

Puppets on Invisible Strings: Arkan's Tigers, the Effect of Paramilitaries and Plausible  
Deniability in the Yugoslav Wars, 1991 – 1995

By

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*This thesis is dedicated to my family, for supporting me. As well as Professor Gregory  
Marshall, for inspiring my love for history.*

## ABSTRACT

Paramilitary organizations have served as a means for governments across the world to avoid blame for atrocities committed during times of war, with Arkan's Tigers in the former Yugoslavia serving as a perfect example of this attempt to achieve plausible deniability. During their operations which ranged from 1991 to 1996, as well as their organized crime activities which lasted up until Arkan's death, Arkan and his soldiers regularly worked alongside Yugoslav government and military officials to engage in ethnic cleansing. This study will observe the acts committed by Arkan's Tigers against the ethnic and religious minorities of the former Yugoslavia, Arkan's connections with members of the Yugoslav state, as well as the Belgrade regime's awareness of and complicity in the actions committed by Arkan. The evidence which has been acquired and analyzed for this study shows that on all levels of the Yugoslav state, from government to military, Arkan's Tigers were supported in their acts which violated the Geneva and Hague Conventions. This evidence, alongside records which show a public denial of complicity in Arkan's actions by politicians such as Slobodan Milosevic, shows that plausible deniability for their actions was a key reason behind the deployment of paramilitaries such as Arkan's Tigers in the Yugoslav Wars.

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## **Introduction**

War has been a subject of tremendous discussion over the past few years, as it has been throughout the modern era. At times they have been lawless and unrestricted in their totality, bringing more death and destruction to civilian populations than to the armed combatants of each side combined. Over the centuries there have been many dozens of nations across the world which have sought to clarify generally accepted rules for the conduct of these wars, in the interest of maintaining discipline and professionalism which may prevent another total war. These rules have been clarified most notably in the Hague and Geneva conventions which not all nations recognize, in a bid to ensure that the lawless hordes of the past will not find their way into the comparatively small-scale scene of modern war. Conflicts of the late-twentieth century proved however that a nation's armed forces would not be needed to instill state-sponsored terror, as this task fell into the hands of those who worked in the shadows and outside of the law. These paramilitary groups have operated across all continents and from each corner of the political spectrum, and they all serve the same purpose: be the regime's bloody iron fist.

Paramilitary organizations have served less menacing purposes than those aforementioned groups in the past, such as law enforcement as well as civilian volunteer militias in the case of invasion, though it was the conflict in the former Yugoslavia that brought global attention to the potential threat these groups pose to the integrity of international law. Unlike other conflicts of the twentieth century like the Gulf War, in which one or two of these paramilitary groups go unnoticed amongst the mass of opposing armed forces, the Yugoslav Wars from 1991 – 2001 presented an almost dizzying number of armed militias on all sides. The war was a culmination of nearly a

century of ethnic and religious tensions in the Western Balkan region of Eastern Europe, in which the Belgrade government reaped the seeds of internal division which were sown by the Hapsburgs before them. Croats, Slovenes, Bosniaks and Albanians sought to remove the shackles placed upon them by an increasingly authoritarian regime that sought to consolidate ethnic Serbian domination in the region. The ethnicities opposed to this Serbianisation of the Yugoslav territories formed their own controversial paramilitary groups, such as the Croatian Defense Forces (HOS) and the Kosovo Liberation Army UÇK, though it was the Serbian government in Belgrade which would sponsor and support the largest and most brutal paramilitaries throughout the conflict. The professed goal of these paramilitary groups was the protection of ethnic Serbs and the preservation of the Yugoslav union, though the conflict would show over time that they served a more sinister purpose.

This hidden agenda of the Yugoslav Wars has been addressed and explored in a great wealth of historiography throughout the years, works which will be mentioned later in this introduction, though it is my goal to focus primarily on one infamous case of paramilitarism which left a scar across the entirety of Yugoslavia's former lands. In order to analyze the intent of the Belgrade-allied paramilitaries throughout the wars in Croatia and Bosnia as well as the Albanian-majority Kosovo, one must first understand the policies of the Yugoslav president prior to the outbreak of war. After the downfall of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia during the early stages of World War II, communist dictator Josip Broz Tito established Yugoslavia as a federated state to quash nationalist sentiment. Each of the six republics and two autonomous regions had their own president. After Tito's death, Serbian president Slobodan Milosevic became President of Yugoslavia. The

downfall of Slobodan Milosevic's Greater Serbia idea and Yugoslavia as a whole came soon after his ascendancy to power with the Anti-Bureaucratic Revolution of the eighties, in which Milosevic's supporters forcibly overthrew the presidents of Montenegro as well as the two autonomous regions of Vojvodina and Kosovo. They were replaced with puppets of Milosevic who dominated half of the Yugoslav presidential system, instilling fear in the remaining republics that their days of regional sovereignty were numbered. While Slovenia was able to successfully secure independence after ten days of light fighting and Macedonia was able to do the same without a single shot being fired, Milosevic and the ethnic Serbs in the remaining republics were willing to fight for what little could still be salvaged of a Greater Serbia. Upon the declarations of independence of Croatia in 1991 and Bosnia and Herzegovina in 1992, the Yugoslav government decided on a strategy: the establishment of pseudo-independent ministates.

In the case of Croatia it was the Republic of Serbian Krajina, established by Croatian Serbs loyal to Belgrade with the intent of annexation in the event of a Serbian victory, and for Bosnia it was the Serbian Republic of Bosnia otherwise known as Republika Srpska which still exists today. These satellites of Belgrade had the support of the Yugoslav National Army (JNA), what was left of it after the chaos of several republics breaking away led to desertions, though it would be necessary for these states to establish and employ paramilitary organizations if they wished to conquer and police disputed territories within the new breakaway republics. These paramilitary organizations were vast in number as they ranged from a revival of the World War II-era Chetniks as well as the White Eagles and the Scorpions, the latter would make a name for themselves at the Srebrenica Massacre, though there was no paramilitary group which became more

infamous amongst non-Serbian ethnic groups than the Serb Volunteer Group. They are more commonly known as Arkan's Tigers or "the Tigers", named after their fearsome and fanatical leader Željko "Arkan" Ražnatović who led a complicated life prior to assuming leadership of what would become the iron-clad right hand of the Belgrade regime. With a crime spree spanning decades of the late twentieth century and nations such as Sweden and Belgium, including a suspected stint with the Yugoslav communist secret police, the Serbian crime lord was unlikely to lead his band of former convicts and gangsters into a legacy of disciplined and lawful conduct. Yet he and his contemporary paramilitary groups were sufficiently supplied and supported by the governments of Milosevic as well as Radovan Karadzic in Republika Srpska, both of whom entrusted the Tigers with the task of carrying out the largest ethnic cleansing operation in the region since World War II.

It was a top-secret affair referred to only occasionally amongst the heads of state in Yugoslavia and its allied satellites, as well as Arkan himself, as the vaguely named Rampart-91 or RAM Plan for short. This plan called for the ethnic cleansing of all contested lands in the Yugoslav breakaway states, where Bosnia suffered the most. Religion was also an important factor, as the Orthodox Serbs had found little common ground with the Catholic Croats as well as the Muslim Bosniaks and Albanians over the past century. Arkan and his militia would be put to work throughout the nineties implementing this plan with vigorous enthusiasm, leading to the deaths of many thousands of non-Serbs in Croatia and Bosnia as well as the forced deportation and rape of many thousands more. His men had been easily motivated to continue with these brutal operations as they were paid in loot, an especially tantalizing proposition as they



found themselves in the significantly wealthier Republic of Croatia where the valuables of their victims were suitable war trophies. Arkan's Tigers left a scar on the former Yugoslavia stretching from the Adriatic Sea to the Drina River, a legacy of mass murder and pillaging that the Belgrade regime hoped to distance itself from when a criminal tribunal at the Hague shined a spotlight on the shadowy underworld of post-Titoist Yugoslavia.

The use of paramilitary groups such as Arkan's Tigers to commit acts of mass murder provides the threat of plausible deniability, even in modern conflicts in which both professional and civilian journalistic coverage is unprecedented. As commander and chief of the armed forces, Slobodan Milosevic of Yugoslavia and Radovan Karadzic of Republika Srpska would be responsible for any orders given as president to their troops to engage in widespread acts of terror. If they were to go through nominally independent paramilitary militias however, they believed that they could claim ignorance of any atrocities while still managing to execute state policy in a brutally efficient manner. Though paramilitary groups could have allowed a leader to commit all of the heinous atrocities which they believed to be necessary for their irredentist goals with impunity, both Milosevic and Karadzic had their true connections with the Balkan death squads exposed in the Hague. While Arkan himself was not present at the trial, he was assassinated by policeman Dobrosav Gavric in the lobby of a Belgrade hotel after being indicted and prior to the start of the trials, his legacy and that of his Tigers remained present throughout the subsequent hearings and still remains in the consciousness of the post-Yugoslav republics today. If anything should be learned from the writings of Arkan's exploits, from Croatia and Bosnia to his post-war life as a Serbian folk hero and second

Heydrich to the Bosniaks, it is that coincidence between the rhetoric of politicians and the actions of supposedly independent armed groups is not always coincidental. Arkan still remains a mysterious figure for all those who did not know him, though there is enough substantive information which has been gathered over the decades to at least accurately define his role in Europe's last civil war.

The primary sources and historiography on Arkan's Tigers ranges from testimonies from his family and indictments from criminal tribunals, to the analysis of an international cohort of scholars across three decades. While there is a generally agreed-upon consensus amongst all those who have contributed to the body of scholarship related to the Serbian warlord, that his actions were indeed criminal and excessive, variety exists in how each source approaches analyzing his part in history. Some sources such as Iva Vukusic's *Serbian Paramilitaries and the Breakup of Yugoslavia* have Arkan and his Tigers as just one of many paramilitary groups responsible for the violence, while Christopher S. Stewart's *Hunting the Tiger* places Arkan's Tigers at the forefront of both the narrative as well as many of the significant events of the Yugoslav Wars. This discrepancy in approach could largely be attributed to the time in which they were published, as Stewart's book being published in 2008 coincides with Kosovo's declaration of independence from Serbia while Vukusic's publication in 2023 coincides with the increased discussion of paramilitaries due to Russia's invasion of Ukraine. This is the primary difference in approach within the historiography of Arkan's Tigers, determining whether they were a primary feature of the Yugoslav Wars driving most of the violence or if they were just a cog in a much larger machine of mass violence and crime. On top of this there is also the debate which my paper will focus on more

significantly than the one mentioned above: whether Arkan was a common criminal given leeway to take advantage of a golden opportunity in chaotic times, or an agent of the state assigned to carry out an organized plan of ethnic cleansing.

The secondary source literature on Arkan's Tigers seems to develop each time there is a new piece of news coming from the former Yugoslavia, though the only English-language book which is dedicated solely to the topic of Arkan's Tigers is the aforementioned *Hunting the Tiger* by Christopher Stewart. This book largely puts a focus on Arkan's personal life rather than being a broad study of the Tigers militia, though many of the testimonies which form the substance of the book are given by former members of the Tigers. Two similar texts which speak on Arkan's Tigers are *Death Squads in Global Perspective* by Bruce Campbell and *Serbian Paramilitaries in the Breakup of Yugoslavia* by Iva Vukusic, though the later references Arkan and the Tigers much more frequently than the former. They each have a similar argument as the subtitle for Campbell's book is *Murder with Deniability*, implying that the Tigers provided plausible deniability for Milosevic to commit genocide, and Vukusic argues that Milosevic had a close private connection with Arkan while publicly keeping his distance from him for political reasons. Where Stewart's approach differs from that of Vukusic and Campbell is that Stewart focuses largely on small-scale incidences and the experiences of individuals when dealing with Arkan and his men, while Vukusic and Campbell take a broader approach in putting Arkan's Tigers into the context of large-scale events such as major battles and campaigns in the war. Other significant primary source works which have aided me in my research largely pertain to broad studies of the individual conflicts, such as *Croatia: A Nation Forged in War* by Marcus Tanner and *The*

*Bridge Betrayed* by Michael Sells about Bosnia. The frequency at which Arkan and the Tigers are mentioned in these books reveals how significant their presence is, when they or the topic of paramilitaries are not the main focus of the text. This is shown through mentioning Milosevic's denial of Arkan's involvement in Bosnia, while Arkan was boasting on television about his role in the Bijeljina massacre, highlighting the issue of paramilitaries and deniability.

Primary source material on Arkan and the Tigers presents an even more drastically different set of approaches than that of the secondary sources, with these ranging from criminal indictments to personal testimonies from his family. An example of a stranger's personal testimony is *The Bosnia List* by Kenan Trebinsevic, who was a young boy in Bosnia during the outbreak of the war who had several encounters with members of Arkan's Tigers. One of the most interesting pieces of literature is *Stories About My Father* by Arkan's own son Vojin, which offers a personal and humanizing take on the Serbian warlord which is hardly present elsewhere. Vojin largely tells of short anecdotes that he recalls of his father throughout the late eighties up until the early two-thousands when Arkan was killed, they seem innocuous on the surface while providing a valuable insight into Arkan's personality behind closed doors. The fact that he is Arkan's son does seemingly present an issue with bias, as does the opening in which he refers to the Yugoslav National Army (JNA) as "our fallen heroes", though he expressly states in the preface that he has no intention to absolve or forgive his father's crimes.

I have been able to acquire a vast wealth of primary source information through the ICTY's court records, both pertaining directly to Arkan as well as those who he was associated with. While Arkan's initial criminal indictment is only ten pages long, as he

was assassinated before there was an opportunity to arrest him and bring him to trial, the indictments and trial records of Slobodan Milosevic, Radovan Karadzic, and others frequently mention their association with Arkan's Tigers and the operations in which they took part. While the book written by Arkan's son Vojin is an individual's interpretation of his experiences with the man, the trial records offer a more objective source base that provides insight into the international reaction to his career.

What I seek to add to the scholarly literature on this subject is a synthesis between the small-scale events, and the grand scheme of the war which aimed for region-wide ethnic cleansing based on a state-approved plan. Rather than focusing solely on the stories of individuals or attempting to narrate the timeline of the grand offensives and battle plans of the war, I seek to connect a man who has been interpreted in court testimonies and literature as a rowdy brigand to the most powerful apparatus of the Yugoslav deep state. Instead of merely placing this in the context of Serbian ethno-nationalism which has been the focus of many other scholars, I place Arkan in the context of similar responses from Croats and other non-Serb minority groups which fueled a cycle of reciprocal violence. In doing so, I portray the history of Arkan's Tigers in the context of a struggle between several ethno-nationalist factions which allowed an agent of the state to operate as a common bandit while carrying out a secret plan with implications for the entire region. I do not however wish to create the impression that Arkan's Tigers are inseparable from other Serbian paramilitaries or to an extent Croatian or Albanian paramilitaries, this is why Arkan's connection with the secret RAM Plan for ethnic cleansing is a major focus of the paper just as much so as his group's infamous looting. The analysis of these aspects of Arkan's history will reach the point of defining

Arkan's Tigers not as merely a group of unruly bandits nor as an extension of the Serb-dominated Yugoslav Army, but as a de facto death squad which set itself apart from all contemporaries in its end goal of murder with deniability.

## Chapter 1 – The Rise of Arkan

Yugoslavia had seen suffering and bloodshed which made the Balkan theater of World War II synonymous with ethnic cleansing, largely due to the pro-German collaborationist regime in the Independent State of Croatia known as the Ustaše as well as the pro-Serb remnants of the Royal Yugoslav Army known as the Chetniks. Each of these factions were dedicated to the mass murder and forced conversion of Serbs and Croats respectively, though it was their brutal tactics and consistent collaboration with the occupying Germans that ensured neither would lead post-war Yugoslavia. Instead it was the communist Partisans under the leadership of Marshall Tito who cultivated a wave of support based on independence-minded and pan-Slavic ideals that culminated in the postwar Yugoslavia being a federated state of equal ethnicities separated from the Soviet bloc of satellite states. This status as an Eastern European communist state outside of Soviet influence allowed Yugoslavia to bargain for economic and military assistance with the Truman administration, which had a vested geopolitical interest in preventing more European states from seeking Soviet succor even in a de-Stalinized Eastern Bloc. This expert international and domestic compromising allowed Tito to bring about the most prosperous period in Yugoslavia's history, one of historic economic prosperity and internal stability amongst the various religious and ethnic groups.

Then, on April 17<sup>th</sup> 1952, a man who would play a key role in destroying the state which Tito had built was born in the industrialized and prosperous Yugoslav republic of Slovenia. He was the son of a Yugoslav Partisan and decorated Air Force veteran and was born Željko Ražnatović, though he would make a name for himself in the coming decades across Europe as Belgrade's underworld connection: Arkan.

Ražnatović began engaging in the criminal lifestyle at a very young age, despite the firm hand of his strict military father attempting to guide him in a different direction. He began purse-snatching and armed-robbery at age twelve, along with other criminal youths in the streets of Belgrade, earning him the ire of his father as well as the local authorities which saw him in and out of juvenile detention facilities.<sup>1</sup> This continued throughout his early teens until he moved to western Europe in the early seventies, where the inhabitants were significantly wealthier than those in Serbia and therefore more valuable targets for Ražnatović. He found great success in his criminal endeavors throughout his late teens and early twenties, moving throughout the Low Countries as well as Sweden and finally deriving his name “Arkan” from one of his fake passports. He was not enough of a criminal mastermind not to be caught however and he wound up serving several stints in prison, for a total of twenty counts of burglary, seven bank robberies, and an attempted murder charge.<sup>2</sup> What made Arkan a rather interesting case was that he always manage an escape from these prisons in western Europe, leading to speculation from the press and his countrymen that he was associated with the Yugoslav state security service known as the State Security Service (UDBA). This speculation turned out to be correct as he had secured this occupation due to his father’s military connections, an attempt by the latter to lure his son out of the criminal underworld, though this led to him becoming a hitman who targeted dissidents of the communist regime abroad.<sup>3</sup> In return for lending his hand to the state, he was provided with all the

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<sup>1</sup> Christopher S. Stewart. *Hunting the Tiger: The Fast Life and Violent Death of the Balkan’s Most Dangerous Man*. (New York, NY: Thomas Dunne Books, 2008), 20.

<sup>2</sup> “Arkan Wanted as a War Criminal.” *Aftonbladet* (Stockholm). March 31, 1999.

<sup>3</sup> Stewart. *Hunting the Tiger*. 35.



fake passports and equipment he needed to be the bank-robbing and jail-breaking scourge of Interpol throughout the late stages of the Cold War.

Arkan was putting his violent criminal expertise in the hands of the Yugoslav state over a decade before the breakaway republics questioned Serbian domination, and it was clear that his services were already indispensable to the Yugoslav government. After his return to Yugoslavia from his crime spree in Western Europe, in order to continue robbing banks in his home country, Arkan used a revolver to shoot and injure two police officers outside his mother's house in 1983.<sup>4</sup> Despite the severity of his crime, and the international attention that was already on him, his connections with the UDBA got him out a mere 48 hours later without punishment. His continued employment by the Yugoslav state despite all the trouble he brought them shows his services were well worth the price, earning him recognition from those who sought to employ him on a larger scale in the future. Though it was not merely agents of the UDBA or fellow thieves that he came to associate with, as the beginnings of his notorious paramilitary organization were found in a place which is an intrinsic part of European sports culture: soccer. Some may be aware of the particularly extreme and violent nature of some "hooligans" particularly in the United Kingdom and South America, who cause large-scale brawls or fires over the result of their favorite team's soccer match.<sup>5</sup> Yugoslavia took it to an entirely new extreme, as indicated by the name given to these soccer hooligans: ultras.

It was hooligans whom the ultra-nationalist Arkan was after, as the political situation in Yugoslavia began to unravel with the rising tensions caused by Slobodan

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<sup>4</sup> Stewart. *Hunting the Tiger*. 102.

<sup>5</sup> Eric Dunning. *The Roots of Football Hooliganism*. (New York, NY: Routledge, 1988), 148.

Milosevic's regime. Arkan would assume leadership of the Delijie, roughly translating to "heroes", which was a notoriously radical group of Red Star Belgrade supporters who were accustomed to using their bodies for violence.<sup>6</sup> Arkan saw himself involved with several violent clashes between groups of soccer ultras, particularly against non-Serb teams, the most infamous being the Dinamo-Red Star riot that saw thousands of Serbs battling thousands of Croats in the streets of Zagreb in 1990. With the Delijie in red and the Croatian ultras in blue, the violent clash of metal bars and fists was on a scale which had not been seen in the region since World War II.<sup>7</sup> It could hardly be expected by all except the bloodthirsty Arkan that this would be but a preview of things to come, as 1990 also saw the first free elections in the Republic of Croatia in over fifty years.

The downfall of Yugoslavia continued to snowball out of control with this sudden democratization, as Slobodan Milosevic's centralization of power through installing puppet presidents in the Serbian autonomous republics and Montenegro triggered a strong reaction in the Northern non-Serbian republics. Talks of secession began to grow, though it would not progress into action until 1991. In the meantime, Arkan began to consolidate his band of rowdy soccer hoodlums into an armed and dangerous militia. These rumors of succession were enough to push many of Arkan's ultras to swear allegiance to him and to the Serbian cause in October 1990, the ceremony taking place in the Pokajnica church where the leader of the 1817 insurrection against the Ottoman Empire died. This ceremony which formed what would be officially known as the Serb

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<sup>6</sup> Iva Vukušić. *Serbian Paramilitaries and the Breakup of Yugoslavia: State Connections and Patterns of Violence*. (Milton Park, UK: Taylor & Francis, 2023), 198.

<sup>7</sup> Vukušić. *Serbian Paramilitaries and the Breakup of Yugoslavia*. 198.

Volunteer group presented obvious symbolism: Arkan was the new Serb-saving warlord, and those who opposed Orthodox Serbs would have to kneel or die.<sup>8</sup>

The formation of the Serb Volunteer Guard was nominally a precautionary step taken in the early days of a potential breakup of the Yugoslav state, one taken to protect ethnic Serbs in what could become foreign nations and/or battlefields. 1990 was not only a preparatory year for Arkan, but also for his allies in the now Serb-dominated government. This government began to establish a blueprint for Serb hegemony in the non-Serb areas of Yugoslavia, known as the RAM Plan. This plan was discussed frequently in the post-war trials at the Hague, one in which Arkan was meant to play a key role, as it called for the arming of Serbs throughout the breakaway republics to establish control and carry out ethnic cleansing.<sup>9</sup> Arkan was already playing his part in this plan for genocide a mere month after his group's formation, as he was arrested with a truck full of weapons on the Croatia-Bosnia border in November 1990.<sup>10</sup> Despite the historically negative relations between Serbs and Croats both in terms of ethnicity and religion, history which was uncomfortably close to home for those who still remembered the ruthless policies of the Ustaše, it would be their northern neighbor in the Republic of Slovenia which would be the first to break away from Yugoslavia. The dawn of 1991 would signal the end for the near 50-year long union of Yugoslavia, though the breakup would not immediately result in the large-scale carnage which the decade became known.

The process of turning the once stable and prosperous Yugoslavia into a multi-ethnic warzone was a slow burn, one which Arkan was heavily involved in, and began

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<sup>8</sup> Stewart. *Hunting the Tiger*. 131.

<sup>9</sup> Vukušić. *Serbian Paramilitaries and the Breakup of Yugoslavia*. 22.

<sup>10</sup> Vukušić. *Serbian Paramilitaries and the Breakup of Yugoslavia*. 88.

with the process of arming local Serbs just as Arkan had planned in 1990 at the behest of President Milosevic. There were clear recipients for these war materials in the pre-war Croatia, as many ethnic Serbs saw the writing on the wall and began to organize an autonomous republic within Croatia intended to remain loyal to Belgrade and Yugoslavia in the event of an independence vote. It became known as the Republic of Serbian Krajina (RSK) and functioned as a pseudo-independent ministate entirely backed and supplied by Milosevic. Arkan would be sentenced to twenty months in Remetinec Prison for his illegal arms trafficking in November 1990, though he would be released after only serving six months of this sentence after President Franjo Tuđman of Croatia accepted a 1 million deutschemark payment from Serbia.<sup>11</sup> Arkan had already achieved significant results prior to his imprisonment, as the Serbian police in the border city of Knin refused to obey orders from Zagreb which forced a destabilizing police buildup. By the end of January 1991 the number of Croatian police in Knin doubled, on top of a newly-formed antiterrorist unit totaling 3,000 men bringing the police presence in the region Arkan visited from 10,000 to 23,000 in a matter of months.<sup>12</sup> Neither Franjo Tuđman nor Arkan had much interest in or use for covert acts at this point, they both knew that a war was on the horizon and prepared accordingly.

President Franjo Tuđman would arguably be the largest driving force for the upcoming war outside of the Milosevic regime in Serbia, as his rhetoric while often misunderstood ensured that Serbs would take issue with his staunch nationalist views. Tuđman was far from being a supporter of the World War II Ustaše regime in Croatia, as

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<sup>11</sup> Stewart. *Hunting the Tiger*. 133.

<sup>12</sup> Mile Bjelajac. *The War in Croatia, 1991 – 1995*. (Belgrade, Serbia: Institute for Recent History of Serbia, 2009), 11.

both he and his brother actively supported the Partisans. Tuđman did gain infamy for genocide denial however, as he denied the 500,000-800,000 death toll of Serbs in World War II.<sup>13</sup> He had also argued that the Jasenovac camp was only a small-scale internment facility, rather than the massive death camp that it actually was, leading many Serbs in Croatia to see him as a genocide denier no different than the Nazis at Nuremberg who sought to whitewash their history. As far as Tuđman and other Croats were concerned, the anti-Serb actions of the Ustaše should not be any further scrutinized than the anti-Croat actions of Serbian King Alexander I or the Chetniks. Tuđman had made an agreement with the leadership of Slovenia to postpone his country's declaration of independence until they were able to resolve their own issues with the Belgrade government, as to not cause too much immediate instability in the region, though the Slovenian War of Independence in June 1991 would end too quickly for such a promise to make much of a difference. The war began just a couple of weeks after Arkan was freed from prison on June 27<sup>th</sup>, and ended just 10 days later. Milosevic allowed Slovenia to slip out of the Yugoslav yoke largely due to their ethnic homogeneity, as their state contained very few Serbs. One of Arkan's soldiers by the name of Trax did take part in this light fighting before being sent home in early July, as both he and Arkan realized that the real war was still to come.<sup>14</sup>

Although the Republic of Macedonia also broke free from the union and without a single shot being fired, largely due to their ethnic homogeneity and weak economy, this only steeled Arkan and Belgrade's desire to not allow the dream of a Greater Serbia to

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<sup>13</sup> Stewart. *Hunting the Tiger*. 126.

<sup>14</sup> Stewart. *Hunting the Tiger*. 172.

shrink any further. While Croatia successfully held a referendum on independence from Yugoslavia just two days prior to Slovenia's war, they withheld the formal declaration of independence as both sides prepared their forces for an inevitable clash. This clash was desired on both sides as neither the Croatian nationalist government nor the centralized authority in Yugoslavia wished to quell tensions between their respective ethnicities, and violent clashes between armed Serbo-Croatian rebels and increasingly militarized Croatian police in the summer were the first shots of the undeclared war.<sup>15</sup> President Tuđman was unfortunately playing into the narrative put forth by Milosevic and Arkan, that the goal of the JNA and its allied paramilitaries was to protect ethnic Serbs from persecution, as his nationalist rhetoric intentionally provoked his Serbian minority in the already hotly-contested regions. His new constitution treated Serbs as a minority class even in areas where they were the majority, many Serbs in border cities were targeted by his newly-formed Croatian National Guard, and his new Croatian flag was remarkably similar to that of the Ustaše regime in what can only be described as a macabre act of defiance.<sup>16</sup> Milosevic and his puppet paramilitaries attempted to use power politics to their advantage in the gradual escalation from diplomatic collapse to all-out war, as a preliminary mobilization of the Yugoslav Army was ordered in July with the intent of putting pressure on Croatia without launching an attack.<sup>17</sup> While the statesmen played for time in the leadup to hostilities, Arkan was patiently awaiting for the opportunity to become a hero in the eyes of Serb nationalists.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Bjelajac. *The War in Croatia, 1991 – 1995*. 12.

<sup>16</sup> Stewart. *Hunting the Tiger*. 136.

<sup>17</sup> Bjelajac. *The War in Croatia, 1991 – 1995*. 15.

<sup>18</sup> Stewart. *Hunting the Tiger*. 282.

Arkan had spent much of his time after his release from Croatian prison building up his forces in anticipation of a clash between an independent Croatia and the irredentist Serb government, awaiting the call from Belgrade to bring the troublesome republic back to heel by any means. He had increased his army's size tremendously since its inception the previous October as it now reached over 3,000 well-trained and equipped men, among these his brother-in-law Aleksander.<sup>19</sup> Arkan had the opportunity to capitalize on the rhetoric of Tuđman's regime by claiming to be a benevolent patriot seeking only the safety and wellbeing of his Serbian people, having worked his way into the good graces of the darkest recesses of the Yugoslav state for decades in order to grant him this opportunity for an Orthodox crusade. The groups of pro-Serbian separatists in the self-proclaimed Republic of Serbian Krajina gave paramilitaries such as the Tigers as well as the Yugoslav Army a head start in the war, one which was desperately needed due to mass-desertions of ethnic Croats from the Yugoslav Army throughout 1991.<sup>20</sup> While Croatian independence had been voted on in May and declared in June, widespread fighting between Serb and Croat forces did not begin until August 1991 when Arkan and thousands of his men were taking up positions in his compound within the Croatia-Serbia border town of Erdut. Here Arkan looked to harden and brutalize his men in order to condition them for what was to come, promising loot to those who proved themselves efficient and dishing out ruthless punishments to those who disappointed him much like a mafia boss.<sup>21</sup> There would be much plunder to be had in the rich and industrialized

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<sup>19</sup> Stewart. *Hunting the Tiger*. 137.

<sup>20</sup> Bjelajac. *The War in Croatia, 1991 – 1995*. 16.

<sup>21</sup> Stewart. *Hunting the Tiger*. 155.

Republic of Croatia, as Arkan took the first steps towards what would become one of the most brutal massacres of the twentieth century.

Arkan had come quite a long way from his humble days of robbing banks and causing soccer brawls, with his long-time connections to the apparatus of the communist state putting him in the position to lead an army into a war between brothers. He had been afforded substantial opportunities under a prosperous and unified Yugoslavia, seeing it collapse would only serve to disrupt those opportunities and bring about the final nail in the coffin of a Greater Serbia. The collapse of Yugoslavia was to be a painful ordeal for all those who endured it, as the past fifty years had been spent showcasing the young republic as a beacon for prosperity and Slavic unity amongst a bleak bloc of communist satellite states. It was however an ordeal which President Milosevic had the political will to see through, as did his rival Tuđman in Croatia, and Arkan would be the right-hand which Milosevic would use to carry out this will. Arkan had set the tools in place for Serbian partisans in Croatia to rise up and fight by their side, all that was left was to take the last step and provoke a war. This was not a difficult task to accomplish after the years of provocations staged with and without the direct support of Milosevic by Arkan, and he was prepared to be right at the center of the conflagration once all of his careful planning had come to fruition.



## **Chapter 2 – The Vukovar Massacre and the Croatian War of Independence, 1991-1992**

“Slobo, Slobo, bring us salad, there will be meat when we slaughter the Croats!”

This haunting tune which was made popular by the paramilitary organization known as the Chetniks, later picked up by the likes of the Tigers and Scorpions, provided a chilling preview for the sentiment which would be expressed by the Serbs in Croatia for the next four years. Memories of the Ustaše militia’s large-scale massacres of ethnic Serbs throughout World War II were still fresh, even in the minds of those who had never experienced them. The Croatian Defense Force even revived the Ustaše state emblem and “za dom spremni” salute in their logo, as the Serb forces both professional and paramilitary set out into newly independent Croatia. Alongside Arkan’s Tigers were several other paramilitary groups whose names remain infamous in the region today, such as the Chetniks and Scorpions as well as the White Eagles. At the end of the hostilities, they would all be at the center of intense questioning during the post-war trials at the Hague. Prior to the desired takeover of the Republic of Croatia, for the purposes of ethnic cleansing and reintegration into Yugoslavia, the goal of the Milosevic regime was to secure the territory of the self-proclaimed Republic of Serbian Krajina which also included territory in the Slavonia and Dalmatia regions. The city which would become the first to witness the barbarity of this gruesome campaign was the largest city in the unrecognized Serbian satellite state, the Croatia-Serbia border city of Vukovar. It was the Siege of Vukovar and the successive Vukovar Massacre which demonstrated the logic of Milosevic’s RAM plan: if Serbs are the minority, use paramilitaries to make them the majority by force.

The people of Vukovar were not prepared to wait and see this come to fruition, as twenty-two percent of the city's Croatian population was evacuated to the opposite side of the country prior to September 1991.<sup>22</sup> Those who remained were a paltry force compared to the combined JNA-paramilitary force that crossed the Danube River to attack in late August 1991. Only around 1,000 Croatian troops were allocated to halt the advance of around 36,000 Serbs while under a constant hail of arial bombardments and artillery fire.<sup>23</sup> In spite of the Yugoslav Army's vast superiority in air power and armored vehicles, this was not to be a battle of breakthrough and rapid encirclement through tactical bombing and expert maneuvering. Throughout the bleak fall of 1991, the combat in and around Vukovar led to the Siege of Vukovar. A strategy of slow starvation, which was established in the medieval age, was conducted with modern twentieth century weaponry. While the Yugoslav Army took up much of the responsibility of starving or dislodging the determined Croatian defenders with their superior weaponry, Arkan was active in the surrounding areas conducting Milosevic's ethnic cleansing policies for the disputed Croatian lands. Such was the case in the small village of Dalj just ten miles from Vukovar in which Arkan emptied out the prisons of eighty Croatian prisoners and had them all slaughtered, save for two who bargained for their lives.<sup>24</sup> Even in these early days of the war his name was becoming almost like an urban legend for the Croatian civilians who heard of his atrocities, especially those in Slavonia who feared that Arkan and his Tigers would be coming for them next.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> Bjelajac. *The War in Croatia, 1991 – 1995*. 20.

<sup>23</sup> Marcus Tanner. *Croatia: A Nation Forged in War*. (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2001), 256.

<sup>24</sup> Stewart. *Hunting the Tiger*. 147.

<sup>25</sup> Tanner. *Croatia: A Nation Forged in War*. 268.

The civilians were all potential victims in this ethnic war of redrawing the boundaries which had existed between the current and former Yugoslav republics for nearly fifty years, as it quickly became evident that this was a war of ethnic extermination rather than political disagreements. There were efforts made by Milosevic and Arkan to paint the Croatian independence movement as a resurgence of the Ustaše political regime from World War II, with Arkan even being so bold as to claim that he had killed twenty-four “Ustaše” in Vukovar.<sup>26</sup> Scholars such as Bruce B. Campbell however, author of *Death Squads in Global Perspective*, point out that the Croats were targeted for their ethnicity rather than their political affiliation with or against the regime of President Tuđman.<sup>27</sup> There was no sense of loyalty or collaboration between different religions or ethnic groups in the early stages of the war, as both sides knew that securing their place of prominence in a post-war Balkan Peninsula meant ensuring their ethnicity became the majority in the regions in which it was the minority. Croats would partake in this policy largely through forced expulsion, with only a few massacres against Serb civilians taking place, as the Croats largely had not desired to assimilate or incorporate Serbian territory outside of the recognized borders of the Republic of Croatia. The Serb government under Milosevic however did not see Croatia as being an intrinsically important piece of a Greater Serbia, due in part to their Catholic faith and nationalism. The Croats were seen as being incompatible with this end goal, and would be forced to either leave or die. Arkan and his Tigers were Milosevic’s primary tool in accomplishing this end goal as, although there were plenty of other groups operating in the region, Arkan’s rise to a

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<sup>26</sup> Stewart. *Hunting the Tiger*. 160.

<sup>27</sup> Bruce B. Campbell, Arthur D. Brenner. *Death Squads in Global Perspective: Murder with Deniability*. (Hampshire, UK: Palgrave MacMillian, 2002), 288.

Serbian warlord was due chiefly to Milosevic's support of his useful criminal tendencies.<sup>28</sup>

This criminality would continue to be put on display throughout the continuation of Vukovar's brutal and destructive siege, as Arkan remained active in his ethnic cleansing operation in the area around Vukovar while awaiting the chance to enter the city like raiders. One of these massacres took place in the small village of Tenja near Vukovar and in the Serb-claimed Slavonian region, where the Tigers alongside the JNA murdered twenty-nine Croats in an occupation that lasted throughout the rest of 1991. The casualties in occupations such as these are not limited to the number of people who were shot into mass graves, as those who survived did so after being imprisoned in their homes at gunpoint or forced to perform slave labor with inadequate provisions of food and water.<sup>29</sup> This practice of temporarily enslaving the enemy combatants or populace of an occupied territory has been a common one throughout the history of war, the position of slave masters was especially disturbing for the Serbs as it further accentuated the propaganda of the Milosevic regime: that the Serbs would literally become the master race. There was also plenty of looting in Tenja, as Arkan and his Tigers became known amongst the Croats and JNA for doing more looting than fighting throughout their time in Eastern Slavonia.<sup>30</sup> Arkan had made a name for himself robbing stores and banks across Europe while carrying out political assassinations on the side, just as he would now plunder the vulnerable Croat civilians of their valuables before putting them to work or to death. The prospect of valuable loot kept Arkan's Tigers motivated and bloodthirsty to

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<sup>28</sup> Stewart. *Hunting the Tiger*. 128.

<sup>29</sup> Stewart. *Hunting the Tiger*. 141.

<sup>30</sup> Vukušić. *Serbian Paramilitaries and the Breakup of Yugoslavia*. 120.

keep fighting and pillaging no matter their conditions, and the Tigers would do so without mercy.

It was an inevitability that the Croatian village of Erdut in which Arkan set up his headquarters also saw a share of mass killings, ones which would be rather close to home for the nearby Serbian regions. Those targeted in Erdut throughout the end of 1991 were Croats, though the mass of victims also included some ethnic Hungarians who had remained in the region since the days of the dual monarchy. Modern-day Croatia as well as parts of Northern Serbia had belonged to the Kingdom of Hungary under the Austro-Hungarian dual monarchy, the latter of which was temporarily occupied during Hungary during World War II under the regime of Miklos Horthy. These occupation troops had carried out a large-scale massacre of over 3,000 Serbs in Novi Sad in 1942, a memory which burned with a hatred in the hearts of Serbs such as Arkan just as brightly as his hatred for the Croat Ustaše. The Vojvodina region just East of Erdut had a large ethnic Hungarian majority, and an example would be made of them at the expense of those in Erdut as Arkan and his men would murder thirty-seven of its inhabitants while terrorizing and exploiting the rest.<sup>31</sup> Many of them would be disposed of in mass graves while others were simply tossed down empty wells, their homes and possessions plundered by Arkan and his Tigers as the valuables of the deceased would serve as a gruesome paycheck for the soccer hooligans turned unprofessional soldiers. The events of Erdut and Tenja served as telling warning signs for the events to come both from Arkan's actions and Milosevic's

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<sup>31</sup> John R. Cencich. *The Devil's Garden: A War Crimes Investigator's Story*. (Dulles, VA: Potomac Books, 2013), 102.

policies, though they would only be a preview of the true horror that awaited the major city of Vukovar as the siege began to crack its defenses.

The bleak 1991 winter in the mountainous Balkan Peninsula brought with it equally bleak prospects for the mostly Croatian inhabitants of Vukovar, who had endured a months-long siege and were in for one of the Yugoslav Wars' most infamous massacres. The bloodshed leading up to this moment was already unprecedented in the region since the days of the Ustaše and the Partisans, as the casualties sustained at Vukovar by the Croats comprised half of all Croatian war casualties in 1991.<sup>32</sup> Serb casualties were however much higher than those of the Croats, making the Battle of Vukovar a pyrrhic victory for the Serbs whose political significance would make up for the flagging morale. The Croats had shown bravery and determination by frustrating the Serbian assault and fighting until the end, those frustrations were soon taken out on the defenseless inhabitants upon victory. It was in Vukovar that the famously chilling song "Slobodan Slobodan, bring us salad, there will be meat when we slaughter the Croats" was first recorded as having been sung by Serbian paramilitaries, and it was in Slobodan's name that this slaughter was carried out. Those who took part in these killings included the Chetniks and the Scorpions, the latter would achieve infamy several years later for the Srebrenica Massacre, and Arkan's Tigers who had awaited their chance to enter the city for months.

The Vukovar Massacre is one of the most well-known events from the Croatian War of Independence for its shocking brutality and blow against Croatian morale, though

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<sup>32</sup> Branka Magaš, Ivo Zanic. *The War in Croatia and Bosnia-Herzegovina 1991–1995*. (London, UK: Frank Cass, 1999), 60.

it would only be a preview of the events to come throughout the nineties. The city was already strewn with hundreds of civilian corpses due to the preceding three month long siege, as the Yugoslav Air Force had regularly strafed civilians and used their bombers to target the Vukovar Hospital which the Serbs claimed to be a military base.<sup>33</sup> When Arkan's Tigers moved into the city they went about their standard routine on a much larger scale due to the size and importance of Vukovar, raping and looting before burning many Croat homes to the ground to ensure those who were exiled had nothing to return to.<sup>34</sup> There were plenty who would not have the opportunity to return, once the war had turned in their favor. Hundreds of non-Serbs were quickly herded onto busses and taken a few miles outside of the city to a farm in the small village of Ovčara, just outside of Vukovar, where they were brutally beaten on their way to their makeshift quarters by the JNA and Serbian paramilitaries such as Arkan's Tigers.<sup>35</sup> They were then loaded into busses in groups of ten or twenty at a time by members of the Territorial Defense, who were nominally the handlers of Arkan's Tigers, and taken out into the wilderness where an estimated 261 were shot into a mass grave.<sup>36</sup> This would be the beginning of the implementation of Milosevic's RAM Plan on a major scale, as the repugnance of Arkan's ethnic cleansing crusade began to resemble less his gangster past in the eighties and more the exploits of the Ustaše he claimed to despise.

The massacre in Ovčara, often grouped together with the Vukovar Massacre due to its proximity, was the largest act of mass murder committed in the Serbian ethnic

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<sup>33</sup> Cencich. *The Devil's Garden: A War Crimes Investigator's Story*. 97.

<sup>34</sup> Magaš, Zanic. *The War in Croatia and Bosnia-Herzegovina 1991-1995*. 354.

<sup>35</sup> Cencich. *The Devil's Garden: A War Crimes Investigator's Story*. 98.

<sup>36</sup> Vukušić. *Serbian Paramilitaries and the Breakup of Yugoslavia*. 167.

cleansing campaign up until this point in the war. Though it was not only through murder that the ethnic makeup of Slavonia was intended to be altered forever, as mass forced expulsion was generally a more clean and easy way of swapping the minority and majority roles in a region. Ethnic cleansing was done explicitly in regions where Croats were the majority in order to make the Serb minority into the new majority, as Vukovar only had a twenty-five percent Serb population before the paramilitaries arrived and forced thousands of Croats to flee west with only the belongings that they could carry.<sup>37</sup> Many nation states such as Germany and Italy were drawn along lines of ethnic majority or with the assistance of natural features such as rivers or mountains, the Balkan Peninsula did not have such conveniences as an ethnically mixed region. In attempting to alter the concentration of certain ethnic groups in regions which had historically been ethnically diverse, or homogenous in favor of a different ethnic majority, the Serbs used the justification of protecting local Serbs to pave the way for justifying the borders of a Greater Serbia. Not all of those who were able to leave Vukovar alive were lucky enough to head west into Croat-controlled land, as thousands were herded into concentration camps such as Velepromet where hundreds more would die from disease and abuse.<sup>38</sup> Croats reacted by forcibly expelling many of their Serb minority citizens, though notably with much less bloodshed and destruction than the methods of Arkan, which would only push the ethnic hatreds even further.

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<sup>37</sup> Tanner. *Croatia: A Nation Forged in War*. 259.

<sup>38</sup> Magaš, Zanic. *The War in Croatia and Bosnia-Herzegovina 1991–1995*. 357.



Arkan's campaigns throughout Slavonia had already begun to earn him fame in Serbia and disdain almost everywhere else, with even other remaining Yugoslav republics beginning to derisively refer to the rump state as "Serboslavia".<sup>39</sup> The growing feelings of contempt were not helped by the slow pace and large casualties of a war that was meant to be won quickly and easily by a technologically superior force, which was now beginning to earn international ire due to the brutal tactics of the army and its paramilitary thugs. While Arkan's Tigers were far from the only paramilitary group operating in the region, as the hastily-assembled Territory Defense group and the notorious White Eagles were in on the looting and slaughtering, it was Arkan's close association with the Belgrade regime and his image as a folk hero that gained him celebrity status for his crimes. On one hand this celebrity status was a godsend for Milosevic, as it both confirmed the Serbian peoples' approval of the war's barbarous course and presented Arkan as a distinguishable figure separate from Milosevic. On the other hand, the rapid rise in popularity of a man like Arkan is always a matter of concern for a communist dictator who fears the prospect of a rival leader coming for his power. For now Arkan remained useful to the Yugoslav political apparatus as well as his men, who were encouraged to continue pushing the Croats with enthusiasm as they were paid in loot on top of their salaries. The Serbian collective of professional soldiers and paramilitaries would continue to have their work cut out for them as the first winter of the Yugoslav Wars set in, and their sights became firmly set on the next propaganda prize of the war.

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<sup>39</sup> Stewart. *Hunting the Tiger*. 173.

While Vukovar was being pillaged and its people slaughtered by a bloodied yet victorious army of Serbs and Serbo-Croats in Slavonia, the historical port city of Dubrovnik in the Dalmatian region of Croatia was facing another brutal siege. The Venetian architecture led many in the region to see this great artistic city as the prize of Dalmatia, a shining jewel of the Balkans across the Adriatic Sea, and the desperate need of a propaganda victory during the first winter of the war drove Milosevic to yearn for its capture.<sup>40</sup> It also had a historical connection to Montenegro, the only remaining Yugoslav republic that was firmly on the side of Belgrade, and so along with paramilitaries the JNA received significant aid from Montenegrin defense forces.<sup>41</sup> This friendship is largely due to the Montenegrins' status as a South Slavic Eastern Orthodox people who see Serbia as a paternalistic entity, it was the only friendship that Serbia could count on as they surrounded Dubrovnik and put it under a siege similar to that of Vukovar. This siege was more similar in length than in conduct, as the civilian death toll was fortunately much lower.

Such a display of unprovoked violence just across the sea from a major NATO country further damaged the international standing of the Milosevic regime, which grew into a more pressing issue as the United Nations recognized the independence of Croatia at the start of 1992. International law dictates that the armed forces of Yugoslavia would have to evacuate Croatia, since an official declaration of war would mean recognizing Croatian independence, though international law had not stopped Milosevic nor Arkan in the past. Regardless, a ceasefire was signed in January 1992 between the Yugoslav and Croat

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<sup>40</sup> Stewart. *Hunting the Tiger*. 158.

<sup>41</sup> Cencich. *The Devil's Garden: A War Crimes Investigator's Story*. 120.

armies. Ironically it would be signed in Sarajevo, which was mere months away from a similar crisis.<sup>42</sup>

Arkan's headquarters still remained in Erdut along with hundreds of his fellow Tigers and, with the perimeter secured and plundered with the aid of the JNA and RSK forces, that did not change regardless of any de jure withdrawal agreements. Here is where the deniability issue comes into play with paramilitaries such as Arkan's Tigers, since they did not belong to the JNA they served as a way for Milosevic to maintain armed and political influence in Croatia despite his army's withdrawal. Arkan could instead work with his soldiers to continue looting while training and equipping the local territorial defense forces and RSK troops to ensure the war in Croatia would continue as a proxy civil war, a task which he had done prior to the outbreak of war and would continue to do.<sup>43</sup> There was a clear effort to disguise the remaining Serbian presence in Yugoslavia particularly regarding the territorial defense forces, as many of them were merely rebranded as local police officers while continuing to perform their usual duties.<sup>44</sup> This deceptive effort to paint the ongoing hostilities between Croatia and Serbia as a grassroots uprising of ethnic Serbs allowed Milosevic a moment to regroup, while his loyal paramilitaries and militias would continue to resist the Republic of Croatia for years to come. While Yugoslavia had now lost more than half of its eight republics, it seemed that one more was about to follow suit.

The developments in Croatia, both in terms of the strategic failures of the Yugoslav army and the confirmation of a Serbian intention of establishing ethnic

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<sup>42</sup> Magaš, Zanic. *The War in Croatia and Bosnia-Herzegovina 1991–1995*. 35.

<sup>43</sup> Vukušić. *Serbian Paramilitaries and the Breakup of Yugoslavia*. 172.

<sup>44</sup> Vukušić. *Serbian Paramilitaries and the Breakup of Yugoslavia*. 180.

hegemony, further solidified the decisions of these former Yugoslav republics to break away from the yoke of Belgrade. They also encouraged the ethnically diverse republic of Bosnia-Herzegovina to consider following the Croatian lead, as their Muslim population was seen as incompatible with Milosevic's dream of a Greater Serbia. It was also a contentious issue for Tuđman as well, despite the two seeming to share a common enemy, as many large sections of Bosnia were ethnically Croatian and the whole of Bosnia-Herzegovina was a province of the Independent State of Croatia just fifty years prior.<sup>45</sup> The same preliminary measures that worked in Croatia were now being put into place in Bosnia in the leadup to yet another war, as Arkan helped smuggle weapons to the Serbs in Bosnia and Tuđman's men did the same for the Croats in what was to become a Croat breakaway republic.<sup>46</sup> Just as the front line in Croatia between the Croats and Serbs was beginning to stagnate in the second year of the breakup of Yugoslavia, both Milosevic and Tuđman had their sights set on yet another front on which they both aimed to expand their territory on ethnic grounds. Though for Arkan it would come to represent something other than a chance to salvage what was left of a collapsing state, it would serve as his magnum opus for mass slaughter and plundering not seen in the Balkans since the dissolution of the kingdom. The end of 1991 had seen the collapse of the Soviet Union, one of Yugoslavia's only remaining allies, and 1992 would see Yugoslavia collapse just as it began: over an assassination in Bosnia.

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<sup>45</sup> Magaš, Zanic. *The War in Croatia and Bosnia-Herzegovina 1991–1995*. 11.

<sup>46</sup> Steven L. Burg, Paul S. Shoup. *The War in Bosnia-Herzegovina: Ethnic Conflict and International Intervention*. (Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe, 1999), 74.

### **Chapter 3: The Bosnia War - Arkan's Crusade**

There has been a debate for centuries as to where the heart of the Balkans lies, whether it is amongst the medieval castles and cathedrals of Istanbul/Constantinople or the long-disputed region of Kosovo which was host to some of the region's ancient monasteries and most legendary battles. Due to its ancient and modern histories, I believe Bosnia to be the heart of the peninsula for all those who inhabit it, be they Christian Slavs or Muslim descendants of Turks and Arabs. For centuries the modern state of Bosnia-Herzegovina had been the front line for countless wars between the two ultimate powers within the Balkans, the Catholic Hapsburg Empire and the Muslim Ottoman Empire. This haphazard division of a region led to the region being the most ethnically and religiously mixed in the entire region, as it still is today. In the late nineteenth century, it became the focal point for Serbian irredentism. This irredentism would inevitably lead to the actions of the Serbian extremist group known as the Black Hand, who were funded by members of the Serbian military, and their assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand which led to World War I. Though Bosnia would wind up annexed by the newly formed Kingdom of Yugoslavia after the war, it would be incorporated into the Independent State of Croatia after Yugoslavia's partition by the Axis in 1941. Even after Bosnia's reintegration as a federal state of Yugoslavia after World War II, it remained fiercely contested amongst Serbs and Croats, as well as the Muslim Bosniaks who were caught between them. Like all critical issues in Balkan history, it was about to resurface as the Yugoslav Wars stepped into a new chapter of ethnic cleansing.

As the war in Croatia continued to drag on into another year, though there was now a de jure ceasefire between the Croat and Yugoslav militaries, the Croatian

resistance and successful independence declarations of Slovenia and North Macedonia encouraged the people of Bosnia to follow the same path. Their situation proved to be especially difficult, as their republic was more ethnically and religiously diverse than any other in Yugoslavia with the population being almost equally divided into thirds. There were large Croat majorities in the northern regions and along the Dalmatian border, large Serb majorities in the southern regions and on the northeast side of Bosnia, while the Bosniaks enjoyed a majority in the center of the nation around the capital of Sarajevo. This was unbearable for the more nationalistic of those living in Bosnia, as the division of the republic amongst its neighboring states seemed almost inevitable if not desirable. It certainly was not a desirable proposition to the mostly Muslim Bosniaks, and the government in Sarajevo had determined that their own declaration of independence was necessary in order to protect themselves from suffering the same fate as Croatia. The spark would come in the summer of 1992 as the tensions between Yugoslavia and Croatia continued to grow over the Serb-majority regions still contested, though it would be Bosnia's incomparable significance to the vision of a greater Serbia which would ensure their fate would be significantly worse.

The leadup to this escalation was emphasized on March 1 by a shooting at a Serbian wedding in Sarajevo, which killed the bridegroom's father and injured an Orthodox priest after the couple paraded through the streets provocatively with a Serbian flag.<sup>47</sup> This incident coincided with a referendum that was being held on the same day, as to the independence of Bosnia-Herzegovina from Yugoslavia. This referendum further

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<sup>47</sup> Robert J. Donia. *Radovan Karadzic: Architect of the Bosnian Genocide*. (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press. 2015), 162.

inflamed tensions between Serb and Bosniak citizens, which had previously been stoked by the likes of Radovan Karadzic of the Serb Democratic Party. It was this same party of Serbs who encouraged a boycott of the independence referendum, so although it had 92.7 percent support it was only voted on by 62.7 percent of the voting population.<sup>48</sup> The population of Bosnia was even more ethnically and religiously divided than Croatia due to a third of its population being Muslim Bosniaks, with the emphasis of the war being on the religious struggle between two faiths more opposed than even the Orthodox and Catholics in Croatia. Arkan's son Vojin attested to his father's professed dedication to the cross in his book "Stories About My Father", in which he recalled being told by Arkan that the only two things he feared "were his wife and the Patriarch of the Serbian Orthodox Church".<sup>49</sup> Arkan made his views on the one-third of Bosnia's population very clear when he referred to them as wild dogs who aimed to kill the Serbs of Bosnia in an interview with CNN. His actions coincided with his words when the shooting began soon after the now former Yugoslav republic's declaration of independence.<sup>50</sup>

The violence would not take long to descend upon the newest theater of what could now be more fittingly referred to as the Yugoslav Wars, as Arkan and his men began their ethnic cleansing campaign in Bosnia with a massacre of dozens of Muslims civilians in Bijeljina.<sup>51</sup> Kenan Trebinjevic, who was a child in Bosnia and the time and author of "The Bosnia List," recalled the massacre at Bijeljina and how Arkan timed the

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<sup>48</sup> Michael A. Sells. *The Bridge Betrayed: Religion and Genocide in Bosnia*. (Oakland, CA: Regents of the University of California. 1996), 6.

<sup>49</sup> Vojin Ražnatović. *Stories About My Father: An Intimate Portrayal of Europe's Most Controversial Paramilitary Commander*. (Scotts Valley, CA: CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform. 2014), 57.

<sup>50</sup> Stewart. *Hunting the Tiger*. 183.

<sup>51</sup> Stewart. *Hunting the Tiger*. 184.

event on April 1 to coincide with the last day of the Muslim holiday of Ramadan.<sup>52</sup> The event is most synonymous with the picture taken by Ron Haviv of Srđan Golubović, one of Arkan's Tigers, kicking the dying body of a Muslim woman as several other corpses line the sidewalk of the village. This massacre was the first of Arkan's crimes mentioned in his ICTY indictment from 1999, in which it was mentioned that the Muslim population was largely killed or expelled to secure Serb dominance in the area.<sup>53</sup> Arkan had seen this as his personal mission to cleanse the Serb areas in Bosnia of their Muslim populations, as is evident by a conversation he had with radical Serb politician and first Vice President of the Serbian Republic of Bosnia Bijana Plavsic. She had requested that Arkan turn over control of the town to the Yugoslav Army, though he only responded by saying he had not yet finished his "business" there to which Plavsic had no response other than congratulating his efforts.<sup>54</sup> This business would amount to the mass looting of the homes of those Bosnian Muslims who were either killed or deported, by Arkan as well as the JNA and other paramilitaries. This was all part of his established MO, which would haunt the thoughts of all those vulnerable civilians in Bosnia for the next several years.

Although one would assume that Croats and Bosniaks would unite against this threat to their livelihoods, originating from a common and long-time enemy, the Croats in Bosnia began to break away and militarize much like the Serbs had done. Soon after the establishment of an independent Bosnia-Herzegovina the Croats had formed the HVO,

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<sup>52</sup> Kenan Trebinjevic. *The Bosnia List: A Memoir of War, Exile, and Return*. (New York, NY: Penguin Books, 2014), 38.

<sup>53</sup> International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia, Raznjatovic – Initial Indictment, ICTY, 1997. 2.

<sup>54</sup> International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia, Prosecutor vs. Momcilo Krajisnik – Judgement, ICTY, 2006. 115.



also known as the Croatian Defense Council which sought to carve out a Herzeg-Bosnia republic which was to operate in the same way as the Republic of Serbian Krajina.<sup>55</sup> Although they were still fighting against Serb paramilitary groups who sought to establish a satellite state drawn on ethnic lines prior to annexation by a foreign power, the Croats now sought to do the same with an unstable Bosnia. With the Serbs carving out their second satellite state in the Serbian Republic of Bosnia, better known as Republika Srpska and led by future war criminal Radovan Karadzic, the Bosnia War had now become a three-way war in which President Tuđman and President Milosevic would seek to expand their borders at Bosnia's expense. Tuđman had even recently appointed the anti-Muslim Gojko Susak as his Minister of Defense, the man who negotiated the 1992 ceasefire in Sarajevo between Croatia and Yugoslavia. In this position, Susak and Tuđman used Croatian media to espouse Muslim stereotypes and encourage anti-Muslim sentiment.<sup>56</sup> The HVO would become infamous in Bosnia for their crimes against Muslim citizens largely mirroring those of Arkan and his fellow Serb paramilitary comrades, crimes which Arkan would soon resume in yet another rural and unassuming city under siege.

This attack came upon the border city of Zvornik which fell under the territorial claim of Republika Srpska, a city which soon served the same purpose as Vukovar did a year prior: a chilling preview of what barbarism was to come. Arkan fell upon the city on April 5 alongside other paramilitary groups such as the Yellow Wasps and Red Berets, though his Tigers comprised the bulk of Serbian personnel. Arkan's Tigers proceeded to

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<sup>55</sup> Tanner. *Croatia: A Nation Forged in War*. 286.

<sup>56</sup> Sells. *The Bridge Betrayed: Religion and Genocide in Bosnia*. 103.

divide Zvornik along ethnic lines by erecting barricades throughout the municipality, in preparation for the impending attack and ethnic cleansing operations against Zvornik's Muslim Bosniaks.<sup>57</sup> This attack came less than a week later when the town was easily captured and occupied by Arkan and his men, the Serbian flag was hoisted atop the town's mosque in a show of contempt for the Muslim population.<sup>58</sup> While the initial carnage of the town's occupation paled in comparison to the ethnic cleansing which would soon follow, there were twenty non-Serb civilian deaths during Arkan's attack on the town.<sup>59</sup> Arkan's Tigers immediately began to loot the homes in Zvornik while they loaded the dozens of corpses onto trucks, many of them women and children, and many surviving Muslims fled to nearby towns which shortly after suffered the same fate.<sup>60</sup> Those who stayed were at the mercy of increasingly aggressive bandits, who began the same process which had been carried out in Vukovar.

While the massacre in Zvornik is not nearly as publicized as that of Vukovar, likely due to how commonplace large-scale massacres would become in Bosnia, its brutality was matched and exceeded. This massacre was prefaced by days of aggressive propaganda from the media in Belgrade, which insinuated there was a plot in Zvornik by the Muslims to slaughter the entire Serbian population.<sup>61</sup> This attempted to give justification for the occupation of the city and the harsh treatment of its people as being

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<sup>57</sup> International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia, Prosecutor vs. Momcilo Krajisnik – Judgement, ICTY, 2006. 136.

<sup>58</sup> International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia, Prosecutor vs. Momcilo Krajisnik – Judgement, ICTY, 2006. 137.

<sup>59</sup> International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia, Prosecutor vs. Jovica Stanisic & Franko Simatovic – Judgement, ICTY, 2021. 81.

<sup>60</sup> International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia, Prosecutor vs. Momcilo Krajisnik – Judgement, ICTY, 2006. 137

<sup>61</sup> Sells. *The Bridge Betrayed: Religion and Genocide in Bosnia*. 66.

merely an act of self-defense, to protect the ethnic Serbs from the privations of an unruly civilian population which Arkan had previously described as wild dogs. Arkan's Tigers and their fellow paramilitary comrades carried out brutal "reprisals" against these inhabitants throughout May and June that year, the most egregious case being the murder of 190 Muslims on June 5. According to an eyewitness, there were three buses each filled with sixty Muslim civilians. They were each taken to a nearby slaughterhouse, where they were lined up against the wall and shot by firing squad of Tigers and Territorial Defense forces.<sup>62</sup> Approximately 507 Muslims were killed in this manner from April to June of 1992 in Zvornik and, according to another witness, even those who survived were left wishing they were dead due to what they had seen.<sup>63</sup> The worst was still yet to come in the aim to make a long-diverse region homogenous in Serbia's favor, as would be the case for what remains one of Bosnia's most controversial provinces.

The Bosnian municipality of Brcko is one of the most ethnically divided regions in the nation today, though its firm majority of ethnic Bosniaks in the early nineties shows the effect of Serbia's ethnic cleansing campaign. This is the city in which Kenan Trebinjevic lived as a child upon the arrival of Arkan and the JNA, a nightmare which began with seeing his lifelong friend show up to his door with an AK-47 to tell his mother "you have one hour to leave or be killed!"<sup>64</sup> The killing was not the only horror in Arkan's occupation of Brcko, as his men helped to imprison and abuse 200 Muslims and Croats in Kolobara Mosque throughout that May.<sup>65</sup> Religious leaders were especially

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<sup>62</sup> International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia, Prosecutor vs. Momcilo Krajisnik – Judgement, ICTY, 2006. 140.

<sup>63</sup> Stewart. *Hunting the Tiger*. 185.

<sup>64</sup> Trebinjevic. *The Bosnia List*. 7.

<sup>65</sup> International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia, Prosecutor vs. Momcilo

targeted in these attacks as the Muslims of Brcko were either detained in the city or sent to the Luka concentration camp, with Trebinjevic even saluting a member of Arkan's Tigers in an attempt to pretend he was a Serb and save himself.<sup>66</sup> Even those who attempted to escape the carnage by fleeing were not safe, as a bridge across the Sava River between Croatia and Brcko was previously blown up during peak traffic on April 30<sup>th</sup>.<sup>67</sup> While it is unknown whether or not Arkan's Tigers were responsible for this explosion which killed 100 people, he and his paramilitary were active in the area at the time and conducting similarly criminal business. The corpses in Bosnia have piled up in the hundreds after the raid of Arkan's Tigers, all in service to the plan which was being executed all throughout the former Yugoslavia.

The RAM Plan for the ethnic cleansing of Bosnia was also known as the Brana Plan as well as Rampart-91, since the plan was arranged in 1991, and was the blueprint for Arkan's current conduct in Bosnia. While this plan was a combined effort of men such as Radovan Karadzic and Ratko Mladic, a Bosnian-Serb military commander, it was decided by Karadzic and Milosevic that Arkan and his militia would direct the ethnic cleansing effort of the plan.<sup>68</sup> The plan called for the eradication of Muslim communities in Bosnia, especially in the areas where Orthodox Serbs were the minority, though mass murder was not the only way in which this was to be achieved. The goal of altering the religious and ethnic identity of Bosnia was also to be achieved through mass rape and

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Krajisnik – Judgement, ICTY, 2006. 125.

<sup>66</sup> Trebinjevic. *The Bosnia List*. 45.

<sup>67</sup> International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia, Prosecutor vs. Momcilo Krajisnik – Judgement, ICTY, 2006. 123.

<sup>68</sup> Tim Judah. *The Serbs: History, Myth, and the Destruction of Yugoslavia*. (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2000), 170.

desecration of holy sites, especially at the expense of women and children. This genocidal plan was intended to strike fear in the population and ensure that those who were not killed were demoralized enough to lose their will and flee.<sup>69</sup> There were concentration camps in place for those who either chose to stay or were unable to flee, to break their spirits even further and force upon the Bosniaks and Croats the idea that the Serbs were their masters. One particularly infamous concentration camp was Omarska in the northern region of Republika Srpska, where at least 700 prisoners were beaten or starved to death by JNA and paramilitary guards in the disease-ridden makeshift prison.<sup>70</sup> Such policies had not been implemented against ethnic groups in the region since the days of the Ustaše, and the chaotic early days of the Army of Bosnia-Herzegovina (ABiH) left most Bosnian Muslims without any protections from the privations of the Yugoslav state.

Due to their common occurrence in the context of genocide throughout the twentieth century, from the Boer War to Yugoslavia, it is important to momentarily discuss the Omarska concentration camp. Operational for less than 3 months in 1992, for the purpose of detaining Bosnian Muslims and Croats, the camp's deplorable conditions and poorly disciplined guards led to a 9% mortality rate. These conditions were brought to light in a trial by the ICTY against former camp guards Miroslav Kvočka, Mlado Radic, Zoran Zigic, and Dragoljub Prcać. Kvočka is the most intriguing case as he was the deputy commander of the camp guards, and therefore was privy of as well as responsible for the unsanitary and abusive conditions in the camp. Kvočka presided over

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<sup>69</sup> Beverly Allen. *Rape Warfare: The Hidden Genocide of Bosnia-Herzegovina and Croatia*. (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1996), 57.

<sup>70</sup> International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia, Prosecutor vs. Momčilo Krajišnik – Judgement, ICTY, 2006. 186.

his position in the camp amongst daily beatings, murders, acts of torture and unsanitary confinement that he did not make sufficient effort to prevent despite having the knowledge and power to do so.<sup>71</sup> Though Kvočka attempted to argue that he was in objection to the crimes being committed at Omarska, witness testimony and records of his employment at the camp indicate that he participated in these crimes both knowingly and willingly until his forcible removal after 2 ½ weeks.<sup>72</sup> The conditions for this removal are an indication of the Bosnian-Serb mentality at the time, as despite his subservience to the genocidal atrocities he was deemed unfit for the job due to his not being a member of the SDS and having a Muslim brother-in-law.<sup>73</sup> Though Omarska closed after less than three months of operation, in response to the presence of foreign journalists, the prisoners were merely transited to other prisons.

There were some who attempted to stand against the planned eradication of Muslims and Croats from Bosnia, though they would often meet with the same end as those who had been dealt with by the UDBA. This was the fate which befell Vladimir Srebrov, a prominent member of the Serb Democratic Party (SDS) alongside its leader Radovan Karadzic, who read the RAM plan and expressed his disapproval.<sup>74</sup> Srebrov believed in a more pragmatic approach which would allow the Serb ethnonationalists to secure their autonomy without committing genocide, and the immoral nature of the RAM Plan compelled him to speak out against his own party. He revealed that the plan called

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<sup>71</sup> International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia, Prosecutor vs. Kvočka, Mlado Radic, Zoran Zigic, Dragoljub Prcać – In the Appeals Chamber, ICTY, 2005, 68.

<sup>72</sup> International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia, Prosecutor vs. Kvočka, Mlado Radic, Zoran Zigic, Dragoljub Prcać – In the Appeals Chamber, ICTY, 2005, 74.

<sup>73</sup> International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia, Prosecutor vs. Kvočka, Mlado Radic, Zoran Zigic, Dragoljub Prcać – In the Appeals Chamber, ICTY, 2005, 76.

<sup>74</sup> Sells. *The Bridge Betrayed: Religion and Genocide in Bosnia*. 15.

for half of all Muslim Bosniaks to be exterminated, with the remaining half either converted to Orthodox Christianity or forced to flee for other Muslim states in a bid to split Bosnia ironically with Croatia.<sup>75</sup> Ironic since the Serbs were still actively fighting the Croats through the efforts of Arkan's Tigers and the territorial defense forces under the RSK, and for President Tuđman this would mean betraying a circumstantial ally as he had already made efforts to arm Bosnian Croats for this purpose. For Srebrov this opposition would also lead to a betrayal from his own allies, as he was imprisoned on false charges and tortured for his dissension in 1992.<sup>76</sup> Not even a founding member of the governing party and close associate of the president of Republika Srpska could put a stop to this plan which had been more than a decade in the making, one which those such as Arkan were more than pleased to carry out with the utmost enthusiasm and brutality.

While the Bosnian people had not shown any signs of capitulation or the surrender of their aspirations to national sovereignty, the goals of the Serbian occupiers to break their enemy's spirit were achieving some level of individual success. Kenan Trebinčević recalls one such case of this psychological and criminal warfare, in which the Serbs ran "rape camps" with the intent of impregnating Bosnian women with Serb children and humiliating the Bosnian men.<sup>77</sup> Far from rape just being an isolated incident committed by undisciplined and rowdy soldiers, it was a tool of psychological warfare and genocide being used just as systematically and strategically as the firing squad. Trebinčević recalls how his father's roommate was forced to watch a group of guards

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<sup>75</sup> Dale C. Tatum. *Genocide at the Dawn of the Twenty-First Century: Rwanda, Bosnia, Kosovo, and Darfur*. (London, UK: Palgrave MacMillan, 2010), 76.

<sup>76</sup> Sells. *The Bridge Betrayed: Religion and Genocide in Bosnia*. 16.

<sup>77</sup> Trebinčević. *The Bosnia List*. 152.

gang-rape his wife in order to inflict maximum psychological trauma on both of them, this occurred inside the Luka concentration camp where his father was imprisoned and randomly beaten by guards.<sup>78</sup> There was also the destruction of mosques as a non-lethal way of breaking the spirit of Muslim Bosniaks, as the destruction of such holy sites is akin to the eradication of one's very community and spiritual connection to the lord. Trebinčević notes that his windows were shattered from the shock waves of Brčko's three mosques being demolished by Serbian explosives, and that his heart cried when he overheard his Serbian neighbors taunting that a parking lot would be built upon the wreckage.<sup>79</sup> It was almost symbolic that the mosques were rebuilt upon his return to Bosnia nineteen years later, as that which was meant to bring about a mass exodus instead fostered a great return when the destruction was reversed.

These individual acts of barbarity against the local population shaped the lives and perceptions of those in the Balkans for decades to come, though the Bosnian War was a series of long and drawn-out atrocities that spanned throughout the early nineties. The events in Brčko is one example of this, as it is still a disputed region between Republika Srpska and the Federation of Bosnia-Herzegovina, though there were two other locations which are especially pertinent to Arkan. The first of which was a brutal siege which encircled the Bosnian capital of Sarajevo, both with paramilitary units as well as soldiers belonging to the Bosnian Serb armies under General Ratko Mladic. Mladic had played a key role in establishing and carrying out the infamous RAM Plan in Bosnia, so his presence outside of the capital city was said by Dale Tatum to be a "tip-off" to the

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<sup>78</sup> Trebinčević. *The Bosnia List*. 94.

<sup>79</sup> Trebinčević. *The Bosnia List*. 95.



impending slaughter of civilians.<sup>80</sup> The second was not in a city which was as politically or economically significant as Sarajevo, but one which would become significant in the legacy of the war as Serb forces occupied the Northern city of Sanski Most. These Serb soldiers called upon Arkan's Tigers to secure and suppress the city's population once the threat of the ABiH loomed on the horizon in 1995, leading to one of Arkan's most shocking atrocities. Each of these examples of brutal siege warfare and genocidal occupation would come under intense questioning at the post-war trials in the Hague, with Arkan's name always appearing alongside a body count.

While Arkan's Tigers were not present in the streets of Sarajevo's city center, or partaking in the infamous sniping campaign which earned Mladic a life sentence, they were heavily active in the surrounding municipalities. Within the Sarajevo Canton where the capital city lies there are nine municipalities, Arkan's Tigers are known to have been active in three of them throughout 1992. Arkan's Tigers arrived in the municipality of Ilidza soon after the events in Bijeljina alongside the Chetniks, where they set about imprisoning the municipality's Croats and Muslims in detention centers where prisoners received harsh interrogations.<sup>81</sup> One witness even described how he was forced by Serbian police to aid in looting the homes of Muslims, homes which would soon be turned over to Serbian soldiers fighting in the region.<sup>82</sup> Many of the Muslims who had not been detained or killed quickly fled the area, out of fear and due to the ongoing repression as the Bosnian capital became encircled. Word of Serbian atrocities reaching

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<sup>80</sup> Tatum. *Genocide at the Dawn of the Twenty-First Century: Rwanda, Bosnia, Kosovo, and Darfur*. 96.

<sup>81</sup> International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia, Prosecutor vs. Momcilo Krajisnik – Judgement, ICTY, 2006. 207.

<sup>82</sup> International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia, Prosecutor vs. Momcilo Krajisnik – Judgement, ICTY, 2006. 208-209.

closer to the capital city in a newly independent Bosnia further inflamed already intense ethnic hatreds amongst the Bosnian Muslims and Bosnian Serbs, leading to a brutal retaliation in the besieged city. This retaliation only intensified Arkan's ethnonationalist hatred.

Immediately after Arkan's advances around the Sarajevo Canton, in an attempt to encircle and bleed out the capital city, a Bosnian gangster by the name of Musan Topalovic set about his own ethnic cleansing campaign. He was the commander of Bosnia's 10<sup>th</sup> Mountain Brigade and, over the next year, slaughtered anywhere from 150 to 200 ethnic Serbs in Sarajevo before tossing their bodies into the Kazani Pit.<sup>83</sup> It was an act of brutality that was not dissimilar to Arkan's modus operandi, and it provided those such as Arkan and Karadzic with an opportunity to point to the Bosnians as being the "wild dogs" Arkan said they were. The behavior of the Bosnian government in the face of ethnic cleansing would however prove to be quite dissimilar to that of the Serbs, as they moved to arrest Topalovic for his crimes in October 1993. He was killed in the altercation, after exchanging fire with Bosnian police.<sup>84</sup> Far from rewarding their war criminals with medals and folk hero status, the Bosnian government generally respected the laws and customs of war even in their most desperate moments. It was also indicated by Milosevic that the Muslim leadership in Bosnia were not fond of Topalovic, a rejection of Arkan's sweeping condemnation of the Muslims.<sup>85</sup> Regardless of whether or not Arkan could establish moral equivalence between his own organization and that

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<sup>83</sup> International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia, Prosecutor vs Slobodan Milosevic – 5 November 2003. 28658.

<sup>84</sup> Sells. *The Bridge Betrayed: Religion and Genocide in Bosnia*. 199.

<sup>85</sup> International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia, Prosecutor vs Slobodan Milosevic – 5 November 2003. 28659.

which he sought to destroy, he continued his destructive campaign across the Bosnian heartland.

Arkan's next assignment in the area around Sarajevo was a request from the JNA to send a platoon of his men to the municipality of Ilijas, where he would implement his usual terror tactics to suppress the local population. This largely took place in the village of Ljsevo, where Arkan's men along with Serb police began disarming the Muslim population causing 60-80 percent of them to flee in fear.<sup>86</sup> Those who were left were subjected to a hail of artillery fire, which targeted civilian homes. This artillery bombardment took place on two separate occasions, and resulted in the deaths of 22 Muslim civilians throughout June 1992.<sup>87</sup> The destruction was not limited to the loss of civilian life, as a Catholic cathedral and three mosques were all destroyed by Serbian forces within the same time span. The destruction in Ilijas was so tremendous and the mass exodus caused by Arkan and the JNA's actions was so severe, a witness at the ICTY trials testified that the area was 100 percent Serb and was an area of "effective ethnic cleansing by the Serbs" when he arrived there later in the year.<sup>88</sup> Those Muslims who remained in the municipality who were not killed remained detained in one of twelve detention centers, in conditions which were little better than those of Luka.<sup>89</sup> Those who fled did so to the North within the Sarajevo canton, only sparing themselves the fate of being one of Arkan's victims temporarily.

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<sup>86</sup> International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia, Prosecutor vs. Momcilo Krajisnik – Judgement, ICTY, 2006. 210.

<sup>87</sup> International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia, Prosecutor vs. Momcilo Krajisnik – Judgement, ICTY, 2006. 211.

<sup>88</sup> International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia, Prosecutor vs Slobodan Milosevic – 5 November 2003. 28706.

<sup>89</sup> Donia. *Radovan Karadzic: Architect of the Bosnian Genocide*. 164.

The last of Sarajevo's three municipalities to experience the brutality of Arkan's Tigers was the majority Muslim municipality of Novi Grad, where the Tigers met up with the White Eagles in May 1992 after Muslims in the area refused to leave their homes. The Muslims had attempted to send their elderly as well as women and children to another settlement away from the front line, but they were stopped by Serbian infantry and tanks who announced over a megaphone "surrender or we kill your children".<sup>90</sup> This was within the town of Ahatovici inside Novi Grad, a town which managed to repel Serbian attacks for a time, until the infantry were reinforced by armored units and the plight of the defenders became hopeless. The casualties were not substantial in the context of the war and evidence suggests that those killed in the fighting were active combatants, though the events which followed this battle are among the most blatantly criminal in Arkan's career. According to witness testimony at the Hague in 2006, fifty of the survivors from the attack were loaded onto a bus before Serb troops opened fire with automatic rifles and hand grenades killing forty-seven.<sup>91</sup> The remaining Muslim survivors were treated harshly by their occupiers, many were beaten and the vast majority suffered malnutrition and dehydration while being detained in a nearby reservoir and called "balijas" (slang word for Muslims). A total of 13,000 Muslims were forcibly expelled from Novi Grad which was almost one-fifth of the municipality's Muslim population, while 3,400 Serbs were moved into the municipality.<sup>92</sup> The once-firm Muslim

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<sup>90</sup> International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia, Prosecutor vs. Momcilo Krajisnik – Judgement, ICTY, 2006. 212.

<sup>91</sup> International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia, Prosecutor vs. Momcilo Krajisnik – Judgement, ICTY, 2006. 213.

<sup>92</sup> International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia, Prosecutor vs. Momcilo Krajisnik – Judgement, ICTY, 2006. 214.

majority was now almost evenly divided between Muslims and Serbs with the gap closing quicker and quicker, this was the RAM Plan in action.

The plan would continue in the center of the Bosnian capital of Sarajevo which endured a grueling siege throughout the duration of the war, with Republika Srpska troops and paramilitary units taking shots at Bosnian civilians with sniper rifles. With the siege being led by Bosnian-Serb general Ratko Mladic at the behest of President Radovan Karadzic, it was longer than the World War II Siege of Leningrad by a year and a half (3 years, 10 months, 3 weeks, 3 days) though admittedly not nearly as deadly. The Serbs would not fight the besieged and battered Bosnian forces on their own however, as the HVO sought to capitalize on the Serbian attack of the Bosnian capital by launching their own on the Herzegovinian capital of Mostar in June 1993. The Croats and Bosniaks had fought side-by-side in the major city for the first year of the war against their common Serbian enemy, though their alliance quickly turned to suspicion and hatred as the struggle for ethnic majority status and irredentism quickly eroded their partnership.<sup>93</sup> Despite still being occupied with their own war against the RSK in Croatia, not to mention Arkan's headquarters in Erdut, the Croats made themselves indirect allies of Arkan by carrying out their own ethnic and religious cleansing in Mostar.<sup>94</sup> The conduct between former allies would not be honorable in the progressively deteriorating battleground that was Bosnia as, despite the many remarkably horrific scenes of ethnic cleansing Bosnia offered, Trebinjevic chose Mostar to bear the title "Stalingrad of

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<sup>93</sup> Cencich. *The Devil's Garden: A War Crimes Investigator's Story*. 19.

<sup>94</sup> Magaš, Zanic. *The War in Croatia and Bosnia-Herzegovina 1991-1995*. 101.

Bosnia.”<sup>95</sup> While Arkan was not directly involved in this battle, its length and brutality proved an invaluable boon to his war effort.

The Siege of Mostar saw much of the same cultural destruction as the likes of Brcko, with religious buildings and some of the city’s most priceless historical landmarks not spared the devastation of total war. The city suffered the destruction of ten mosques which were integral to the Muslim population which had existed since the Ottoman Era, along with the centuries-old Stari Most Bridge which was rebuilt after the war.<sup>96</sup> The Bosnians still managed to put up fierce resistance against their mounting list of enemies however, both due to their motivation of self-preservation and due to the continued disagreements between Croatian President Tuđman and Serbian President Milosevic over lines of division. Tuđman and Milosevic could agree in principle to a division of Bosnia especially on ethnic majority lines, though these lines could never be agreed upon as the Croat HVO was taking aggressive actions such as forced expulsion to alter the ethnic demography of key regions just as the Serbs were.<sup>97</sup> The situation quickly attracted the attention of the diplomatic community as Bosnia and Croatia were both recognized as independent states in the UN, a peace agreement would have to be reached between both sides if either one was to outlast the boundless genocidal intent of Belgrade. Initially this diplomatic attention was relegated to recognitions of independence, most notably by the US and Germany in April 1992, though in October the UN Security Council passed Resolution 781 which imposed a military no-fly zone over Bosnia. While Bosnians and Serbs continued to fight with and against the Croats from the Republika Srpska claimed

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<sup>95</sup> Trebinjevic. *The Bosnia List*. 5.

<sup>96</sup> Sells. *The Bridge Betrayed: Religion and Genocide in Bosnia*. 112.

<sup>97</sup> Cencich. *The Devil’s Garden: A War Crimes Investigator’s Story*. 22.

lands down to Herzegovina and the Bosnian capital, Arkan would seek a new and unfamiliar battlefield in a strange power grab: politics.

Arkan responded to the 1993 elections to the Serbian National Assembly by establishing his own political party, the Party of Serbian Unity, which stood for his professed virtues of Serbian ultranationalism and cultural conservatism.<sup>98</sup> He was attempting to run for all 250 seats in the National Assembly, which would transform Serbia into a one-party warlord state in the best case scenario for Arkan. Fortunately for all others who would suffer from this outcome, his popularity would not translate into political success. His party did not win a single seat in the National Assembly, as he only received 41,362 votes compared to the ruling Socialist Party's 1,576,287.<sup>99</sup> His son would write that his father's fame stemmed from his actions in war and not from any natural ability to charm voters, as he was deemed to be a poor orator with no experience in the back-stabbing and lying game of politics. He laments that his father took part in a televised debate where his opponent stated that Arkan had worn more socks on his head than on his feet, referencing his past as a bank robber, and that his father "had no ample reply except to expose his charismatic smile and hope for the live show to come to a speedy conclusion."<sup>100</sup> His party was largely an afterthought, due to the largely centralized nature of Serbian politics under Milosevic. Serbian ultranationalism and support for the war was widespread across the political scene, so there was no need for yet another ultranationalist war hawk party. Despite his fierce reputation in leading men into battle, whether against soldiers or civilians in possession of valuable loot, Arkan

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<sup>98</sup> Stewart. *Hunting the Tiger*. 217.

<sup>99</sup> Stewart. *Hunting the Tiger*. 219.

<sup>100</sup> Ražnatović. *Stories About My Father*. 133.

would refer to politics as the only battle he was never able to win.<sup>101</sup> The end of 1993 was largely the end of Arkan's political ambitions, though it was a new beginning for the war in Bosnia as a political agreement shifted the balance against the Serbs drastically.

The international community had been closely monitoring the situation in Bosnia as the same ethnic cleansing which gained ire in Vukovar was now taking place around Sarajevo, and the addition of Croatia meant that foreign arbitration from the United States would be necessary. This would take place in Washington D.C. in March 1994, when President Franjo Tuđman of Croatia and President Alija Izetbegović of Bosnia met to discuss a ceasefire and peace agreement. There was a great deal of hesitation in the West as to whether or not intervention was worth the risk, with US Secretary of State Warren Christopher even referring to Bosnia as an “unsolvable problem from hell” and a “tribal feud.”<sup>102</sup> It was and would continue to be the desire of President Clinton however to establish and maintain peace in the Balkans through diplomacy, with military intervention as an undesirable, but entirely potential last resort. Tuđman and Izetbegović were each in positions of strength and weakness upon their negotiations in Washington, a common enemy being the only commonality between them. Tuđman's armies were causing a great deal of stress on the Bosnians without scoring any major military victories, and the ABiH was holding back the Croats from major successes while being unable to mount a substantial counterattack to drive the invaders out. Like almost all stalemates this would result in a compromise, one which would ensure the Croats and Bosnians would see each other through the remainder of the nineties as allies.

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<sup>101</sup> Ražnatović. *Stories About My Father*. 134.

<sup>102</sup> Magaš, Zanic. *The War in Croatia and Bosnia-Herzegovina 1991–1995*. 168.



The Washington Agreement sought to establish a solution for the issue of ethnic representation in a diverse region, thus Bosnia would look to the same solution as its predecessor state: federalization. Much like Tito had established Yugoslavia as a federation of republics after his victory in World War II, in order to placate ethnic nationalism, Bosnia and Croatia agreed to establish the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina with cantons for Bosniak and Croat-majority regions.<sup>103</sup> It also brought an end to the Herzeg-Bosna Croat-majority breakaway state and its leadership which was forced into retirement, with armed Croats in Bosnia either standing down or being integrated into the Croat Army.<sup>104</sup> This short yet brutal war between Croatia and Bosnia was costly to both sides in terms of lives and time, as Arkan and the Republika Srpska militias were allowed to continue their ethnic cleansing operations from Erdut to the outskirts of Sarajevo while former allies killed one another. The combined forces of Croatia and Bosnia now possessed the military capability to mount successful offensives against the Serbs, though a UN peacekeeping force which had been in the region since 1992 attempted to mitigate the conflict as much as possible. The UN was already made well-aware of the excesses and atrocities committed by the Tigers, such as the imprisonment of 5,000 Bosnian Muslims on a pig farm where Orthodox crosses were carved into their foreheads.<sup>105</sup> The UN were intent on establishing so-called “safe zones” where Muslim Bosniaks and Catholic Croats could be protected from these excesses where their respective nations could not protect them; this would prove to be naïve.

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<sup>103</sup> Tatum. *Genocide at the Dawn of the Twenty-First Century: Rwanda, Bosnia, Kosovo, and Darfur*. 95.

<sup>104</sup> Tanner. *Croatia: A Nation Forged in War*. 292.

<sup>105</sup> Stewart. *Hunting the Tiger*. 186.

Serbs such as Arkan were not clever about hiding their disdain for the UN peacekeepers in blue helmets stationed throughout Bosnia, their statements later being used in the Hague to prove the premeditated and calculated nature of the crimes which they would come to deny. General Ratko Mladic, one of the key architects of the genocidal RAM Plan, made some disdainful remarks when addressing a media camera crew on the topic of Srebrenica in August 1994. Srebrenica was designated as a “safe zone” by the UN peacekeepers to which Mladic remarked “If the Americans and English, the Ukrainians and Canadians in Srebrenica, in the meantime it's the Dutch, would not protect them, they would have disappeared from this area long ago.”<sup>106</sup> This remark about making the Bosnian Muslims in Srebrenica “disappear” was chilling in the moment due to what had previously been done in Sarajevo and Brcko, though hindsight would consider it to be grim foreshadowing for the worst single crime of the Yugoslav Wars. The Bosnian Serbs violently clashed with UN peacekeepers in Tuzla in April 1994 and Gradacac in October 1994, both were decisive UN victories and Tuzla was ironically declared to be a designated “safe zone”.<sup>107</sup> The UN unfortunately did not place their combined forces into Yugoslavia to force an end to the conflict, but rather to mitigate the consequences of war and this was their greatest mistake. The Serbs had nothing but contempt for the UN’s mission and paid no mind to their safe zone designations, with Srebrenica being the crowning example.

The massacre at Srebrenica was the most brutal of the war, a wholesale slaughter of thousands, which elicited feelings of disgust in observers and rage in the nation’s

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<sup>106</sup> International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia, Prosecutor vs. Ratko Mladic – Trial Chamber Judgement, ICTY, 2017. 2266.

<sup>107</sup> Sells. *The Bridge Betrayed: Religion and Genocide in Bosnia*. 102.

defenders. It is no surprise that a notorious paramilitary group known as the Scorpions was heavily involved in the massacre, after they and the Army of Republika Srpska descended on the poorly-defended town under UN-Dutch control in July 1995.<sup>108</sup> Serb forces under Mladic spent the next two weeks shipping busloads of civilians to mass graves where they were to be shot by firing squad, in a plan which was conceived and ordered by Milosevic's Bosnian puppet Radovan Karadzic.<sup>109</sup> Mladic used similar rhetoric to Arkan, as he attempted to put a pseudo-historical spin on the following events. Mladic referred to the planned massacre of thousands of Muslims to his officers as "revenge on the Turks", in reference to the Muslim Ottoman Empire.<sup>110</sup> His army and the Scorpions were taking their "revenge" on hundreds of unarmed civilians. The Bosnian Serb Army and the Scorpions raped and tortured many of these civilians, and killed 8,372.<sup>111</sup> The death toll of this massacre would amount to about 8 percent of all deaths in the four year Bosnia War, as an estimated 100,000 civilians and soldiers were killed throughout the conflict which includes Serbs and Croats as well as Bosnians. While Arkan's Tigers were not involved in the massacre at Srebrenica, not due to any protests to the murder of civilians, the Tigers committed some of their most shocking atrocities within the following months upon the request of the Army of Republika Srpska.

Before Arkan had a chance to head North in a desperate defense of Belgrade's Bosnian puppet army, a severe blow was struck against their Croatian satellite which had been fighting in Krajina and Slavonia since 1991. The Croats and Bosnians launched

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<sup>108</sup> Tatum. *Genocide at the Dawn of the Twenty-First Century: Rwanda, Bosnia, Kosovo, and Darfur*. 105.

<sup>109</sup> Donia. *Radovan Karadzic: Architect of the Bosnian Genocide*. 265.

<sup>110</sup> Bjelajac. *The War in Croatia, 1991 – 1995*. 236.

<sup>111</sup> Sells. *The Bridge Betrayed: Religion and Genocide in Bosnia*. 217.

Operation Storm in August 1995, with the aim of recapturing vast swathes of territory from the RSK. They obliterated the RSK after killing hundreds of troops and taking thousands more as prisoners, a quick and decisive operation shattering Serbian morale.<sup>112</sup> Any hopes of Milosevic maintaining control over Croatia in a rump Yugoslavia were decisively crushed, with the only territory still under Serb control being a strip of land in Slavonia which included Arkan's headquarters in Erdut.<sup>113</sup> The counteroffensive was able to capture over 4,000 square miles of territory in just three days which caused a massive flight of panic amongst the Serb soldiers and civilians, with hundreds of thousands fleeing their homes into the regions of Northern Bosnia still controlled by the Army of Republika Srpska.<sup>114</sup> It is arguable whether or not this mass exodus resembles the same ethnic cleansing carried out by Serb armies in non-Serb regions, though the evidence of excesses committed by Croats and Bosnians do not compare to those of Serbs in Srebrenica and Vukovar. Arkan was now left entirely with a Bosnian front to contend with as, the quasi-war with Croatia was de facto over. He soon discovered that an outside force had seen enough of Serbian excesses in this theater, and had decided to act.

NATO had been observing the violence in Croatia and Bosnia for the past four years with a clear preference towards the separatist republics, though up until this point their support had only amounted to diplomatic recognition and peacekeeping forces. After thirty-eight civilians were killed by a Serbian artillery shell in besieged Sarajevo, the United States under Bill Clinton decided they had seen enough.<sup>115</sup> The United States

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<sup>112</sup> Tanner. *Croatia: A Nation Forged in War*. 297.

<sup>113</sup> Magaš, Zanic. *The War in Croatia and Bosnia-Herzegovina 1991–1995*. 374.

<sup>114</sup> Stewart. *Hunting the Tiger*. 231.

<sup>115</sup> Stewart. *Hunting the Tiger*. 232.

along with France and the UK launched Operation Deliberate Force in September 1995, a two-week bombing campaign on Serb positions in Bosnia to show that the failure of “peacekeeping” was recognized.<sup>116</sup> Operation Deliberate Force was a show of defiance to Milosevic’s terror campaign, a message that force will now be met with greater force until this conflict is brought to an end. Arkan was undoubtedly bitter about this outside interference, especially against an enemy he had no hope of fighting, though in a characteristic display of typical dictators he showed the most bitterness towards his own people. According to a dossier compiled by the Humanitarian Law Center, around 5,000 refugees from the RSK were forcibly mobilized into Arkan’s Tigers.<sup>117</sup> He showed the most contempt towards them for retreating rather than fighting to the death, referring to them as “drunkards” and “cowards” who were to blame for the loss of the RSK. He would not have long to sulk about this lost opportunity for Serbian expansionism, as Bosnia still remained the longest aspiration of Serb irredentists and he had the bolstered numbers to see their last satellite republic salvaged.

In September 1995 the village of Sanski Most was in danger of being captured by the ABiH and the Bosnian-Serb army there feared impending chaos, they requested Arkan’s Tigers to make for the settlement and “restore order” in the only way Arkan knew how. Sanski Most had a majority Muslim population according to the pre-war 1991 census, with forty-seven percent Muslims and forty-two percent Serbs, though by 1995 the Muslims who had not been exiled were subject to three years of harsh authoritarian

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<sup>116</sup> Magaš, Zanic. *The War in Croatia and Bosnia-Herzegovina 1991–1995*. 221.

<sup>117</sup> Jovana Kolaric. *Dossier: Forced Mobilization of Refugees*. (Belgrade, Serbia: Humanitarian Law Center, 1995), 36.

rule by the Serb occupiers.<sup>118</sup> This population loss of Bosnian Muslims as well as Croats would reverse itself however, as the sudden and decisive victories of the Bosnian-Croat alliance gave the former inhabitants the confidence to return which further demoralized the Serb garrisons.<sup>119</sup> While Arkan was nominally there to maintain order and check the advance of the ABiH, which was much more battle-hardened and larger than in 1992 and was bolstered by the victorious Croats, his actual purpose was to continue the RAM Plan wherever Serbs still maintained control. Just like Arkan's Tigers had their nerve center for the RSK in Erdut, he also established a headquarters for his troops in the Hotel Sanus with the manager's office as his own office and the boiler room as his prison. Though unlike Erdut, which was ethnically cleansed in advance in order to serve as a training camp for the Tigers, Hotel Sanus was to be Arkan's own personal Omarska. Arkan had been left bitter by the recent defeat of the RSK and his rhetoric towards his forced conscripts made this clear, he would no longer be content with allowing the Muslims to either leave or live in fear.

The occupation of Sanski Most by Arkan's Tigers is one of the most well-documented events in the history of Arkan and his organization, particularly the mistreatment of prisoners in Hotel Sanus. The prisoners consisted of mostly male Bosnian Muslims, who were kept in a boiler room which was about the size of an average bathroom approximately fifty-four square feet. They were packed in thirty to thirty five at a time and were given inadequate food and water for days in a row, to break their

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<sup>118</sup> International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia, Raznjatovic – Initial Indictment, ICTY, 1997. 2.

<sup>119</sup> Stewart. *Hunting the Tiger*. 235.

spirits.<sup>120</sup> Their treatment was only worsened by the frequent beatings that prisoners would receive at the hands of Arkan's Tigers as they took out their aggressions for recent setbacks, with at least two prisoners even being beaten to death throughout September.<sup>121</sup> The Serbs in the surrounding area were conscripted and encouraged to join in on the rape and pillaging of Sanski Most, such as in the case of Razia Beharemovic who recalled being blindfolded and beaten by her Serbian neighbor who then stole her jewelry and money.<sup>122</sup> One of the only female prisoners of Arkan's Hotel Sanus headquarters was raped by one of Arkan's men, on a bus just in front of the hotel.<sup>123</sup> Arkan had turned Sanski Most into his own personal warlord domain with violence and fear being the law of the land, though he was not known for keeping his activities limited to his immediate surroundings. Just as he had used Erdut as a station from which to raid Tenja and Vukovar, the areas just outside of Sanski Most now suffered the same terror.

Arkan was on a campaign of ethnic cleansing for Milosevic and Karadzic which was as or more brutal than any in his past four years, as could be seen from the perspective of a man known as witness RFJ-073. He was a Bosnian Muslim taken from Hotel Sanus by Arkan's Tigers in a truck with eleven other prisoners to Tmova, he was the only survivor of the massacre which befell those twelve other men. According to his testimony they were each taken two at a time into a half-enclosed garage where they were either shot in the back of the head or, in the case of two detainees, had their throats slit

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<sup>120</sup> International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia, Raznjatovic – Initial Indictment, ICTY, 1997. 5.

<sup>121</sup> International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia, Raznjatovic – Initial Indictment, ICTY, 1997. 4.

<sup>122</sup> Stewart. *Hunting the Tiger*. 236.

<sup>123</sup> International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia, Raznjatovic – Initial Indictment, ICTY, 1997. 3.

with a knife.<sup>124</sup> The witness also testified to the cruel brutality shown by the Tigers during this execution as the prisoners begged to be spared, and one of the Tigers handed his combat knife to a sixteen year old volunteer saying “you can do the best part of the job.”<sup>125</sup> The witness was made an invalid due to the attempted execution and yet managed to survive to tell of his experience in the Hague, though it was only the beginning of Arkan’s mission in and around Sanski Most throughout the Autumn of 1995. Next time the busload would be even larger, and once again there would be only one survivor to shed light on the darkest pages of the Bosnia War.

The next busload of prisoners would be loaded on the very next day after the massacre in Trnova, this time consisting of twenty-five non-Serb men including witness RFJ-065 and the woman who was raped by one of Arkan’s men. The prisoners were even forced to sing Serb nationalist songs which glorify the ethnonationalist Chetniks, another paramilitary organization which had spent both World War II and the past five years massacring Croats and Bosnians. Many of these Bosnian Muslims were taken from the nearby settlement of Kijevo, and were taken to Sasina. In total there were sixty-six prisoners taken to Sasina, where they were to be killed by Arkan’s Tigers. The witness recalls seeing guards slitting the throats of prisoners and shooting them in the back of the head as they kneeled down, cursing their mothers as “balija” which is a slang word for Muslims.<sup>126</sup> The death toll was much higher than at Trnova as sixty-five Bosnian Muslims and Croats were murdered by Arkan’s Tigers in Sasina, a massacre on par with

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<sup>124</sup> International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia, Prosecutor vs. Jovica Stanisic & Franko Simatovic – Judgement, ICTY, 2021. 118.

<sup>125</sup> Stewart. *Hunting the Tiger*. 237.

<sup>126</sup> International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia, Prosecutor vs. Jovica Stanisic & Franko Simatovic – Judgement, ICTY, 2021. 119.



Bijeljina in 1992 which was the debut for Arkan's brutality in Bosnia.<sup>127</sup> Though unlike Bijeljina where Arkan was assisted in his massacre by the White Eagles, or Brcko where large numbers of inhabitants were killed over the span of months, Arkan's Tigers had been solely responsible for the slaughter of at least seventy-six civilians and the attempted murder of two more over the span of just twenty-four hours. The haste at which Arkan was carrying out his part of the RAM Plan showed not only his dedication to its end goal, but also his realization that the war and his dream of a Greater Serbia were on borrowed time.

Arkan's Tiger's and the rest of the Serb soldiers stationed in Sanski Most fled the area in early October 1995 as the ABiH successfully captured and entered the city, the head-strong paramilitary leader would come to know only retreats for the rest of the year. While he and his army had been fighting across the remnants of Serbian controlled territory in Croatia and Bosnia, their enemies growing in strength, Slobodan Milosevic was in Dayton Ohio discussing an end to what was supposed to be a crusade for a Greater Serbia. The Dayton Peace Accords of 1995 attempted to establish a ceasefire so that an agreement could be reached on an internal division of Bosnia, though there was a feeling amongst Serbs and Muslims that neither side would withdraw from land they currently controlled.<sup>128</sup> The fighting therefore would not cease until each side had pushed the other back to the agreed-upon lines of division by force, a symbol of how uncompromising this war had become. The agreed-upon lines amounted to an almost 50/50 division as it was

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<sup>127</sup> International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia, Prosecutor vs. Jovica Stanisic & Franko Simatovic – Judgement, ICTY, 2021. 120.

<sup>128</sup> International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia, Prosecutor vs Slobodan Milosevic – 5 November 2003. 28680.

actually a 51/49 division, with what could hardly be called the lion's share going to the Bosnians who had suffered the most for the past four years.<sup>129</sup> The discussions also included Croatian President Franjo Tuđman who had exploited the conflict in Bosnia in a coy attempt to secure any possible gains for Croatia, though both he and Milosevic only achieved half of their aims.

The Dayton Peace Accords reached an agreement which did little to alleviate the tensions and ethnic conflict, external unity at the cost of internal division. The Federation of Bosnia & Herzegovina was granted control over 51 percent of Bosnia, with Croat-majority areas receiving representation as Tuđman wished, and 49 percent was granted to the beaten yet unconquered Republika Srpska under Radovan Karadzic. The negotiations were not without any hitches especially in the case of contested cities like Sarajevo, where the Bosnians wanted united cities while Karadzic wished for a Berlin-style wall to divide a nation physically which was already divided politically and religiously.<sup>130</sup> Though Bosnia was largely divided equally between the Christian Croats and Serbs as well as the Muslim Bosnians, the 95 percent Muslim population of the Serbian autonomous province of Kosovo was ignored at Dayton despite the crackdown in Kosovo being a major catalyst for the wars.<sup>131</sup> There was only one province within the partitioned Bosnia that was not entirely granted to the federation or the Serbian republic, that was Kenan Trebinčević's home of Brčko which had suffered just as much as Bijeljina or Sanski Most. Trebinčević believes that the Dayton Peace Accords were just an attempt by President Clinton to go into the 1996 elections with an achievement to his name, as the

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<sup>129</sup> Stewart. *Hunting the Tiger*. 286.

<sup>130</sup> Sells. *The Bridge Betrayed: Religion and Genocide in Bosnia*. 154.

<sup>131</sup> Tatum. *Genocide at the Dawn of the Twenty-First Century: Rwanda, Bosnia, Kosovo, and Darfur*. 122.

agreement prevented a strong and victorious ABiH from finishing the war and liberate their nation.<sup>132</sup> Regardless of what outcome could have been achieved by a further continuation of the conflict, peace was to finally prevail.

The Dayton Accords were negotiated throughout the fall and finally came into effect in December 1995, securing the death of Yugoslavia fifty years after the state had been reclaimed and unified by Marshal Tito. Milosevic and Arkan had missed the chance to ever secure a Greater Serbia out of the collapsing state, as the only other Yugoslav republic which remained besides the autonomous provinces was Montenegro which was sparsely populated and economically insufficient. These regions also amounted to all of those which Milosevic's Anti-Bureaucratic Revolution had firmly secured through puppet rulers, so he was left with a state which was small yet secure. This was at least how the situation seemed from a political point of view, as the religious tensions in Kosovo had continued to grow throughout the conflict in Bosnia with the same protests as seen throughout the late eighties and early nineties. These tensions would not reach a breaking point immediately in reaction to Serbia's military defeat, as there would be peace in the Balkans for a time. Many Bosnians and Serbs who once lived on either side of the new line of partition were unable to return to their homes, such as Kenan Trebinjevic whose family was unable to return to Brcko until the next century. Those who now lived in either the federation or the Serbian republic did not reintegrate into a mixed and peaceful society. Rather, their new status of segregation and apartheid only radicalized their hatreds for the "other" even more.

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<sup>132</sup> Trebinjevic. *The Bosnia List*. 59.

It is particularly notable that this conflict ended without any leader on any side being deposed by the victorious power, which is a rare outcome for the total war of the twentieth century. Milosevic and Karadzic for the Serbs, Tuđman and Izetbegović of Bosnia, all of the presidents who had once sought the heads of the other now were believed by the international community to be capable of peaceful coexistence. This could be due to the desire for reconciliation in the region between the ethnic groups, as the public trial and execution of a nation's leader for war crimes could potentially give rise to further ethnonationalist conflict in the region. Though this could also be the result of the plausible deniability granted by the use of paramilitary organizations, as Milosevic himself even pleaded to the United States in 1995 that Arkan was a loose cannon who he was not associated with. According to the United States special envoy to Yugoslavia Richard Holbrooke, Milosevic referred to Arkan as "that crazy Serb" and "my sworn enemy" who would kill Milosevic if given the chance.<sup>133</sup> This seems ridiculous given the immense privileges provided to Arkan and his organization under Milosevic's regime, from special treatment by the police to endless villages to burn and loot to his heart's content, though it may seem convincing to an outsider who is not aware of Arkan's past connections. This of course does not take into consideration the massacres and atrocities committed by previously mentioned groups such as the White Eagles or the Chetniks, even the Scorpions who were responsible for the Srebrenica Massacre. Arkan's charismatic reputation had allowed him to become the face of Serb excesses in Bosnia,

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<sup>133</sup> Stewart. *Hunting the Tiger*. 230.

therefore Milosevic was able to convincingly deny his culpability for the warlord's actions for a time. Plausible deniability saved the Milosevic regime.

The Belgrade government was not able to achieve its goals in Bosnia despite winding up with a settlement which still allowed them to project their influence outside of their borders, which can still be seen today in the separatist voices within Republika Srpska. There were a number of separatist voices within Serbia as well, though they were voices which Milosevic would have to contend with just as he had attempted to contend with the Bosnians and Croats before. The mostly Albanian Muslim population of Kosovo saw the successful breakaway wars waged by Croatia and Bosnia as encouragement for their own struggle for liberation, a conflict which seemed insignificant when compared to the previous events and yet was to prove disastrous. In that time Arkan became a national hero for his actions in Bosnia, his wedding to famous pop star Ceca even being broadcasted on Serbian television in 1995. Although there were moderate voices in Serbia who protested the violence, they were drowned out and sidelined. Arkan's reputation encouraged him to partake in the same behavior which had propelled him to celebrity status amongst the people, and special agent status within the government, until his country needed an unofficial army once again. While the battlefields in Bosnia and Croatia quieted down for the first time in nearly five years, and the criminals who had raped and plundered their way through a whole region went back to their lives, voices in the international community began to discuss just what horrors had taken place in the Balkans.

#### **Chapter 4: The Ghost of Prince Lazar, Arkan the Warlord Celebrity 1996 – 1999**

Arkan had entered the Yugoslav Wars as a career criminal who was obscure to both the international and local communities, he had left them as a war criminal who was infamous abroad and famous at home. He had even married a famous pop singer in Serbia named Ceca, real name Svetlana Velickovic, in a wedding ceremony which was made into a televised national event. He was not looked at so fondly by the Western nations throughout Europe and America however, as international observers were well-aware of the actions committed by him and his paramilitary organization from 1991 – 1995. Though since the Yugoslav Wars did not end in the same decisive defeat as World War II did for the Germans, meaning no war criminals could be forcibly detained and put on trial, those such as Arkan and the statesmen who aided and ordered his atrocities remained. Slobodan Milosevic remained the de facto dictator of Serbia as its president, with his position, and Arkan had to confront the difficult challenge of all war-minded men after the fighting has come to an end: living in peacetime. Arkan would re-enter Serbian society just as he had left it for Erdut five years prior, as a gangster with the protection of the Yugoslav state to carry out his business with impunity.

Before Arkan could work on the process of settling down into what would be a very short-lived time of peace, there remained one mostly symbolic gesture to take care of first: the official disbandment of Arkan's Tigers. This took place in April 1996 just 4 months after the fighting had ended in Bosnia, though this was largely a symbolic gesture as the group agreed to reform if Serbia was once again plunged into war. This proved to be even more of a half-hearted gesture when Arkan set about his newest business venture, one which was connected to his pre-war roots as a football hooligan for the Belgrade Red

Star team. Mere months after the disbanding of the Tigers Arkan became the leader of a new organization in June 1996, this time it was a second division football club named Obilic which was an unsuccessful middling team at the time.<sup>134</sup> It was Arkan's goal to bring this team to the top just as he had brought a rag-tag group of peasants into the most feared paramilitary force in Eastern Europe, and he elected to use much of the same tactics in the field of sports as he did in that of war. Abuse of his players and threats against their opponents would become the norm throughout his ownership of Obilic, and the former members of his now technically disbanded organization were never too far behind their old leader.

Arkan was known for abusing his recruits in Erdut in order to keep them disciplined and ruthless, this was no different when taking control of a football team when he saw the championship tournament as just another war. Players were reportedly lashed as punishment for drinking before games and, if they wound up losing those games, they would be told to walk home instead of taking the team bus.<sup>135</sup> This was nothing compared to what was done against opposing teams however, as they were regularly harassed and threatened by both Arkan and former Tigers who stacked the stadium. They were given threats of assault or murder if they were to score against Obilic in games, making it clear that it was not just Arkan's rigid discipline that allowed them to claw themselves out of the second division by the end of 1996. There was even a report that the manager of another team was murdered for refusing to sell one of his players to Arkan, with that player then being kidnapped and forced to sign a contract at gunpoint.<sup>136</sup>

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<sup>134</sup> Stewart. *Hunting the Tiger*. 254

<sup>135</sup> Stewart. *Hunting the Tiger*. 256

<sup>136</sup> Stewart. *Hunting the Tiger*. 255

Victory was the only matter of concern for Arkan in peacetime just as it was in war, the means which he resorts to in the pursuit of victory will all be justified by history in his mind. In this circumstance, he was able to achieve what he was after.

The leadup to this great accomplishment would not be without incident though, as Arkan was officially indicted for war crimes by the ICTY in September 1997. This indictment would not present any immediate danger to Arkan, as the current Yugoslav government would not allow for his exile to the Hague, though it served as a blight on his name and a confirmation of all that had been said about him both abroad and at home by his critics. The indictment consisted of 24 counts ranging from violations of the laws of war to crimes against humanity, and primarily focused on the massacres which occurred in Trnova and Sasina as well as the Hotel Sanus boiler room.<sup>137</sup> The media would ensure that Arkan would not be able to forget this indictment as he was asked about it every time he left his house, though he always attempted to remain cool and composed in front of the cameras as he was known for his charisma.<sup>138</sup> Arkan had previously been a bit too comfortable in front of the press and their cameras, so any attempt to disprove his criminal history would clash awkwardly with his previously-documented statements where he proudly flaunted his exploits. Though this would continue to be a source of annoyance for Arkan throughout the rest of his life, he was on the cusp of a great accomplishment.

Arkan's Obilic was able to make something out of their months of fear and abuse at the hands of their warlord turned manager, as they managed to win the 1997-1998

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<sup>137</sup> International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia, Raznjatovic – Initial Indictment, ICTY, 1997. 5 - 10.

<sup>138</sup> Stewart. *Hunting the Tiger*. 269.



season and win the Yugoslav league championship. This was of especially great significance since only two teams, Red Star Belgrade and Partizans, won the Yugoslav/Serbia & Montenegro league championship from 1992 to 2006 with the sole exception being Obilic's victory in 1998. Arkan's son Vojin recalled how excited his father was at the prospect of bringing this team from nothing to the championship, and he tells of an interesting remark made by another team manager to Arkan over the phone. Vojin states that this team manager told Arkan that "the state would never allow" him to become champion, a rather telling remark about Arkan's relationship with the Yugoslav state as a tool to be wielded very carefully.<sup>139</sup> Though Arkan brushed off this remark with a reminder of his cunning and notorious luck, it implies that Arkan's widespread popularity was becoming a clear and present danger for the regime in Belgrade which feared an ambitious rival leader. Arkan was able to prove the rival manager wrong and win the championship for his team, along with \$100,000 in a bet, characteristically referring to himself as the "Champion of Yugoslavia" to his son.<sup>140</sup> While Arkan had clearly found a great deal of success in a business venture which was only partly outside his area of expertise, one last war would soon top off the twentieth century in the Balkans.

Tensions with the Albanian ethnic majority in Kosovo had only risen since the beginning of Milosevic's reign of terror a decade ago, especially when word of the brutality shown to Bosnian Muslims became known to the Albanian Muslims in the autonomous province. The question of Kosovo was however one which was much

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<sup>139</sup> Ražnatović. *Stories About My Father*. 112.

<sup>140</sup> Ražnatović. *Stories About My Father*. 113.

trickier than that of Bosnia or Croatia, as its significance in Serbian history dates back centuries to the days of the medieval principality's vain struggle against the invading Ottoman Empire. Prince Lazar, who would later be immortalized in Serbian folklore as a Christian martyr, in 1389 led an army which was half the size of the Ottomans in a bloody and largely inconclusive battle which was meant to halt the Ottoman advance in the Balkans. Though Serbia was conquered by the Ottomans and remained a province of their vast empire for hundreds of years, the Battle of Kosovo came to serve as the iconic image of the Serbian national identity throughout the nineteenth and even the twentieth century 500 years later. Kosovo is also host to some of the most coveted religious sites in Serbian history, medieval cathedrals such as the 700-year-old Patriarchal Monastery of Pec and the 800-year-old Gracanica Monastery which established Kosovo as being the heart of Serbia and of the Balkans. With this cultural and historical significance established in a region which was arguably the catalyst for a series of wars that saw Yugoslavia lose half of its territory, the Serbs were unwilling to allow the final nail in the coffin to be the loss of what Prince Lazar died to keep. Only now, instead of a Serbian prince, the forces of infamous Balkan warlords would be called upon to make the final stand in the destructive nineties.

Fighting in Kosovo began in 1998 and was significantly different from that which had been seen in Bosnia and Croatia, as it was largely a war between Albanian insurgents and Serb police as opposed to two nations' armed forces. On the Albanian side there was the Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA) which was formed under the leadership of Albanian hero Adem Jashari, who had been leading an insurgency against Serb-authority in Bosnia since the signing of the 1995 Dayton Agreement. This insurgency did not amount to any

significant cost in damages or death toll, but it was enough to show the Milosevic regime that their perceived weakness after defeat in two back-to-back wars was enough to embolden their rivals both foreign and domestic. Arkan exhibited no sympathy for the plight of the Albanians in Kosovo as he argued that they already possessed their own nation, in contrast to the Croats in 1991 and Bosnians in 1992, and that those who do not conform to Serbian law “can leave and never return.”<sup>141</sup> What Arkan was implying when he referred to the Albanians never returning would only be unclear to those unfamiliar with the warlord’s past crimes, crimes which would not be out of place in Kosovo. The downfall of Yugoslavia had begun with Milosevic’s heavy-handed approach towards Kosovo, and it would end all the same with an expectedly merciless level of brutality that the fields of Kosovo had known since Prince Lazar’s last stand. While the Kosovo War was fortunately less costly in human lives than Bosnia and Croatia, the opening stages of the war saw one of the most devastating losses of life in a single incident throughout the Yugoslav Wars.

Adem Jashari, the man who placed himself at the forefront of Kosovo’s struggle for liberation, was cornered and killed along with 59 others at his Prekaz compound in March 1998. While the Yugoslav Army and police professed the operation to be a legitimate anti-terrorist mission, the fact that over a dozen women and at least ten children were killed in the attack convinced Amnesty International that this was a genocidal massacre rather than a law enforcement operation.<sup>142</sup> This was an especially devastating start to the war for Albanians as the KLA was not a large organization at the

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<sup>141</sup> Stewart. *Hunting the Tiger*. 213.

<sup>142</sup> Heike Krieger. *The Kosovo Conflict and International Law: An Analytical Documentation 1974–1999*. (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press. 2001), 96.

time, with an estimated 150 KLA troop in Kosovo before the start of full-scale combat making it much weaker than the poultry forces Croatia and Bosnia started out with.<sup>143</sup> The numbers game is always an issue for insurgents in the early stages of their operations, and as the war dragged on it became clear that the strength of the KLA would be in foreign support for the Albanian majority. Until foreign support was forthcoming, insofar as such support went further than diplomatic recognition, the Kosovo War took on the shape of a guerilla war which would not reach the same scale of destruction as the wars in Croatia or Bosnia. Though they would have to contend with the brutal reprisals against guerilla warfare in an urban environment, the perception by the Serbs that any Albanian of fighting age could be a KLA combatant.

Though it was through ethnic cleansing that the Serbs managed to provoke an international coalition against themselves in Bosnia, the lessons of the past were always slow to be learnt in the Balkans. Serb police and anti-terrorist forces committed several massacres throughout Kosovo aimed at terrorizing and subduing the Albanian citizens, most of which would occur in the early months of 1999 as the intensity of the conflict began to inflame tensions further. One of the most notable massacres of the Kosovo War was the murder of 130 Albanian civilians in the city of Izbica, an attack which was carried out by the anti-terrorist forces as well as paramilitary forces.<sup>144</sup> This after the inhabitants of Izbica were demanded to hand over their money and valuables to the soldiers in exchange for their lives, mirroring the tactics of Arkan's Tigers who would

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<sup>143</sup> Tim Judah. *Kosovo: War and Revenge*. (New York, NY: Yale University Press. 2000), 118.

<sup>144</sup> International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia - The Prosecutor of the Tribunal against Slobodan Milosevic, Milan Milutinovic, Nikola Sainovic, Dragoljub Ojdanic, Vljako Stojiljkovic. ICTY. 1999. 98.

leave no massacred village with its wealth intact. These attacks only further radicalized and mobilized the ethnic Albanian population in Kosovo and abroad, as the KLA received military aid from Northern Albania as early as March 1998.<sup>145</sup> This close cooperation between Albania and their ethnic brethren in Kosovo was to be expected, as it was the professed desire of the KLA to unite Albania with Kosovo just as the provisional republic of 1912 had strived for. Though since Kosovo had not yet issued any declaration of independence from Yugoslavia, as it was not their initial intention to become a separate entity, the Serbs could justify their harshness by claiming that their sovereign territory was under threat.

These claims were at times not difficult to prove, as the KLA often made it difficult to distinguish perpetrators from victims due to their own atrocities. The KLA captured and ran the Lapusnik concentration camp throughout the Kosovo War with the intent of punishing ethnic Serbs, crimes which were brought to light in the ICTY's indictment of KLA commander Fatmir Limaj and two of his camp guards. 35 Serb civilians were kidnapped by the KLA and imprisoned in the Lapusnik camp where they endured inhumane conditions and brutal treatment, with as many as 24 of them being killed either in the camp or in the Berisa Mountains throughout July 1998.<sup>146</sup> This was the same month in which KLA forces launched an attack on Orahovac where 85 Serb civilians were abducted with 40 being murdered, which led to the Serbs murdering 79

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<sup>145</sup> International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia – Prosecutor vs. Slobodan Milosevic. ICTY. 2004. 10.

<sup>146</sup> International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia. Prosecutor vs. Fatmir Limaj, Haradin Bala, Isak Musliu – Judgement. ICTY. 2005. 5.

Albanian civilians when they retook the town three days later.<sup>147</sup> With less than a third of Lapusnik's inmate population surviving, and some of the survivors appearing at the Hague to provide witness testimony of their harsh treatment, it's clear that the KLA was an example on the opposing side of brutal paramilitaries being able to do what their state sponsors cannot. The brutality of this case makes it all the more incredible that Commander Limaj was acquitted on all charges, going on to become the Deputy Prime Minister of Kosovo in 2017 and the current leader of Kosovo's Social Democratic Initiative. The only KLA guard in this case to be convicted and sentenced was Haradin Bala, who received 18 years in prison for personally taking part in the murder of ten Serbs in the Berisa Mountains.<sup>148</sup>

Though the KLA was most overtly supported by Albania, as the two shared an ethnicity and a religion, the KLA was also acting as an example of plausible deniability on the opposite side of the Yugoslav Wars. The United States had always been clear in its support for the breakaway republics of the Yugoslav Wars, though as far back as the beginning of the Bosnia War they had been hesitant to provide material or economic aid to the belligerent powers. In the case of the KLA however, the CIA actively partook in arming and training the Albanian insurgents in an act which exhibited clear knowledge of and support for their actions.<sup>149</sup> Just as the Serbs had previously used their de jure peace to fund the Republic of Serbian Krajina in Kosovo, the European and American nations

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<sup>147</sup> International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia. Prosecutor vs. Fatmir Limaj, Haradin Bala, Isak Musliu – Judgement. ICTY. 2005. 63.

<sup>148</sup> International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia. Prosecutor vs. Fatmir Limaj, Haradin Bala, Isak Musliu – Judgement. ICTY. 2005. 293.

<sup>149</sup> Tom Walker, Aidan Laverty. "CIA Aided Kosovo Guerrilla All Along." *Sunday Times* (London), March 12, 2000.

opposed to Milosevic's Greater Serbia had their own paramilitary force to achieve plausible deniability. This was just a fraction of what allowed the KLA to continue outlasting the Serb onslaught however, as they were funded by ethnic Albanians across the US and armed by their ethnic brethren throughout Albania and the Western regions of Macedonia.<sup>150</sup> This only continued to increase the Serbs' feeling of paranoia that they were facing an existential threat that could lead to the destruction of Serbia itself, and the drastic actions which followed only further strengthened international resolve.

The culmination of these drastic actions would be a massacre which occurred in January 1999 in the Kosovar village of Racak, which served as a definitive rejection of a NATO-brokered ceasefire between the KLA and Yugoslav forces in October of the previous year. This incident was justified by an act of KLA aggression which had occurred one week prior in the outskirts of Racak, where KLA troops killed three Serbian police officers in an ambush.<sup>151</sup> The response by the Serbs was characteristically heavy-handed however, as the anti-terrorist branches of the Yugoslav military and police proceeded to massacre 45 Kosovar Albanians in Racak with only 9 being confirmed members of the KLA.<sup>152</sup> The scale of ethnic cleansing in Kosovo was growing on a monthly basis, and it was rightfully feared in American and European circles that this conflict could escalate into the brutality which had been seen just four years prior if drastic action was not taken. This response came in the Rambouillet Accords proposed by delegations from America and Albania as well as France and the UK, with the threat of

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<sup>150</sup> Stewart. *Hunting the Tiger*. 259.

<sup>151</sup> International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia – Prosecutor vs. Slobodan Milosevic. ICTY. 2004. 10.

<sup>152</sup> Judah. *Kosovo: War and Revenge*. 193.

imminent NATO involvement if Yugoslavia did not consent to the demand made by the international coalition. Though since any concessions made to foreign powers during a time of war would be taken as a sign of weakness in a state built around military might, the conclusion of the last Yugoslav war was destined to be the same as that of Bosnia.

The conditions of the accords were, in all fairness to the Serbs who rejected them, rather demanding almost Carthaginian. Article I of the accords put forth a reasonable demand of the Serbian government, that all citizens of Kosovo shall be granted equal rights to those in the Serb-majority regions of Yugoslavia and shall have their humanity and democratic freedoms respected.<sup>153</sup> Though it was clear throughout the text of the agreement that NATO did not seek merely a cession of hostilities but the independence of Kosovo from Yugoslavia entirely, as Articles III through V state that Kosovo shall have its own judiciary and executive branches which are not subject to Yugoslav law.<sup>154</sup> The demands go even further to accommodate outside forces who will serve as peacekeepers in the aftermath of the Kosovo War, demanding that Yugoslavia allow 30,000 peacekeepers into a self-governing Kosovo whose shall also be exempt from Yugoslav law.<sup>155</sup> Perhaps the most humiliating request of all was that NATO personnel be granted access to all airports, seaports, and railways in Kosovo without payment to the Yugoslav government.<sup>156</sup> Milosevic's regime would have likely been toppled if he were to accept such an agreement, which would establish Kosovo as the personal property of NATO to

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<sup>153</sup> United Nations Security Council. Rambouillet Accords – Interim Agreement for Peace and Self-Governance in Kosovo. 1999. 4.

<sup>154</sup> United Nations Security Council. Rambouillet Accords – Interim Agreement for Peace and Self-Governance in Kosovo. 1999. 13 – 20.

<sup>155</sup> United Nations Security Council. Rambouillet Accords – Interim Agreement for Peace and Self-Governance in Kosovo. 1999. 81.

<sup>156</sup> United Nations Security Council. Rambouillet Accords – Interim Agreement for Peace and Self-Governance in Kosovo. 1999. 82.



do with it as they pleased. It was too late either way however, as rejection of this agreement would ensure that this war became unwinnable for Milosevic and would topple his regime in a more destructive manner.

Although the accords were proposed by the United Nations, they would not be the ones to take action and intervene like they did in Bosnia just a few years prior. The United Nations Security Council was mostly composed for Western nations friendly to the Kosovar Albanian cause, though the communist Chinese and Slavic nationalist Russians were friendly to Milosevic and opposed military action. This operation would be conducted by NATO without the consent of the United Nations, due to the escalating brutality of the war and the precedent which had been set by the wars in Croatia and Bosnia. Milosevic believed that the allied nations were bluffing, and so did not even show up to the proposal of the Rambouillet Accords.<sup>157</sup> On March 24 1999, the last Balkan War began with NATO airstrikes on Serbian military targets in Kosovo, from infrastructure and bases to armored vehicles and tanks. The need for military intervention was justified even further when the Serbs carried out another brutal atrocity the next day, when 112 ethnic Albanian men were shot dead and set on fire with petrol in the village of Krusha.<sup>158</sup> Serbs were momentarily united in disdain for NATO as the airstrikes reached further into Serbian territory, where Arkan and his son were faced with the downfall of a nation.

At a time when Milosevic was drawing increased ire every day for his approval of the war's continuation, Arkan's ego and overconfidence consistently drew him back into

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<sup>157</sup> Stewart. *Hunting the Tiger*. 261.

<sup>158</sup> Human Rights Watch. "Massacre at Krusha e Madhe". 1999.

the spotlight of international scrutiny. Arkan's son writes that Borislav Pelevic, Arkan's best man, provoked a planned NATO airstrike on Arkan's mansion by declaring to the media that Arkan's Tigers were "deeply engaged" with the fighting in Kosovo.<sup>159</sup> This contradicts Arkan's previous statement that the guard would only be reactivated if NATO troops invaded Serbia, and this bit of bluster was enough to provoke a decisive response from those who halted his ambitions in 1996. The pressure on Serbia only got greater as NATO airstrikes moved North from Kosovo up to the Yugoslav capital of Belgrade, an act which still causes tremendous tensions between Serbia and America today. Although Arkan's son Vojin argues that the NATO bombing of Belgrade united the Serbian people behind Milosevic for a time, this unity would crumble the moment Belgrade capitulated to end the last of the Yugoslav Wars with a fourth defeat.<sup>160</sup> Before this could occur, Arkan attempted to use his infamous public speaking skills to win the propaganda war for Serbia on the least likely of places: American media.

Arkan would not let the hardships of 1999 deter him from maintaining a presence in the spotlight, as he gave a rare English-speaking interview to CNN in 1999. He rebuked any eyewitness testimonies of his war crimes by stating "my units were the most disciplined army in that time during that war in 1991 and further on", as well as that "you can do anything with your CIA funds...you can provide 'eyewitnesses' also."<sup>161</sup> He also misread the geopolitical situation at the time by issuing direct threats to NATO personnel in and around Yugoslavia, saying that "the next time you will have those (US soldiers)

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<sup>159</sup> Ražnatović. *Stories About My Father*. 26.

<sup>160</sup> Ražnatović. *Stories About My Father*. 39.

<sup>161</sup> CNN. "Crisis Kosovo: Željko Ražnatović/Arkan Interview." YouTube, uploaded by KidThunder10. 1999. 1:12:29 – 1:30:09.

bodies sent back by plane to United States.”<sup>162</sup> This was in reference to three American soldiers who were illegally detained by Yugoslav forces while patrolling the border inside North Macedonia, implying that these would be the only Americans taken alive and that future prisoners would be executed. Every attempt by the interviewer to challenge Arkan’s claims or elaborate on his threats was met by deflection, as he claimed that Albanians in Kosovo were “running away from NATO bombs” rather than running from the JNA.<sup>163</sup> Arkan argued that “you are hurting civilians more than you are hurting military forces”, which is both ironic and incorrect as can be seen by the Serbian capitulation to NATO bombing campaigns in June 1999.<sup>164</sup> Arkan’s interview with CNN went over as well with the American public as his political debate in 1993 did with his own people, with the same lack of success as the fiasco in Kosovo was the end of Yugoslavia’s attempted salvation.

For the second and final time in the nineties, Slobodan Milosevic was forced by NATO action to come to the peace table on their terms. The peace was largely contingent on an agreement that Kosovo would be politically administered by the UN, a necessary compromise for the Serbs, and that it would not declare independence from Serbia. Once Milosevic was assured that Kosovo would not be allowed to hold an independence referendum for several years, he agreed to withdraw all Yugoslav troops from Kosovo in exchange for NATO ceasing its bombardment.<sup>165</sup> This was a revised version of the

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<sup>162</sup> CNN. “Crisis Kosovo: Željko Ražnatović/Arkan Interview.” YouTube, uploaded by KidThunder10. 1999. 1:15:05 – 1:15:11.

<sup>163</sup> CNN. “Crisis Kosovo: Željko Ražnatović/Arkan Interview.” YouTube, uploaded by KidThunder10. 1999. 1:15:51.

<sup>164</sup> CNN. “Crisis Kosovo: Željko Ražnatović/Arkan Interview.” YouTube, uploaded by KidThunder10. 1999. 1:16:56 – 1:17:02.

<sup>165</sup> Judah. *Kosovo: War and Revenge*. 285.

Rambouillet Accords known as the Kumanovo Agreement, allowing NATO's occupation of and free movement in Kosovo as opposed to the entirety of Yugoslavia proposed in the Rambouillet Accords. Some international spectators believed that a backdoor agreement involving Russia was also responsible for the sudden end to hostilities, a belief which was given justification when thirty Russian armored vehicles carrying 250 troops moved down from their peacekeeping operations in Bosnia to seize Prishtina International Airport.<sup>166</sup> Perhaps Milosevic believed that if a friendly country such as Russia occupied a significant portion of Kosovo's capital, he may be able to maintain a level of control in the region and prevent any future likelihood of an independence referendum. This was flawed logic if it was Milosevic's plan as Russia would pull out of Kosovo just four years later, leaving NATO and the Albanian population in control of Kosovo's destiny.

The Kosovo War was the de facto end of Yugoslavia and all of Milosevic's Greater Serbia ambitions, with their capital in flames and their former territories thoroughly secured by a well-equipped coalition of hostile nations. Arkan was now left without any future prospects which resembled those that catapulted him to the status of a folk hero, stunned and humiliated just like his employers in Belgrade as he awaited the inquiries of international courts. The war saw tremendous excesses from both the Serbs as well as the Albanian KLA, especially after the Yugoslav Army withdrew and ethnic Serbs in Kosovo had their houses burned and were sometimes even murdered by vengeful Albanians. Arkan had attempted to lie about the excesses of his paramilitary organization in the past, though his crimes as well as those committed by his superiors

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<sup>166</sup> Judah. *Kosovo: War and Revenge*. 284.

were coming to light as UN and NATO personnel now occupied all former battlefields of the 1991 – 1999 wars. Arkan had seen a tremendous rise in fame and power over the past eight years, though the next six months would see his rapid and violent downfall.

### **Chapter 5: The Fall of Arkan, Milosevic, and all Yugoslavia**

After eight years of waging the most brutal series of wars that Europe had seen since Yugoslavia's first breakup, both Slobodan Milosevic and Arkan were in living on borrowed time. Milosevic was at the forefront of international attention, due to his position as the Yugoslav dictator for the past decade, and there was widespread support across Europe and America for a tribunal of the conflict's most notorious criminals. Among this list of wanted criminals was Arkan near the very top, as he had already received an indictment from the ICTY two years prior in 1997. Arkan's son Vojin recalls a conversation he had with his father in December 1999, related to a claim by Serbian politician Zoran Djindjic that he would help expunge Arkan's Interpol warrant if he met with him. Arkan was enraged as he believed this was a trick to have Djindjic brought to power and Arkan sent to the Hague, with Arkan claiming "betrayal has been the focal theme in the history of our people" and "I will never go down in history as a traitor."<sup>167</sup> His position in the history books and in the minds of his people would not change from this point, as his career was over and his life was soon to come to an end. Though the regime of Slobodan Milosevic was crumbling under the weight of international scrutiny and domestic unrest, it was the life of the man who had dedicated his life to securing the regime's power who went first as the final nail in the coffin for Belgrade.

Arkan was sitting in a hotel lobby with a few of his bodyguards on January 15 2000, filling out a betting slip as his luck in gambling was legendary amongst those who knew him. His luck ran out when 23-year-old Dobrosav Gavric approached him from

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<sup>167</sup> Ražnatović. *Stories About My Father*. 40.

behind and shot Arkan in the head, along with two of his associates who died immediately while Arkan died on the way to the hospital.<sup>168</sup> Gavric was an off-duty policeman whose motives still remain unknown to this day. He was apprehended after initially attempting to flee and was sentenced to ten years in prison in 2002.<sup>169</sup> Arkan had met his end by the very means which had secured him a position of great power and privilege: assassination. The Tigers never reformed after his death and Obilic went on to become a legitimate team free from kidnappings and intimidation, though many of his former comrades went unpunished for their crimes. It is rather strange however that Arkan's assassination seemed to have no reasoning behind it, and there was no obvious connection between Arkan and Gavric. This mystery has given rise to a conspiracy theory as to whether Arkan's former confidants in the state security and Belgrade had stabbed him in the back.

Arkan no longer served any use to the Belgrade government in the post-war and post-communist environment, his continued existence could have been seen as a symbol of the nation's past crimes and therefore an inconvenience in this era of international intrigue. Arkan's own past as a government hitman lends credence to this theory, as Gavric was similar to Arkan in the sense that he was also a violent gangster. Gavric continued to pursue his criminal activities in South Africa after his release from prison, activities such as drug trafficking and a drive-by shooting for which he remains in a South African prison to this day.<sup>170</sup> It would also explain why an off-duty policeman, a

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<sup>168</sup> Ražnatović. *Stories About My Father*. 2.

<sup>169</sup> Cencich. *The Devil's Garden*. 180.

<sup>170</sup> Aleksander Djuricic. "Serbian Gangster's Deadly South African Connection." *Balkan Insight* (Belgrade), 12 Nov 2018.

profession which happens to be a government job that allows Gavric to carry a gun in public, shot Arkan for seemingly no reason at all. Unfortunately this cannot be proven as both Gavric and the Belgrade government have remained tight-lipped for the past twenty-four years, though there have been much more radical theories proposed than that of a government conspiracy which at least has merit and precedent. One such theory was proposed by Yugoslav information minister Goran Matic, who attempted to explain Arkan's assassination as a plot by the "Montenegrin mafia that wants to take over Belgrade."<sup>171</sup> Since Arkan and his Tigers militia were Milosevic's underworld connection, the Montenegrin mob may have believed that his death would lead a vacuum which they could fill. With the well-known and immense privileges that came from being on the Serbian dictator's payroll, Matic saw this as a sensible motive. Regardless of the reasons behind the assassination, and the connections the assassins may have shared, Arkan's death was not the end of prosecution against the war criminals of the nineties.

Many of the most prolific criminals of the Yugoslav Wars such as Mladic and Karadzic went into hiding after the war, with Karadzic even taking up an alias as a psychiatrist in Austria, Milosevic however still remained in power. He had attained support for his regime through his support of a Greater Serbia, and by stoking the flames of hatred against the West for their bombings in the mid and late nineties. Now all that remained of his propaganda efforts were the same hostile and independent neighbors he had sworn to reintegrate, and surrender in the face of the very Western opposition he swore to fight. This decade of surrender broke the façade of strength which he had built

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<sup>171</sup> Steven Erlanger. "Milosevic Government Denies Role in Killing of Serbian Warlord." *New York Times* (New York), 19 Jan 2000.



around himself and, combined with the economic hardships that followed a decade of unsuccessful war, the remaining Yugoslav civilians had reached their limit. Slobodan Milosevic's eleven year dictatorship came to an end in October 2000, when disgruntled citizens forced his resignation in the face of international sanctions and the oppressive anti-democratic regime.<sup>172</sup> Dictatorial regimes such as Milosevic's often survive and thrive based on instilling fear and inspiring success due to the lack of a democratic process, both of which went out the window when the warlord was assassinated and twenty-five percent of Montenegro's population lived in poverty.<sup>173</sup> Of course it would never be so simple as merely stepping down from the political stage for the man who held the greatest responsibility for the past ten years of war, as he was arrested and brought to the Hague to at last shed light on a shadowy period in world history.

This was the first time in history that a sitting head of state was arrested for war crimes, though he would not be the last as President Saddam Hussein would continue this precedent just three years later for similar reasons. Milosevic's trial began in 2002 and continued until 2006, not nearly as expedited as the Nuremberg Trials half a century ago, and there were plenty of interesting statements made within that four-year time span which defined Milosevic's relationship with Arkan and other paramilitaries. During a court hearing for an acquittal request in June 2004, when referring to Arkan Milosevic was quoted as saying, "we need people like this now, but no one should think that they are more powerful than the state."<sup>174</sup> This lends further credence to the theory that Arkan

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<sup>172</sup> Louis Sell. *Slobodan Milosevic and the Destruction of Yugoslavia*. (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2002), 344.

<sup>173</sup> Sell. *Slobodan Milosevic and the Destruction of Yugoslavia*. 60.

<sup>174</sup> International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia. Prosecutor vs. Slobodan Milosevic – Judgement of Acquittal. ICTY. 2004. 113.

was assassinated by Milosevic's state security, as his previous ventures into the field of politics and his celebrity status could have been seen as attempts to usurp power from the state. There is also the comment that the Yugoslav authorities "need people like this now" in a desperate time of war, they clearly no longer had any need for a violent criminal in peacetime. Especially considering Arkan's brief political career, regardless of its failure, was a challenge to his role and the status quo. Unfortunately most of Milosevic's time at the Hague consisted of delayed hearings due to his poor health, which was acknowledged by the trial chamber as two chronic heart conditions which resulted in proceedings being suspended thirteen times.<sup>175</sup> After years of ethnic cleansing, and several years before that in which the plans were put to paper, the man who held the greatest extent of knowledge was living on borrowed time.

Slobodan Milosevic died due to cardiovascular complications on March 11 2006, after countless appeals and delays, in an event which is still the subject of conspiracy in Serbia today. The prosecutor released a statement on the same day asserting that justice for his crimes had yet to be obtained, mentioning Radovan Karadzic and Ratko Mladic by name as those who would be rightfully punished in Milosevic's place.<sup>176</sup> Both Karadzic and Mladic were in significantly greater health, both men still being alive today, the issue was tracking them down after nearly a decade of hiding and constant relocation. During this time they were made to watch as what little of Yugoslavia remained slowly disintegrated, with the name "Yugoslavia" being permanently retired in favor of Serbia

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<sup>175</sup> International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia. Slobodan Milosevic vs. Prosecutor – Decision on Interlocutory Appeal of the Trial Chamber's Decision on the Assignment of Defense Counsel. ICTY. 2004. 4.

<sup>176</sup> International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia. Statement by the ICTY Prosecutor. ICTY. 2006.

and Montenegro in 2003 followed by the separation of both nations three months after Milosevic's death in 2006. Karadzic was arrested by Serbian police in July 2008 in a bid to show Western powers their commitment to justice, though his arrest was still fervently protested by Serbian ultranationalists.<sup>177</sup> 2008 also saw the independence of Kosovo, which was immediately recognized by the United States to the further disdain of those who followed Milosevic and Karadzic just a generation ago. Mladic was arrested just a few years later in 2011 also by Serbian police, who worked with Western powers to begin the extradition process immediately despite objections from Mladic and his supporters.<sup>178</sup> Since both Karadzic and Mladic held positions of high authority in the Republika Srpska, and worked closely with Arkan in drafting and carrying out the RAM Plan, their trials and sentences were seen as the prime opportunity for achieving both clarity and long-awaited justice.

Karadzic was charged with four crimes in his initial indictment in 1995: genocide, crimes against humanity, violation of the laws or customs of war, and grave breaches of the Geneva Convention.<sup>179</sup> After Milan Babic committed suicide one week before Milosevic's death in March 2006, he was a two-time president and prime minister of the RSK, Karadzic was the highest-ranking political official in the ICTY's custody. Karadzic repeatedly attempted to distance himself from Arkan throughout the trial, claiming that he had never met him before and that the Bosnian Serbs "have always asked Serbs not to

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<sup>177</sup> Donia. *Radovan Karadzic: Architect of the Bosnian Genocide*. 318.

<sup>178</sup> Cencich. *The Devil's Garden*. 178.

<sup>179</sup> International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia. *Radovan Karadzic – Initial Indictment*. ICTY. 1995.

mobilize.”<sup>180</sup> The ICTY disproved these claims by acknowledging Karadzic’s several documented interactions with Arkan prior to and during the war, including his request that Arkan participate in the Siege of Sarajevo which led to the murders and looting in the Sarajevo municipality previously discussed.<sup>181</sup> A statement from lieutenant general Manojlo Milovanovic further contradicts Karadzic’s claim, in which the general recalls a meeting with Karadzic and Arkan in 1995 regarding Arkan’s presence in the region being an order from Karadzic. Milovanovic asked Karadzic if he had given this order and Karadzic did not respond, “he did not say yes and he did not say no” according to the general.<sup>182</sup> Milovanovic recalls another meeting between the two just a few months later, in Bijeljina of all places, in which Karadzic tells Arkan that he is “deeply thankful” for Arkan’s actions and that the warlord “will always have a place in the heart of those who you have defended.”<sup>183</sup> The two were anything but estranged from one another, and their close acquaintance proved to be one of several instances in which the Bosnian Serb state worked hand-in-hand with the lawless world of paramilitary groups.

While Karadzic hoped he had achieved plausible deniability in his dealings with the Tigers, Scorpions, White Eagles and others, the mountain of evidence in witness testimonies and documented communications proved to be impossible to deny. One such document was a letter from Arkan to Karadzic in 1994, which applauded Karadzic’s “heroic resistance” against NATO and that he would heed Karadzic’s call to ““protect

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<sup>180</sup> International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia. Prosecutor vs. Radovan Karadzic – Judgement. ICTY. 2016. 1232.

<sup>181</sup> International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia. Prosecutor vs. Radovan Karadzic – Judgement. ICTY. 2016. 1238.

<sup>182</sup> International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia. Prosecutor vs. Radovan Karadzic – Judgement. ICTY. 2016. 1246.

<sup>183</sup> International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia. Prosecutor vs. Radovan Karadzic – Judgement. ICTY. 2016. 1247.

Serbian nationality and Orthodoxy.”<sup>184</sup> From Bijeljina and Sarajevo to the Hotel Sanus of Sanski Most, Karadzic was clearly in a close working relationship with Bosnia’s most prolific paramilitary commander and war criminal. It was this association, along with his previously documented complicity in the Scorpions’ massacre of over 8,000 in Srebrenica, which guaranteed his conviction. Karadzic was found not guilty on only one out of twelve counts, one count of genocide, though he was found guilty of another count of genocide as well as five counts of crimes against humanity and four counts of violating the rules of war.<sup>185</sup> For these crimes, Karadzic was sentenced to forty years in prison on 24 March 2016.<sup>186</sup> Karadzic attempted to appeal this decision in 2018, only for his sentence to be increased to a life sentence in 2019 when this appeal was denied. Karadzic’s trial highlighted the extent to which the Serbian political structure was connected to paramilitary groups such as Arkan’s Tigers throughout the conflict, as even the mass-looting gangster was a useful means to an end.

The trial of Ratko Mladic concluded soon after that of Karadzic, despite the former being arrested several years after the latter, and revealed just how adamant the Serbian politicians were about allowing Arkan to operate in the Bosnian warzone. Mladic, who was the commander of the Bosnian Serb Army, apparently had to plead repeatedly to Karadzic to forbid Arkan and his Tigers from operating in regions such as Banja Luka and Sanski Most. Mladic expressed dismay over Arkan looting buildings and

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<sup>184</sup> International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia. Prosecutor vs. Radovan Karadzic – Judgement. ICTY. 2016. 1279.

<sup>185</sup> International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia. Prosecutor vs. Radovan Karadzic – Judgement. ICTY. 2016. 2562.

<sup>186</sup> International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia. Prosecutor vs. Radovan Karadzic – Judgement. ICTY. 2016. 2561.

stealing cars throughout the areas in which he operated, operations which took place without the authorization of Mladic and his staff. Arkan apparently also stole military equipment and mistreated many of Mladic's officers and soldiers, even murdering one outside of Novi Grad.<sup>187</sup> If Mladic was the military commander in the Bosnian Serb-occupied regions, and Arkan was operating in those regions for several years without the permission of and to the dismay of Mladic, this indicates a great deal of political meddling which gave this de jure civilian authority over a general. Mladic was not concerned with Arkan's actions from a humanitarian perspective, his conduct of the Siege of Sarajevo is proof of that, though his struggle with Karadzic over Arkan's involvement in the region also shows that Arkan was not merely operating in a military capacity. The trial record even alludes to a statement made by Karadzic before the war in December 1991, in which he declares that "We will release our tigers and let them do their job ... we shouldn't hold them back."<sup>188</sup> For Mladic's crimes committed in Sarajevo and Srebrenica, as well as his previously referenced role in concocting and implementing the RAM Plan, he was sentenced to life imprisonment on 22 November 2017.<sup>189</sup>

The aftermath of the ICTY trials brought about a new era of relative peace in the Balkans, although deep-seeded ethnic hatreds remained amongst those who had lived through the inconclusive wars. This ugly dynamic was especially true for those at the top of the political structure, just as it had been under Milosevic, as Serbian President

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<sup>187</sup> International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia. Prosecutor vs. Ratko Mladic – Judgement. ICTY. 2017. 137-138.

<sup>188</sup> International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia. Prosecutor vs. Ratko Mladic – Judgement. ICTY. 2017. 45.

<sup>189</sup> International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia. Prosecutor vs. Ratko Mladic – Judgement. ICTY. 2017. 665.

Tomislav Nikolic lamented at the ICTY was engaged in a “systematic atmosphere of lynch-mobbing of everything that is Serbian.”<sup>190</sup> Nikolic was a member of the Serb Radical Party, Serbia’s equivalent of Karadzic’s ultranationalist Serb Democratic Party, so his sentiment is not unexpected. The ICTY was accused by many Serbs and sympathetic observers as being disproportionately harsh towards Serbian politicians and military men, as more than half of all those arrested and convicted were Serbs.<sup>191</sup> Though at a glance the ICTY may appear to be disproportionately targeting Serbs, it is an honest reflection of the majority of war crimes from 1991 to 1999 being committed by Serbs. The actions of Arkan’s Tigers in Vukovar and Sanski Most were only a fraction of the excesses committed by ethnic Serbs in and out of uniform, with the massacre of 8,000 by the Scorpions in Srebrenica being a clear indicator as to the reason for this skewed representation in the court room. Though there is also the aforementioned case of KLA Commander Limaj, whose acquittal after running a brutal concentration camp served as fuel for the fire of Serbian resentment. Regardless of any protests there were still dozens of non-Serb war criminals tried and convicted at the Hague, though many low-ranking paramilitary troops were able to slip back into peacetime society.

The deaths of Milosevic and Arkan, as well as the life imprisonment of Karadzic and Mladic, spelled the end of an era in the Balkans. No longer would the nations of the region settle their differences with bloodshed, as a decade of warfare and decades of trials helped to bring the battle-scarred and newly independent nations into the international community. Though memories still remain of the atrocities and excesses committed by

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<sup>190</sup> Marija Ristic. “Serbia Slams Hague Tribunal at UN Debate.” *Balkan Insight* (Belgrade), 11 April 2013.

<sup>191</sup> ICTY official website, The Cases.

those who had long claimed to be brothers, the resentment fades with each passing generation. Karadzic and Mladic will never command paramilitary or professional armies again, and those they commanded have largely either faded into obscurity or followed them into prison cells. Though the outcome of the ICTY trials was not entirely satisfying to the ethnic groups involved, nor were the early deaths of two of Yugoslavia's most prominent war criminals satisfying to the tribunal, the example which was set serves as a guarantee of peace for the present and hope for the future.



## Conclusion

Throughout this thesis I have established the most notable crimes committed by Arkan during his command of the Tigers, and used both witness testimonies as well as accounts given by the media of various nations as well as members of the Yugoslav military to give credence to these claims. These attacks, which exhibited clear genocidal intent through their targeting of specific religious or ethnic groups, provided evidence to Arkan's shared mentality and association with those at the top of the Yugoslav political hierarchy. This association, when contrasted with the claims of Milosevic calling him "crazy" and Karadzic saying he never knew him, provides the evidence of an intent to achieve plausible deniability by committing genocide through the acts of paramilitary groups. Mention and definition of the RAM Plan was key in establishing this connection, and the plans which Milosevic and Arkan had to see this genocide through. Though the RAM Plan was meant to remain in the shadows of Yugoslav political history by all those who conceived and carried it out, my goal for this thesis was to bring its effects and implications to light.

A great challenge in bringing this information to light was deciding on the proper sources for modern Balkan history, as some sources may be easily deemed unreliable due to their bias or lack of understanding of Balkan culture and history. The documents of the ICTY trials were an invaluable source of information, both due to the enormity of their records as well as the vast surplus of witness testimonies from the few who managed to survive these atrocities. The importance of first-hand accounts also led me to gravitate to sources such as *The Bosnia List*, as the experiences of Trebinjevic showed how sudden the shift was from peace to violent ethnic hatred instigated by outside forces. While I was also able to make use of many Western sources, I sought to include the direct words of Arkan and his family whenever I could as to not

demonstrate a one-sided slant. It is in this that I thank his son Vojin for his book *Stories About My Father* which helped to provide this balanced approach, which provided a great deal of insight into the personal life and business of Arkan. Although there is a clear bias, both due to the family connection and his book being dedicated to the Serbian veterans of the Yugoslav wars, his refusal to deny Arkan's crimes or condone them helps provide the voice of an honest and reasonable member of the other side. Alongside his interview with CNN during the Kosovo War, I sought to allow his words to stand alongside those who encouraged and challenged his actions. Though there will always be a level of scrutiny given to the source material used for any historiography on Yugoslavia, I believe this work achieved its stated intent.

My intent with this thesis was to provide the history of Arkan's Tigers in the context of the Yugoslav Wars, with the goal of showcasing the direct relationship between Arkan and the leading Serbian political figures in every atrocity his group committed. The historiography specifically dedicated to Arkan is already very limited, partly due to how recent these events were and the fact that there were several other paramilitary groups which got up to similar activity. Even in the historiography which does exist, such as *Hunting the Tiger*, many of the major atrocities go uncovered or barely touched in favor of taking a more personal approach by speaking to those who knew him and had memories of him. I put great emphasis on covering the atrocities not only to showcase how significant his involvement in the war was, but also to serve as further evidence of a pre-planned genocide being carried out in which Arkan was the puppet on Milosevic's string. Although his history as a bank robber and hitman made it rather easy for scholars and the media to assume his actions were merely those of a thug running rampant in a chaotic environment, I sought to argue that Arkan's involvement was more official and organized than even the efforts of the JNA. While it was a rather difficult task, as Balkan history is just as

devoid of one culprit as it is of one commonly agreed-upon viewpoint, I am content that the stated evidence shows this argument to be as valid as its contribution is unique to the historiography.

Arkan was the exact person Milosevic needed at just the right time, a radical Serbian nationalist who had no qualms about inhumane work and with plenty of experience in getting said work done. His de jure status as a civilian organizing a group of armed patriots was perfect for Milosevic and his political allies, as it not only allowed the guise of plausible deniability but also fed into his propaganda machine. Arkan's Tigers indicated that the war effort was so popular amongst the Serbs, even those who were not able to join the army could not help but take up arms to defend their ethnic brothers and expand their borders. Arkan was also rather well-versed in history, at least in a region where historical facts are commonly twisted and mangled to the point of being unrecognizable, so he always presented curious journalists with a pseudo casus belli to cover for the Milosevic regime's aggression. He claimed that the war in Croatia was against the Ustaše, Nazi collaborators from fifty years in the past which had come to once again reform the Independent State of Croatia and massacre Serbs. During the war in Bosnia and later during the Kosovo War, he referred to the Muslims as "Turks" which were artificial leftovers from Ottoman aggression and forced conversion over several centuries. All of these excuses were to cover for his true agenda of forcing the ethnic makeup of the Balkans to change in his favor, an effort which succeeded as well as his attempts to convince the world of his historically cited righteousness.

Željko Ražnatović, the charismatic and criminal paramilitary leader known as Arkan, established a legacy that reflected both his nation's history and its downfall. Yugoslavia was a nation built upon the Serbian assumption to the role of South Slavic unifier, an assumption which

was made on the basis of dominion over the non-Serbian ethnicities of their new lands. It was King Alexander I in the thirties and the Chetniks during World War II who expressed this mentality through violence and oppression, a system which largely continued under Marshal Tito only without the emphasis on Serbian ethnonationalism. Arkan and Milosevic took Yugoslavia out of its position as a remarkable regional power and back to the thirties, working in tandem with one another in order to realize the Greater Serbia dream which their predecessors had failed to establish at the expense of non-Serbs. Though Milosevic and his cohorts attempted to distance themselves from the infamy of Arkan as soon as the war began to turn against them, their own statements both publicly and privately proved that they were always in agreement as their paramilitary allies. Even though it was a great danger to the careers of all those associated with Arkan, working alongside a known bank-robber and government assassin turned genocidal warlord, Arkan's lack of any official position in the Serbian government or military allowed his associates to always maintain the façade of plausible deniability. In the end that façade, like Yugoslavia, fell.

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