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The Yugoslavia Civil War and the Allies in World War II

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Abstract: Allied support for the various factions within Yugoslavia waxed and waned throughout World War II. This essay examines who comprised those factions by providing an in-depth analysis of their goals and their leaders. The intra-factional fighting resulted in one of the highest rates of suffering of all nations during World War II, and a theretofore little-known communist in charge of the country until his death in 1980. Allied support changed throughout the war based on the evolving understanding, and undoubtedly fueled the fighting between groups, while preventing the Axis from fully concentrating on defeating Russia in Operation Barbarossa.

Keywords: Yugoslavia; civil war; Allies; Axis; World War II.

Introduction

While the entire world was engaged in total war between 1941 and 1945, Yugoslavia was viciously destroying itself in a civil war. Not only were Yugoslavians fighting external invaders, but internal fighting between two resistance groups—the Chetniks and the Partisans—and the Axis-backed puppet regime known as the Ustaše all occurred simultaneously. The amount of death and destruction wrought within Yugoslavia was great, and the Allied response and support waxed and waned, at times directly conflicting with other members of the alliance. The result is that little is understood generally of the Yugoslavia civil war, and even less is understood about the motivating factors, external supporters, and individual actors within each faction. This essay will provide background information on the seeds of war, describe the fighting and evolving alliances, and then will examine the changing external support provided by the Allies. Ultimately, ignoring individual politics of the Chetniks and Partisans and choosing the side inflicting more damage on the Germans, the Allies ceased supporting the Chetniks midway through the war in favor of supporting the seemingly more active Partisans. Although Allied leaders never gained a full appreciation for the groups’ motivations for post-war Yugoslavia, the practical English prime minister, Winston Churchill, convinced the rest of the Allies to exclusively support the Partisans despite their strong communist ideology. This dual support to antagonist groups from the Allies undoubtedly contributed to the raging civil war.

Yugoslavia was strategically important. Axis interests centered on the need for resources, materiel, and manpower. Führer Adolf Hitler desired shoring up the southern flank prior to beginning Operation Barbarossa so that German forces did not need to expend limited resources fighting a war in the Balkans while fighting in Russia. Additionally, since Germany did not possess the needed petroleum and mineral assets found in the Balkans, Hitler wanted the resources to fuel Barbarossa. The Allies had their own intentions for the Balkans, of course. Russian Premier Josef Stalin desperately wanted the Allies to open a
second European front to ease some of the pressure off the Red Army. The British initially wanted to frustrate any German acquisition of laborers and/or material from the Balkans, while increasing its Balkan influence. At war's end, the British coordinated with the Soviet Union for spheres of influence. The US pragmatically supported both the Partisans and Chetniks to balance each's postwar influence on the country. The support provided to Yugoslavia resistance groups fueled the ferocity of the civil war, in a country which had experienced unrest since its inception at the end of World War I.

Yugoslavia’s Origins and the Seeds of Discontent

Yugoslavia was a multi-ethnic, multi-religious state formed by the Treaty of Versailles. Originally “The Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes,” it was renamed “Yugoslavia” in 1929. It consisted of five distinct nations of Serbs, Croats, Slovenes, Macedonians, and Montenegrins, although the latter two were claimed by Serbs as Serbs. While sometimes under the Austro-Hungarian or Ottoman Empires, the five nations had never been under a single monarch prior to the Treaty of Versailles. However, faced with external threats from Italy and Bolsheviks, the nations established a single state. The way the nations united proved calamitous in subsequent years due to their organization outside of federal principles. The system clearly favored the Serbs due to their victory over the formerly great Ottoman Empire during the Balkans War in 1913, and its subsequent valiant performance during the Great War. The short-term gains that strengthened the Serbs kept Yugoslavia in permanent crisis. One of the clear losers, the Croats, did not forget the reason for their tenuous standing within Yugoslavia as they eventually became the major ethnic group of the murderous Ustaše.

The Croats had good reason for disdain of their positioning. Possessing the second most populous ethnicity within Yugoslavia, they were not provided equal representation within the government. Rallying behind the leadership of Stjepan Radić and his party, Croats soon found themselves supportive of a party that frequently refused to participate with the interim parliament due to perceived slights in the new government. Radić gradually sought additional external support from the Communist International (Comintern) organization and was subsequently assassinated at parliament in June 1928, resulting in further distrust and anger with the Yugoslav parliament. Under King Alexander I’s leadership, Yugoslavia transitioned to a royal dictatorship.

Yugoslavia was poorly managed, and it shunned external support. Dysfunction and mismanagement defined Yugoslavia during the 1930s. As Europe inched toward war, Yugoslavia anxiously clung to neutrality. Yugoslav Prince Paul visited Berlin in June 1939 in a failed German attempt to gain Yugoslavia’s loyalty. Yugoslavia was in a tenuous situation: economically weak and consisting of multiple competing factions, it was ripe for invasion. With the Allies on their heels and possessing little appetite to provide meaningful support, Paul reluctantly joined the Tripartite Pact on March 25, 1941. This agreement guarded the Axis’ southern flank and gave them critical fuel resources, and Paul secured some provisos: Yugoslav sovereignty remained intact, there was no military commitment
required, no transit of German troops through Yugoslav territory was permitted (an agreement with questionable certainty), and there would be support for Salonika when the war was over. While generally a solid negotiation for the weak Yugoslavia, news of the agreement infuriated Yugoslavian citizens.

War Begins

Just two days after joining the Tripartite Pact, on March 27, 1941, various Yugoslav factions engaged in a coup to overthrow King Peter II. Anger with Peter II’s regime simmered for years, and the pact was simply the final issue to push tempers over the edge. Spearheaded by Yugoslav nationalists, the revolutionaries attempted to maintain some semblance of continuity within the newly established government. However, having been reactively born, the resulting system was poorly organized and supported. While the newly established leadership attempted to portray itself as a continuation of the previous regime with respect to foreign policy, including the Tripartite Pact, Hitler quickly decided that Yugoslavia could not be left alone.

Hitler was enraged upon hearing of the Yugoslavia coup and immediately ordered his generals to attack Yugoslavia “with merciless brutality.” Hitler was driven not only by deep-seated racism, but also by the need to delay Barbarossa to secure his southern flank. Hitler feared the Russian winter, a risk he sought to minimize by planning to begin Barbarossa on May 12, 1941. The Axis invaded Yugoslavia on April 6, 1941, and Hitler was forced to delay Barbarossa by more than a month. Yugoslavia’s army was outmatched, and Germany accepted Yugoslavia’s total capitulation on April 18, 1941.

Effective and brutal, the invasion of Yugoslavia was over within 12 days. Hitler originally attempted to empower the Croatian Peasant Party’s leader, Vladko Maček, but Maček turned down the offer to lead an independent Croatian puppet state. Hitler then turned to the Ustaše and its leader, Ante Pavelić. Believing that the fascist Ustaše would be supportive of Nazism, the Wehrmacht exchanged effective invasion troops with less-proficient occupation troops. Believing their Yugoslavia question was answered, German planners turned their attention and resources east. Meanwhile, the Ustaše rapidly began their onslaught on non-Croats and non-Catholics. What followed from the Ustaše’s reign, German occupation, and competing inter-factional fighting was upwards of 1.75 million Yugoslavians dead by war’s end, and a little-known communist—Josip Broz, or “Tito”—in charge of a broken nation. Before examining how Tito’s Partisans became victorious, it will first be necessary to examine the competing factions within Yugoslavia.

The Factions

The Ustaše

The first faction that will be examined is the Ustaše. Primarily Croat, the Ustaše were a disaffected group formed from both within and external to Yugoslavia. Their primary
goal was not to have a unified Yugoslavia; instead, their focus was to have an independent
Croat state, with subordinate states under Croat rule.\textsuperscript{18} Inspired by Nazi and Italian flavors
of fascism, the Ustaše dreamed that the independent Croat nation would be freed from the
grasp of other, lesser races. One former Partisan official remembered that “both groups
[Communist Partisans and Ustaše] believed that Yugoslavia should be broken up into its
component parts. The [Ustaše] wanted a series of independent states” and Yugoslavia, “as an
‘artificial creation of the imperialist Versailles Peace Treaty,’ should and must disappear.”\textsuperscript{19}
Despite being Slavic, the Ustaše claimed they were Eastern Goths in an attempt to appease
the staunchly anti-Slavic Germans.\textsuperscript{20} The only exception the ardently Croat Ustašes made
was for the Bosniak Muslims, who they claimed were simply Croats Islamized by the
Ottoman Empire.\textsuperscript{21}

The Ustaše were led by Pavelić, a staunch fascist, Croat-nationalist fixed on
returning the Croatian nation to a united, mono-ethnic country. As the second-best
German option—after Maček turned down the offer—to lead the Independent Croatian
Nation (NDH), Pavelić was emplaced as the leader because he was believed to be best-
suited to gain and maintain order with a minimal amount of German troop investment.\textsuperscript{22}
The Italians believed Pavelić was a good fit, as well, due to the assistance and safe haven
they provided the Ustaše after they were expelled from Yugoslavia.\textsuperscript{23} On April 15, 1941,
with the Axis invasion nearing completion, Pavelić emplaced himself as Poglavnik (head,
or chief) of the NDH, and was quickly recognized by the Axis. Immediately in charge of
nearly 40 percent of Yugoslavia, the Axis felt confident that Pavelić would simply acquiesce
to their wishes and be a valuable figurehead with widespread support from throughout
the populace.\textsuperscript{24} To their surprise, Pavelić felt no loyalty to the Axis and established his own
version of a Croat state.

Once empowered, Pavelić immediately viciously pursued his government’s extreme
priorities. Because the army swore allegiance to the Poglavnik, Pavelić had the muscle to
push “ustashisation” throughout the NDH. Although needing to supply foodstuffs, raw
materials, and critical materiel to the German war machine, Pavelić was given wide latitude
in running the government. On April 17, 1941, he issued a decree that allowed the Ustaše
to kill anybody they wanted removed.\textsuperscript{25} That decree was simply the first step in establishing
Pavelić’s ethnically cleansed Croatian state.

In the summer of 1941, the Ustaše began its ethnic cleansing processes, gradually
developing systematic methods for mass murder. Historical conflicts between the Croats
and other ethnic groups—especially the Serbs—drove this extermination policy which
garnered wide support among the Ustaše members. At just over half of the NDH’s 6.5
million occupants, the Croat Ustaše sought to change the demographics through a brutal
process of thirds: one third exported, one third forcibly converted to Catholicism, and
one third exterminated.\textsuperscript{26} Using terror tactics, the Ustaše preferred a terrible tool called a
“srbosjek” which literally translates to “Serb killer.” The srbosjek was a knife that attached
to the hand with a glove and which Ustaše killers particularly enjoyed using due to its
effectiveness and for the terror it inflicted upon its hapless victims. This weapon suited the Ustaše because they wanted to both kill mass numbers of Serbs and inflict great amounts of horror. While roving bands killed other ethnicities throughout the countryside, the Ustaše also established concentration camps, the largest of which was called Jasenovac, to aid it in its more systematic extermination goals. A terrible combination of killing through manual means (the srbosjek), firing squads, and gas chambers combined to enable the killing of hundreds of thousands of Serbs, Jews, and Roma at Jasenovac.

One of the main detractors of the Ustaše’s hegemonic goals was that it did not possess widespread support from within the NDH. The Ustaše was a fringe group, unlike the Maček-led Croatian People’s Party, and because of that fact believed that the only way it could control the countryside was through terror tactics. The minimal amount of Axis occupation forces enabled the Ustaše to pursue its murderous agenda with impunity. As long as the Ustaše continued supplying Germany, they were given wide latitude. This extreme Croatian-nationalism was directly opposed to another resistance group, the Chetniks, who desired a return to the original united-Yugoslavia government.

The Chetniks

The Chetniks were primarily a Serbian nationalist resistance group whose initial membership consisted of former Yugoslavian military officers. Riding a wave of high regard following their valiant performance during the Balkan Wars against the Ottoman Empire, and again in the Great War, the Chetniks were revered. During the interwar period, however, the Chetniks divided and squabbled amongst themselves about what their role in Yugoslavia should be. They devoted no time or effort to training for guerrilla-style warfare, nor did the leadership ever envision the Chetniks being used for guerrilla warfare. Upon Yugoslavia’s capitulation to the Axis, it is of no surprise, then, that multiple organizations claiming to be Chetniks sprouted up throughout the country. This event was a major contributor to the subsequent confusing and conflicting Allied policy regarding support for the Chetniks. The main Allied-supported Chetnik group, however, was led by Draža Mihailović.

Upon the outset of hostilities, Colonel (later General) Draža Mihailović was serving as the Deputy Chief of Staff of the Yugoslav Second Army. Mihailović did not recognize Yugoslavia’s capitulation as legal, and immediately made for a remote Serbian town called Ravna Gora where he assembled a group of former Yugoslav Army officers. Not schooled in the art of guerrilla warfare, Mihailović’s initial strategy was to build up forces, appeal to the Allies, and wait for an Allied invasion into the Balkans before taking any large actions.

A leading theory on guerrilla warfare, On Guerrilla Warfare, by Chinese communist Mao Zedong, was published in 1937 and could have potentially provided Mihailović with doctrinal knowledge for how to wage guerrilla warfare. There is, however, no evidence that Mihailović possessed any knowledge of this or any other guerrilla warfare theory. The
three stages of Mao’s theory are: 1) strategic defensive phase, which is characterized by little
violent action and establishing bases of support and training; 2) guerrilla warfare, which
still involves expanding support networks but is also characterized by traditional “hit and
run” guerrilla warfare skirmishes; and 3) war of movement, where the belligerents reach
parity with the enemy and face him in open, traditional battle. This final stage demonstrates
the legitimacy of the resistance movement. The stage of each warfare is fluid, however, and a
resistance movement can quickly move forward—and backward—during the war, and even
in different locations of the war.\(^{35}\) For most of the war, Mihailović wavered between phases
one and two, frustrating both Yugoslavians eager for action against their oppressors, and
external supporters anxious for action against both the Axis and Ustaše.

One of the major reasons for Allied confusion on whom to support in the Yugoslavian
theater stems directly from the multiple, often opposing factions of Chetnik militias throughout
Yugoslavia. While Mihailović claimed widespread support, convincing followers to take up arms
with the aim of restoring, essentially, the status quo at the end of the war was a difficult task.\(^{36}\)
Adding to the confusion, in the winter of 1941-1942, many Chetniks joined the ranks of German
puppet elements controlled by Milan Nedić, placing them on the Axis payroll and enabling
them to survive the winter. The upside was pay for the soldiers; the downsides were numerous.
The downsides included more confusion over what side the Chetniks were on, what bands were
legally approved by Nedić—and transitively by the Germans—and what Chetnik volunteers
were available to Mihailović for employment.\(^{37}\) Essentially a general without soldiers, Mihailović
relied on his reputation, a flurry of memos demanding patience, and correspondence with the
Allies to maintain his Army.\(^{38}\)

Linking up with the Partisans in the fall of 1941, Mihailović sought to join forces
in a combined effort to defeat the fascist Ustaše and push Axis occupiers out of Yugoslavia.
Apart from surface knowledge of the other organization—the Partisans knew the Chetniks
were Serb, Yugoslav nationalists; the Chetniks knew the Partisans were communists, but
little else—the factions understood very little of the motivations for resisting the Ustaše and
Axis occupiers. At the meeting, it was clear to both Tito and Mihailović that their goals for a
post-war Yugoslavia were incompatible. While the Partisans and Chetniks briefly cooperated
following that meeting on September 19, 1941, by the end of October the Chetniks and
Partisans were at war with each other, the Ustaše, and the Axis occupiers.\(^{39}\) Being strongly
pro-Serbian, pro-monarchy put Mihailović directly at odds with Tito’s communist ideals for
a pan-Yugoslavian communist state. For the rest of the war, Chetniks fought the Partisans,
sometimes even alongside the Ustaše and Germans.

The Partisans

While originally disdainful of unified Yugoslavia, in 1935 the Communist Party of
Yugoslavia (KPJ) changed its guiding principle to be one of an ethnically inclusive
Yugoslavia. This switch came at the behest of the Comintern.\(^{40}\) The switch also put the
Partisans and Ustaše fully at odds, because prior to that point their only agreed-upon
stance was that Yugoslavia needed to be split up into countries generally aligned with its ethnic majorities. At the beginning of the war, the KPJ advocated resisting the invaders, but were not supported by elements within the government distrustful of the communist Partisans or their intentions. Owing to the large amount of private land ownership throughout Yugoslavia, the Partisans were forced to downplay their traditional communist objectives. Instead, they appealed to nationalist, democratic, and federalist sentiments, while simultaneously relying on their appeals to pan-Slavism. Since the Axis was virulently anti-Slavic, portraying the war through a Slavic-Teuton lens proved effective in garnering support throughout the war.

It was this pan-Slavic stance that especially set the Partisans apart from both the Ustaše and the Chetniks. The Ustaše were strictly pro-Croat, pro-Catholic; the Chetniks were staunchly pro-Serb, pro-Orthodox; the Partisans were pro-Slavic, without a specific religious leaning, allowing them to appeal widely across Yugoslavia. This key difference enabled the smallish, initially weak Partisans to survive early disasters in the war, gain strength over time, and include the widest number of Yugoslavians. In addition to its potential for mass-appeal, their leadership behind Broz set them apart from the other groups.

Broz was an enigma to many within Yugoslavia. His nom-de-guerre, Tito, added to his shroud of mystery. In 1928 he was arrested for carrying a revolver illegally, as well as possessing WWI-era bombs and Marxist propaganda. Jailed for nearly six years, Tito was released in March 1934 and exiled in Austria. Initially introduced to communism as a POW in Russia during WWI, Tito’s time in prison further radicalized his beliefs, and one of his followers described him as “sincere but reserved, with a self-confident revolutionary hardness.” British envoy to Yugoslavia, Brigadier Fitzroy Maclean, described Tito as having “a very firm mouth and alert blue eyes … he seemed perfectly sure of himself.” Communism was Tito’s driving force; a united, communist Yugoslavia following World War II was his ultimate end-state. Tito and Mihailović shared their desire for a united Yugoslavia, but their ideological differences were too great. The Chetniks and Partisans thus became enemies.

Unlike Mihailović, who wished to remain in Mao’s first or second phase of guerrilla warfare, Tito immediately and prematurely moved into phase three, “war of movement.” During this phase, the resistance group is supposed to have reached parity with its foe and be able to fight in open battle with his enemy. Tito’s decision to establish “The Soviet Republic of Užice” early in the war nearly destroyed the Partisan movement. Tito undertook this operation at the behest of the Comintern wishing to relieve some pressure off the Soviet Union battling the Germans. As part of its retribution for Germans killed and wounded in battle, the Partisans lost over 1,000 soldiers in its failed defense of Užice. Although the loss of Užice cost the Partisans dearly in the immediacy, it provided Tito with valuable battlefield experience from which he learned to better manage conducting operations while not provoking a large enemy counteraction. His war against the Chetniks
and Ustaše continued, and slowly grew larger, deadlier, and more confusing for external elements through the end of the war.

**Allied Support**

By the end of 1941, Yugoslavia was amid a maelstrom of violence that would continue for the succeeding three and a half years. The Axis backed the murderous Ustaše, whose main form of governance revolved around terror. The loosely organized Chetniks were more concerned with defeating the Partisans and preserving the monarchy than actively fighting the Axis invaders. The competently led Partisans added to the confusion and murderous tendencies of the Axis, Ustaše, and Chetniks by forcing fence-sitters to choose a side to support. Whereas Mihailović did not want to provoke retribution killings, Tito used these killings to great effect to force citizens to choose a side to support. While the Allies were generally aloof to the Yugoslav plight and were more concerned with its own survival early in the war, its leaders saw an opportunity to use the Yugoslavian struggle to further their own aims.

Initially, Mihailović was exactly the leader the Allies hoped to support to demonstrate progress in the Balkan theater. Much of Mihailović’s positive reputation was not due to his or the Chetniks actions or battlefield acumen; rather, the reputation was due to the British responding to Soviet demands for a second front to alleviate some pressure on their beleaguered fighters. In fact, Mihailović did not do much active fighting but furiously sent multiple memorandums. He was a valued Allied figurehead whose support by the British-recognized legitimate Yugoslav government-in-exile allowed him to receive more recognition than he deserved.

The British were likewise amenable to Mihailović’s lack of action, as they directed him to maintain a low profile until they were better able to support him and his forces. During the bloody year of 1942, the Allies supported the Chetniks with little more than sporadic supplies and propaganda—the purpose of which was to convince Stalin the Allies were fighting along a second front as much as it was to motivate the Chetniks. Toward the end of 1942, British sentiment changed.

Following Allied success in 1942, British and American planners re-examined their Balkans strategy to see how they could adapt to the changing ground situation. Allied bombing was highly effective and prevented use of the main north-south railway by the Germans. Leading up to the effective bombing campaign, a single British Special Operations Executive (SOE) officer was embedded with Mihailović. The British officer noted Mihailović refused to fight and complained bitterly that his lack of action was due to a dearth of supplies provided by the British. Additionally, the few actions Mihailović undertook were often against the Partisans, thus not meeting the British intention for their sponsored resistance group in Yugoslavia. This lack of activity prompted the SOE to embed with Tito to determine his actions and capacity for further operations.

Following months of prodding Mihailović to action to no avail, British planners sent
Brigadier Fitzroy Maclean to assess Tito’s Partisans. In this enlightening encounter between Maclean and Tito, the British government gained an appreciation for how the civil war began and the deep-seated differences between Chetniks and Partisans. Tito was a shameless, intransigent communist, and Maclean wondered whether through British support “his [Tito’s] allegiance to Moscow [might] weaken?” Maclean also wondered that as time went on whether Tito might “become more of a nationalist, [and] less of a Communist?” This naive wish eventually waned with increased Partisan brutality. In the meantime, the British were anxious to sponsor an active anti-Axis resistance movement inside Yugoslavia, and the Partisans had overtaken the Chetniks as their primary aid recipient.

Although not fully comprehending the intricacies of the various resistance movements, the British did grasp much of the challenging situation within Yugoslavia. While the US sought to install its own SOE-equivalent Office of Strategic Services (OSS) into Yugoslavia, Churchill bluntly stated that he did not believe OSS General William Donovan would have the knowledge or personnel available within Yugoslavia to fully comprehend the situation. The US wanted to insert its own agents into Yugoslavia to understand the situation outside of the lens of the British intelligence apparatus.

Contrary to British wishes, the US sent fact-finding envoys to both Mihailović and Tito during 1943. A memorandum from Donovan to US President Franklin D. Roosevelt provided a holistic view of all the factions. In the memo, Donovan noted that the Partisans were “made up of men from every region of the country and they [were] engaged in hostilities in every part of the country.” Contrary to the breadth and depth of the Partisan resistance, Donovan informed Roosevelt that, of the Chetniks, “nearly all [of the fighting] units are east … Their strength is customarily exaggerated …[and] these men are nearly all Serbians.” The memo was remarkably accurate, except for not fully appreciating the extent of Tito’s communist bent. Donovan ended the memo by informing Roosevelt that “most [Yugoslavs] desire a democratic Government … [but] they are not definite on the means of accomplishing” that goal. This understanding guided future US actions in the country. However, general fear of an increased communist presence within Yugoslavia drove the US to continue supporting the Chetniks to counterbalance Tito’s postwar supremacy. The Americans also possessed a deep mistrust of British and Soviet post-war aims for the Balkans.

The Americans knew of British and Soviet intentions for establishing various “spheres of influence” within the Balkans, which conflicted with Roosevelt’s anti-imperialist ideals. Convinced that Mihailović was too weak to effectively gain control over the country, and fearing a communist postwar Yugoslavia, the US developed the “Shepherd Project” which aimed to emplace a supposedly widely-regarded Croat nationalist—Ivan Šubašić—into King Peter’s cabinet, in hopes that they would be able to counterbalance communist control and maintain influence. The Shepherd Project required King Peter to publicly cut ties with Mihailović and solely support Šubašić, and therefore the Partisans over the Chetniks. Despite Tito’s rhetoric claiming he would support democracy and an inclusive government, as soon as Šubašić arrived and the Soviets recaptured Belgrade in the fall of
1944, the Partisans threw any democratic-leaning pretense aside. Tito demonstrated his political acumen—and lack of qualms with blatantly lying—when he pushed aside all non-communists to gain tighter control over the government.\textsuperscript{61} As Maclean later lamented, “at this stage such a reorganization”—Šubašić and the Partisans coming to a mutual agreement—“was no longer a practical proposition. Two years earlier something of this kind might have been possible. Indeed, had action ... been taken soon enough, it might have been possible to weld Partisans and Chetniks into one unified resistance movement. Now Tito was in a position to dictate his terms.”\textsuperscript{62} While the move cut off Mihailović from most Allied support, the US still provided small amounts of support to him through the rest of the war.

While the Partisans controlled a large portion of the country near the end of 1944, Mihailović doggedly fought in Serbia. Šubašić noted, when summarizing the fighting in a September 1944 memo to Donovan, that Mihailović was “not of great importance” nor did he and the Chetniks “signify anything, because of the presence of Russian troops on the border of Yugoslavia.”\textsuperscript{63} Šubašić ended his letter to Donovan imploring for additional US involvement within Yugoslavia following the war due to his belief that “no single nation in the Balkans is able to organize itself and to form a state without the help of the Great Powers, because their ambitions are conflicting with each other.”\textsuperscript{64} Despite this, the Allies used the small area under Mihailović’s control to assist them with rescuing downed Allied pilots from throughout the Yugoslavian countryside which resulted in the rescue of hundreds of downed Allied pilots.\textsuperscript{65} Any hope for continued Allied support was dashed, however, as the Partisans further increased their control on the country in the remaining months of the war.

Conclusion

At war’s end, Mihailović attempted to escape further into the mountains but was captured by Partisans in the spring of 1946. After a speedy trial in June, Mihailović was shot for his traitorous actions against the Partisans, on behalf of the Germans and Ustaše, during the civil war.\textsuperscript{66} Pavelić was shot in an attempted assassination in 1957 in Argentina and eventually succumbed to his wounds in 1959. Tito’s Partisans were in complete control of Yugoslavia, and the communists remained in power with Tito at the helm until his death in 1980.\textsuperscript{67}

The Yugoslavian civil war resulted in one of the proportionally highest casualties counts of any country during the war. While certainly many deaths were attributed to the German invasion, many more came at the hands of Ustaše brutality and intra-resistance group violence. The various competing factions created a nightmare scenario for the Allies who had to rely on skewed versions of a few selected individuals, each with his own postwar visions of greatness. Allied support wavered between the Chetniks and Partisans, eventually providing most support to the Partisans. While they did not immediately reap the benefits of influence within Yugoslavia, once Tito split with Stalin in 1948, the Allied war efforts began paying off.\textsuperscript{68}

Yugoslavia devolved into another terrible civil war in the 1990s. Many of the same
themes from World War II were present: ethnic rivalries, religious differences, and jealousy of the “other” ethnic group drove vicious warfare. Some of the hatred undoubtedly derived from the Ustaše’s systematic killing of other ethnicities. While it is impossible to prove “what could have been,” upon reflection of the two Yugoslav civil wars, one cannot help but wonder how Yugoslavia’s future would have changed had Maček accepted control of the NDH. Maček undoubtedly acted honorably by refusing to acquiesce to the Axis war machine, but with his possessing greater support of ethnic Croats, he would not have needed to resort to terror for effective control over the country. The Croat People’s Party control of the NDH would have precluded the Ustaše’s murderous campaigns and could have saved hundreds of thousands of Serbian lives. Without that extra added killing, perhaps Yugoslavians could have found common ground following Tito’s death. Alas, much as Maclean lamented Allied failure to unite Chetniks and Partisans, Maček did refuse the post of running the NDH as an Axis puppet, and Pavelić was left to his murderous ways.

The resulting Yugoslavia civil wars were driven by ethnic hate, marked by relentless killing, and fueled by external support. The winners of the first civil war eventually lost control over the country, resulting in more fighting. Until its dissolution following its second civil war in less than half a century, Yugoslavia was a failed attempt to unite different nations under one state, resulting in significant unrest throughout the twentieth century amongst groups of people with no real incentive to unite. While uniting after World War I against mounting external pressure to create a stronger nation was driven by the best intentions, the resulting intra-communal conflict was a direct result of that failed experiment.

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Endnotes


2. Pavlovich, Hitler’s New Disorder, 9-11.


8. Tomasevich, 11.


11. Tomasevich, 22.


13. Pavlowitch, 12.

14. Pavlowitch, 16.

15. Pavlowitch, 16.


22. Shepherd, Terror in the Balkans, 78.


28. The actual number of individuals killed is still emotionally debated. Estimates range from 80,000 to as much as 1.7 million men, women, and children killed. The Partisans exaggerated these numbers following the war for war reparations. Regardless, the systematic murder the Ustaše undertook made it the only satellite Axis state to enact its own killing process—a dubious distinction. For more information, see: Yeomans, *Annihilation*, 18; Tomasevich, *Occupation and Collaboration*, 738; and Pavlowitch, *Hitler’s New Disorder*, 34.


30. Shepherd, 79.


32. Tomasevich, 121.


34. Pavlowitch, 55.


38. Pavlowitch, 63-64.


40. Tomasevich, 96.

41. Tomasevich, 36.

42. Tomasevich, 97.


44. Djilas, *Memoir of a Revolutionary*, 262-263.


47. Pirjevec, *Tito and His Comrades*, 80. Hitler ordered mandatory killings of civilians: for every German soldier killed or wounded, 100 or 50, respectively, Yugoslav citizens would be killed. This order drove Tito to conduct additional attacks, while conversely it drove Mihailović to remain tepid.


49. Pavlowitch, *Hitler’s New Disorder*, 64.


55. Maclean, 247.


58. “OSS Reports, 1941-1943.”

59. "OSS Reports, 1941-1943.”


64. "OSS Reports, 1944-1945.”


67. Pirjevec, 454.

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Books: Feldman, Lily Gardner, Germany’s Foreign Policy of Reconciliation: From Enmity to Amity (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, 2012), 20-33


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Feldman, Germany’s Foreign Policy of Reconciliation, 73-78.
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