

The War in Croatia, 1991-1995

Key Points

- In 1990-1991, Belgrade played on genuine but imaginary Serb fears of a repeat of WWII Ustaša atrocities. There was discrimination, but hardly on a level to justify comparisons w/WWII. The killing of Serb civilians occurred only later, after the rebellion had created a different set of circumstances.
- Serb overrepresentation in special police, army officer corps, police & party created resentment and mistrust among Croats, inspiring the heavy handed, wholesale dismissal of Serbs by the Tudjman regime that showed little respect for Serb sensibilities and paranoia.
- The war was both a civil war and international conflict.
- Despite a July 1991 truce, all sides in the Croatian conflict were bent on achieving their objectives by force. The events surrounding the Borovo Selo incident and the murder of Osijek Police Chief Riehl-Kir illustrate the determination of extremists on both sides to resort to violence.
- The JNA siege and destruction of Vukovar was not only militarily unnecessary, but instrumental in turning world opinion against Serbia, particularly following the execution of 200 wounded Croatian POWs at Ovčara farm.
- Despite Gen. Kadijević's insistence that JNA forces were prohibited from taking Dubrovnik's historic city center, the 3-month siege and bombardment of the city offered no strategic value. The damage to historic structures, death of 80 civilians, and massive looting of the surrounding countryside by JNA forces led to the ICTY's conviction of two top commanders, the increasing isolation of the Milošević regime, and the degradation of the image of Serbs around the world.
- Available evidence suggests that the Croatian Army (HV) does not appear to have committed many violations of humanitarian law during *Operation Flash*.
- The RSK leadership's last hope for a peaceful, political solution to the conflict -- whether based on Z-4 or some other negotiated settlement -- was allowed to pass.
- US aircraft did not actively assist Operation Storm, although planes on patrol did fire on Croatian Serb (SVK) radar sites that "locked on" to them.

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- Whereas Croatian police protected Orthodox churches, there remains a need to explain the government's failure to anticipate or prevent the wanton looting and killing of several hundred Serbs among the estimated 8000 principally older people stayed behind.
- Although many observers expected Serbs to flee *Operation Storm*, whether out of fear or unwillingness to live in a Croatian nation-state, there is no evidence that the Croatian government planned to expel or commit violence against them.
- While Tudjman accepted the presence of a substantial Serb minority and did not act overtly to expel or commit violence against them, he preferred a more ethnically homogenous Croatia and passively welcomed their decision to leave.