Ethnic cleansing and political stability: the case of the Krajina

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Introduction

In 1991, Croatia came apart. The country seceded from the disintegrating Yugoslavia, only to have its own Serb minority region declare itself "the Serbian region of Krajina in Croatia." War broke out, the Yugoslav National Army (JNA) intervened on behalf of the Serbs and occupied a third of Croatia's territory, expelling some 200,000 people, mostly Croats.[1] For the next four years, Croatian Serbs held the Krajina as an autonomous but internationally unrecognized state backed by Belgrade. However, the Croatian government under Franjo Tudjman's nationalist Croatian Democratic Union[2] never accepted this status quo, and instead built up its armed forces until it finally overran Serb defenses during Operations Flash and Storm in the summer of 1995, during which most of the Krajina's Serb population was in turn expelled in a matter of days.

The resulting refugee crisis created by this cleansing and counter-cleansing has taken years to resolve, and even today, in a far more liberal and inclusive Croatia that is a member of the European Union, the majority of former Serb inhabitants have not returned and are unlikely to do so.

This paper considers the war over the Krajina and the subsequent post-war returnee situation for both Croats and Serbs. It explores the motivations for actors to act as they did, including both national political figures and refugee populations who subsequently sought to return. Finally, it offers the following conclusion: discriminatory "ethnic spoils" policies by the Tudjman government favored Croat returnees over Serbs, and therefore the former returned in far greater numbers. However, the defeat of the Croatian Serbs as a viable political threat

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[1] Mulaj, p. 36.

[2] Hereafter HDZ, for *Hrvatska Demokratska Zajednica*.

removed the existential threat of an ethnic security dilemma, solidified internationally recognized borders, and allowed for peaceful reintegration of those Serbs who did return, and for peace and stability between Serbia and Croatia ever since.

War

It was by no means inevitable that Yugoslavia would come apart. Secession is the most extreme demand an ethnic minority can make,[3] and many other options—regional or cultural autonomy, affirmative action, or proportional representation—were perhaps on offer. But by the end of the Cold War, Yugoslavia was under great strain. Since the 1970s, the country had faced mounting debts and an inability to pay its creditors. The standard of living of its people was declining, and inequalities between the regions were increasing. Yugoslav leader Josef Broz Tito had been able to use "regime strategies"[4] under the communist system to stem ethnic rivalries and prevent factionalism along ethnic lines, but these worked only as long as he lived to maintain them. The country's 1974 constitution had a "collective presidency" among the separate regions, allowing the president of each an effective veto that could only be overridden by Tito, the President For Life.[5] After his death in 1980, the state's increasing federalism accelerated, moving toward outright separatism after Slobodan Milošević's consolidation of the national leadership in 1987.[6] It was arguably "the threat of recentralization in the late 1980s, that triggered the secessions."[7]

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[3] Kubo, p. 214.

[4] Massey et al, p. 60.

[5] Sawka and Pavković, p. 158.

[6] Massey et al, p. 60.

[7] Sawka and Pavković, p. 158.

Scholars have debated whether the ethnonationalism on display was inherent or whether it was abused by calculating political leaders seeking to consolidate power. Many argue that the Croatia's secession and the resulting wars over the the Krajina were the result of "purposeful policies on the part of elites," [8] pointing out that intermarriage rates between the Croats and Serbs in the 1980s were as high as one in three;[9] that just before the 1990 election, only 37% of Croats identified Croatian independence as one of their top political priorities;[10] and that the HDZ "in general portrayed itself as wanting democracy and peace and as a moderate nationalist party" in the run-up to the election.[11] But this debate between "primordialists" and "constructivists" [12] is often reductive and is almost beside the point. Both factors were at play and indeed are interrelated, because political leaders and "big men" in the Balkans have typically leveraged power through political and economic patronage networks that, even in pluralistic parts of Yugoslavia, were largely stovepiped along ethnic lines.[13] Milošević and Tudjman were able to "advance their personal political agenda[s]" through nationalism because "most of those who followed them did so because they thought they were best served by militant nationalists." [14] The HDZ was the best financed party in Croatia,[15] and in general nationalist parties were the best organized and able to mobilize.[16]

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[8] Gagnon, p. 131.

[9] Mansfield and Snyder, p. 169.

[10] Gagnon, p. 135.

[11] ibid., p. 137.

[12] Kubo, p. 212.

[13] Kanin, in class.

[14] Gurr, p. 138.

[15] ibid., p. 139.

[16] Kanin, in class.

Moreover, the circumstances on the ground were ripe for instability. Democratizing societies are often prone to conflict due to "weak central authority, unstable domestic coalitions, and high-energy mass politics" and often go to war "not because war is popular with the mass public, but because domestic pressures creative incentives for elites to drum up nationalist sentiment."[17] The Serbs were also numerically concentrated in specific regions of Croatia, something they shared, according to one study, with 88% of ethnic-based uprisings since 1945.[18]

What could have happened will long be debated. What is clear, however, is what did happen. On election day 1990, nationalist parties swept to power across Yugoslavia, and once in office, quickly made their presence felt. In Croatia, the Tudjman government emphasized Croatia's ethnic identity by "adopting a range of ethnic symbols such as the traditional coat of arms, flag and national anthem as the official insignia of the republic; making the Latin script the official alphabet; and making the civil services exclusively Croatian by firing Serbs and employing Croats instead."[19] In June of that year, the government drafted Constitutional amendments to define Croatia "as the sovereign state of the Croat people," while defining all other groups as minorities.[20]

All of this deeply worried the Croatian Serbs, who, despite only accounting for 12% of Croatia's population, had been "disproportionately represented in the composition of Croatia's communist leadership"[21] and feared a loss of political privileges in a Croat-dominated Croatia. Compounding this were more existential fears: the Serbs remembered "the genocide against

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[17] Mansfield and Snyder, p. 169.

[18] Gurr, p. 142.

[19] Mulaj, p. 35.

[20] ibid.

[21] Massey et al, p. 61.

them that took place in the Axis-sponsored Independent State of Croatia"[22] at the hands of the Croatian Ustashi during World War II, when Nazi-backed Croatian nationalists massacred Serbs with the stated goal of killing a third, expelling a third, and forcibly converting a third.[23] Serb nationalists would use this history to mobilize Serb solidarity for the forthcoming war.[24]

In the summer of 1990, the self-appointed Serbian National Council proclaimed a 'Declaration of the Sovereignty and Autonomy of the Serbian People'," [25] and the situation sat on a knife's edge for the rest of the year, with repeated clashes between protesters and police. All the while, Tudjman refused multiple entreaties to preemptively strike.[26] Hardliners in the Serb Democratic Party (SDS), "under direction from Belgrade," were pushing for "a full break." [27] In both the SDS and the HDZ, moderates were being undermined or removed by hardliners.[28] The HDZ could legitimately fear Milošević's designs and the SDS could legitimately fear the HDZ, but both parties were also strengthened by real or perceived threats posed by the other.

Legal norms became twisted for political ends. The Serbs rejected Croatia's eventual declaration of independence as illegal under Yugoslavia's 1974 constitution, while the Croats rejected Krajina Serb referenda on secession from Croatia in which only Serbs had been allowed to participate. When Croatia finally did secede in the summer of 1990, it, like Slovenia before it, invoked the principle of the "self-determination of peoples." The Krajina Serbs counter-seceded

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[22] Radan, p. 523.

[23] Bell-Fialkoff, p. 116.

[24] Gurr, p. 139.

[25] Massey et al, p. 61.

[26] Gagnon, p. 145.

[27] ibid., p. 146.

[28] ibid., p. 147.

under the same principle,[29] laying bare the primary problem with the idea of self determination of peoples: namely, which peoples?[30] The confusing nature of this right led to contorted legal opinions from the European Community, which accepted Croatia after an assurance of "special autonomous status" for the minority Serbs, but rejected the Krajina's application "on the basis of the inter-related principles of the inviolability of Croatia's borders and the absence of the right to external self-determination of its minority Serb population."[31] European states refused to interpose troops between the parties for lack of consent by the sovereign actors, and indeed Germany's move to recognize Croatian independence was in part "designed to circumvent this obstacle."[32]

The mantra of the day was, "Why should I be a minority in your country when you can be a minority in mine?"[33] All sides desired borders that confirmed their majority status, and hardliners in all camps were prepared to use violence if necessary to obtain them. With the HDZ's election in Croatia, Serb conservatives and the JNA tried "to destroy the federation through force and then to consolidate power in a smaller, Serbia-dominated state" without Slovenia and Croatia.[34] As the situation spiraled, all sides had increasing incentive to take the nationalist line and secure political control of a defined ethnic-defined national territory. Where minority populations existed across borders, the grim logic of ethnic cleansing followed.

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[29] Radan, p. 523.

[30] Castellino, p. 125.

[31] ibid, p. 524.

[32] Woodward, p. 199.

[33] Kanin, in class.

[34] Gagnon, p. 142.

Amid the competing declarations of independence and mutually exclusive referenda, open war broke out in August 1991. Quickly, the Serb separatists got the upper hand with the backing of the JNA, gaining control of the Krajina and eastern and western Slavonia. The war itself became "an instrument of ethnic cleansing."[35] The JNA was now thoroughly Serb-dominated (many non-Serbs had already left to join new national armies), and Croatia's nascent national army could not repel them. In a prelude of what would become standard procedure in Bosnia, the Serbs expelled some 200,000 people, most of them Croats.[36] As Serb nationalists tried to cement their dominance of the Krajina, even Serb moderates were harassed and sometimes killed at the hands of the radicals.[37] [38]

A ceasefire was finally agreed on 2 January 1992, and under the Vance plan the JNA formally withdrew, though in practice much of its equipment and personnel remained to secure the new Republic of Serbian Krajina. In February, the U.N. Security Council authorized a peacekeeping force (UNPROFOR) in the Krajina "with a mandate to protect Serb civilians from reprisals and facilitate the return of Croat refugees"[39] and a civilian "transitional administration" for the disputed territories (UNTAES).[40] From 1992 on, Croatia was left in an untenable situation: Zagreb had no control over a quarter of its territory, and "the majority of Croatia's Serb population were refugees in 'Krajina' or in Serbia."[41] The Serbs, meanwhile, hunkered down into

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[35] Mulaj, p. 36.

[36] ibid.

[37] Woodward, p. 221.

[38] Gagnon, p. 4.

[39] Jenne, p. 376.

[40] Crumley-Effinger, p. 20.

[41] Gagnon, p. 154.

a garrison state with Knin as its capital, dependent on the encouragement and sometimes direct support of Milošević.[42]

Throughout the war, the Krajina issue had "bedeviled Western diplomats," who from 1993 on feared a new Serb-Croat war above all else.[43] U.S. Ambassador to Croatia Peter Galbraith said such a war would have all the savagery of Bosnia "with ten times the firepower."[44] U.S., European, and U.N. diplomats attempted to find an acceptable compromise, yet could make no headway beyond the Vance plan.[45] Galbraith's "Z-4" plan would have integrated the Serbs back into Croatia in return for autonomy, but years of negotiations yielded nothing. The Croats feared that a cementing of the status quo would lead to a "Cyprus-ification" of the situation and an eternally frozen conflict. The Serbs, meanwhile, were "willing enough to negotiate endlessly about the *possibility* of reintegration, while in reality doing everything they could to integrate their territory with the adjacent Serb-controlled areas of Bosnia."[46] Though the Vance plan had called on them to disarm, Knin recognized that there was no international will to enforce this. The fundamental issue of territorial status proved unresolvable, and unlike the U.N. and its peacekeepers, the parties on the ground did not want "peace at any price."[47]

Indeed, the fact that the Croats were no longer fighting did not mean they accepted the status quo. Zagreb was determined to regain full control of the Krajina "at any cost."[48] While

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[42] Crumley-Effinger, p. 20.

[43] Rieff, p. 71.

[44] ibid.

[45] Silber and Little, p. 354.

[46] Rieff, p. 72.

[47] ibid.

[48] Radan, p. 524.

Tudjman proved pliable on the issue of Croats in Bosnia, shifting his position several times, he never wavered on the Krajina being an integral part of the Croatian state.[49] Instead, he waited until he had sufficient power, and the right political moment, to strike.

By 1995, the military balance had begun to shift. Throughout the Krajina's autonomous existence, Croatia built up its army in violation of an international arms embargo, "especially through covert aid from private military organizations in the United States," while Belgrade's support for the Krajina had "dwindled in the wake of the economic sanctions which had been imposed against Serbia, Montenegro, and the Serbs of Croatia" by the U.N. Security Council in May 1992.[50] In the summer of 1995, Tudjman allied himself with Bosnian Muslim leader Alija Izetbegović, to Washington's delight, and launched a joint attack on the Bosnian Serb forces, shifting the military balance and putting Milošević further on the defensive.[51]

Tudjman's excuse to launch the final offensive on the Krajina was the re-closing of a the main Zagreb-Belgrade Highway, which had been reopened as part of painstaking negotiations championed by the United States.[52] It was the right moment. The Krajina Serbs depended on the coast for commerce and had no economic viability on their own. For four years, they "had by necessity been a garrison society, in which every adult male was, in effect, either a policeman or a soldier." Economically and militarily, they were exhausted.[53]

Operation Flash saw the Croatian army seize Western Slavonia with shocking speed. Serbs fled by the thousands with little resistance. Serb TV scarcely mentioned the event in the

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[49] Rieff, p. 72.

[50] Radan, p. 524

[51] Silber and Little, p. 345.

[52] ibid., p. 354.

[53] ibid., p. 355-6.

nightly news, suggesting that Milošević had decided to stay "on the sidelines."[54] To this day, speculation continues as to whether Tudjman and Milošević struck a secret accord to ensure Belgrade's non-interference;[55] but either way, the Krajina Serbs had clearly lost their primary patron.

After the success of Operation Flash, the Knin leadership "was now split into several different political camps with the government, police and military all in complete disarray."[56] While its leaders Milan Babić, Milan Martić, and Borislav Mikelić fell to infighting, at least 10,000[57] and possibly as many as 18,000[58] Serbs who had been evicted from Sector West searched for shelter, first in the remaining Serb-held territories, then in Bosnia and beyond. By the time Babić became Prime Minister again on 28 July, he understood his breakaway state would not survive without Milošević's support, and promptly flew to Belgrade to try to get it.[59]

As the Croats massed their forces for a final taking of the Krajina, the American position had shifted as well. The Croatian hard right had benefited as Washington "moved to support Croatia as a regional counterweight to Serbia in order to end what it perceived to be a military stalemate in Bosnia."[60] Tudjman understood from his communications with Galbraith that the United States would not interfere, and American officials merely expressed "concern" at the buildup.[61] Meanwhile, events in Bosnia gave Washington another reason to go along. July

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[54] ibid., p. 354.

[55] Kanin, in class.

[56] O'Shea, p. 209.

[57] ibid., p. 209-210, 217.

[58] Silber and Little, p. 353.

[59] ibid., p. 222.

[60] Gagnon, p. 167.

[61] O'Shea, p. 211.

brought the massacre at Srebrenica and the massing of Serb forces around other safe zones, especially at Bihac, which international peacekeepers seemed powerless to protect. On 17 July, President Bill Clinton's National Security Advisor Anthony Lake unveiled his "endgame strategy," that would involve threats—ultimately carried out—to bomb Bosnian Serb positions and lift the already heavily violated arms embargo.[62] The embargo was indeed lifted by Congress nine days later. Operation Flash had exposed Milošević's unwillingness or inability to defend the Bosnian and Croatian Serbs. The Clinton Administration, long reluctant to enter the fray militarily, took heart that it could attack the Bosnian Serbs without facing the united JNA.[63]

On the morning of 4 August, Operation Storm commenced. Croat forces advanced on Knin, outnumbering Serb defenders five to one and featuring superior training as a result of an "increasingly congenial relationship with the United States."[64] Advancing on the breakaway republic's capital, the Croats came "burning and looting all before them," and ill-treating the U.N. peacekeepers that had monitored the status quo. In one instance, they marched Danish troops ahead of the infantry as human shields.[65]

During the attack, Tudjman "broadcast assurances that the rights of Serbs would be fully assured, asking them to remain,"[66] but the army's tactics perhaps betrayed its true intentions. "The Croats had left escape routes" and through these the Serb leadership and much of the population fled.[67] By mid-morning on 5 August, the Croatian army arrived on the outskirts of

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[62] Power, p. 437.

[63] ibid., p. 438. NATO planes would eventually launch a series of hundreds of attack missions over three weeks against Bosnian Serbs starting 30 August (p. 440).

[64] Silber and Little, p. 357.

[65] O'Shea, p. 226.

[66] Gagnon, p. 169.

[67] Silber and Little, p. 358.

Knin and found the city "deserted."[68] The next day, the Serbs asked for a ceasefire "so that they could arrange a safe evacuation," but the Croats insisted on an "unconditional surrender."[69] Perhaps Tudjman was already looking ahead, imagining two alternate scenarios; one, a firmly Croat Krajina populated by grateful Croat returnees who would reliably vote HDZ for years to come; the other, an conquered, embittered Serb minority who would vote instead for anyone else. The Croatian President would later say, "I thought 60 to 70 percent of the Serbs would stay, that they would understand that democratic Croatia will guarantee their ethnic rights. So the Serbs themselves are to blame for their destiny."[70]

By the end of Operation Storm, Croatia had secured all of its territory. The Erdut Agreement, formalizing the new facts on the ground, would follow closely on the heels of Dayton. But the Croat conquest caused a massive population upheaval, and left the Krajina "virtually cleansed of its Serb inhabitants, who retreated with the Serbian army."[71] In all, 300,000 Serbs were evicted from their homes, and by 1998, Brendan O'Shea could write that "Croatia has become the most ethnically cleansed of all Balkan states."[72]

Returns

With the Erdut and Dayton accords, the war was over. Hundreds of thousands had been displaced across the former Yugoslavia, and the Croatian government had to contend with both internally and externally displaced persons. These two groups did not receive equal treatment.

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[68] ibid.

[69] ibid

[70] ibid.

[71] Mulaj, p. 38.

[72] O'Shea, p. 231.

The government moved quickly to repatriate its internally displaced persons, who were mostly Croat, while actively discriminating against potential Serb returnees until Croat dominance over the Krajina region had been established. Not until the majority of Croats had returned home (and in many cases to former Serb homes), were significant Serb populations able to return.

Many refugees were anxious to return home, not only to reclaim their property and restore their communities, but because they often found themselves disparaged and resented by existing residents wherever they went.[73] The problem was immense. Throughout the war, refugee estimates ranged from 430,000 to 700,000 or 9-15% of Croatia's population, and it was closer to the higher figure in the aftermath of Operation Storm.[74] The HDZ pressed to solve the refugee problem quickly, not only to "divest itself of the refugee burden," but also in the belief that "repatriation would consolidate support for the HDZ," especially among returnees.[75] Zagreb began overseeing returns "within days" of Operation Storm, but from the beginning the process was biased in favor of internally displaced Croats over externally displaced Serbs "in the areas of property repossession, reconstruction, and access to social services and pensions."[76] The government passed laws forcing internally displaced Croats to return within two months or lose government assistance, while other laws simultaneously "explicitly prevent[ed]" the returns of internationally displaced minorities, particularly Serbs, often divesting them of their property.[77] Contrary to standard international practice, the government classification system for displaced persons prioritized ethnicity over location: internally displaced Croats were "expellees," ethnic

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[73] Gagnon, p. 4.

[74] Djuric, p. 1640.

[75] Djuric, p. 1643.

[76] Jenne, p. 376.

[77] Djuric, 1642. This despite the fact that by October 1995, over 10,000 internationally displaced Serbs had submitted return applications (p. 1644).

Croats abroad were "refugees," and Serbs, even Serb refugees abroad, were "displaced persons."[78] Croatia's Law on the Status of Expellees and Refugees and the 1998 Programme of Return codified this into unequal standards for return, favoring Croats, and "the state actively pursued a policy of resettling ethnic Croats in regions formerly populated by Serbs, such as Krajina and Western Slavonia."[79] Local housing commissions were set up to oversee returns. Not surprisingly, these discriminated in favor of Croats.[80] Government officials also favored temporary occupants over property owners in housing disputes, mindful that the former were disproportionately Croat and the latter disproportionately Serb.[81]

None of this should be surprising. By ensuring a loyal Croat population had first right of return, the Tudjman government was operating from the logic of "ethnic spoils,"

> which holds that the wartime ethnic entrepreneurs have incentives to maintain ethnically homogenous enclaves in the wake of sectarian conflict, and that co-ethnics in their patronage networks have incentives to assist them.[82]

The effects were dramatic. Less than a year after Flash and Storm, half of Croat refugees had returned,[83] while a normative framework for Serb returns did not even come into effect until 1998.[84] Even after discriminatory laws were largely removed, local authorities hindered the process.[85] Serb returns were viewed as "inappropriate," a threat by Croats to their political and

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[78] ibid., p. 1644.

[79] ibid., p. 1646.

[80] ibid., p. 1647.

[81] ibid., p. 1639.

[82] Jenne, p. 371.

[83] Jenne, p. 376.

[84] Djuric, p. 1642-3.

[85] ibid., p. 1658.

economic control and "the local social order," and in contravention to the "state-reproduced system of values which reflected a nationalistic and exclusive attitude."[86]

These events hurt Serb refugees but helped the HDZ. As expected, the Croat returnees became the party's strongest supporters.[87] The HDZ took advantage of a popularity boost from its military victory and the absence of Serbs, moved elections up, and won them.[88] Playing the ethnic card would help keep liberal opposition parties at bay through the end of the 1990s,[89] and some have argued that Tudjman's desire to annex "Herceg Bosnia," against Croatian public opinion, stemmed from his belief that the region would deliver still more votes to the HDZ.[90]

However, the interdependence worked both ways. As the HDZ came to depend politically on the support of Croat returnees, "it had to ensure continued resource flows" to the clientelistic networks it had created, which "fortified a high level of interdependency between the HDZ" and these returnees.[91] The HDZ's "war bump" was short-lived, and within months is popularity had fallen again,[92] leaving it more electorally dependent on the Croat returnees than ever. Croat elites among the returnees protected their political power and limited how far the central government could go in allowing Serb returns, even if it wished them. The support of local institutions and authorities is critical for a successful reintegration process,[93] and Serb returns suffered in its absence.

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[86] ibid., p. 1647-8.

[87] Djuric, p. 1643.

[88] Gagnon, p. 170.

[89] Gagnon, p. 134.

[90] ibid., p. 164.

[91] Djuric, p. 1646.

[92] Gagnon, p. 170.

[93] Jenne, p. 372.

Events changed with the turn of the millennium. Tudjman died in December 1999, and the HDZ lost the 2000 elections to a more moderate coalition. By 2001, 88% of Croats had returned and consolidated Croat grip on the Krajina.[94] The new President, Stjepan Mesić, authorized a US$55 million program "to assist minority returns," which was funded by international donors under the Stability Pact,[95] while the parliament passed a constitutional law "mandating proportional representation in the civil service."[96] With a more moderate government and more moderate laws came a wave of Serb returns.

"Moderate," however, is relative. The coalition government still did not formally express support for Serb returns until 2003,[97] and the bulk of the anti-Serb policies and rhetoric continued. Local government offices, many still under HDZ control, continued to throw up hurdles to Serb returnees, and many returnees subsequently left in frustration upon being frozen out by Croat-dominated ethnic patronage networks.[98] When Serb officials were able to win local offices over some HDZ candidates in the former Krajina, bitter disputes over the renaming of streets ensued.[99] Croatian political rhetoric continued to treat the Serbs as a fifth column for Belgrade, and Tudjman himself lauded the "achievement" of significantly reducing their numbers in Croatia in his 1997 annual speech.[100] Meanwhile, "senior Croatian officials in ministries responsible for land and property made statements that blatantly discriminated against Serbs."[101]

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[94] Djuric, p. 1651.

[95] Jenne, p. 376.

[96] ibid., p. 377.

[97] ibid., p. 1658.

[98] Jenne, p. 387.

[99] Djuric, p. 1651-3.

[100] Djuric, p. 1643.

[101] Crumley-Effinger, p. 22.

Ironically, it would be the HDZ's return to power in 2003 that would finally ease the process of returns. Lacking the ability to form a government, it partnered with the social democratic Serb party SDSS in exchange for concessions and normalization of the returns process. "Changes in administrative treatment occurred almost overnight" and formerly hostile local authorities "suddenly changed their attitudes, becoming more benevolent towards the Serb returnees." [102]

By this time, however, most of those who planned to return had already done so. Returns peaked in 2000 and fell every year thereafter, plunging into the hundreds by the end of the decade. By 2005, only a third of Serbs had returned, compared to nearly all Croats, and the 2001 census showed the Serbs were now only 4.5% of Croatia's population, two thirds less than in 1991.[103] Issues on housing ownership dragged on, with some cases still unresolved as late as 2007.[104] All over the former Yugoslavia, the displaced found the ability to return home did not ensure an easy transition. In neighboring Bosnia, a 2009 report found that

> although some communities are mixed again, this is no guarantee of interethnic harmony. In plenty of communities, returnees are reminded of their second-class status as minority returnees and not as ordinary prewar residents of their own hometowns.[105]

By decade's end, most Croats had returned, and most Serbs who had not already done so had lost interest. In the end, Tudjman's vision was realized: a decisively Croat Croatia, in full control of its territory, West-aligned and in the European Union.

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[102] Djuric, p. 1655.

[103] Jenne, p. 377.

[104] Djuric, p. 1655.

[105] Tuthail and O'Laughlin, p. 1052.

Conclusions

In the halls of international institutions, a common refrain of diplomats is that "there are no military solutions." The case of the Krajina should make these diplomats uncomfortable, for it clearly shows that sometimes there *are* military solutions. Additionally, the Krajina raises another, even more uncomfortable question: does ethnic cleansing work?

First, a word on what this question does not mean. Ethnic cleansing is a notoriously nebulous term, ranging from mutually agreed population swaps at one end of the spectrum to genocide at the other.[106] Obviously, in addition to being a heinous tactic, large scale massacres like Srebrenica are highly destabilizing and can galvanize global opinion against the perpetrators, as the Bosnian Serbs discovered in 1995 when they were subjected to punishing NATO airstrikes. Long-term attempts to cleanse or subjugate minorities can "undermine the social cohesion of a country" and "is thoroughly counterproductive as a tool of state-building."[107] A far better strategy is to integrate minorities into the political and economic spheres of the country. But what if the ethnic security dilemma renders this impossible?

Ethnic cleansing in the former Yugoslavia "can be understood primarily as a policy designed to construct homogeneous polities over contested territories whose people's allegiance could not be assured."[108] Klejda Mulaj argues that that "[f]or the most part, ethnic cleansing in this region reflects the official perception of minorities as a threat undermining the cohesion of the dominant nation."[109] But in the case of Croatia it was more than this. Croats were by far the dominant majority in Croatia from the beginning, and the fear came primarily from the fact that

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[106] Bell-Fialkoff, p. 110.

[107] Mulaj, p. 40.

[108] Mulaj, p. 23.

[109] ibid., p. 40.

the Croatian Serbs were tied to larger Serb populations in Bosnia and Serbia, who together had formed a plurality in Yugoslavia. The Krajina Serbs were far more threatening because of their ties to Belgrade and the threat a "Greater Serbia" posed to the territorial integrity of Croatia. Operations Flash and Storm resolved this problem: by the end of the summer of 1995, Croatia's borders and political nature were secured, and in subsequent years, Croatia could, and did, re-admit large numbers of its Serb population without them posing an existential threat to the nature of the state.

Ethnic cleansing is also harder to define when populations voluntarily or preemptively leave. By March of 1991, some 20,000 Serbs had already fled Croatia, most bound for Vojvodina. "From the very start, fear itself created large numbers of refugees."[110] Throughout the war, all sides would use a range of tactics to encourage widespread flight. Rape as a weapon of war was used to terrorize people into leaving. So were prisoner of war camps, where the prisoners' families were told their loved ones would be released only if the families agreed to leave.[111] Most Serbs in the Krajina fled before the Croatian army had the chance to throw them out.

Uncomfortable as it may be, clearly delineated territory certainly makes peace deals easier. This was true even in the most notorious cleansing episode of the war. During the Dayton negotiations, Western negotiators were "secretly relieved" that Srebrenica and Zepa had fallen because it made the subsequent division of Bosnia much easier to enforce.[112] "Neater maps" could now be drawn.[113]

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[110] Bell-Fialkoff, p. 118.

[111] Bell-Fialkoff, p. 120.

[112] Power, p. 438.

[113] Silber and Little, p. 350.

There is also strong evidence that federations with autonomous zones are sub-optimal at best, and can often be unworkable and undemocratic, particularly in lower-income countries. Most developing world federations "remain intact because of the authoritarian practices of their central leaderships, but this is a highly inefficient mode of governance."[114] Most federations created in the 20th century either broke apart or became partly or fully centralized.[115] The former Yugoslav states are testament to this, with the most stable ones (Slovenia, Croatia) being the ones most firmly defined in terms of ethnic character, and national identity, while the ones with significant ethno-geographic minority populations (Bosnia, Macedonia, Kosovo) are the least stable and the most dependent on international stewardship. Even today, Serb-controlled parts of Kosovo and Bosnia and Herzegovina would probably secede if allowed to vote on the matter.[116] And even relatively peaceful freezing of conflicts can have deleterious effects on the lives and economic opportunities of inhabitants. Disputed "limbo worlds" like Nagorno-Karabakh, Somaliland, North Cyprus, and Abkhazia "have to try harder" to establish the legitimacy that the international community has not given them.[117] They are often dependent on external support or indefinite peacekeeping missions; are at risk of becoming garrison states like the Krajina did; and face the near-constant risk of reconquest, or, failing that, of becoming "permanent second class state[s]."[118] These are no conditions to build a stable, functional, liberal, and prosperous society at peace with its neighbors.

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[114] Sawka and Pavković, p. 150

[115] ibid.

[116] ibid. p. 168.

[117] Wood.

[118] ibid.

The region also has a history of large-scale population transfers that were followed by lengthy stability between former enemies with previously disputed territories. Greece and Turkey ended their war with an agreed compulsory population exchange involving two million people. At the cost of tremendous suffering to the displaced individuals, it achieved the goal of stability between the two states. During the Second World War, the Nazis not only perpetrated the Holocaust, but also deported large numbers of people, particularly in Poland, to "Germanify" territory they had seized. When the war was over, Eastern European countries retaliated by deporting nearly 12 million Germans back to Germany, over a sixth of whom died "from a combination of war, hunger, cold and disease."[119] The Czech Republic's revenge against Hitler's occupation of the Sudetenland was the "organized transfer" of almost two million Germans.[120] The fact that no subsequent German leader would have again likely sought to use German minorities as an excuse for expansionism was now buttressed by the fact that there would be no Germans left to afford the opportunity. Of course, the causality of the stability that followed is disputed. Did the absence of Germans abroad end German revisionism and expansionism? Or was it the division of Germany between great powers and the onset of the Cold War? Or was it cultural changes within Germany itself after the fall of the Nazis?

The question of what would have happened if Serbs had freely been allowed to return in the immediate aftermath of Operation Flash, as Croats were, is a counterfactual and is thus unknowable, though surveys suggest that, through the former Yugoslavia, more people would have returned home had the right housing and economic conditions existed.[121] However, minority returns can be destabilizing because they render "control of that territory once again

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[119] Bell-Fialkoff, p. 115.

[120] Glassheim, p. 463.

[121] Jenne, p. 377.

uncertain, thus re-creating the same security dilemma that will help to escalate the conflict in the first place."[122] Zagreb's initial policy avoided this outcome by ensuring undisputed Croat control of all of Croatia's territory and the ethnic spoils therein. As with the founding of most European states, it was "the fait accompli of physical control through military force" that won the day.[123]

In doing so, the HDZ created a climate conducive to more conciliatory returnee policies later on. The 2000s offered Croatian leaders a political landscape in which they could be more accommodating than in the 1990s. There were several reasons for the shift. First, with the war over and the regional political situation largely stabilized, the ethnic security dilemma posed by a breakaway Serb province was removed. Second, the subsequent Serb returnees were too few in number to pose a real threat, and they understood that they were "effectively finished as a united political force."[124] Third, the government's plodding acceptance of more Serbs in power was done "mostly under international pressure and to meet other incentives, such as EU membership."[125] Fourth, electoral alliances of convenience (notably between the HDZ and SDSS) helped align political motivations to make returns easier. In short, the defining of national identity and borders through military force helped lead to political stability which allowed for greater returns and tolerance than likely could have happened otherwise.

Some have argued that the validity of an "ethnic security dilemma" was undermined by the fact that 100,000 Serbs ultimately did return, and that the state allowed them to. However, at less than a 20th of the population, this smaller Serb community posed no serious political threat to the established order, and even after returning faced consistent employment discrimination and

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[122] Jenne, p. 374.

[123] Woodward, p. 212.

[124] Kanin, in class.

[125] Crumley-Effinger, p. 22.

underrepresentation in the civil service wherever proportional representation was not required by law.[126] Also telling is that, despite a superior economic situation in Croatia than in Serbia in the early 2000s, two thirds of Serbs chose *not* to return.

The moral calculus of long term peace against short-term suffering is beyond the scope of this paper. But it seems clear that solidifying the ethno-nationalist identity of states through partition can, under the right circumstances, yield greater stability than other outcomes. Carter Johnson found that "partition is a uniformly effective tool in preventing a recurrence of war and low-level violence, but only if it includes the physical separation of ethnic groups."[127] Johnson also found, however, that incomplete partitions (such as India and Pakistan and Israel and Palestine, where territory or populations are still disputed) set the stage for long-term instability,[128] and that "[b]ecause partition without the separation of ethnic groups does not increase the likelihood of securing peace, population transfers become necessary."[129] Whether these are through negotiated population exchanges, forced evictions, or voluntarily departures, the plight of the moved populations is usually tragic and harrowing. But as Andrew Bell-Fialkoff wrote in *Foreign Affairs* in the summer of 1993, whether people leave voluntarily or are compelled to go, fear and a desire for stability and peace

> will accomplish the same end. ... With no sizable minorities left within any state and with the warring factions securely walled off behind "national" boundaries, the best that can be hoped for is that the motors of conflict will be disabled and the fatal cycles of violence that have marred Balkan history will finally have reached their end.[130]

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[126] Jenne, p. 378.

[127] Johnson, p. 143.

[128] ibid, p. 162.

[129] ibid, p. 167.

[130] Bell-Fialkoff, p. 121.

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