" against a small, democratic, market- and European-oriented republic.

Although the intervention of the federal army was limited to the policing of international border crossings in Slovenia (a contingent of 2,000 YPA soldiers and 900 federal policemen was dispatched to be confronted by some 32,000 Slovenian soldiers), the picture portrayed by the media was totally different. Scenes of T-55 tanks adorned with red stars present during the ten-day conflict in Slovenia were reminiscent of the suppression of the Prague Spring and the Tiananmen Square demonstration, although there were nine casualties on the Slovenian side and over forty among YPA troops. The Slovenian media campaign was well organized and precisely targeted and soon tilted the sympathy of the international public in its favor.¹³ The episode soon ended the mutual interest of Slovenia and Serbia in the secession of Slovenia from the Yugoslav federation; consequently, the federal Presidency unexpectedly ordered the withdrawal of the YPA from Slovenia.

Unlike Slovenia, Croatia entered the war less prepared in terms of having gained the support of both the domestic and international public. Until the destruction of the town of Vukovar by the YPA, the Croatian public had actually been divided over

¹³ "It was democracy vs. communism and, of course, this definition of the situation tilted the sympathy of a significant part of West European and especially German public opinion towards the Croats and Slovenes pressuring West European governments towards a change of policy. This naturally stimulated the stubbornness of the 'break-away' republics, especially Croatia." *Ibid.*, p. 198.

the issue of independence; and Croatia's international image was still tarnished by the genocide committed by Croatian Ustasas against the Serbs during World War II. In addition, at the beginning of the war the Croatian media were prone to professional lapses that were remedied only in the fall of 1991.¹⁴ To this end, the board of Croatian Radio and Television laid down the following twelve rules in its "Instructions on Reporting from War Zones":

- Reports must begin with the most recent information, and only then is a review of the day's events to be given;
- Future actions to be taken by the Ministry of Internal Affairs and the Guard [the embryonic Croatian armed forces] are not to be publicized;
- Crying and lamentations by the population are not to be broadcast;
- Pictures of blown-up, badly wounded, or shot Croatian soldiers are not to be shown; statements by the wounded are not to be broadcast;
- The terms "Chetnik" [Serbian paramilitary] or "extremist" are not to be used; only the term "Serbian terrorist" is to be employed;
- The YPA is not to be described in any way other than the "Serbian-communist army of occupation";
- The term "Mupovci" [members of the Ministry of Internal Affairs forces] is not to be used to describe members of the police force, only the word "policemen";
- The names of owners of shelled houses are not to be disclosed;

¹⁴ See Sandra Basic, "The Media Landscape," in Marjan Malesic, ed., *The Role of Mass Media in the Serbian-Croatian Conflict* (Stockholm: Styrelsen for psykologiskt forsvar, 1993).

- When referring to the number of guardsmen and policemen killed, a report must be accompanied by the words "fell for the freedom of Croatia," or "gave their lives on the altar of the homeland," or "heroes in the defense of the homeland";

- Reports must be stripped of commentaries; only the facts are to be stated;

- Defeats suffered at the front are not to be kept secret, but emphasis is to be placed on the tremendous forces used by the enemy and of its unscrupulous bestiality; such reports must conclude with optimistic expressions and promises: for instance, "we shall bring freedom back to our Kijevo" [a Croatian village in Krajina taken by the Serbs];

- Reports are to be made about the successful defense of towns and are to be shown in special programs.¹⁵

Unlike in Slovenia, the YPA used its full force of heavy weaponry in Croatia, resulting in the virtual destruction of cities and villages. That move contributed to the final consensus among the Croats, who, regardless of their political convictions, supported the Croatian government, while the sympathies of the international public shifted against the Serbs (particularly during the siege of Dubrovnik). Outgunned by the federal army, the government in Zagreb focused on propaganda, aiming to change international opinion toward favoring the lifting of the UN arms embargo and engagement in military intervention, which would have shifted the course of the war in its favor. The Yugoslav center for Eurovision (the European television agency) was based in Zagreb, which is why reports from Yugoslavia for quite some time came only through biased and heavily censored stations in Croatia. In addition, some 700 for-

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 34-35.

eign correspondents were accredited in Zagreb during the war, and many of them wrote their reports based only on Croatian sources.

In the struggle to gain the favor of the international public, Croatia relied on the hosts of Croatian emigrants and workers in Western Europe and North and South America. Partly because of their influence, and partly because of historic and cultural links, Croatia first managed to win the support of the influential German media, particularly the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*. Since public opinion in the US was decisive in shaping the Western attitude to the war, Croatia (and later Bosnia and Herzegovina and ethnic Albanians from Kosovo) engaged American public relations firms such as Ruder & Finn and Waterman & Associates¹⁶ to influence the editorial staffs of the leading American media, policymakers, and think tanks. Although active to some extent in the Croatian phase of the war, these agencies only exerted their full influence during the conflict in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

The war in Croatia ended in December 1991 with the adoption of the Cyrus Vance plan and the invitation to the ministers' meeting of the EC in Brussels of all Yugoslav republics that wished to be internationally recognized. The focus of the rivalry between the Serbs and Croats then shifted to Bosnia and Herzegovina, which had been the subject of this conflict from the very beginning. The government of this multiethnic republic (whose population consisted of 40% ethnic Muslims, 33% Serbs, 18% Croats, and 9% Yugoslavs) was aware from the outset that it could not resist the superior military might of the Serbian and Croatian armed forces.

¹⁶ See Jacques Merlino, *Les Vérités yougoslaves ne sont pas toutes bonnes à dire [The Truths about Yugoslavia Are Sometimes Best Left Unsaid]* (Paris: Albin Michel, 1993); and *SAAO Public Affairs Journal* (Washington, D.C.), no. 8, October 1993, pp. 11-16.

It therefore used diplomacy and the efforts of the media to encourage international military intervention, hoping that it could turn the situation to its advantage.

The Sarajevo government was supported by a strong campaign by the international media, which from the beginning had underscored the human costs of this brutal conflict and had begun to exert pressure on Western governments and governments of Islamic countries to intervene militarily. At this stage of the war, differences between the views of the Western media and the public on military intervention as a means of stopping the Bosnian tragedy, together with the unwillingness of Western governments to get involved in a war in which none of them had a national interest, caused tension in Western capitals and in relations between the West and Islamic countries. The alternatives were moves that would respond to public pressure to do something without risking direct military interference, such as sea and air blockades and international sanctions against Serbia and Montenegro, deliveries of humanitarian aid, and the deployment of the UN Protection Force in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

However, in an ethnic conflict as complex as that in Bosnia and Herzegovina, the choice was to do everything or nothing: either to intervene militarily in order to establish a UN trusteeship in this former Yugoslav republic or to accept the outcome of protracted armed clashes. Efforts supported by the international media's campaign to intervene gave the government in Sarajevo the illusion that assistance was imminent and a reason to reject the EC's early efforts at mediation, such as the plan proposed by the Portuguese ambassador Jose Cutillero, which after eighteen months of war seemed to provide the only possible political solution to the conflict.¹⁷ The threat of imminent military

¹⁷ David Owen and Thorvald Stoltenberg's plan for Bosnia and Herzegovina is simi-

intervention pushed the Bosnian Serbs and later the Bosnian Croats to attain their military goals and thus reinforce their bargaining positions.

Although the authorities in Serbia and Montenegro have continued to maintain that they are not parties to the conflict and that their role has been reduced to offering humanitarian aid to the Serbian population in Krajina and Bosnia and Herzegovina, the Serbian media has assumed an active role. The government-controlled media, primarily Serbian Television, has had three objectives: first, to support the demands of the local Serbian population in Croatia and in Bosnia and Herzegovina for secession from these republics after their emancipation from Yugoslavia; second, to convince the public in the former Yugoslavia that the war is justified; and, third, to try to win international support for Serbian objectives.

Regarding the first goal, the Serbian media have depicted the conflict as a war of liberation for Serbian populations that would have faced the threat of genocide had they accepted minority status within the newly independent Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina. Although in principle the right of other peoples to gain independence from the common state has not been disputed, the media have denied that they have a right to subsume parts of the Serbian population. The media have also claimed that after the breakup of Yugoslavia the only way for Serbs in Croatia and in Bosnia and Herzegovina to protect themselves from genocide similar to what they experienced during World War II would be the creation of a state in which all Serbs lived together.

The Serbian opposition press, however, has consistently maintained a negative attitude toward the conflict, seeing as the true motives behind the war the desire of elites in the republics to use nationalism to pre-

lar to Cutillero's plan, but what separates them is eighteen months of the cruelest armed conflict in postwar Europe.

vent democratic and market changes and to preserve former totalitarian structures of power. As a result, control over the state media, especially Serbian Television, became the focal point in the struggle between the government and the opposition in Serbia. Independent media such as *Vreme*, *Borba*, NTV Studio B, and Radio B-92 have made efforts to offer journalists on the opposite side an opportunity to present their views on the war. The authorities in Serbia have probably tolerated independent media out of a wish to improve Serbia's image abroad and because they realize that the independent media's influence is limited to the urban middle class, which would be inclined to support the opposition anyway.

As far as propaganda directed at other countries is concerned, the Serbian media concluded relatively early that they could not counteract the influence of the leading international media. They therefore confined their propaganda to the Serbian emigration in Western Europe and North America and conducted specific media campaigns that tried to justify the government's policy. It could be said, however, that the real target of these isolated propaganda drives was the domestic rather than the international public.

Conclusion

The Yugoslav conflict has proved that truth is the first victim of war; more specifically, it has shown that since the end of the Cold War the media have been able to play a major role in psychological warfare and in the mobilization of public opinion in order to achieve political goals. The extent of hatred among the peoples of the former Yugoslavia and the deliberate violence of the war have shown the devastating consequences of a long period of propaganda aimed at preventing the restoration of the common state. One of the most detrimental consequences of the propaganda has been that people have only been able to perceive the war in

the way that the media has presented it. The effects of such propaganda only confirm the words of former US Secretary of State John Foster Dulles:

In order to make a nation support the burdens of maintaining a great military establishment, it is necessary to create an intellectual climate akin to [a] war psychology. There must be the portrayal of an external menace. This involves the development to a high degree of the nation hero, the national villain, and the arousal of the population to a sense of sacrifice. Once these [conditions] exist, we have gone a long way on the path to war.¹⁸

¹⁸ Atlee Beechy, "First They Make Enemies," MCC Peace Office Newsletter (Akron, Pennsylvania, 1991).

In addition, because none of the leading European countries had a defined national interest in the Yugoslav conflict, the international media focused on the impact of the conflict on the local population rather than on its geopolitical elements. However, some of the international media began to play on the emotions of the public, perhaps inadvertently influencing the conflict. "For example, when Lord Owen, chief negotiator to the Balkans for the EC, gives a press conference or an interview in New York at the UN, the Muslims, Serbs, and Croats respond to it within a matter of hours, and the mass media have to deal with it."¹⁹ Critics of this

¹⁹ "Foreign Correspondence in the Age of Globalism and Post-Cold War World: A Conversation," in *The Media and Foreign Policy in the Post-Cold War World*

kind of reporting tend to say that the media are capable of stirring up emotion rather than reason and that that is how they actually create the kind of public pressure that has confused and misguided the mediating efforts of the international community and thus influenced the extent and course of the conflict.²⁰ Both theses prompt the conclusion that in the war in Yugoslavia the written and spoken media played an important if not leading role in shaping national and international public opinion and, hence, international relations and the conduct of the war.

(New York: The Freedom Forum Media Studies Center, 1993), p. 34.

²⁰ See Merlino, *Les Vérités yougoslaves*. . . .