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Croatian Radical Separatism and Diaspora Terrorism During the Cold War

Mate Nikola Tokić

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Mate Nikola Tokić

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To my family
—immediate and extended, near and far, old and new—
for not just making this book possible
but for making it and indeed everything else I have ever done worthwhile.

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List of Acronyms

AdR	Archiv der Republik (Archive of the Republic [of Austria])
AHD	Australsko hrvatsko društvo (Australian Croatian Association)
AHNO	Australsko hrvatski narodni odpor (Australo-Croatian National Resistance)
AJ	Arhiv Jugoslavije (Archive of Yugoslavia)
ALN	Alianza Libertadora Nacionalista (Nationalist Liberation Alliance)
ALP	Australian Labor Party
ANZ	Archives New Zealand
ASIO	Australian Security Intelligence Organisation
BA	Bundesarchiv (Federal Archives [of Germany])
BKA	Bundeskriminalamt (Federal Criminal Police Office [of Germany])
BStU	Bundesbeauftragte für die Stasi-Unterlagen (Office of the Federal Commissioner for the Stasi Archives)
CIA	Central Intelligence Agency
Cominform	Information Bureau of the Communist and Workers' Parties
Comintern	Communist International
CPA	Communist Party of Australia
CPF	Commonwealth Police Force [of Australia]
DA MSP RS	Diplomatski arhiv Ministarstva spoljnih poslova Republike Srbije (Diplomatic Archives of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Republic of Serbia)
DGB	Deutsche Gewerkschaftsbund (Confederation of German Trade Unions)
DHS	Department of Homeland Security [of the United States]
DOJ	Department of Justice [of the United States]
ETA	Euskadi Ta Askatasuna (Basque Homeland and Liberty)

FALN	Fuerzas Armadas de Liberación Nacional (Puerto Rican Armed Forces of National Liberation)
FBI	Federal Bureau of Investigation
FLN	Front de libération nationale (National Liberation Front)
FRG	Federal Republic of Germany [West Germany]
GDR	German Democratic Republic [East Germany]
HBZ	Hrvatska bratska zajednica (Croatian Fraternal Union)
HDA	Hrvatski državni arhiv (Croatian National Archives)
HDO	Hrvatski demokratski odbor (Croatian Democratic Committee)
HDP	Hrvatski državotvorni pokret (Croatian Statehood Movement)
HDS	Hrvatska državotvorna stranka (Croatian State-Forming Party)
HDZ	Hrvatska demokratska zajednica (Croatian Democratic Union)
HKB	Hrvatsko križarsko bratstvo (Croatian Crusaders' Brotherhood)
HNO	Hrvatski narodni odbor (Croatian National Committee)
HNSS	Hrvatska nacionalsocijalistička stranka (Croatian National Socialist Party)
HNV	Hrvatsko narodno vijeće (Croatian National Council)
HOP	Hrvatski oslobodilački pokret (Croatian Liberation Movement)
HOS	Hrvatske oružane snage (Croatian Armed Forces)
HPRO	Hrvatska pravaška republikanska omladina (Croatian Rights Republican Youth)
HRB	Hrvatsko revolucionarno bratstvo (Croatian Revolutionary Brotherhood)
HRS	Hrvatski radnički savez za Njemačku (Croatian Worker's Union for Germany)
HSP	Hrvatska stranka prava (Croatian Party of Rights)
HSS	Hrvatska seljačka stranka (Croatian Peasant Party)
HZ	Hrvatska zajednica (Croatian Association)
INTERPOL	International Criminal Police Organization
JAT	Jugoslovenski Aero-Transport (Yugoslav Air Transport)
KPJ	Komunistička partija Jugoslavije (Communist Party of Yugoslavia)
LAC	Library and Archives of Canada

MPE	Movimiento Peronista de los Extranjeros (Peronist Movement for Foreigners)
NAA	National Archives of Australia
NARA	National Archives and Records Administration [of the United States]
NDH	Nezavisna Država Hrvatska (Independent State of Croatia)
NHZ	Narodna hrvatska zajednica (National Croatian Society)
OSA	Vera and Donald Blinken Open Society Archives
Otpor	Hrvatski narodni otpor (Croatian National Resistance)
Ozna	Odjeljenje za zaštitu naroda (Department of the Protection of the People [of Yugoslavia])
PAAA	Politisches Archiv des Auswärtigen Amtes (Political Archives of the Foreign Office [of Germany])
PCA–Senate	Publications Archives–Parliament of Australia
PIRA	Provisional Irish Republican Army
PLO	Palestine Liberation Organization
RAF	Rote Armee Fraktion (Red Army Faction)
RICO	Racketeer Influenced and Corrupt Organizations Act
SAO	Srpska autonomna oblast (Serbian Autonomous Oblast of Krajina)
Säpo	Säkerhetspolisen (Security Service [of Sweden])
SDB	Služba državne bezbednosti (State Security Service [of Yugoslavia])
SFRJ	Socijalistička Federativna Republika Jugoslavija (Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia)
SKH	Savez komunista Hrvatske (League of Communists of Croatia)
SKJ	Savez komunista Jugoslavije (League of Communists of Yugoslavia)
SLS	Slovenska ljudska stranka (Slovene People's Party)
SOHDA	Središnji odbor hrvatskih društava Australije (Committee of Croatian Associations in Australia)
SOHDE	Središnji odbor hrvatskih društava Evrope (Central Committee of Croatian Associations in Europe)
SP	Stranka prava (Party of Rights)
Stasi	Ministerium für Staatssicherheit (Ministry for State Security [of East Germany])
TNA	The National Archives [of the United Kingdom]
TO	Teritorijalna obrana (Territorial Defense)

TRUP	Tajne revolucionarne ustaške postrojbe (Secret Revolutionary Ustaša Formations)
TUP	Tajni ustaški pokret (Secret Ustaša Movement)
UAH	Ujedinjeni američki Hrvati (United American Croats)
Udba	Uprava državne bezbednosti (State Security Administration [of Yugoslavia])
UHNj	Ujedinjeni Hrvati Njemačke (United Croats of West Germany)
UMA	University of Melbourne Archives
UNS	Ustaška nadzorna služba (Ustaša Surveillance Service)
VMRO	Vnatrešna Makedonska Revolucionerna Organizacija (Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organization)

Introduction

Our Position Is Clear

We live—we are told by politicians, the media, and even scholars—in an unprecedented age of terror. To cite just one example of such rhetoric, the contentious conservative Australian senator Pauline Hanson warned in 2016 that “we have terrorism on the streets that we’ve never had before.”¹ Of course, such claims are patently and indeed often willfully ahistorical. Our present-day age of terror is far from being the first, or even the most formative, epoch of terrorism of the past two centuries. Since the birth of modern terrorism in the mid-nineteenth century, political violence and terrorism have been a continuous presence in the global political landscape, from the anarchists and nationalists of the pre–World War I era, to the state-sponsored terror of the interwar period, to the anticolonial struggles following World War II, on to the militant leftists of the Cold War, and finally to the terrorism of the present day.

Even among those who concede that the contemporary age of terror is not *sui generis*, many still contend that today’s political violence differs fundamentally from that of previous eras. The issue centers on the fundamental question of who today’s terrorists are. Prior to September 11, 2001, according to this thinking, terrorism was primarily a domestic problem perpetrated by domestic actors. That is, through the end of the twentieth century, the history of terrorism was essentially national in character, the contributions of various international and transnational forces notwithstanding.² With 9/11, however, terrorism moved beyond national borders. Shifts in the political constellations of the post–Cold War world and a radical transformation in the nature of globalization, the reasoning goes, led to a new kind of terrorism that emanated primarily from those considered in one way or another as outsiders, meaning migrants, foreigners, and diaspora communities.

But here again history tells a different story. As one of many examples—not coincidentally the subject of this book—emigrant Croatian separatists who sought the destruction of socialist Yugoslavia and the establishment of an independent Croatian state were among the most dynamic terrorists of

the second half of the twentieth century. Active in countries as widely dispersed as Sweden, Australia, New Zealand, West Germany, and the United States, Croatian extremists were responsible for scores of bombings around the world in the 1960s and 1970s, as well as numerous attempted and successful assassinations. Croatian separatists also launched two guerilla incursions into socialist Yugoslavia and carried out the hijacking of two airplanes. In Australia alone, state security officials attributed at least sixty-five incidents of significant violence to Croatian separatists between 1963 and 1972, no less than twenty of which they characterized as “major.”³ Worldwide, anti-Yugoslav Croats committed on average one act of terror every five weeks between 1962 and 1980.

If today somewhat forgotten, violence perpetrated in the struggle for Croatian national independence was far from inconsequential. To give one example of the seriousness with which Croatian revolutionary separatism was viewed, in 1972 the West German government declared political violence among migrant Croats to be the country’s “number one problem with foreigners.”⁴ Similarly, the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) in the United States classified Croats together with the Puerto Rican Armed Forces of National Liberation (FALN; Fuerzas Armadas de Liberación Nacional) and the Cuban Omega 7 as the most dangerous foreign national terrorists operating in the country.⁵ And in socialist Yugoslavia itself, President Josip Broz Tito characterized ongoing Croatian terrorism as perhaps the greatest “threat to the [Yugoslav] regime and to the survival of the federal state.”⁶ To be sure, terrorism did not lead to either the breakup of socialist Yugoslavia or the establishment of the Republic of Croatia. But it did help define the discursive, rhetorical, and political parameters that framed the path to both.

As to the supposed novelty of the role played by transnational and international actors in contemporary terrorism and political violence, the basic contours of this argumentation can be seen globally in recent developments in state policies dealing with terrorism as well as in the polemical rhetoric of those who seek to instrumentalize both the real and imagined threat of “foreigner violence” to promote various political agendas. As the scholar of international relations Fiona Adamson observes: “International migration has moved to the top of the international security agenda. Increasingly, policy-makers in the United States, Europe, and around the world are making links between migration policy and national security. Much of this discussion has focused on migration flows as a conduit of international terrorism.”⁷ In other words, the first step in combating terrorism has shifted from identifying and then addressing the myriad root causes of radicalization to controlling and securitizing transnational migration.⁸ If we stop migration—to distill this idea even further—we stop terrorism.

Such policies have been accompanied by a sharp increase in politicized rhetoric on the perceived connection between terrorism and migration, primarily among increasingly emboldened right-wing populists the world over. In January 2018, to provide just one example, US president Donald Trump tweeted his claim that “nearly 3 in 4 individuals convicted of terrorism-related charges are foreign-born,” citing a report produced jointly by the United States Departments of Homeland Security (DHS) and Justice (DOJ).⁹ Significantly, neither the tweet nor the report upon which it was based made mention of the fact that the alarming statistic included only those found guilty of “international” terrorism and excluded all cases of people convicted of “domestic” terrorism. The political motives for the Trump administration’s flagrant misrepresentation of the character of terrorists and terrorism in the current debate over immigration are transparent. Hungary’s prime minister Viktor Orbán, meanwhile, has been even more brazen in making claims about the direct relationship between migration and terrorism. To cite just two examples of his rhetoric, “migration is the Trojan wooden horse of terrorism”¹⁰ and “the factual point is that all the terrorists are basically migrants.”¹¹

As recent scholarship has demonstrated, however, very few facts support either such state policies or rhetorical claims. Studies examining the relationship between migration and political violence have repeatedly found no causal link between the two issues.¹² Indeed, the most current research strongly suggests that, if anything, the opposite may be true. As one of the first large-scale quantitative studies of the relationship between migration and terrorism concludes: “Our arguments and empirical analyses support the . . . hypothesis that immigrants are an important vehicle for the diffusion of terrorism from one country to another. At the same time, . . . our results emphasize that immigration per se is unlikely to positively affect terrorism. On the contrary, we actually find that more migration generally (i.e., when immigration is not necessarily linked to terrorism in the migrants’ countries of origin) into a country is associated with a lower level of terrorist attacks.”¹³ Rather than asserting that there is no relationship between population flows and political violence, this study stresses—in direct contradiction to claims made by political figures such as Hanson, Trump, and Orbán—that the relationship between migration and terrorism is neither intrinsic nor linear. Migration certainly can and indeed has contributed to increased terrorist activity around the world. But it has also served at times as an important factor in processes of deradicalization and peace-building, both in migrants’ homelands and in their host countries.¹⁴ And in still other situations, there has been no correlation—causal or otherwise—between migration and political violence. The point is simply, to quote the noted scholar of terrorism Alex P. Schmid, that “the relationship between terrorism and various forms of migration is a complex one.”¹⁵

Difficulty in unraveling the manifold layers of complexity that exist in the linkages between population flows and political violence is at least in part a product of disciplinary segregation that exists within academia. Without making too fine a point about it, only recently have scholars of migration—whose cutting-edge research comes from the field of social anthropology—shown interest in the work of scholars examining political violence and terrorism, topics that in recent years have been primarily the domain of political scientists and political sociologists. As Schmid explains, for much of their respective histories, “the study of terrorism and the study of migration have been two separate fields. While there is a huge literature on both migration and on terrorism, there are no in-depth studies on the intersection of the two phenomena.”¹⁶ In many ways, this state of affairs is itself quite revealing, indicating that the relationship between migration and terrorism is perhaps far less essential or compelling than contemporary political figures would have us believe. The flip side, of course, is that the scarcity of academic literature directly exploring the connection between population flows and political violence has left open considerable discursive space for claims of a causal link between increases in migration and terror that are based on perception, anecdote, and political agenda rather than on considered and rigorous research.

One of the more intriguing possible bridges linking migration and terrorism research is an academic discipline that has, broadly speaking, both neglected and been neglected by each—namely, history. Again, echoing the previous point, it is not that there are no histories of either migration or terrorism. Indeed, both migration and terrorism scholarship often draw on historical examples to support their conceptual and theoretical claims. But even if we accept evidence that the humanities and social sciences are moving toward greater multi- and interdisciplinarity, deep-seated and long-standing disciplinary partitions have often led scholars to engage neighboring disciplines in only the most cursory and superficial ways, leaving disregarded perspectives and approaches that could constructively inform their own work. What sets history apart in this constellation is its nature as a truly hybrid discipline, straddling the humanities and social sciences in ways that other disciplines do not.¹⁷ Even if history has a tendency to discover only belatedly theoretical and conceptual developments in other fields, once it does, to quote Isabelle Duyvesteyn, it is singularly equipped to turn “the grey areas between disciplines that used to be dividing walls [into] promising new areas of research.”¹⁸ While history alone can never fully solve the problem of understanding, the core tools of the discipline—chronology, narrative, and interpretation—all serve as ready pathways to understanding in numerous and varied disciplines.¹⁹

To state the point differently, scholars researching both migration and terrorism could learn something from history. Or rather—to be even more precise—they could both learn something from historiography. This serves as the fundamental starting point of this book. While the empirical subject to be explored in the text—Cold War-era anti-Yugoslav separatist Croats—may be of greatest interest to specialists in Croatian and Yugoslav history, the underlying conceptual issues addressed in the book—the origins, development, and character of diasporic political violence—are relatable across disciplines and specialties. The text makes no claims to proposing an overarching model for understanding the relationship between migration and terrorism. It does, however, seek to provide new and formative perspectives for those aiming for this goal. To borrow from the historian and noted scholar of political violence and terrorism Walter Laqueur, this book, like all histories of terrorism, is by no means “a magic wand, a key to all the mysteries of contemporary terrorism.” Still, as he continues in his own study of the phenomenon, “in the absence of other satisfactory explanations, it [does] provide some useful insights” that can contribute to the growing—and necessary—debates both within and outside academia about one of the more prominent and pressing issues of the day.²⁰

Overview

The central aim of this book is less to recount each individual act of political violence at the hands of Croatian separatists than to explore the social and political factors that led at least some members of the emigrant Croat population to embrace terrorism as an acceptable form of political expression during the Cold War. In other words, its concern is with the discourses and practices of radicalization and the ways in which both individuals and groups engaging in terrorism construct a particular image of the world to justify their actions. Most importantly, it was not simply the extreme nationalism of Croatian separatists that engendered radicalization. Rather, it was an engagement with particular transnational structures and practices that encouraged certain political actors first to imagine, then develop, and finally justify the decision to incorporate violence into their repertoires of political engagement. In this regard—to borrow from the sociologist Arjun Appadurai—landscapes became as important as lands in envisioning, organizing, and realizing violence in the name of national liberation.²¹

While myriad factors contributed to the radicalization of anti-Yugoslav Croats during the Cold War, four stand out as most formative. The first and arguably most important factor in engendering extremist Croatian separatism were patterns of migration. Political violence and terrorism that aimed to destroy socialist Yugoslavia and establish an independent Croatia was in character and practice a diasporic phenomenon. Importantly, “diaspora” is not

understood here as a “bona fide actual entit[y],” as Gabriel Sheffer writes in his influential work on the subject.²² Rather, this book employs the understanding of diaspora as articulated by Rogers Brubaker—namely, “stances, projects, claims, idioms, practices, and so on.”²³ Diasporas, in other words, are not bounded communities that can be described in essentialist terms. Instead, they are the collection of experiences, formulations, and contentions made in the name of said alleged bounded communities. Rather than being characterized by homogeneity and unity, diasporas are always marked by diversity and even discord, resulting in their being—in James Clifford’s deft formulation—“a ‘changing same,’ something endlessly hybridized and in process.”²⁴

This idea of a “changing same” is central to understanding the process of radicalization among those who came to embrace extremism and militancy in the name of Croatian freedom. Cold War–era diasporic Croatian politics was defined by its fierce infighting and fractional splintering. Among the first generation of emigrants who fled to the West in the immediate aftermath of World War II, this fragmentation actually resulted in something of a deradicalization of the national liberation movement. To be sure, the rhetoric of this first postwar generation of anti-Yugoslav Croats—the majority of whom had been members of the fascist Ustaša movement during the war—contained plentiful calls to political violence during the early years of the Cold War.²⁵ But actual—as opposed to rhetorical—violence was absent from their activities. The reversion to political violence and terrorism came only with a shift in the demographic makeup of the Croatian community abroad beginning in the late 1950s that fundamentally changed the dynamics of Croatian diasporic stances and practice.

The standard narrative of the history of Cold War–era Croatian separatism attributes the movement’s return to terrorism to younger emigrants being exposed to Ustašism by older, post–World War II émigrés.²⁶ Without minimizing the unquestionably formative role played by both the history and principles of the Ustaše in fostering Cold War–era Croatian political violence, however, this book argues that the violent radicalization of younger emigrants, in fact, developed as a result of direct opposition to the older generation. In the eyes of those who arrived in the West after the late 1950s, the generation of Ustaša émigrés that had fled Yugoslavia following the collapse of the war-time Independent State of Croatia (NDH; *Nezavisna Država Hrvatska*) had accomplished very little since being forced from their homeland. Indeed, the older generation had brought about not just a general stagnation in émigré separatist politics but had diminished the possibility for revolutionary change in Croatia.²⁷ This fervent disillusionment with the older generation of Croatian emigrants, as will be explored extensively, became the cornerstone for the radicalization of younger separatists beginning in the 1960s.

A second dynamic contributing to the radicalization of Croats in the emigration were shifts in the political landscape of international relations and politics throughout the Cold War years that influenced both the ideological and organizational development of Croatian separatism and helped define the strategic thinking of radical separatists. For much of the 1950s, the Croatian political emigration bet heavily on what they—together with many others—believed would be the inevitable military confrontation between East and West. In this conflict, according to the logic of anti-Yugoslav separatists in the first fifteen years following the end of World War II, Croats both in the emigration and within Tito's Yugoslavia would side with the West against the forces of the East, fighting together with the Western Powers to liberate eastern Europe from the forces of communism. For their efforts, the Croatian nation would be rewarded with an independent state sponsored by and allied with the West.

In what would prove a fateful concurrence of events, the demographic shift in the Croatian emigration came just as *détente* among the Great Powers was starting to define Cold War international politics. Of the issues fueling the conflict between the younger and older generations of Croatian separatists in the emigration, few were as contentious as the question regarding the degree to which the national liberation movement should rely on the West for either moral or material support. In direct opposition to postwar émigrés, the younger generation believed the question of Croatian statehood to be irrelevant to the Great Powers and, as such, would never factor into the strategic considerations of global politics. To wait on the Western—or indeed any—Powers to come to the nation's rescue was, simply, to wait on a train that would never come. Instead, the only way forward was for the people of the nation itself to take up arms and bring down Tito's hated Yugoslav state through violent and revolutionary struggle.

This radicalization among Croatian separatists arose at least in part due to a third dynamic—namely, the context of the violence within which the postwar Croatian national liberation movement operated. Among the myriad violent milieus through which anti-Yugoslav Croatian separatism had to maneuver during the Cold War, four can be identified as particularly formative in the radicalization of Croatian nationalists. The first was a deeply ingrained national victim complex that served as an integral component of postwar Croatian diasporic identity discourses. At the heart of this victim complex was the Bleiburg tragedy, when tens of thousands of Croats and others were killed by Yugoslav Partisan forces at the end of World War II. For many Croatian emigrants—and not just radicals—Bleiburg was proof positive of the Belgrade regime's intent to carry out nothing less than the “biological destruction” of the Croatian nation.²⁸ In other words, “Serbo-communist” rule in Yugoslavia—to

use a favorite term of anti-Belgrade Croats—was not simply autocratic and discriminatory against Croats but was manifestly genocidal. As such, violent struggle against Belgrade was not only legitimate; it was absolutely necessary for the existential survival of the nation.

The second formative milieu of violence within which radical Croatian separatists operated was a particular interpretation of Croatia's own recent history. As much as the younger generation of separatists resented and even vilified postwar émigrés, they praised the older generation for its activities during the interwar period. Indeed, a major point of contention between the two generations was the younger generation's failure to understand why the older generation—in opposing socialist Yugoslavia—had ignored those strategies of uncompromising struggle that had earlier succeeded against interwar royalist Yugoslavia. Younger emigrants asserted that it was the campaign of terror waged by Ante Pavelić's Ustaša movement in the 1930s that had made possible the establishment of the NDH in 1941—Croatia's first state in nearly a thousand years. The same would equally be true, younger radicals argued, for a new independent Croatia. Of course, this reading of history ignored many crucial details regarding the establishment of the NDH, not least the circumstances of World War II and the Axis invasion of the Balkans. But for postwar separatists, the particulars of how the NDH came to be were less important than finding in their own history a model for achieving national liberation.

A third milieu of violence was provided by global events in the early Cold War years that reinforced the idea that revolutionary political violence was an effective political strategy for achieving national independence. To whatever degree bipolar Great Power confrontation determined much of postwar international politics, the younger generation of Croatian separatists recognized that the era was equally defined by revolutionary struggles for national liberation. With special focus on the revolutions in Cuba, Algeria, and the Congo, anti-Yugoslav Croats found in postwar anticolonialism a model for how to frame and wage their conflict with Belgrade.²⁹ These young radicals asserted that "Serbo-communism" was not just genocidal but imperialistic. Thus, socialist Yugoslavia's incorporation of Croatia was no different than the United Kingdom's occupation of India or Portugal's control over Angola. The only way to break imperial rule, global history was showing, was to rise up against a nation's colonial masters in armed struggle. If the peoples of Africa, Latin America, and Asia could achieve national independence this way, then certainly the Croats could as well.

Finally, the evolution of Croatian anti-Yugoslav separatist politics over the course of the 1960s and 1970s starkly reflects the era's broader culture of terrorism. The decade following the coming of age of the so-called 1968 generation witnessed a striking surge in the adoption of violence as a form of

political articulation. The early 1970s saw the blossoming of groups such as the Provisional Irish Republican Army (PIRA), Red Army Faction (RAF; Rote Armee Fraktion), National Liberation Front (FLN; Front de libération nationale), Basque Homeland and Liberty (ETA; Euskadi Ta Askatasuna), Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO), and the Red Brigades (Brigate Rosse), all of which actively embraced terrorism as a legitimate means for pursuing their political aims. Operationally and ideologically, Croatian separatists generally both isolated themselves from and were isolated by others throughout the Cold War era, in large part due to the real and imagined fascist overtones of both their rhetoric and aims. Nevertheless, Croatian separatists functioned within the increasingly radicalized global political environment of the time and were invariably influenced by the strategies, methods, and even principles of other violent groups. While the postwar activities of émigré Croatian separatists predated those of most other radical groups active around the same time, it is no coincidence that the frequency and seriousness of Croatian separatist violence greatly increased after 1968. Whereas Croatian terrorism primarily took the form of late-night bomb attacks and assassination attempts during much of the 1960s, by the end of the decade and into the 1970s, it added the plane hijackings and hostage-taking used by other contemporaneous terrorist groups.

A fourth factor contributing to the radicalization of Croatian separatists could be merged with the third but deserves separate consideration. Throughout the Cold War years, there was little that both affected and helped define the strategies of anti-Titoist extremists more than state-sponsored reactions to their activities. First and foremost, this meant the actions of the Yugoslav State Security Administration (Udba; Uprava državne bezbednosti), which aggressively engaged émigré Croatian separatists for the entirety of the country's existence.³⁰ Much of the Udba's engagement with what they variably referred to as "the hostile emigration" (*neprijateljska emigracija*), "the fascist emigration" (*fašistička emigracija*), and "the extreme emigration" (*ekstremna emigracija*) involved acts of violence, with Yugoslav agents responsible for potentially dozens of assassinations of separatist Croats over the course of the Cold War. In addition, Udba agents infiltrated a great majority of émigré separatist organizations in Australia, West Germany, the United States, and elsewhere, using agents provocateurs to undermine their efforts. Importantly, the purpose of this infiltration was not the destruction of the separatist movement but rather, for reasons that will later be discussed, its further radicalization.

The behavior of the governments of the countries where Croatian separatists lived and operated and also where the majority of Croatian separatist violence took place was similarly formative. Importantly, this included inaction as an active undertaking. It would be specious to suggest that government

and security officials in places like Bonn, Stockholm, or Canberra either encouraged or even supported Croatian separatist violence against socialist Yugoslavia. It is, however, true that as a result of both irresoluteness and political calculation they often failed to actively pursue stringent policies to curtail that violence. For a full decade after the first significant act of postwar Croatian separatist terrorism took place—in West Germany in 1962—Western capitals viewed the movement ambivalently, which led them to adopt what best can be described as a *laissez-faire* attitude toward the activities of extremist Croats. This in turn provided separatist radicals with the necessary social and political space in which to organize and operate. Only beginning in the early 1970s did Western governments begin to change their stances toward Croatian extremism. Their adoption of new measures to constrain the movement led to a rapid and ultimately effective deradicalization of the Croatian separatist movement.

These four factors are, of course, far from exhaustive. Equally important, it is crucial not to be overly deterministic as to the radicalizing effect these various social and structural dynamics had on both individuals and organizations. As deadly as anti-Yugoslav Croatian political violence was during the Cold War, it remained the product of a small percentage of the hundreds of thousands of Croats living in the emigration. A West German governmental report from 1972 put it succinctly: “The vast majority of Croats in the Federal Republic are docile. [The problem of terrorism is] a matter of only a tiny, virulent minority.”³¹ Australian prime minister Gough Whitlam expressed a similar view in a letter written in 1973 at the height of a crisis involving Croatian terrorists: “Only a small minority of Croatian immigrants are engaged in acts of political terrorism in this country.” He continued, “The majority of Croatian and other Yugoslav settlers are highly valued citizens and residents of this country.”³² In other words—in a lesson that politicians today would do well to heed—the problem was not with Croats as such. Rather, the problem of radicalization arose with a small group of people for reasons related to complex relationships among myriad and competing social movements, practical and circumstantial limitations, and personal, political, and institutional disruption. This distinction is important.

This said, a critical mass of Croats in the emigration did radicalize, sparking a twenty-year-long campaign of violence and terrorism that led to death and destruction around the globe. It is important to understand that the Croatian separatists’ embrace and execution of political violence and terrorism did not result from some dysfunctional irrationality, whether understood systemically, organizationally, or even psychologically. Rather, it was the product of an identifiable development in strategic thinking among anti-Yugoslav radicals that led to coherent—if unquestionably both myopic and distorted—choices

of action. While one can argue that decisions regarding the use of violence by adherents of the national liberation movement were misguided, imprudent, and even amoral, they were made by actors with a particular understanding of the world and their place in it, an understanding shaped by a multitude of factors and experiences.

This book traces the factors that contributed to the radicalization of the second generation of post–World War II Croatian emigrants to the West. The six chronologically arranged chapters conform to pivotal and formative developments in the history of Cold War-era radical Croatian separatism. The opening chapter examines fractures and fissures within the movement in the first postwar decade and their general influence on émigré political engagement. It demonstrates how and why terrorism, once a cornerstone of the Ustaše, ceased to be part of the functional political repertoire of radical émigré separatism. Chapter 2 explores how, during the second half of the 1950s, the focus of émigré separatism shifted away from fighting the hated socialist Yugoslav state to a basic—and ruinous—internal power struggle. As a consequence of this change, active political agitation aimed at securing an independent Croatian state became, at best, only a secondary priority for radical organizations within the diaspora. Instead, by the late 1950s competition for new recruits came to dominate the activities of rival factions. As will be explored, these rivalries were a crucial factor in the radicalization of a younger generation of separatists in the 1960s, but often not in the manner imagined by the older generation.

Chapter 3 explores the general factors that led in the early 1960s—after nearly two decades of inactivity—to a renewal of extremist politics within the diaspora. First and foremost, the chapter focuses on the activity of a new generation of emigrants who left socialist Yugoslavia for the West beginning in the late 1950s and early 1960s. In particular, it looks at the political and strategic thinking of these new radical emigrants, including the role of ideology in the radicalization of many who joined the Croatian separatist movement. Chapter 4 then provides a more narrative exploration of the first acts of terror committed by radical Croatian separatists beginning in 1962. The chapter examines the development of the tactics used to draw attention to the Croatian cause globally during the 1960s and the ways in which purveyors of violence justified their actions. It also explores how émigré violence provoked state-sponsored violence, creating new landscapes of engagement among the various actors invested both positively and negatively in Croatian separatism.

Chapter 5 looks at the period that, in hindsight, proved to be the high point of the radical Croatian separatist movement. It delves into the many social, cultural, and political factors that, taken together, led emigrant separatists to adopt a number of critical changes in their tactical and strategic thinking,

which translated into a period of intense activity. During this period, Croatian separatists hijacked an airplane in Sweden, occupied a Yugoslav consulate, bombed scores of Yugoslav institutions around the world, assassinated several Yugoslav diplomats and representatives, and launched a spectacular if ill-fated armed guerilla incursion into the heart of socialist Yugoslavia. In the short term, the resultant wave of terror brought Croatian terrorists both fame and infamy. In the long term, this increased violence precipitated the imposition of new and ever more debilitating governmental restraints on separatist radicals. Chapter 6, in turn, deals with the repercussions of this greater attention paid to Croatian separatists by various state actors. The mid-1970s was witness to arguably the most brazen acts of Croatian separatist terrorism. At the same time, the period also saw the precipitous marginalization of the movement. Precisely at the time Croatian radicals became most adventurous, states took concerted action to end—definitively once and for all—not just anti-Yugoslav terrorism but terrorism of all kinds. Finally, the epilogue explores how, in the early 1980s, terrorism ceased to be a part of diasporic political engagement, replaced in its stead by other forms of activity.

Here, a word concerning the overall periodization of the book is in order. The title of the book—*Croatian Radical Separatism and Diaspora Terrorism During the Cold War*—refers to a well-understood period of time, from, say, the 1947 publication of George F. Kennan’s “X Article”³³ to the 1991 dissolution of the Soviet Union. Anti-Yugoslav Croatian political violence, however, was limited, roughly speaking, to the years 1962 to 1980. The use of “Cold War” to frame the book is nonetheless appropriate for two reasons. First, since this book is equally as concerned with terrorism as such as with the processes of radicalization and deradicalization that led to the use and eventual abandonment of violence, the longer time frame is applicable. Second, “Cold War” serves as more than simply a marker of periodization. Rather, the Cold War is both context and milieu. In the case of radical Croatian separatism, it was a context and milieu that both made the movement possible and gave it shape.

Questions regarding the book’s periodization are most likely to be raised regarding the years immediately leading up to and following the end of the Cold War. Readers with an interest in Croatian or Yugoslav history may object that the text fails to explore the link between the radical separatism of the 1960s and 1970s and the paramilitarism and Ustaša revivalism of the early 1990s in Croatia. The explanation, simply, is that the Croatian radical separatist movement had been marginalized and indeed suppressed nearly a decade before the disintegration of socialist Yugoslavia. During the late 1980s and early 1990s, a new form of Croatian diasporic engagement with “homeland politics” developed that was separate—if, of course, still closely related—from that of radical separatism in the preceding decades. To be sure, important

parallels, connections, and continuities can be drawn between the two. In fact, several authors have done just that, most notably Paul Hockenos, Zlatko Skrbiš, and Francesco Ragazzi.³⁴ However, the substantial and significant differences between earlier radical separatism and later diasporic homeland politics argues for seeing the two as more than simply successive phases of the same basic phenomenon.

The decision to relegate the history of the second half of the 1980s and the wars of the 1990s to this book's epilogue stems from what admittedly might be an exaggerated desire to make a historiographic point. Terrorism was unquestionably both a product and a feature of Cold War-era Croatian diasporic politics. But it is imperative not to conflate the two. As mentioned earlier, those who engaged in acts of political violence represented only a tiny minority of those active in the broader struggle for Croatian independence from socialist Yugoslavia and an even smaller percentage of the overall Croatian emigrant population. This book, to state the point directly, is a history of diasporic separatism that turned to terrorism in an attempt to advance the cause, not a general history of diasporic separatism during the Cold War. Croatian nationalism in the emigration in the late 1980s and early 1990s was often unquestionably radical, militant, and even violent. It did not, however, employ terrorism—or at least the rather narrowly understood form of terrorism explored in this text.

The distinction between violence and terrorism may be minor, but it is also vital. The late 1980s and early 1990s witnessed a revival of Ustaša symbols and ideology within Croatia.³⁵ To a great degree, this tradition—suppressed in socialist Yugoslavia—had been sustained in the emigration. This book argues that, perhaps against expectations, the radical separatist movement was not the most significant factor in keeping Ustašism alive. Rather, a number of strands within the political emigration nurtured and promoted the cult of the NDH and the Ustaše. Moreover, the revival of Ustašism in the waning days of socialist Yugoslavia owed less to those who had engaged in political violence and terrorism during the middle decades of the Cold War than to others in the diaspora who proved pivotal in the years that followed. For this reason, this book deals only peripherally as opposed to systematically with the diaspora's role in Croatia's political developments in the years immediately before and after the end of the Cold War.

Conceptual and Definitional Frames

The overall narrative and argument of this book relies on some central conceptual and definitional frames. It has become almost obligatory, for example, that academic texts dealing with political violence convey some version of the observation that scholars of terrorism are far more numerous

than terrorists, and that there are, in fact, more definitions of “terrorism” than scholars of the field. Perhaps nowhere has this problem been exposed more starkly than in the opening chapter of Alex P. Schmid, A. J. Jongman, and Michael Stohl’s seminal text *Political Terrorism: A New Guide to Actors, Authors, Concepts, Data Bases, Theories, and Literature*, which cites and discusses no less than 109 definitions for the term “terrorism.”³⁶ In contrast—although the term is employed throughout—this narrative study offers no authoritative definition of “terrorism.” As Isabelle Duyvesteyn has written, while in the social sciences such definitions are “deemed essential to agree on the basic outline of what the subject entails,” in historical studies “this problem is important but less pressing.”³⁷ For the historian, in other words, precise definitions of the terms “terror,” “terrorism,” and “terrorist” are in many ways ancillary to conveying both the situational and—more important—normative uses of the labels.

In its use of the term “terrorism,” this book adopts the language that radical Croatian separatists themselves used to describe their activities. It was broadly understood among extremists in the emigration that national liberation from the clutches of “Serbo-communism” could only come through revolutionary struggle. In time, this revolution would take the form of a mass, popular uprising within the Socialist Republic of Croatia against the regime in Belgrade. Preceding the rising up of the Croatian nation, however, the struggle would by necessity take the form of sabotage, guerilla insurgency, and—importantly—terrorism in order to lay the foundations upon which to build the successful revolution. Some separatist groups called for their followers to engage in acts of “commando-terrorism.”³⁸ Others were a bit more circumspect, describing their actions as the “inversion of standard warfare.”³⁹ Still others simply ordered those in their ranks to “destroy all Yugo-embassies and consulates [and] kill Yugoslav diplomatic representatives”: acts of terror by any other name.⁴⁰

Most importantly—as radical separatists themselves recognized—the term used to label the violence perpetrated in service of the revolutionary struggle for national liberation was and in many ways remains arguably ultimately immaterial. This idea was captured bluntly but effectively in a manifesto released to justify the hijacking of an American airplane by radical Croats in 1976:

We expect all “peace-loving” forces in the world to describe us as terrorists. . . . The point to be made here, obviously, is not to conclusively define “terrorism,” an impossible and unnecessary task. . . . One man’s terrorist is another man’s patriot, depending solely on one’s national and political objective and suitability.

We must remember that today's "terrorists" are often tomorrow's policy makers, having participated in the formation of a new, independent state. Such was the position of the supporters of the Declaration of Independence. . . . With this reality reappearing dependably from one day to the next, all ethical and moral revulsion felt for so-called "terrorist" acts is necessarily irrational.⁴¹

If hijacking an airplane—or assassinating a diplomat, bombing an embassy, or taking hostages—is terrorism, a radical separatist would respond, so be it. It matters not, the logic continued, whether those active in the revolutionary struggle for national liberation are labeled terrorists or the violence they employ to pave the way to independence are "acts of terror." The Croatian separatist movement was imagined as one without compromise. Both morally and discursively, this meant a potential embrace of any and all forms of violence, including terrorism, in order to further the cause. And embrace violence they did.

This book's second conceptual concern is its engagement with "history." Some of the most prolific and productive areas of academic inquiry in the humanities and social sciences in recent years have concerned the politics of social memory and remembrance. Scholarship contending with the history of socialist Yugoslavia and in particular its collapse into warfare in the 1990s has been at the forefront of this research, both benefiting from and contributing to theoretical and conceptual advances in how academics understand the construction of social memory and its political mobilization.⁴² The field of terrorism studies shares these concerns, particularly research dealing with ethno-national terrorism. Indeed, the creation and maintenance of national myths are absolutely central to national liberation movements in serving to rally support for the cause, justify the struggle, and legitimize the use of violence. Of course, such narratives are not presented and treated as myths but rather as "factual histories" that are both proven and incontestable. Broadly, these "histories" serve two purposes. On the one hand, they keep alive a memory of the former glory and greatness of the national group in question, often with a reference to past examples of independence. On the other hand, they nourish a sense of deprivation, marginalization, and even existential threat by propagating the litany of affronts, injuries, and crimes committed against the nation, both in the past and often in the present day.⁴³ The resultant victim complex then becomes a powerful and compelling force to mobilize populations to action.

The Croatian radical separatist movement not only follows this pattern, but in many ways it serves as a textbook example of how history and memory are instrumentalized to promote a particular political agenda. As will be

seen throughout this book, radical Croatian separatists justified their actions through what generously could only be called highly contentious historical claims. Importantly, this book does not contend historiographically with the myths and interpretations of the past promulgated by extremist Croats in the emigration. As mentioned previously, there is already a large and growing body of literature dealing with the uses and abuses of history and memory among Croats, both in the past and today. Rather, this book focuses on the instrumentalization of particular histories and memories, first to help radicalize the separatist movement and later to legitimize the movement's embrace of terrorism. This distinction should not be confused with an acceptance or validation of the "histories" examined within the text. The point is rather to lay bare how Cold War-era Croatian separatists discursively framed their struggle. The claims made by separatist radicals, for instance, that Tito's socialist Yugoslavia was engaging in genocidal practices against the Croatian nation or that the Bleiburg massacre was a tragedy that far exceeded the crimes of the NDH makes neither true. However, the separatists' belief in their truth is crucial to understanding their radicalization and turn to terrorism.

A third concern central to the book's narrative is the terminology that refers to different groups of actors within the Croatian separatist movement. Broadly speaking, the limited literature on Croatian political violence after World War II describes acts of terror as the work of "émigrés."⁴⁴ This book argues that this label obscures as much as it reveals about the origins, development, and nature of Croatian separatist violence during the Cold War. Those who might be considered true "émigrés"—meaning the generation that left Yugoslavia in the immediate aftermath of the war for reasons that can be described primarily if not wholly as political—were not the ones actively engaged in the separatist violence of the 1960s and 1970s. Rather, as already mentioned—and will be explored at length—Croatian separatist violence and terrorism during this period arose out of a direct opposition to the "émigré" generation, not from that "émigré" generation itself.

With no significant exceptions, the perpetrators of Cold War-era separatist violence belonged to what this book refers to as a generation of "semi-émigrés." In contrast to Croats who left for the West immediately following the end of World War II, the generation that left socialist Yugoslavia beginning in the late 1950s and early 1960s did so largely more for economic than political reasons. Nonetheless, to characterize this generation simply as "economic migrants" ignores the complex motivations and forces that led so many Croats to leave their homes. In the experience of most of this second generation of postwar emigrants, the line between "economic" and "political" migration was blurred. The label "semi-émigré" is meant to conceptualize this dual reality. If "émigré" has the connotation of political self-exile, then

“semi-émigré” suggests the shared role played by economics and politics in the story of the second generation of post–World War II Croatian emigrants. Stated more directly, “semi” is not a reference to the space the younger generation occupied (i.e., half in the emigration and half at home) but rather to the motivating factors that led the majority of the generation’s members to go abroad in the first place (i.e., half political and half economic). Even more simply, and without intending to reify the two primary groups of Croatian emigrants at the heart of this book’s narrative, the distinction between the terms “émigré” and “semi-émigré” is meant to distinguish those who left Croatia directly after World War II from those who made their way to the West a generation later.

The drawing of this distinction between these two generations of emigrants provides a framework for dealing with a fourth issue related to Cold War–era political violence and terrorism—namely, the legacy of the Ustaše. Both contemporary and contemporaneous accounts of postwar Croatian separatist terrorism place blame for the violence on the “Ustaše.” The majority of these accounts have a clear normative objective for labeling Croatian violence as such. This was particularly true for the Yugoslav government, whose own political legitimacy relied on keeping a real or imagined Ustaša threat to the regime alive. The reality of Cold War–era Croatian radical separatism, however, both complicates and problematizes such reductionist claims. To be sure, the Ustaše served as a crucial foundation for Croatian separatism throughout the Cold War, and Ustašism was deeply embedded in the DNA of the national liberation movement. In particular, the semi-émigré generation of separatists emulated the extreme national chauvinism of the interwar and wartime Ustaše, expressing contemptuous and often genocidal views toward the Serbs.

This said, the radical postwar separatist movement originated, developed, and operated in a context meaningfully different from that of the prewar, wartime, and even postwar Ustaše, leading to significant distinctions between the two. As will be explored later, these differences were especially pronounced in the highly elastic ideological pragmatism and political opportunism of radical separatists in the 1960s and 1970s. If the defining characteristics of Ustašism were, as Mark Biondich has written, “anti-Serbianism, anticommunism, and its cult of Croatian statehood,”⁴⁵ the postwar separatists reduced their message to anti-Serbianism and the cult of Croatian statehood. It was not, of course, that communism somehow became the preferred ideology of radical separatists following World War II. Rather, statehood trumped political philosophy, meaning that separatists were willing to align with supporters of any ideology—including communists—who could potentially help in the destruction of Tito’s hated Yugoslav state. As the title page of every edition of *Drina*, one of the leading separatist newspapers of the Cold War era,

declared matter-of-factly: “Our position is clear: Overthrow every Yugoslavia. Overthrow it together with Russians and Americans, with communists, with non-communists, and with anticommunists. Overthrow it together with anyone who is trying to overthrow it. Overthrow it by means of verbal dialectic and dynamite, but overthrow it, for if there is one country without the right to exist, that can only be Yugoslavia.”⁴⁶ This is not to suggest, of course, that the very real fascist leanings of Cold War–era anti-Yugoslav Croatian separatists should be ignored or even downplayed. Indeed, the “anti-ideological” political realism of radical Croats arose from an excess rather than a deficiency of nationalism within the movement. But it was a nationalism even less burdened by ideological concerns than that of the already ideologically incoherent and self-contradictory Ustaše.⁴⁷

An imperfect analogy can be found in the relationship between Nazism and neo-Nazism. Just as neo-Nazis cannot be understood in isolation from the Nazis under Hitler, Cold War–era radical Croatian separatism cannot be understood without regard to the prewar and wartime Ustaša movement.⁴⁸ Many if not most of the symbols, ideas, and aims adopted by postwar radical Croats were either taken from or directly referenced the Ustaše. But as with Nazism and neo-Nazism, the social contexts and historical conditions that underlaid the development of semi-émigré Croatian separatism in the 1960s and 1970s mean that an understanding of the origins, development, and character of the Ustaše can give only a partial picture of these postwar radicals. Circumstances do not just matter but are formative, and as such there is value in exploring movements such as neo-Nazism and semi-émigré Croatian separatism as phenomena unto themselves. Without making any relativistic comparisons between certain movements and their “neo” offspring, discussion of sociological and historiographic differences between, say, Ustašism and postwar radical separatism is meant only to productively complicate how we think of social movements of all kinds.

The difficulty in comparing neo-Nazis and radical semi-émigré Croats is the degree to which—as discussed earlier—postwar Croatian separatism was arguably as much an “oppositional” as a “neo” movement. Here again, the details of history are important. Far more than was the case with the Nazis, the Ustaše maintained a high level of continuity in the decades following World War II. As this book explores at length, intense disappointment in and disillusionment with those Ustaše who continued their political activity well into the Cold War was a central contributor to the adoption of terrorism and political violence in the struggle for Croatian independence beginning in the 1960s. Many members of the semi-émigré generation rejected émigré Ustaša leaders, including the movement’s poglavnik—or führer—Ante Pavelić. Indeed, radical separatism developed in a very meaningful way out of a conscious and

deliberate desire by a new generation of semi-émigrés to create an alternative to the Ustaše—or at least to what the Ustaše had become. Consequently, to reduce postwar radical separatism to simply Ustašism or even neo-Ustašism obfuscates an important and even formative feature of the movement.

Historical Background

This said, whatever the differences between the prewar and wartime Ustaše and postwar separatist movements, much more connects than separates the two. Understanding the origins, evolution, and activities of Cold War-era radical separatism requires knowledge of how far-right Croatian nationalism developed from the mid-nineteenth century to the end of World War II.

In the succinct words of Mark Biondich, “the most significant factor shaping modern Croatian nationalist ideology has been the concept of historical rights.”⁴⁹ Developed in the nineteenth century most prominently by the politician, publicist, and writer Ante Starčević, this notion holds that because the medieval Croatian kingdom had never been truly abolished, independent statehood was a historical right owed to the people of Croatia, above and beyond the natural right to statehood ostensibly enjoyed by all nations. Although first incorporated into Hungary in 1102 and then into the Habsburg Empire in 1527—or so the thinking went—the legal continuity of Croatian political structures such as the diet (*Sabor*) and office of the viceroy (*Ban*) as well as the maintenance of the Croatian political nation as incorporated in the nobility meant that Croatia had never completely lost its autonomy.⁵⁰ As argued by adherents of state rights, Croatian statehood was a fact, not just an aspiration. That foreign hegemonic actors—notably Budapest and Vienna—denied and violated this “fact” did not undermine the essence of the Croatian state.

The establishment of the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes after World War I did not destroy the convictions of radical adherents to the idea of historical Croatian state rights. For many hard-line Croatian nationalists, “Yugoslavism”—whose advocates called at a minimum for the political union and at a maximum the ethnic assimilation of all South Slavic peoples into a single state—meant little more than the shift in domination over the Croatian nation from the Austrians and Hungarians to the Serbs. The most radical opposition to the new government in Belgrade came from the Croatian Party of Rights (HSP; *Hrvatska stranka prava*), which was a direct descendent of the Party of Rights (SP; *Stranka prava*) founded by Starčević, together with Eugen Kvaternik in 1861. The HSP advocated a position of exclusionary nationalism that not only rejected the idea of political cooperation among Croats and other national groups but viewed cooperation as intrinsically harmful to the Croatian nation.⁵¹ Indeed, the party’s program viewed any activity whose ultimate aim was not the abolishment of Serbian hegemony over Croatia as

anathema. In the words of one party leader, the entire *raison d'être* of the HSP was to stand as “the bearer of an uncompromising and revolutionary struggle [against Belgrade].”⁵²

During much of the first decade of royalist Yugoslavia's existence, there was little to suggest that such views were more than empty rhetoric. This changed rather dramatically following King Aleksandar's establishment of a royal dictatorship on January 6, 1929, in the aftermath of the assassination of Stjepan Radić, the charismatic leader of Croatia's most popular political party, the Croatian Peasant Party (HSS; *Hrvatska seljačka stranka*).⁵³ With all national political parties disbanded and fearful that the regime would begin persecuting Croatian nationalists and political hard-liners, many members of the HSP fled the country, primarily to Benito Mussolini's fascist Italy. In exile, the most militant Croat dissidents coalesced around the HSP's former party secretary, Ante Pavelić. A rising star of the HSP, this young lawyer set out to recruit a dedicated cadre of radical nationalists willing to engage in a violent struggle for the liberation of Croatia from the fetters of Serbian control. In 1932, this movement was formalized as the Ustaša—Croatian Revolutionary Organization (Ustaša; *Hrvatska revolucionarna organizacija*), with Pavelić as *poglavnik*, or leader.⁵⁴

It could be argued that Croatian nationalists only truly radicalized in exile, in large part due to engagement with new and formative transnational spaces, practices, and structures. Shortly after escaping to Italy, Pavelić established relations with two groups who put violence at the core of their political programs. The first was the Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organization (VMRO; *Vnatrešna Makedonska Revolucionarna Organizacija*), with whom Pavelić signed a declaration of agreement to engage in a common struggle to bring about the destruction of both the Yugoslav state and Serbian hegemony over the Croatian and Macedonian nations. The second was Mussolini's fascist party. Mussolini had long held Belgrade to be at least partially responsible for Italy's so-called mutilated victory after World War I, and many of Il Duce's imperialistic pretensions during the interwar period focused on lands contained within royalist Yugoslavia. Invested in the destabilization of the Southern Slav state, Mussolini was more than happy to provide support for enemies of the Belgrade regime.

With inspiration and encouragement from the VMRO and Italian Fascists, the Ustaše came to fully embrace political violence and terrorism as “act” rather than simply “idea.” The Ustaše established two military-style camps to train its members in the tactics and methods of terrorism and guerilla warfare, one in the northern Italian town of Bovegno and the other on a Hungarian estate called Janka Puszta, located three kilometers from the border with Yugoslavia. From 1929 to 1934, the Ustaše engaged in a campaign of terror,

sabotage, and political murder in royalist Yugoslavia that included assassinations and assassination attempts as well as bomb attacks on police stations, governmental buildings, and trains. The Ustaše also planned and executed an incursion into the Velebit region of Croatia in hopes of instigating a popular uprising against the state.⁵⁵ The revolt never materialized, but the incursion nevertheless rattled authorities in Belgrade. In response, the royalist Yugoslav government moved to suppress revolutionary tendencies among the country's population, instituting a number of stringent security measures.

The most notorious act of violence committed by the Ustaše prior to World War II was the assassination of Yugoslavia's head of state, King Aleksandar. On the afternoon of October 9, 1934, Aleksandar was shot and killed as his motorcade made its way through the French port city of Marseilles at the start of an official state visit to France. The bullets were fired by a Bulgarian member of the VMRO named Vlado Chernozemski, but the assassination had been planned and prepared by the Ustaše. The strategic thinking behind the regicide was that the monarch's death would rob royalist Yugoslavia of its great "unifier"—as Aleksandar's supporters referred to him—subverting the state and paving the way for Croatian independence.

As is often the case with such acts of political violence, expectations did not match reality. Within Croatia itself, the regicide was broadly condemned, with the populace reacting not with revolutionary fervor but with disquiet, misgiving, and even genuine sorrow.⁵⁶ Internationally, the fallout from the assassination forced Mussolini to neutralize the Ustaše, as the organization had become more a liability than an asset. The architects of the attentat against Aleksandar—Ante Pavelić and Eugen Dido Kvaternik—were arrested and imprisoned for two years. The remaining Ustaše were sent into internal exile on the Sicilian island of Lipari. Three years after the assassination, in 1937, Mussolini even signed an agreement of friendship with royalist Yugoslavia that included a complete ban of the Ustaše in Italy. The murder of King Aleksandar, which was meant to bring about the destruction of royalist Yugoslavia, actually did more damage to the Ustaše themselves. Broken and disjointed, the movement spent the remainder of the 1930s forced to struggle not for national liberation but simply for some modicum of cohesion and relevance.

An argument could be made that the Ustaše would simply have fallen into obscurity—the assassination of King Aleksandar notwithstanding—and even oblivion, had it not been for World War II. The Axis invasion, defeat, and partition of royalist Yugoslavia in April 1941 not only gave new impetus to the movement but thrust the Ustaše into a position of significant power. Pavelić was not Hitler's first choice to assume leadership of the newly established Independent State of Croatia; HSS head Vladko Maček famously twice was

offered and declined the position. But when given the opportunity, Pavelić embraced the office with a fervor perhaps unmatched in Nazi-occupied Europe. If the ideological underpinnings of Ustašism remained largely underdeveloped and rudimentary prior to the war, its principles became totally clear under the new regime.⁵⁷ Greatly indebted to the Italian Fascists and, in particular, the German National Socialists, Pavelić and the Ustaše coupled integral nationalism with a cult of violence that was fiercely hostile to communism, capitalism, and liberal democracy once in power. Moreover, they held the view that the unity of the Croatian nation—which they understood as an organic entity—could be preserved only through the destruction of all threats to the nation, both internal and external.

To this end, the Ustaše implemented a program of ethnic genocide that rivaled any in wartime Europe. State and military authorities brutally persecuted Serbs, Jews, Roma, and Croatian antifascists within the NDH, with Serbs singled out for especially harsh violence. The Ustaša militia was given free rein to terrorize minority populations throughout the NDH, and in the village of Jasenovac, some 100 kilometers from Zagreb, the Ustaše established a network of concentration camps with the aim of eradicating those populations. By war's end, the Ustaše had murdered a minimum of 50,000 people in Jasenovac, with the number likely close to twice that amount.⁵⁸ In total, the Ustaše killed upward of 350,000 Serbs between 1941 and 1945, themselves killed or deported to Nazi extermination camps 32,000 of the 40,000 Jews living in the NDH, and eradicated nearly all of the state's 25,000 Roma. Of the more than one million people who lost their lives in Yugoslavia during World War II, 60 percent died in the NDH. This toll places the country third behind only the Soviet Union and Poland for total casualties in Nazi-occupied Europe.⁵⁹

The Allied victory over the Axis Powers in 1945—which includes the defeat of both the Nazis and Ustaše by the Partisan forces of Marshal Tito—brought an end to the Independent State of Croatia. Not entirely unjustifiably, many Croats—soldiers and civilians alike—feared that capture by advancing Partisans in the last days of the war would subject them to retributive violence for Ustaša crimes. Tens of thousands of Croats attempted to flee the territory that comprised the NDH at the end of the war in the hope they might surrender to British forces in occupied Austria and avoid capture by the communists. It was not to be. They reached the Austrian border near the town of Bleiburg, only to have the British deny their request to surrender. Worse, the British proceeded to hand the refugees over to Tito's forces, who executed several thousand on the spot. Many more died over the course of the next several days and weeks during an eight-hundred-kilometer-long “death march” back into Partisan-controlled Yugoslavia. As with almost all estimates regarding mass

violence in Yugoslavia during World War II, the question of how many died at Bleiburg and during the so-called Way of the Cross (*Križni put*) is highly contentious. Recent estimates suggest that of the two hundred thousand people who reached Austria in May 1945, some seventy thousand were killed, of whom fifty thousand were Croats.⁶⁰ As will be further explored later, Bleiburg became the cornerstone of a powerful victim complex that permeated postwar Croatian identity discourse, particularly in the emigration.

While most Ustaše sought through emigration to escape the new reality of a reconstituted, communist-led Yugoslav state, at least some continued the struggle for an independent Croatia. For several years after the official end of World War II, guerilla units of Ustaša soldiers known as Crusaders (*Križari*) waged a sustained, if limited and poorly organized, armed resistance against Tito's fledgling communist authority in Yugoslavia.⁶¹ Among other acts of violence, the *Križari* sabotaged communications and rail lines, targeted public and governmental officials for assassination, attacked police and army installations, and even destroyed collective farms. Alive to the risk that the insurgency posed, the Yugoslav security services implemented a counterinsurgency campaign called *Operacija Gvardijan* (Operation Guardian), which involved first and foremost the infiltration of the *Križari*. The culmination of *Gvardijan* came in the summer of 1948 when the *Križari* launched their largest operation of the postwar era, codenamed *Akcija 10. travnja* (Tenth of April Action) in reference to the date of the NDH's founding. Fully informed of the details of this effort, the Yugoslav security services were able to entrap eighteen separate groups of *Križari* militants, totaling ninety-six men, including the leader of the operation Božidar "Božo" Kavran. Although small groups of *Križari* would occasionally appear even into the 1950s, *Gvardijan* and the subsequent trials of captured *Križari* extinguished once and for all any pretense of a significant Ustaša presence in postwar Yugoslavia. It was equally clear that, as before the war, the struggle for Croatian national liberation was a battle that would have to be waged from exile.

About the Author

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