Political Memoirs, Myth, Policy, and the Wars of Yugoslav Secession

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Abstract

An outpouring of academic interest in the collapse of Yugoslavia and the subsequent wars of secession has developed key areas of critical analysis to approach the subject. While much of this recent work has emphasized the importance of persistent myths about the region and its people, little work has conclusively demonstrated the correlation between these misconceptions and policy formation. The use of popular, political memoirs as historical sources has been lightly treated in recent historiography, suggesting a reluctance to critically engage with the genre or accept these texts as valid sources of information. This case study argues that the political memoirs surrounding the collapse of Yugoslavia and the subsequent wars of secession complicate the assumed relationship between widespread myths of the region and the formation of policy at the military and diplomatic level.

Introduction

My paper focuses on the response of western diplomats and military personal to the collapse of Yugoslavia and the resulting wars of secession. While much work has been done on the exploration of several key

theoretical concepts surrounding these events, little has been done to illustrate how fundamental misunderstandings of the region, its history, or its people have affected policy decisions or actions beyond language and representation.[1] My paper analyses five memoirs of western policy makers and evaluates the extent to which mythologies or essentializations influenced policy at the diplomatic and military level. I do this in order to investigate the correlation between these myths and policy

[1] Three major veins of critical analysis have been well explored by previous authors. Firstly, Milica Balić-Hayden, Maria Todorova and others) have thoroughly developed the theory of "Balkanism," or the systemic "othering" of the region by observers. While Todorova draws from Edward Said's influential *Orientalism*, she argues that Balkanism is distinct constructive process of making the Balkans a primitive self rather than an alien other, or, in her words, "the Balkans are left in Europe's thrall, anti-civilization, *alter ego*, the dark side within" (Maria Todorova, *Imagining the Balkans* (New York, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 482). Such representations include the observation of Richard Cohen in 1995 that Bosnia is "formidable, scary place of high mountains, brutish people, and tribal grievances rooted in history and myth born out of boozy nights by the fire" representing an apathy and misunderstanding of Yugoslav affairs and the belittling of human suffering, "Send in the troops," *Washington Post*, 28 November 1995. Secondly, Benedict Anderson, Ernst Gellner, Anthony Smith, and others have investigated and critiqued concepts of collective identity and nationalism within international relations. Collective identity is essentially viewed as a social reality but nationalism is seen as a relatively recent and artificial phenomenon that has a significant propensity towards instability and conflict. And thirdly, it has been repeatedly asserted that the collapse of Yugoslavia was not the result of any grand continuity of violence in the region, or a product of "impersonal and inevitable forces beyond anyone's control" (John Major, quoted in M. Levene, "Introduction" in M. Levene and P. Roberts (eds.), *The Massacre in History*, (New York: Polity, 1999)). These false ideas of "ancient hatreds" (John Major, quoted in "Warring Factions Strike Bosnia Deal," *The Times* (London), 28 August 1992: 1) or "age-old animosities" (George H. W. Bush, quoted in Jack Snyder, "Nationalism and the Crisis of the Post-Soviet State," in Michael Brown, (ed), *Ethnic Conflict and International Security* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993), 79) are extremely pervasive myths, ones fostered by local nationalist leaders in order to legitimize both their use of violence and their authority as sovereign nations. Sabrina Petra Ramet's *Thinking about Yugoslavia: Scholarly Debates about the Yugoslav Breakup and the Wars in Bosnia and Kosovo* (Cambridge University Press, 2005) is a fantastic review of the issues and historical controversies raised by these events.

towards the violence and during the peace process. I will compare opinions, observations, and personal or professional biases of these authors with academic literature in an attempt to measure the amount of disconnect between the two. In doing this I will demonstrate the value of the political memoirs as unique historical sources that require further attention, particularly in the historiography of the Yugoslav wars of secession.

My essay argues that political memoirs are crucial historical sources to grasp the international response to events around the fall of Yugoslavia. Firstly, I provide a brief overview of the academic literature and the widespread myths of the conflict in order to give context in which political memoirs were written. In the second section, I survey the literature on the use of political memoirs as historical sources and evaluate their potential usefulness for the Yugoslav case study. I then examine five of these memoirs in order to answer the research question: did popular misconceptions shape the way Western diplomats and generals understood and responded to the conflict? By analyzing disconnects between political memoirs and recent academic accounts, I argue that the relationship between "Balkanist" myths and the creation of policy is not clear-cut. Senior diplomats and military commanders were either influenced by or recognized the falsity of these popular misunderstandings to different degrees, but personal perceptions were generally less influential than professional and institutional biases.

The Yugoslav wars in academic literature and popular memory

The Yugoslav wars of secession continue to be one of the most well-researched yet popularly misunderstood events of recent history.[2] The lack of serious Western[3] scholarship or interest in the region before the onset of violence left academics scrambling to provide rational explanations for its bloody collapse. [4] The generally unforeseen phenomena of nationalist independence movements after the Cold War combined with the relatively paltry understanding of modern nationalism, identity-politics, and sociological theory led to a serious academic paralysis during the critical years of Yugoslavia's collapse. Moreover, a long period of pejorative histories of the region had conditioned the Western mind to see region

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[2] These conflicts, which include the brief violence during the seceding of Slovenia in 1991, the bloody war in the Croatian Krajina from 1991-1995, and the war in Bosnia-Herzegovina (hereafter Bosnia) from 1992-1995, and the Kosovo Crisis of 1999 are also referred to in the West as the "Conflicts in the Former Yugoslavia," "Yugoslav Wars," the "Yugoslav Wars of Succession," or even the "Third Balkan War" (coined by journalist Misha Glenny, referring to the Balkan wars of 1912-13). The war in Bosnia was also known as the "Bosnian conflict" or, misleadingly, the "Bosnian Civil War." How the violence was depicted by Western sources (as either merely a "conflict" between "factions," a complicated inter-ethnic "civil war," or a full-blown "war" between nations) is often an indicator of the author's political motivations.
[3] Here, I am following convention by using the terms "West" or "International Community" to refer to North American and Western European countries. Both terms are problematic in that they connote either an imaginative geography or a perceived cohesiveness between states that do not necessarily exist.
[4] One example of early academic writing is Lenard J. Cohen's book, *Broken Bonds: The Disintegration of Yugoslavia* (1993). The first edition of this book presents an apologetic, no-fault chronology of the origins of the conflict. Ivo Banac's 1994 review of *Broken Bonds* describes it as "a tedious and lazy book calculated to avoid making a noise … and have us accept the old trivialities in a new garb,"*Political Science Quarterly*, 109, 4 (1994): 728.

and its inhabitants as predisposed towards violence. These works include Rebecca West's influential 1941 travelogue *Black Lamb and Grey Falcon* and Robert Kaplan's *Balkan Ghosts,* published half a century later.[5] Thus, without the adequate discourse or frame of mind to sufficiently condemn the outbreak of ethnic violence, "media commentators and politicians fell back on the lazy metaphors used by the populist leaders themselves."[6] Although there are many excellent studies of the war and its causes, virtually all of them emerged after the cessation of violence, well after international attention had moved on.[7]

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[5] Rebecca West's *Black Lamb and Grey Falcon*, which gives a decidedly pro-Serb and anti-Muslim position, had an impact on policy makers for two generations, as argued in "Rebecca West's War," by Brian Hall, *The New Yorker*, 15 April 1996. For an excellent account of the long history of "Balkanist" literature, see Maria Todorova's *Imagining the Balkans* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), "The Balkans: From Discovery to Invention." *Slavic Review*. 53, 2 (Summer 1994): 453-482, or Milica Bakić-Hayden and Robert M. Hayden's influential article "Orientalist Variations on the Theme "Balkans": Symbolic Geography in Recent Yugoslav Cultural Politics." *Slavic Review*. 51, 1 (Spring 1992) 1-15.

[6] Klaus Eder, Bernard Giesen, Oliver Schmidtke, and Damian Tambini, *Collective Identities in Action: A Sociological Approach to Ethnicity*, (Aldershot and Burlington: Ashgate, 2002), *ix.*

[7] See Aleksandar Pavković, *The Fragmentation of Yugoslavia: Nationalism in a Multinational State*, (London: Macmillan, 1997), Sabrina Petra Ramet, *Balkan Babel: The Disintegration of Yugoslavia from the Death of Tito to the War in Kosovo* (Boulder: Westview, 1999), Mark Mazower, *The Balkans: A Short History* (New York: Random House, 2000), John Allcock, *Explaining Yugoslavia*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000), and Branka Magaš and Ivo Žanić (Eds.) *The War in Croatia and Bosnia-Herzegovina 1991-1995*, (London and Portland: Frank Cass, 2001), R. J. Crampton, *The Balkans Since the Second World War*, (London: Longman, 2002), V. P. Gagnon, *The Myth of Ethnic War: Serbia and Croatia in the 1990s* (Ithica and London, Cornell University Press, 2004), and Smail Čekić, *The Aggression against the Republic of Bosnia and Herzegovina: Planning, Preparation, Execution*, (Sarajevo: Institution for the Research of Crimes against Humanity and International Law, 2005), among others.

Popular conceptions of the wars in the former Yugoslavia were therefore shaped more by journalistic reports and rushed, popular accounts than by careful academic study. The central question, therefore, becomes whether or not these prevalent myths and misunderstandings shaped the way policy-makers understood and acted during the conflict and after. Political memoirs of generals, diplomats, bureaucrats, and statesmen become critically important. Widespread popular interest in the war with little previous literature on the region led to a deluge of texts from many sources to satisfy the appetite for understanding the "new" phenomena of nationalism and "ethnic-cleansing" in post-communist Europe. Interestingly, almost all of the major actors in the Western peace efforts and military leaders have published memoirs of their role in the events, often concurrently with but not necessarily informed by academic accounts. Due to the relatively unfamiliar and complex history of the region, each author sought to provide their own overview of events and a framework in which they should be seen. Thus, the historian is left with a fascinating and unique set of sources depicting the ways each of these actors interpreted the conflict in their own words.

Recent scholarship concerning the origins of the collapse of Yugoslavia has particularly emphasized that it was not simply the "natural" outcome of intractable ethnic differences within a single state, or that it was the inevitable "bubbling over" of "ancient hatreds" after the

death of Tito in 1980.[8] The collapse of Yugoslavia was indeed packaged and sold as an "ethnic conflict" by former-communist nationalist elites and reported around the world as such that the fracture of the Yugoslav state and the subsequent violence followed ethnic lines seemingly confirmed this diagnosis.[9] However, by asserting the primacy of ethnic nationalism in the origins of the collapse of Yugoslavia, observers have shifted attention away from more careful analysis of its historical context. Essentialist readings frequently overlook the rising political, economic, ideological, institutional, and constitutional crises within the Yugoslav state that were central preconditions for the rise of virulent nationalism in its constituent republics during the 1980s.[10]

My paper does not imply that nationalism was insignificant in the region before the 1980s. I also do not

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[8] Particularly focused on debunking these persistent myths are historians Noel Malcolm (*Bosnia*) and Mark Mazower (*The Balkans*) and sociologist John Allcock (*Explaining Yugoslavia*).

[9] For an account of American media coverage during the war, see: J. Sadkovich, *The U.S. Media and Yugoslavia, 1991-1995* (Westport: Praeger, 1999). Mark Thompson's *Forging War: The Media in Serbia, Croatia, Bosnia, and Hercegovina* (London: University of Luton Press, 1999) sheds light on the nationalist propaganda campaigns prior to the outbreak of war in the region. For an insight into international (Western) opinion during the war, see Malcolm Penny, Richard Sobel and Robert Shapiro *International Public Opinion and the Bosnian Crisis* (Langham: Lexington, 2002).

[10] While no comprehensive account has yet covered the economic origins of the Yugoslav crisis, several authors have suggested that burgeoning economic crisis (principally caused by poor central planning of the economy, the world oil crisis, the cessation of funding to non-aligned countries under Ronald Reagan and Margaret Thatcher, and the resulting IMF restructuring plans and compounded by unhelpful constitutional reforms)was a critical contributing factor to the collapse of federal institutions and the subsequent rise of separatist nationalism through the 1980s. See: Noel Malcolm, *Bosnia* (pp.210-212), John Allcock, *Explaining Yugoslavia* (pp. 89-99), and Richard Crampton, *The Balkans since 1945* (pp. 138-154).

suppose that Yugoslavia was a haven of ethnic pluralism prior to its collapse, neither do I make the counterfactual argument that the Yugoslav federal state was "salvageable" and that the West bears ultimate responsibility for its disintegration. I do reassert the general and well-established findings that nationalism was not the sole cause of the collapse of Yugoslavia and that the international community's reaction to the crisis was unhelpful at best, with significant regional and international implications.[11] Undoubtedly, the debate about the causes of the wars of secession will continue far into the future. What is clear, however, is that the deepening crisis in the region was responded to by the muddled, contradicting policies of European Community member states[12] before it became the European Union in 1992 and America's indifference and inaction.[13] While Western states claimed to be "doing their

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[11] On the response of the international community to the collapse of Yugoslavia, see: J. Gow, *Triumph of the Lack of Will: International Diplomacy and the Yugoslav War*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997) and Vojin Dimitrijević, "The International Community and the Yugoslav Crisis" In: Nebojša Popov, (Ed.) *Srpska Strana Rata*, (Belgrade: Republika, 1996), Trans. Drinka Gojković, *The Road to War in Serbia: Trauma and Catharsis*, (Budapest and New York: Central European Press, 2000). For its implications for international law, see Peter Radan, *The Break-up of Yugoslavia and International Law*, (London and New York: Routledge, 2001).
[12] For example: the recognition of independence of Slovenia by Germany despite the official EC policy of preserving the Yugoslav federal state.
[13] Much can be said about the fundamental misreading of the collapse of Yugoslavia and the decision of the Bush administration to not intervene, thus crippling European attempts to keep the peace (as the EC had no military leverage to support their positions). Commentators have noted that immediately following the end of the cold war, America was fundamentally reassign its global role and diminishing its commitments abroad. Secretary of State James Baker, who visited Yugoslavia once in 1991 for one day, argued succinctly "we don't have a dog in that fight," and that Yugoslavia "was as good a first test as any" for the EC to deal with its own security matters (James Baker III with Thomas DeFrank, *The Politics of Diplomacy: Revolution, War and Peace 1989-1992* (New York: G.P. Putnam and Sons, 1995), 483). Even from a post-

part" by participating in United Nations peacekeeping operations, the force provided was unable to prevent the spread of violence or what became known euphemistically as "ethnic cleansing."

From 1991 to 1995, the wars in Slovenia, Croatia, and Bosnia cost the lives of approximately 200,000 people. More than 250,000 were wounded (50,000 of them children), and in Bosnia, half of the pre-war population of 4.3 million were either refugees in host countries (1.2 million) or internally displaced persons (1.5 million).[14] The economic cost of the war was also heavy, crippling industry and agriculture and causing between $15 and $20 billion worth of damage to the country's assets and infrastructure. [15] Only in 1995 did the international community eventually intervene under the relatively new

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cold war *realpolitik* perspective, however, the American administration failed to recognize the impact of the collapse of Yugoslavia on trans-Atlantic relations and the credibility of NATO and UN peacekeeping operations, which deteriorated incredibly during this time and was a significant motivation for intervention in 1995.

[14] Casualty figures come from World Bank, *Bosnia and Herzegovina: Toward Economic Recovery* (Washington, DC: World Bank, 1996), 10, and World Bank, *Bosnia and Herzegovina: The Priority Reconstruction and Recovery Program: The Challenges Ahead*, Discussion Paper no. 2 (2 April 1996): 68, and displacement figures com from UNHCR Sarajevo, "Statistical Summary, November 1998," quoted in Elizabeth M. Cousens and Charles K. Carter, *Towards Peace in Bosnia: Implementing the Dayton Accords* (Boulder and London: Lynne Rienner, 2001), 25. It should be noted here that the death-toll from Bosnia was originally estimated to be 200,000 (claims that may have been embellished by Bosniac officials), but recent research by the ICTY and the Research and Documentation Centre in Sarajevo have put the figure at 102,000 (97,200, including 3,372 children, who can be named) with the possibility of a slight increase due to ongoing research. See: Ewa Tabeau and Jakub Bijak, "War-related Deaths in the 1992–1995 Armed Conflicts in Bosnia and Herzegovina: A Critique of Previous Estimates and Recent Results," *European Journal of Population*, 21, 2-3 (2005): 187-215 and Research and Documentation Centre, Official Website: <http://www.idc.org.ba>.

[15] World Bank, *Bosnia and Herzegovina: Towards Economic Recovery*, 10.

and much debated concept of "humanitarian intervention." While widely unpopular in the State Department and the two houses of Congress, and perhaps *because* it was so unpopular [16] Bill Clinton finally decided to commit American support to NATO and the peace process, which ended the war in a few short months. While thirty previous cease-fires had failed to stop the war, the Dayton peace accords hold to this day.[17]

Memoirs and the international response to the collapse of Yugoslavia

It is vital to understand the failure of the international community to respond to the collapse of Yugoslavia, the role of the UN peacekeeping mission, and the early diplomatic efforts and the relative success of the humanitarian intervention. Arguably, the lessons that could be learned from this period of international relations have not been heeded. Foreign policy continues to be shaped largely by traditional, realist national interests under the rhetoric of international cooperation and

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[16] This decision has been characterized as a "calculated gamble" to save Clinton's presidency, following the loss of the two houses of Congress in the 1994 mid-term elections. See: John Harris, *The Survivor: Bill Clinton in the White House* (New York: Random House, 2005) 200.

[17] That peace has held is not to say that Dayton was a "perfect" solution by any means—in many respects, ideals such as democracy and justice were compromised for the sake of stability. See: Elizabeth M. Cousens and Charles K. Cater, *Towards Peace in Bosnia: Implementing the Dayton Accords* (Boulder and London: Rienner, 2001) and Christophe Solioz and Tobias Vogel (eds.), *Dayton and Beyond: Perspectives on the Future of Bosnia and Herzegovina* (Baden-Baden: Nomos, 2004).

humanitarianism. [18] Moreover, conflicts and genocide continue to be seen as "natural" phenomena through a commonplace uncritical acceptance of "ethnicity," "civilization," and difference being the inescapable root cause of conflict in the world. The unsuccessful peace efforts, the failure of UN peacekeeping operations, and the ambiguity over the motivations for the American led military action in Bosnia has fuelled scepticism of international institutions and intervention in the name of "humanitarianism."[19] However, political memoirs help lay to rest many more pessimistic observations of the US and other international actors in the Yugoslav context. Failure in the region was not the result of carefully considered diabolical plans but was because of narrow-mindedness in failing to consider the implications of a failed Yugoslavia, disunity between the EC, the UN, and the US, dysfunctional bureaucratization of decision making structures, and misinformation from the nationalistic elite and uninformed commentators.[20]

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[18] The Bosnian case study helps prove the direct relationship between the pursuit of national interests and the preservation of international institutions, international law, and human rights. See: C. Whitehead, "Two Tales of Dayton: Humanitarianism and Realpolitik in the Bosnian Peace Process" (Master's Thesis, University of Victoria, 2005). While the perceived failures in preventing genocide in the former Yugoslavia and Rwanda helped shape the response to the crisis in Kosovo in 1999, since 2001 American foreign policy and rhetoric in particular has reverted to that of national self-interest.

[19] See Ramsey Clark (et al.), *NATO in the Balkans: Voices of Opposition* (New York: International Action Center, 1998), Noam Chomsky, *The New Military Humanism: Lessons from Kosovo*, (Monroe: Common Courage Press, 1999), and David Chandler, *Bosnia: Faking Democracy after Dayton* (London: Pluto Press, 1999).

[20] Much could be said about this controversial point. Recent scholarship regarding the Clinton administration's 1995 decision to get involved in the region has explored the motivations and mechanisms behind it. See Derek Chollet, *The Road to the Dayton Accords: A Study of American Statecraft*, (New

Political memoirs of this period offer the historian both unique challenges and rewards. Though often taken at face value by academics, supposedly because of the methodological difficulties they pose,[21] these memoirs shed light not only on the intense human suffering caused by the wars and the internal personal battles fought to rationalize, legitimize, or survive their effects, but also on the motivations, principles, and actions of policy makers who influenced the events. While the usefulness of political memoirs in this respect is clear, the conceptual frameworks and methodological guidelines for these sources are woefully underdeveloped. George Egerton tried to address the systematic use of memoirs for academic purposes in his edited volume *Political Memoir: Essays on the Politics of Memory,* published in 1994. Egerton and his contributors argue that despite being a remarkably ubiquitous form of writing since antiquity, there has been "little in the way of systematic critical analysis [of political memoir] as a distinct form of historical and political literature."[22] This form of writing, Egerton posits, is best described as a "poly-genre," as it "appropriates autobiography, biography, diary, history, political science, journalism and pamphleteering, to

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York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), John Harris, *The Survivor*, and Ivo Daalder's memoir *Getting to Dayton: The Making of America's Bosnia Policy* (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution Press, 2000).

[21] The author's purpose is often held in suspect, as it seems "less to offer an objective account than to justify his or her actions in retrospect and to provide evidence for the defence before the bar of history" (John Tosh, *The Pursuit of History: Aims, Methods and New Directions in the Study of Modern History* (London: Longman, 2002), 61).

[22] George W. Egerton, "Indroduction," in G.W. Egerton (ed.), *Political Memoir: Essays on the Politics of Memory* (London and Portland: Frank Cass, 1994), *xi.*

name only its nearest literary neighbours."[23] However it remains unique by its diversity, a "literary chameleon"[24] inhabiting "an academic no-man's-land between literature and the social sciences."[25] In this respect, while literature regarding these constituent genres exists, they are ultimately only selectively applicable to political memoir and of limited use for this study; it is not sufficient to characterize a political memoir as merely akin to autobiography.

This distinction between autobiography and political memoir must be made clear for this case study. While autobiography focuses upon personal experiences and development, usually over a long period of time or the author's lifespan,[26] the political memoirs of the Yugoslav wars of secession centre on political participation, reflection, and explanation. Given the appetite for rational clarification during and after the conflict, these memoirs concentrate almost entirely on the *event* rather than themselves and they seek to offer an "objective"[27] account,

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[23] Egerton, "Introduction," in Egerton (ed.) *Political Memoir, xii.*

[24] *Ibid*

[25] George W. Egerton, "The Lloyd George 'War Memoirs': A Study in the Politics of Memory," *The Journal of Modern History*, 60, 1 (March 1988): 56.

[26] For examples of critical theory on autobiography and biography, see James Olney, *Metaphors of the Self: The Meaning of Autobiography* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1972) and his two edited volumes *Autobiography: Essays Theoretical and Critical* (Princeton: PUP, 1980) and *Studies in Autobiography* (New York: 1988), Roy Pascal, *Design and Truth in Autobiography* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1960), Ira Nadel's *Biography: Fact, Fiction, and Form* (London: Macmillan, 1984).

[27] While I do not ascribe to absolute notions of objectivity, I do believe that there are more authoritative representations of historical events than others. A defence mounted against both the use of "subjective" sources and also of aspiring to relative historical "truth" may be useful here: "It will be clear, then, that historical research is not a matter of identifying *the* authoritative source and then exploiting it for all it is worth, for the majority of sources are in some

in some cases more so than to offer justification for particular actions. Moreover, periods of reflection between events the published memoirs offered distance from the subject. Their responses offer effective and often educated criticisms of events, policies, actions, and even themselves. Interestingly, the distance created through the systematic "othering" of the region as specifically prone to violence and instability allowed the authors significant freedom to narrate the events without fear of being blamed for the conflict or its consequences.

However, as with any genre of sources, it is imperative to have a critical eye for inconsistencies, falsehoods, essentializations and other flaws. As memoirs are not usually subjected to the same rigour as academic sources, they are somewhat more likely to misconstrue facts and processes through either ignorance or selfish aims.[28] This, while useful for showing how actors may have misread events and acted inappropriately, can have a significant impact on shaping popular history and social memory, as memoirs are much more widely distributed than academic histories. Memoirs, therefore, have the

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way inaccurate, incomplete or tainted by prejudice and self-interest. The procedure is rather to amass as many pieces of evidence as possible from a wide range of sources—preferably from *all* the sources… [and] in this way the inaccuracies and distortions of particular sources are more likely to be revealed. Each type of source possesses certain strengths and weaknesses; considered together, and compared one against the other, there is at least a chance they will reveal the true facts—or something very close to them." (John Tosh, *The Pursuit of* History, 98)

[28] An example how the memoir may be used for political ends is General Wesley Clark's *Waging Modern War: Bosnia, Kosovo and the Future of Combat* (New York: Public Affairs, 2001), which presents the Clinton administration's policy in both Bosnia and Kosovo in a positive light, placing blame on the "crushing restraints" of the modern media and domestic politics and Slobodan Milošević. Clark was a Democratic presidential candidate in 2004.

potential to be either excellent sources of personal experience and insight into internal mechanisms of an event or dangerous drivel designed to confuse, exonerate, or justify the author's actions. The truth or falsity of the political memoirs is not the central concern, but rather how the author's conceptions or misconceptions may have shaped events. Certainly memoirs help provide the historian with "rich data,"[29] or a dataset provided as the author intended. In this respect, the memoir can be taken as qualitative data similarly to the opinions expressed in an interview except the "interviewee" anticipates questions the reader might have.

Warren Zimmermann, the last American ambassador to Yugoslavia from 1989 to 1992 recounts the "destruction" of the Yugoslav state in his book entitled *Origins of a Catastrophe*. Zimmermann's familiarity with the region as a vibrant, multicultural state that "stood for civility and tolerance among peoples"[30] before the wars allows him to step outside conventional essentializations to show accurately the destruction of Yugoslavia. His thesis is that "the Yugoslav catastrophe was not mainly the result of ancient ethnic or religious hostilities, nor of the collapse of communism … but the conscious actions of nationalist leaders."[31] His insider perspective into the processes and events precipitating the collapse is extremely useful for examining the progressively harsh nationalistic rhetoric

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[29] Joseph Maxwell, *Qualitative Research Design: An Interactive Approach* (Thousand Oaks: Sage, 2005), 110.
[30] Warren Zimmerman, *Origins of a Catastrophe: Yugoslavia and its Destroyers* (New York, Toronto: Random House, 1999), 4.
[31] Zimmermann, *Origins of a Catastrophe*, vii.

and the actors guiding the descent into fracture and war. Yet despite his critical appreciation of the myth-making processes and the artificiality of the "ancient hatreds" argument, Zimmermann defends the international community's sluggish response.

Although he finds mistakes within the first Bush administration's policy of "unity and democracy"[32] and the "little resolve, determination, or consistency" [33] of the Clinton administration until 1995, Zimmerman finds that "no imaginable political or even military intervention from outside could have arrested the nationalist-inspired drive to Yugoslavia's destruction." [34] Somewhat paradoxically, however, Zimmermann recognizes that "the refusal of the Bush administration to commit American power early in the Bosnian war … was our greatest mistake of the entire Yugoslav crisis. It made an unjust outcome inevitable and wasted the opportunity to prevent over a hundred thousand deaths."[35] The failure of the US to act forcefully in the formative years of the wars of secession was an unfortunate but inevitable result of the Vietnam syndrome

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[32] Essentially arguing for "unity, but not unity imposed by force," Zimmerman, *Origins of a Catastrophe*, 248.

[33] Zimmermann, *Origins of a Catastrophe*, 223.

[34] Zimmermann, *Origins of a Catastrophe*, *xi.* This point is frequently raised, but it is debatable. For instance, Tariq Ali highlights how a comprehensive reconstruction plan with an attractive aid package—instead of a "gadarene rush to seek cheap advantages in the region" (*Masters of the Universe: NATO's Balkan Crusade* (New York: Verso, 2000), *xvii*) could have conceivably preserved Yugoslavia as a loose confederation at a fraction of the cost of the resulting war and reconstruction. Counterfactuals aside, it is clear that the massive economic crisis of the 1980s (in which the IMF played a substantial part) debilitated federal institutions and ideology and created widespread social unrest.

[35] Zimmermann, *Origins of a Catastrophe*, 216.

and the Powell doctrine, [36] which required an overwhelming public support for intervention that simply was not there in 1992. "The failures do not lie with the Western witnesses to Yugoslavia's death," he argues, but "within the corpse itself."[37]

Zimmermann's consciousness of the artificiality of ethnic myths in the region certainly aids his analysis of the "catastrophe." This is abetted by his familiarity with the federal Yugoslav state *before* and during the initial stages of violence. Whereas Zimmermann writes primarily about the origin of the collapse, the following authors, who got involved only after the onset of violence, only briefly or inadequately consider it. Zimmerman's memoir thus illustrates a clear example of how even a critically minded observer, insofar as understanding the artificiality of popular myths, could rationalize Western non-involvement. Thus, the notion that the United States did not take action because they misinterpreted events as deep seated "ethnic-hatreds" is inadequate. It requires a more careful consideration into the strategic calculus of the first Bush administration.[38]

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[36] The Powell doctrine (from the Persian Gulf war) expresses that military action should be used only as a last resort and only if there is a clear risk to national security by the intended target; the force, when used, should be overwhelming and disproportionate to the force used by the enemy; there must be strong support for the campaign by the general public; and there must be a clear exit strategy from the conflict in which the military is engaged.

[37] Zimmerman, *Origins of a Catastrophe*, 248.

[38] A useful account is James Baker with Thomas DeFrank, *The Politics of Diplomacy: Revolution, War and Peace 1989-1992* (New York: G.P. Putnam and Sons, 1995). Baker remains adamantly unapologetic for the decision not to get involved in the collapse of Yugoslavia. "President Bush's decision that our national interests did not require the United States of America to fight its fourth war in Europe this century," he asserts, "was absolutely the right one" (651).

Canadian Major-General Lewis Mackenzie, chief of staff for the United Nations Protection Force (UNPROFOR) and commander of peacekeeping operations in Sarajevo in the summer of 1992 published his memoirs, *Peacekeeper*, in 1993. As his UN appointment to the former Yugoslavia was his eighth peacekeeping assignment, Mackenzie was understandably familiar with the limitations such operations involve and the internal workings of the UN and military commands. *Peacekeeper* takes the form of a daily record of events in Sarajevo, based on UN communiqués and news releases, texts of ceasefire agreements, correspondents' reports from newspapers and magazines, personal memories, and a well-kept diary. While as a military man, Mackenzie limits his analysis of UN policy and instead deals with the day-to-day challenges of the performing his duties with given resources, he nevertheless gives subtle insights into his personal beliefs throughout the text. While speaking to French President Mitterrand, who had decided to make a surprise visit to Sarajevo, Mackenzie sums up this perspective: "I'm not particularly interested in the long and complex history of this region. All that does is complicate the discussions I have with both sides. Our job is to try and achieve some semblance of a ceasefire, so we can deliver food and medicine."[39] However, despite showing little interest in the origins of the conflict or the claims of each ethnic group, Mackenzie posits in a letter home to family and friends that "history is repeating itself as the various ethnic groups … seek to exterminate

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[39] Lewis Mackenzie, *Peacekeeper: The Road to Sarajevo* (Vancouver and Toronto: Douglas & McIntyre, 1993), 254-255.

each other; except this time it's by artillery rather than swords."[40] Moreover, in this letter he takes for granted the hopelessness of the case for peace in 1992:

> Tragically, there is no solution that I can postulate. Hatred is deep, and everyone has a gun and calls himself a sniper. Hundreds of years of ethnic violence and intolerance are dredged up at each meeting; everyone thinks that theirs is a just cause. From my impartial point of view, there is more than enough blame to go around for all sides, with some left over.[41]

Mackenzie's frustration with the pointlessness of the violence, what he saw as the willingness of each side to kill their own civilians for propaganda purposes, and the lack of a legal UN mandate to involve his forces in the prevention of violence led him to act out of impartial humanitarian intent and for the survival of his personnel. Mackenzie's memoir is useful in that it provides a good look into the early strategies, goals, limitations, and mechanisms throughout the early phases of the UN Protection Force and humanitarian relief work. Stopping the violence was the ultimate goal, but it was not considered feasible until each side felt they would gain more from peace than from extreme acts of violence, which was not the case in 1992. Mackenzie criticizes the "painfully slow process"[42] of the

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[40] Mackenzie, *Peacekeeper*, 152.
[41] *Ibid.,* 154-155.
[42] *Ibid*, 101.

UN's decision-making apparatus, systemic inefficiencies within its bureaucracy, and the absence of a 24-hour military command centre.[43] In the brief final chapter of his book, he also gives his response to the question of what to do in Bosnia:

> My answer is always the same: "stop the war." But you can't do that militarily without killing a lot of people, including your own … and the whole thing will just flare up again when you leave. You have to force all three sides to agree to a constitutional solution that will stand the test of time. All solutions in Bosnia are bad, but constitutional compromise is the best of the worst.[44]

Mackenzie's Memoir catapulted him to "hero" status after its publication. He toured Canada and gave speeches to the US congress and the military establishment. Although this drew criticism from his own government and forced him to retire a year early, he continued to give public speeches. Roy Gutman, writing in the volume *Soldiers for Peace*, is highly critical of his role in Sarajevo. Mackenzie, he argues, hardly knew why he was there and even though he was undoubtedly aware that ethnic cleansing was occurring just outside of the city he made no effort to document it. Gutman is particularly aggrieved by Mackenzie's insistence that each side was equally to blame,

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[43] *Ibid*, 331.
[44] *Ibid*, 326.

implying that there were no aggressors and no victims. Indeed, this was not the case even at the time it was widely speculated that the majority of ethnic cleansing in Bosnia was committed by Bosnian Serbs. Later analysis has shown that over 80 per cent of civilian deaths were Bosnian Muslims. [45] Mackenzie was also highly critical of the American attempts to bolster Bosnian Muslim forces and position Milosevic as the aggressor. In front of the House Armed Services Committee, Mackenzie argued that "Dealing with Bosnia is a little bit like dealing with three serial killers. One has killed 15, one has killed 10, one has killed five. Do we help the one that's only killed five?" It was later disclosed that a Serbian nationalist group, Serbnet, paid a $15,000 honorarium to Mackenzie for the appearance, [46] though he denied that it influenced the content of his speech.[47]

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[45] 83.33 per cent of civilians killed in Bosnia from 1991-1995 were listed as Bosnian Muslims, 10.27 per cent were Serbs, and 5.45 per cent were Croat; of soldiers, 53.83% were Bosnian Muslims, 36.21per cent were Serbs, and 9.78 per cent Croats. See Ewa Tabeau and Jakub Bijak, "War-related Deaths in the 1992–1995 Armed Conflicts in Bosnia and Herzegovina: A Critique of Previous Estimates and Recent Results," *European Journal of Population*, 21, 2-3 (2005): 187-215 and Research and Documentation Centre, Official Website: <http://www.idc.org.ba>. Moreover, military strength was nowhere near equal between sides. The Bosnian Serb army inherited almost all the heavy artillery and arms from the defunct Yugoslav National Army (JNA) and several key armament factories, and was supported by weapons stockpiles from Serbia. In September of 1992, it was estimated that the Bosnian Muslims had only 2 tanks and 2 armoured personnel carriers (APCs), while the Bosnian Serb army had 300 tanks, 200 APCs, 800 artillery pieces and 40 aircraft (Noel Malcolm, *Bosnia: A Short History* (Basingstoke and Oxford: Macmillan, 1994), 243).
[46] Roy Gutman, "Bosnia: Negotiation and Retreat" in Barbara Benton (ed.), *Soldiers for Peace: Fifty Years of United Nations Peacekeeping* (New York: Facts on File, 1996), 198.
[47] Dele Olojede and Roy Gutman, "Former U.N. Leader MacKenzie Speaks on Behalf of Serb Forces," *Newsday* 113 (1993): 29, 3.

British General Sir Michael Rose, the UNPROFOR commander from 1994-1995, provides an excellent complimentary text to *Peacekeeper* with his memoir *Fighting for Peace.* Published in 1998, Rose's memoir has the significant benefit of hindsight not afforded to Mackenzie's. Also, Rose makes a much more determined effort to explain a greater history of the region and the course of the war, compared to Mackenzie's deliberately limited perspective. In this respect, Rose opens himself up to much greater criticism; although their two perspectives are quite similar, Mackenzie does not profess to be an expert of the region where Rose does. However, despite a number of incorrect historical assertions, including the old myths of a Balkan propensity towards violence, and that Tito's death "unleashed"[48] the forces of nationalism, Rose provides an above-average explanation of the origins of the conflict and a number of helpful observations.

In particular, Rose's defence of the international and UNPROFOR role during the initial crisis, fury at the role of the western media, and criticism of the Clinton administration's "lift and strike" during later years are compelling. The international community's "cautious response" to war in Bosnia was less than ideal, but Rose argues that it was "understandable."[49] The UN had tried to prevent the war by keeping the former Yugoslavia together, had imposed an arms embargo, sent humanitarian relief, and created the "conditions for a political settlement that

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[48] General Sir Michael Rose, *Fighting for Peace! Bosnia 1994*, (London: Harvill Press, 1998), 4.
[49] Rose, *Fighting for Peace*, 251.

included the implementation of a peace deal between the Croats and Muslims."[50] Rose unsurprisingly downplays the huge cost in human suffering that resulted from such an "understandable" mistake. To his credit, he had little or no responsibility for this decision, but at the same time his prejudice towards defending his institution is clearly visible. Rose also argues that the UN mission in Bosnia was significantly hindered because of the powerful propaganda being put out by nationalist leaders and disseminated by the international media, which rarely gave the "carefully compiled, more accurate reports from UNPROFOR"[51] similar coverage. Continuous broadcasts of images of war led to the feeling that the UN was failing, while "the emotions of the people around the world were cynically and cleverly manipulated"[52] by opportunistic ethnic leaders. Additionally, Rose argues that the insistence of the Clinton administration to "lift and strike" or an increased use of force was a reckless use of power without responsibility; he recounts how UN peacekeepers called the policy "stay and pray," as they worried greatly that an increased use of force or a NATO bombing campaign would recast them as combatants, as occurred in Somalia with such disastrous results.[53]

My fourth analysis is of David Owen's 1995 *Balkan Odyssey*. Lord Owen, British EU representative for the standing International Conference on the Former

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[50] Rose, *Fighting for Peace*, 252.
[51] *Ibid.,* 243.
[52] *Ibid.*
[53] *Ibid.,* 9.

Yugoslavia (ICFY) from September 1992 to June 1995 was the co-author of the Vance-Owen Peace Plans (VOPP), put forth in 1992 and 1993. While providing an excellent view into the diplomatic, humanitarian, and military efforts made by the EU, UN, and NATO, Owen's memoir reads as an almost archetypal account of negative stereotypes, Balkanism, and myths surrounding the inevitability of conflict in the region. It opened with a simple phrase also used in Mackenzie and Rose's memoirs: "Nothing is simple in the Balkans."[54] Owen continued:

> History points to a tradition in the Balkans of a readiness to solve disputes by the taking up of arms and acceptance of the forceful or even negotiated movement of people as the consequence of war. It points to a culture of violence within a crossroad civilization where three religions, Orthodox Christianity, Islam and Roman Catholicism, have divided communities and on occasions become the marks of identification in a dark and virulent nationalism.[55]

Owen begun his book with a long account of his previous experience in Yugoslavia as a foreign secretary during the late 1970s and his assignment to the ICFY in 1992 in a chapter conspicuously named "Mission Impossible?" In this chapter, Owen assured the reader that

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[54] David Owen, *Balkan Odyssey* (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1995), 1.
[55] *Ibid.,* 3.

he was "no stranger to Yugoslavia" and he puts together a brief but revealing narrative of Balkan's "labyrinth of history."[56] Interestingly, not only did the First World War originate in Sarajevo, but also it was apparently Tito himself who ordered the creation of the Ustaša-run concentration camp at Jasenovac.[57] This would have incredibly difficult for Tito, considering the Ustaša wanted him dead and his area of operations until the end of the war was at least a hundred kilometres away.

In spite of being such a fatalistic view of Balkan history, it is noteworthy *Balkan Odyssey* actually manages to create quite an accurate picture of the actors and situation in Bosnia from 1992 to 995. Moreover, Lord Owen was a *proponent* of international intervention in 1991, at least in hindsight, and a diligent advocate of peace in the region. At first this seems to be a paradoxical position because many used the "ancient hatreds" argument to defend inaction but it should be considered that it was his appointed task to bring peace to the region. Owen's dubious historical references, therefore, can be seen primarily as a defence against his critics, self-justification for the failure of his two peace plans. Moreover, his extremely scathing review of the pre-Dayton Clinton administration must be seen from this light. Although his peace plans were good compromises for all sides and essentially the basis for the Dayton peace treaty in 1995, the ICFY in 1992 to 1993 lacked the coercive power that only NATO, led by the US, could provide. Owen, quite

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[56] *Ibid.*, 6.
[57] *Ibid.,* 8.

understandably blames the US for failing to support the VOPP in 1992 and 1993, and that "Washington bears a heavy responsibility…for prolonging a war, with miserable consequences."[58]

Richard Holbrooke's *To End a War*, published in 1998, provides an important counterpoint to *Balkan Odyssey*. It is also by far the most insightful look into the "shuttle-diplomacy" prior to the Dayton peace accords. Holbrooke, assistant secretary of state and designated envoy to the former Yugoslavia, was despatched to the region in August of 1995 in a concerted effort by the Clinton administration to achieve peace in the region. This international peace effort occurred only after a number of widely publicized developments in the region, including several mortar attacks on civilians in Sarajevo, the massacre of over 6,000 Bosnian Muslims men and boys at the UN "safe-area" of Srebrenica, and the hostage-taking of 350 UNPROFOR soldiers. While I will not go into the details of the peace process here, I will nevertheless point to the significant change of perspective embodied by Holbrooke's appointment: the growing desire for international intervention now clearly outstripped its opponents.[59]

In early 1995, Holbrooke referred to the collapse of Yugoslavia as "the greatest collective security failure of the

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[58] *Ibid.,* 354.

[59] Holbrooke's account does tend to give the idea that he alone was responsible for many, if not all, of the decisions of the Dayton peace process. While it is certainly true that Holbrooke enjoyed a large degree of autonomy from Washington, the critical decision to end the war had been made by Clinton. Ivo Daalder's well researched account of American foreign policy from his perspective on the National Security Council, *Getting to Dayton: The Making of America's Bosnia Policy* is an important corrective to this perception.

West since the 1930s."[60] His memoirs are clear that the intentional response was "at best uncertain and at worst appalling."[61] Holbrooke perceptively comes to five reasons why and how this failure occurred: "first, a misreading of Balkan history; second, the end of the cold war; third, the behaviour of Yugoslav leaders themselves; fourth, the inadequate American response to the crisis; and finally, the mistaken belief of the Europeans that they could handle their first post-cold war challenge on their own."[62] I was surprised to find his first point, or what he called the "Rebecca West Factor," [63] articulated better than most historians of the region. Holbrooke suggests a clear relationship between the mistaken beliefs of "ancient hatred" in the region and the refusal of the US to get involved until 1995. Lawrence Eagleburger, the former American Ambassador to Yugoslavia and secretary of state who succeeded James Baker in 1992, regularly expressed his frustration with those Americans who called for action "in stark terms," and Robert Kaplan's 1993 best-selling travelogue *Balkan Ghosts*, according to many press reports, "had a profound impact of President Clinton and other members of the administration shortly after they came into office." [64] Holbrooke agrees directly with Zimmermann's

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[60] Richard Holbrooke, "America, a European Power," *Foreign Affairs*, (March 1995): 40

[61] Richard Holbrooke, *To End a War* (New York: Random House, 1998), *xv*.

[62] Holbrooke, *To End a War*, 21-22.

[63] Generations of previous observers including all four authors of the memoirs examined here read Rebecca West's 1937 travelogue *Black Lamb and Grey Falcon* as an accurate portrayal of politics and enmities in the region even until 1991.

[64] Holbrooke, *To End a War*, 22.

account of the crisis as being precipitated by opportunistic elites, but he vehemently disagrees with the initial American response. Holbrooke, understanding that the logic of non-intervention was out of national self-interest, argues a unique position, one that is a central lesson for future conflicts, "in the long run, our strategic interests and human right supported and reinforced each other, and could be advanced at the same time."[65] Despite his critical understanding of the situation, however, Holbrooke was compelled to accept a pragmatic approach to the peace process along similar lines to the Vance-Owen plan proposed over two years previously in order to secure a swift and workable peace.

Conclusion

In my brief analysis of these five texts, I have shown examples of how a select few policy makers have responded to and justified their own roles during the collapse of Yugoslavia. Although an exhaustive analysis is not possible here, I summarized each text's specific tone, assumptions, and theses. In this way I have shown that in these texts professional roles and institutional constraints mattered more than personal biases for on-the-ground policy makers. While Mackenzie, Rose, and Owen exhibit a generally essentialist discourse in terms of the region's history and tensions between its people, they nevertheless managed to use their given resources and mandates to

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[65] *Ibid.,* 370.

create positive differences and struggle towards peace. Mackenzie did not care to speculate much about the region, instead lamenting the pointlessness of these "despicable" wars and stuck to his limited role and practical criticisms. Rose did much the same thing, but, in writing some years after the conflict, he elaborated much more on his opinions of what went wrong and showed a fair degree of ambivalence to any supposed "failure."

Owen accepted Balkanist attitudes almost completely but his peace plans were practical compromises that failed due to American indecision and reluctance to enforce it. Zimmermann, on the other hand, better understood the "reality" of the collapse of Yugoslavia, but he had little power to stop it without the support of the US government or the public. Holbrooke, arriving late on the scene, apparently understood the conflict better than his predecessors, but even his peace plan was governed by the predominantly nationalist rhetoric used by all sides in order to achieve a swift agreement. Institutional roles, therefore, were more important than the personal beliefs of these western policy-makers, and their success was generally restricted to the amount of support received from the UN, European, and American bureaucracies.

Memoirs themselves are indeed essential historical sources, especially so for such relatively recent events. Although each must be carefully treated for potentially serious professional or personal biases, memoirs can provide much in the way of inside insight into historical events, people, and places. Memoirs provide perspectives into the opinions and influences of individual historical

actors that secondary sources can only generalize, guess, or take for granted. In examining the history of the Yugoslav wars of secession, memoirs are indeed critical sources for showing how the mechanisms of international relations, diplomacy, and security function and the complicated relationship between personal biases and institutional responsibilities. The samples represented here are only a few of one genre of historical sources relating to the wars. With further study, it would be possible to uncover more of the institutional mechanisms that so limited the actions of these policy makers using the methods mentioned above. Furthermore, memoirs as historical sources demand greater critical analysis as they are too useful to remain outside the historian's library.

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     In conclusion, the determining factors for the failure of the international community in preventing the Yugoslav wars of succession and genocide were, as illustrated here, not simply the case of key military and diplomatic policy makers being under mistaken impressions. Key actors, including Zimmermann, Mackenzie, Rose, and Owen, were often limited in their actions by larger bureaucracies who were in turn limited by a more general, popular mandate. The UN's involvement was limited by its Security Council resolutions, the EU's involvement was characterized by inconsistency within its national members and insufficient threat of force to back up negotiations, and the US refused to get involved because of a lack of popular or administrative support. My study shows that a more "bottom-up" perspective is needed to understand the relationship between widespread myths regarding the

region and its people, a lack of popular and administrative will to get involved, particularly in North America, and the hesitant international response to the collapse of Yugoslavia and the spread of violence.

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