The Transformation of Mihailović’s Chetnik Movement: From Royalist Yugoslav Forces to Serb Nationalist Guerrillas

by

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Abstract

General Dragoljub Mihailović’s Chetnik movement has been the subject of historical studies for more than half a century. Most have focused on the Chetnik-Partisan war and the issues of Chetnik resistance to and collaboration with the Axis powers. This study expands on the existing body of knowledge by considering the effects of ethno-religious conflict on the Chetnik wartime strategy and ideology.

By examining primary source documents, this thesis looks at the original wartime Chetnik plan for guerrilla resistance as envisioned by Mihailović and traces its gradual transformation in the light of both the Ustaša genocide against the Serbs in the Independent State of Croatia and the Serb uprising there. As Chetnik and Axis wartime documents show, ethno-religious conflict had a profound transformative effect on Chetnik wartime behaviour and their post-war vision for royalist Yugoslavia. Ethno-religious conflict also had a significant impact on the Chetnik strategy of collaboration with the Italians in the Independent State of Croatia, the Chetnik relationship with the Partisans and the Chetniks’ resistance plans.

As a result of these various wartime processes, the Chetnik movement transformed from being a direct extension of the Yugoslav Royal Army into a Serb national force that focused on the survival of Yugoslav Serbs and was devoted to Serb post-war territorial unification within a restored Yugoslavia – or even without the restoration of Yugoslavia, for that matter. This meant abandoning Yugoslavism as an ideological platform, something that contributed to the Allies’ abandonment of the Chetniks in favour of the communist Partisans.

Keywords: The Chetniks; Yugoslavia, History, Axis occupation 1941-1945; World War, 1939-1945, Underground movements, Yugoslavia; Guerrillas, Yugoslavia; Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Montenegro, Serbia
For my parents.
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Preface

This thesis traces the Chetnik movement’s gradual transformation from the remnants of the Yugoslav Royal Army to a Serb\(^1\) nationalistic guerrilla force. In particular, it examines the transformative effects of ethno-religious conflict\(^2\) on the Chetnik movement’s strategy and ideology in occupied Yugoslavia during the Second World War. It argues that ethno-religious conflict shifted the Chetnik focus from Yugoslav matters to exclusively Serb concerns, opened an early avenue for cooperation with the Italians which later led to partial collaboration with the Axis and diverted the movement’s energy from the resistance struggle. When combined with the effects of the civil war with the Partisans, these developments led to the Chetnik downfall and the communist takeover of Yugoslavia at the end of the war.

The ethno-religious struggle is one of three parallel conflicts (the other two being the war against the Axis and the Chetnik-Partisan war) in which the Chetnik movement was engaged during the Second World War. Of the three, it has received the least attention from historians. The Chetnik movement organised and led by Colonel and later General Dragoljub Mihailović Draža was a guerrilla resistance organisation that emerged in the aftermath of the so-called April War\(^3\) in 1941; it lasted until Mihailović’s capture by the state security forces of communist Yugoslavia on March 13, 1946. Mihailović and his men saw themselves as a continuation of the royalist Yugoslav army; they used the Yugoslav nomenclature (the movement was officially known as the Yugoslav Army in the

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1 Note on terminology: there is no clear distinction of meaning between ‘Serb’ and ‘Serbian’ in English. In this thesis, the term ‘Serb’ will be used when discussing issues that apply to all Yugoslav Serbs, while ‘Serbian’ will be used for Serbia/Serbs from Serbia only. The same device will apply for ‘Croat’ and ‘Croatian’; the former will pertain to all Yugoslav Croats, the latter to Croatia/Croats from Croatia only.

2 The ethno-religious conflict involved Serbs on one side and Croats together with Slavic Muslims (present-day Bosniaks) on the other. The Serbs and Croats were national groups, while the Slavic Muslim identity was at the time still religious-based rather than national. For this reason the conflict is termed ‘ethno-religious’. The religious side of the conflict is underlined by the fact that Serb national identity was tied to the Serbian Orthodox Church, and Croat national identity was tied to the Roman Catholic Church. Moreover, the Ustaša regime in the Axis-created Independent State of Croatia was clerofascist and persecuted Eastern Orthodox Serbs with the fervour of a modern day crusade.

3 The April War is the historical term for the 11-day Axis invasion of Yugoslavia, from April 6 to April 17, 1941.
Fatherland for most of its existence) and were recognised by the Yugoslav government in exile in London, as well as the Allies, as the legitimate Yugoslav armed forces on the ground in occupied Yugoslavia for much of the war.

Unforeseen wartime circumstances, however, led to discrepancies between the official image projected by the Chetniks and the realities of their strategy and goals on the ground. This thesis shows that the original Chetnik wartime plan was to create a clandestine organisation that would initiate a general uprising against the Axis occupation forces once the western Allies approached Yugoslavia’s borders, but two major developments frustrated this plan and forced the Chetniks onto a very different path.

The first of these two developments was the Ustaša genocide of the Serbs in the Independent State of Croatia⁴ which started as soon as that regime came to power in April 1941. Ustaša atrocities against the Serbs in Herzegovina, Bosnia and the Serb-populated areas of historical Croatia, Slavonia and Dalmatia provoked a massive Serb uprising in these regions in the spring and early summer of 1941. This was the first challenge for the Chetniks, because they had neither anticipated the Ustaša policy of Serb extermination nor the massive Serb uprising it provoked. Mihailović’s answer was to integrate Serb insurgents in the Independent State of Croatia into the Chetnik movement, something achieved with varying degrees of success. Serb insurgents fought against the Ustaša formations (comprised of Croats and Slavic Muslims), but did not actively attack German or Italian occupation forces except in self-defence. This was an ethno-religious struggle rather than active resistance to the Axis occupiers, and the Chetniks effectively became part of the ethno-religious conflict in the Independent State of Croatia, fighting on the Serb side with its incorporation of Serb insurgents into the Chetnik movement. Not surprisingly, this swelled the Chetnik movement’s numbers in the Independent State of Croatia, to a point of exceeding leadership capacity of Mihailović's professional military core located in Serbia.

Moreover, Chetnik goals in the Independent State of Croatia were different from those in ethnically and religiously homogenous Serbia and this had impact on the movement as a whole. In the Independent State of Croatia, the main focus of the

⁴ The Independent State of Croatia was proclaimed in Zagreb on April 10, 1941.
Chetniks was the protection of Serb-populated areas from Ustaša attacks, and this turned them into a Serb paramilitary territorial defence force in the region. This policy also moved the Chetniks away from engaging in active warfare against the foreign (German and Italian) occupiers in the Independent State of Croatia (the fact that the Ustašas were an integral part of the Axis block notwithstanding). In fact, the Chetnik policy of fighting primarily for Serb self-preservation in the Independent State of Croatia created the potential for widespread cooperation with the Italians, who (for their own political reasons) demonstrated anti-Ustaša and pro-Serb leanings from May 1941 on.

Because of this, Chetnik-Italian collaboration in the Independent State of Croatia has to be examined in the light of the ethno-religious conflict. The ethno-religious conflict transformed Chetnik ideology and its post-war vision. In the light of wartime events, particularly those in the Independent State of Croatia, Mihailović’s Chetnik movement became focused on the territorial unification of the Yugoslav Serbs (within Yugoslavia as a large Serb territorial unit, or even without Yugoslavia if necessary), and the supremacy of Serb national matters in Chetnik ideology meant that Yugoslavism was cast aside and all but officially abandoned.

The second major development that frustrated Mihailović’s initial resistance plan was the communist-instigated uprising in Serbia in the summer of 1941. Reacting to Stalin’s directives to European communist parties after the German attack on the Soviet Union, the Communist Party of Yugoslavia began active resistance in early July 1941 – first in Serbia and then in other areas of occupied Yugoslavia. The uprising in Serbia became massive, and Mihailović was forced to become involved despite his serious reservations. Thus, from early July to late October 1941, Mihailović’s Chetniks and the communist-led Partisans (as the communist guerrilla movement became known) maintained a strained but functioning common front against the German and Serbian quisling forces in Serbia. However, the German counter-offensive and unprecedented reprisals among the Serbian civilian population (shooting 100 hostages for each German soldier killed and 50 for each one wounded) convinced Mihailović that the uprising in Serbia had to become quiescent; he therefore ordered his troops to attack the Partisans on October 31, 1941. This was the beginning of the Chetnik-Partisan war which raged in occupied Yugoslavia for the rest of the war and lasted well into the post-war period.
Gradually, the Chetnik-Partisan war became the primary focus of Mihailović's movement in occupied Yugoslavia as a whole and demanded most of its resources. This conflict diverted Chetnik attention from the resistance to the Axis in a major way. In the Independent State of Croatia, the Chetnik-Partisan war built upon earlier Chetnik-Italian cooperation that had begun within the context of the ethno-religious conflict, and numerous Chetnik detachments were 'legalised' as Italian army auxiliaries in a form of a volunteer anti-communist militia (MVAC) to fight the Partisans. This arrangement also expanded into the German-controlled areas of the Independent State of Croatia, where some Chetnik detachments were 'legalised' as Domobrani (Croat army) auxiliaries (volunteer anti-communist militia, or VAM) for the same purpose.

Although the Chetnik core around Mihailović and numerous Chetnik detachments in various parts of occupied Yugoslavia remained true to their purpose of guerrilla resistance to the Axis, Chetnik-Italian cooperation followed by Chetnik-Italian, Chetnik-Domobrani and Chetnik-German collaboration diminished Chetnik activities against the Axis and caused concern among the Allies. Partial collaboration with the Axis, the war against the Partisans and an ideological shift from a Yugoslav to a Serb platform persuaded the Allies to switch support to the Partisans, who were [seen as] more active against the Axis and more promising candidates for restoring the Yugoslav state after the war. From mid-1943 on, the Chetniks were gradually abandoned by the Allies and then finally by the Yugoslav government in exile and the King himself, thereby sealing the fate of Mihailović and his movement. In fact, as this thesis makes clear, by the time the Chetniks were abandoned by the Allies, their transformation from a Yugoslav royalist to a Serb national force was complete – in terms of both strategic and ideological goals.

As the only force to fight in three parallel conflicts in occupied Yugoslavia (the war against the Axis, in the ethno-religious conflict, and in the Chetnik-Partisan war), the Chetniks are a unique wartime movement. Their strategic and ideological development created a complex web of often conflicting interests and policies, some of which have not been previously examined in detail.
Review of Literature

Introduction

The purpose of this historiographical review is to familiarise the reader with and provide a critical analysis of the body of work dealing with the Chetniks in the region of the former Yugoslavia during the Second World War. To this end, the segment groups the works thematically and chronologically and discusses their strengths and weaknesses. It elaborates on the major themes, ideas and assertions of this thesis in light of existing work, underlining its original contributions and historical relevance.

There is a large body of historical work on the Chetniks, the earliest originating in the immediate aftermath of the Second World War. Rather than looking individually at a very large number of books and articles created since 1945, I will propose three historiographical categories (or ‘schools’) for works that share common characteristics; I will then discuss a representative work from each category in some detail. The three categories are: (i) books and articles written in the former Yugoslavia during the post-Second World War period; (ii) books and articles written in the West after 1945 (further subdivided into scholarly works produced by western authors and the writings of Yugoslav émigrés); (iii) historical works written in Serbia in the post-Yugoslav period, or from 1991 on. Of course, each work is unique. Nevertheless, those falling within the larger categories share a focus and certain peculiarities. It is therefore possible to select and discuss a representative example of each.

Yugoslavia’s Post-war Historiography

The historiography produced in communist Yugoslavia had a close relationship with the Yugoslav communist regime. Thus, the official ‘party’ and ‘state’ line about the Second World War and the Chetnik movement is mirrored in the writings of Yugoslav historians after 1945.
The National Liberation Struggle\(^1\) waged against the Axis occupiers and their domestic collaborators of all ethnic affiliations by the communist Partisans during the Second World War was, in effect, the ideological founding claim of socialist Yugoslavia. During the late 1940s, a particular historical interpretation solidified to became the official ‘Titoist’ truth. This authorised version of wartime events was disseminated in a variety of ways – via memoirs and wartime diaries of former Partisan commanders and communist party leaders and in various reports and large collections of selected documents that presented the Partisans in the best possible light while simultaneously highlighting the treasonous characteristics of their domestic wartime opponents\(^2\). The epitome was Tito’s personal report about the war, presented at the Yugoslav Communist Party’s Fifth Congress in 1949.

In his report, Tito juxtaposed the heroic struggle of the Partisans with the activities of a group of individually unnamed occupiers, quislings and collaborators. Soon after, the Military Historical Institute in Belgrade began publishing document collections on the Second World War in which many stereotypical examples of communist party language can be identified\(^3\). Within this Partisan version, the Chetniks were simply seen as one member of a diverse group of domestic collaborators, the others being Croatian Ustašas, Serbia’s pro-German administrators and Montenegrin and Slovenian pro-Italian and pro-German collaborators.

In stark contrast to the care the Yugoslav communists devoted to building and sustaining this Partisan version of the National Liberation Struggle was their lack of interest in attaining internal reconciliation. All blame for large-scale war crimes and atrocities was laid squarely at the feet of the Axis occupiers and their domestic collaborators. In order to ‘balance the guilt’, the Yugoslav regime (and, in turn, the Yugoslav historians) attempted to promote parity between the (Croatian) Ustaša regime and the (Serbian) Chetniks. As a result, Mihailović’s Chetniks became an integral part of

\(^{1}\) Shortened in Yugoslav terminology to NOB (for ‘Narodnooslobodilačka Borba’).

\(^{2}\) The official interpretation also became a standard part of the school curriculum.

\(^{3}\) A typical example of the communist party language reads as follows: ‘Our revolution took place under specific conditions, and the key to its success is the brilliant clear-sightedness of comrade Tito and our Party, who under these very circumstances were able to find appropriate ways and forms to lead the general people’s uprising to victory’. Published in: Zbornik dokumenata i podataka o narodnooslobodilačkom ratu jugoslovenskih naroda. Tom V, Knjiga 1. Borbe u Hrvatskoj 1941 godine. (Beograd: 1952), p. ix.
the forces of the Axis, portrayed as one of the main opponents in the domestic collaborationist camp.

The stigmatisation of domestic collaborators and traitors was achieved through the dissemination of elaborate and extensive academic and non-academic publications. In addition, in the immediate post-war period, the high profile trials of Croatian Roman Catholic Bishop Alojzije Stepinac and Serbian Chetnik leader Dragoljub Mihailović undoubtedly helped to perpetrate the Titoist interpretation of wartime events in the Yugoslav general public\(^4\). Following the Tito-Stalin split and the expulsion of Yugoslavia from the Cominform in 1948, the Partisan achievement became even more important to justify the existence of the Yugoslav state and legitimise the country’s communist regime.

It is apparent that the historiography of socialist Yugoslavia was subject to a large amount of political control. Marxism-Leninism was a necessary interpretative framework, even though this ideological emphasis was less important than in the countries of the Soviet bloc, and particular explanations and points of view were both expected and common. Speeches by various leading communist party figures indirectly provided ongoing guidelines and frameworks that had to be followed. Few distinctions were made between various Partisan enemies; as far as the party was concerned, all were collaborators, all committed atrocities, and all were equally guilty. Thus, over time, parity between the Chetniks and the Ustašas was achieved\(^5\). Those historians who failed to adhere to the guidelines of the Communist Party jeopardised their employment and were ultimately blacklisted and prevented from publishing.

There are two possible reasons why Yugoslav historians followed the official party and state line. One explanation is self-censorship: historians clearly knew the boundaries of correct opinion. Awareness of what was permitted was not enough,

\(^4\) Stenographic records from the trial of Dragoljub Mihailović Draža will be utilized for this thesis as a primary source.

\(^5\) There were no attempts to make the case for parity in terms of number of victims, as it would have been impossible to equate a guerrilla group (the Chetniks) and a regime that was running concentration camps (the Ustašas) in terms of numerical deaths, especially as such facts were common knowledge of the general public. Rather, references to the Chetniks and the Ustašas were used to illustrate that both Serbs and Croats had wartime renegades, traitors, collaborators and war criminals; in other words, everyone was doing it.
however. Besides knowledge of the official line, there had to be an awareness of the likely consequences should that official line not be followed. In this way, authors could produce uncontroversial material on their own, without falling victim to censorship. Fear of punishment (such as prolonged jail sentences) certainly played an important part in their motivation to promote a particular viewpoint, although some authors undoubtedly believed in the official line.

A second explanation points to the restricted flow of information. Yugoslav archives restricted access to documents on the Second World War and the Chetniks which, by default, directed research down particular paths. This resulted in works that either voluntarily followed the official line, or had no viable alternative. Attempts to prove Chetnik collaboration with the Axis, for example, became a fixation within the scholarly circles of post-World War Two Yugoslavia, with the aim of discrediting the competing resistance movement. To this end, only selected documents were made available. While the authenticity of these documents was not necessarily in question, limiting a researcher’s exposure to a single perspective would limit his/her possible conclusions. Not only was access restricted, but some documents were removed from the archives and/or destroyed.

By the mid-1980s, attempts to ‘balance the guilt’ became less pronounced, and by the end of the decade, historical research had become polarised along ethnic lines. By the time inter-Yugoslav hostilities erupted into open conflict, national historiographies were already transformed into nationalist institutions.

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6 Second World War materials became freely available to researchers in 1991, the start of the post-Yugoslav era.

7 The best example is the ambitious and very large collection of wartime documents published in numerous volumes over decades entitled ‘Zbornik dokumenata i podataka o narodnooslobodilačkom ratu jugoslovenskih naroda’. These collections reproduce archival fonds according to their origin (German, Italian, Chetnik, Partisan, Ustaša, Nedić’s Serbia, the Yugoslav Royal Government in Exile documents, and so on). The documents included in the collections are not necessarily questionable in terms of their authorship (except in rare instances, which will be discussed later in connection with the Chetniks); the problem lies in what has been omitted. For example, there are no documents on Chetnik-German clashes after the start of the Chetnik-Partisan war (after October 1941), or Partisan-German wartime contacts, although it is now known that both exist in the archives.

8 A well-known example is the documentation of Mihailović’s execution and burial. This issue came to focus recently in Serbia, where a substantial monetary reward was offered by one of the Serbian immigrant organisations (Serbian National Defence, from the US) to anyone who successfully located Mihailović’s grave.
Milovan Djilas’ Second World War diary *Wartime* is a good example of Titoist writing in the post-war period. Djilas’ account of the war is very personal, full of details on people and places and devoted to realistic descriptions of both the *zeitgeist* and *genus loci* rather than any ideological interpretation of the events. In fact, Djilas’ descriptions are surprisingly fresh and animated.

As might be expected, Djilas’ belief in the validity of the Partisan cause is absolute. Nevertheless, this does not prevent him from criticising individual members of the Partisan movement, even to the point of pointing out mistakes that the Partisans made during the course of the war. This comes across in his analysis of the changing relationship between the Yugoslav communists and Stalin, especially in the early post-war period.

Interestingly, Djilas was not shy about commenting on the inter-ethnic conflict that raged across Yugoslavia during the war. He described Ustaša atrocities against the Serb civilians and admitted that the Partisan movement had grown out of the general revolt of Serb civilians against Ustaša massacres in the Axis-established Independent State of Croatia (a revolt which, in part, came under the direct control of Yugoslav communists and royalists). However, Djilas never elaborated on the significance of these events or the deeper roots of the inter-ethnic conflict. Instead, he simply labelled Ustaša ideology as alien and strange, distancing the Ustašas from the Croatian people (the Titoist interpretation never equated the Chetniks with the Serbian people either, but considered them Serb renegades, collaborators and traitors).

By the mid-1980s Yugoslav historiography was already transforming. An early example of the changing landscape is the two-volume work by Dr. Veselin Djuretić, devoted to the Western Allies’ policies regarding wartime Yugoslavia, published in

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10 Instead of the terms ‘ethnic conflict/war’, this thesis will use the term ‘ethno-religious conflict/war’. However, this term requires some contextual explanation; one is provided later in the discussion, but until that point, the former will be utilised.

11 As will be shown later, the same Serb revolt in the Independent State of Croatia created the Chetniks there. Thus, both guerrilla movements west of Serbia and Montenegro stemmed from the local Serb uprising.
In 1985\textsuperscript{12} In the new approach, Chetniks were not dismissed as collaborators and traitors but analysed in a multi-dimensional light. For the first time in the Yugoslav post-Second World War historiography, they were discussed as both a resistance and a semi-collaborationist movement. This dichotomy, in fact, had been at the heart of the Allies’ dilemma in their relationship with the Chetniks.

Djuretić was by no means pro-Chetnik; nor was he anti-Chetnik by default. He broke new ground by setting the Chetnik ideology beside that of the Partisans. Moreover, he criticised a number of policies of the Yugoslav Communist Party (CPY), including the theory that the CPY overlooked the Serbs’ ‘wartime tragedy’\textsuperscript{13} in order to build the new Yugoslavia. Another new element was the linking of Chetnik ideology with the Yugoslav monarchy and the Serbian wartime national program. Then, at the end of his first volume Djuretić presented his most revisionist thesis, one that touched the heart of the Partisan view of history. He argued that the Partisan victory had been possible only because the Allies dropped their initial logistical and political support for the Chetniks; it was not due to the strength of the Partisan movement itself.

By 1985, then, the black and white image of the Chetniks and the Partisans that had been established in the country after the war was becoming blurred, and many grey areas (some incorrect) were emerging. The same can be said of Djuretić’s dualistic view of the British, who were presented as both naïve (regarding the Partisans) and deceitful (regarding the Chetniks).

**Western-Produced Historiography**

Works of an academic nature written by western historians and works written by members of various Yugoslav émigré groups differ in scope and focus from work produced in socialist Yugoslavia but still leave much to be desired.

Western historians tended to focus on the role of British and American military missions, aspects of the ‘big picture’ (i.e. the territory of the former Yugoslavia in the


\textsuperscript{13} The Ustaša genocide against the Serbs.
British, Soviet and American strategic plans) and the roots of subsequent Cold War
connections. A special subcategory within this branch consists of memoirs written by
members of British and American missions to Mihailović and/or Tito. In these memoirs,
members of military missions to opposing Yugoslav camps tended to present the group
they were affiliated with in the best possible light, in many ways mimicking the Chetnik-
Partisan rift during the war.

Nevertheless, even the memoirs written by members of the Allies’ military
missions in the former Yugoslavia tended to ignore the ethnic conflict raging on the
ground, focusing instead on the questions of resistance, collaboration and the
Chetnik/Partisan role in the Chetnik-Partisan war. While these works provide a valuable
insight into the Chetnik (and Partisan) methods, ideology and mindset, they fall short in
their attempts to explain the root causes of Chetnik (and, to a lesser extent, Partisan)
engagement in the ethnic conflict and the Chetnik transformation from a Yugoslav
resistance force to an essentially Serb paramilitary group.

A good example of such a work is The Embattled Mountain by F.W.D. Deakin14,
a member of the British military mission to the Partisans. In many ways, Deakin
supported the Titoist version of Yugoslav wartime history. In sharp contrast to the
wartime recollections written by members of the Allies’ military missions to Mihailović,
Deakin’s memoirs leave no doubt that there was clear evidence of collaboration between
Chetnik commanders and the Axis powers. During his stay with the Partisans, Deakin
worked hard to reduce British support for the royal Yugoslav government in London and
Mihailović, and he strove for the recognition of the National Liberation Movement, in
other words, the Partisans, as the dominating military and political organisation in
wartime Yugoslavia. Deakin urged his commanders in Cairo to influence the BBC to
publicly attack collaborationist Chetniks and personally implicate Mihailović. While he
recognised that there were ‘legal’ and ‘illegal’ Chetniks (those who had operational anti-
Partisan agreements with the Axis, and those who did not), Deakin argued that all were
ultimately under Mihailović’s supreme command, which clearly made him an Axis
collaborator15. Nor did he see a difference between the Chetniks in Serbia and those
elsewhere in Yugoslavia, even though local conditions were very different throughout

15 Essentially a chain-of-command argument.
occupied Yugoslavia. The fact that the Chetniks collaborated with the Italians (in Montenegro, Bosnia and Herzegovina and Croatia) and Germans (in Bosnia) meant that the entire movement was collaborationist, including its leadership (with Mihailović). Throughout his account, Deakin emphasised that the Chetniks considered the Partisans rather than the Axis to be their primary enemy.

Yugoslav émigré works differ in their quality, approach and purpose. They include memoirs and articles written by individuals who were, in one way or another, participants in the events of the Second World War. The authors range from members of the Yugoslav government in exile to prominent Chetniks and Ustašas who managed to flee the country in the closing days of the war. One cannot call the work academic; it was generally influenced by politics and mostly nationalistic. More specifically, writers often reacted to the official war accounts in communist Yugoslavia or to the work of other émigré authors of different ethnic and/or political affiliations. Many deliberately distorted and omitted facts, and their obvious bias makes one question the overall usefulness of these sources.

A more respectable example of Yugoslav émigré works is *The Book about Draža*, a two volume collection devoted to Mihailović\(^{16}\) published in 1956 in Windsor, Ontario, to commemorate the tenth anniversary of the Chetnik leader’s execution by Yugoslav communist authorities. Written by a number of different authors affiliated with Mihailović’s movement (including a few Americans, either members of military missions to the Chetniks or downed airmen saved by the Chetniks), this work provides a summary of Chetnik policies, delivered in essays, personal recollections, letters and reproductions of original documents.

The two volumes offer a wide-ranging mixture of works in terms of quality, ranging from serious analytical writing to outright propaganda. Nonetheless, the collection is representative of the post-war Chetnik émigré mode of thinking. For example, a detailed explanation of Chetnik ideology sits beside praise for Mihailović’s personal virtues and a discussion of the significance of the Chetnik movement for the Serbs as a nation. Not surprisingly, perhaps, ‘Yugoslavism’ as a concept remains in the background.

A recurring theme of all Chetnik post-war writings is the betrayal of the movement by the Western Allies (particularly the British) from 1943 on, and accordingly, this appears in the book as well. To underline the fundamental injustice in switching from supporting the national pro-Western Chetniks to the communist pro-Soviet Partisans, the authors underline the wartime sacrifices by the Chetniks (and Mihailović personally) and their unquestionable anti-Axis orientation. Further, they consider that the betrayal resulted in the communist takeover of Yugoslavia in 1945.\(^{17}\) The Chetniks and pro-Chetnik intellectuals strongly believed that they were robbed of their wartime victory due to British machinations, including Churchill’s deals with Stalin and a flood of false reports filed by pro-communist individuals and sent to the Partisans and the Chetniks. Even the most analytical pieces in this collection fail to criticise the Chetnik movement or Mihailović in any way. Nor do they hint at the strategic and ideological mistakes that led to the Chetnik demise in 1945. Notable also is the complete omission of references to Chetnik participation in the wartime ethnic conflict.\(^{18}\)

There are some more academic works within the Yugoslav émigré category. One of the most prominent historians to study the Chetniks in detail is Croat-American historian Dr. Jozo Tomasevich, a Yugoslav émigré. His work includes *The Chetniks* (1975) and *War and Revolution in Yugoslavia, 1941-1945: Occupation and Collaboration* (2001). Both deal systematically with Mihailović and his movement, examining in detail such aspects as the Chetnik ideology, mindset and methods of operation, the issues of collaboration and the relationship with Yugoslav governments in exile and the Allies (the British in particular, but also the Americans and the Soviets). Tomasevich had no access to archival materials located in various repositories in communist Yugoslavia, and most of his primary sources are important German and Italian documents captured at the end of the war, accessed on microfilm from the United States National Archives.\(^{19}\) Tomasevich also utilises memoirs and articles written by war participants and published outside postwar-Yugoslavia, as well as the Yugoslav historiography available in the West. His conclusions offer the most balanced view of all those works mentioned thus

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\(^{17}\) In many ways, this is a stronger version of Djuretić’s 1985 argument discussed previously.

\(^{18}\) The approach emphasised the Chetnik resistance struggle. In contrast, authors in post-war socialist Yugoslavia focused on Chetnik atrocities against the non-Serbs, but provided little analytical context.

\(^{19}\) Stanford University contains a collection of Tomasevich papers available to researchers, including the sources he collected and used in his work, courtesy of the late historian’s family.
far, but he makes no attempt to examine the deeper causes of the ethnic conflict in occupied Yugoslavia from either the Croatian or the Serbian point of view.20

**Post-Yugoslav Historiography**

With the break-up of Yugoslavia in 1991, the last remnants of the Titoist interpretation of history faded away in all successor states. In Serbia, a substantial amount of revisionist literature about the Chetniks in general and Mihailović in particular emerged21. These works focused their attention on clearing Mihailović’s name and absolving his movement, presenting the Chetniks as a Serbian national resistance movement that was unjustly accused of treason, enemy collaboration and war crimes. In this revision of history, most of the previous historical works written in Yugoslavia about the Chetniks were cast aside and labelled as irrelevant, flawed by their selective use of archival materials or even accused of outright fabrications and falsehoods.

This provoked a reaction from a number of established Yugoslav historians, who felt that their reputations and academic records were under attack. They founded the Society for Truth about the Anti-fascist People’s Liberation Struggle with the specific intention of defending an accepted version of the Yugoslav people’s ‘liberation struggles’ during the Second World War. It should be noted that these historians were not simply trying to defend the Titoist participation, as they embraced new archival research that emerged after 1991, introducing new perspectives on Chetnik resistance and Partisan collaboration with the Axis powers22. Nevertheless, they clung to the view of the Chetnik movement established in postwar Yugoslavia, seeing them as a collaborationist, Serbian nationalistic movement that was overshadowed by the Partisans, a real resistance group founded on genuine Yugoslav ideology.

20 Interestingly, Dr. Ivan Avakumović, a Serb émigré author, has published work of the same quality in terms of research, but with an exclusive focus on Chetnik resistance to the Axis with no attention paid to the ethnic conflict or the Chetnik role in it see: Avakumović, Ivan. *Mihailović According to German Documents*. (London, 1968).

21 This was only in Serbia; Chetniks were no longer the focus of scholarly research elsewhere in the former Yugoslavia after the dissolution of the country. This work is the most recent in the field and is of particular interest because of the now-unrestricted local access to archival sources about the Second World War.

22 Such as the temporary March 1943 Partisan-German agreement, a topic touched on earlier.
Perhaps the most prolific author of the post-Yugoslav revisionist school in Serbia is Miroslav Samardžić. Samardžić’s most ambitious historiographical undertaking is a series of books entitled *General Draža Mihailović and the General History of the Chetnik Movement*, which amounted to sixteen volumes by early 2011. Besides this magnum opus, Samardžić is the author of a two-volume work, *Chetnik Battles Against the Germans and Ustašas 1941-1945*, in which he presents the Chetniks as both a resistance and a Serb national movement. Samardžić has also written a book dedicated to the Partisan movement, *The Collaboration of the Partisans with the Germans, Ustašas and Albanian Militias*.

Samardžić’s energy and literary output are remarkable, but it is evident that he is not a professional historian. There are several problems with methodology. The main issue evident in all his works is that he is clearly trying to prove a pre-conceived notion rather than allowing the evidence to speak for itself. His goal, stated at the beginning of all his work, is to correct the ‘historical wrongs’ done to the reputation of the Chetniks (and, on a personal level, to Mihailović) by the regime historians of communist Yugoslavia. His work is decidedly and unashamedly revisionist: he presents his work as a library of what he calls the forbidden history.

To his credit, Samardžić does draw on primary sources. Most of these are found in the Institute for Military History in Belgrade, the main archival repository for all Second

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23 Born in 1963 in Aleksandrovac (Serbia), Samardžić studied economics before becoming a publicist in the late 1980s. His rise to fame is associated with the magazine ‘Pogledi’ (‘Views’; archive available online at the time of writing), which started publishing taboo-breaking articles about the Chetniks and Mihailović in the last few years before the break-up of Yugoslavia. Samardžić became the editor-in-chief of the magazine, but this was only the beginning of his publishing career. After 1991, the year Yugoslavia disappeared, along with the last remnants of the Titoist interpretation in any official capacity, Samardžić produced an astonishing number of books devoted to the Chetniks and their leaders, particularly Mihailović.

24 Besides these works, Samardžić is the author of a number of other books devoted to individual Chetnik commanders and editor of a number of memoirs written by Chetnik commanders and soldiers who escaped Yugoslavia at the end of the war. Some of these memoirs are simply reprints of editions that were published privately abroad but never in Serbia, while others are previously unpublished. He also edited an ambitious three-volume collection of more than one thousand Second World War photographs of Chetniks, all the photographs known to exist.
World War documents that survived the war from the former Yugoslavia. The author’s two-volume book *Chetnik Battles Against the Germans and Ustašas 1941-1945* is potentially useful because it draws upon primary sources available in Belgrade’s archives. Samardžić spent time in the former Yugoslav state archives researching many instances where the Chetniks clashed with the Germans and the Ustašas. Thus, these two books fill a void in the Yugoslav historiography. However, Samardžić’s conclusion that the Chetniks were a non-collaborationist form of Serb national resistance, actively fighting against the Germans (as occupiers) and Ustašas (to protect and avenge slaughtered Serb civilians) is one-sided. Ironically, it is as biased as the historiography produced in communist Yugoslavia that Samardžić tries so hard to discredit.

A similar issue exists with Samardžić’s *The Collaboration of the Partisans with the Germans, Ustašas and Albanian Militias*. Potentially, the book is extremely valuable for its use of previously unavailable archival sources. Emphasising aspects of the Chetnik struggle against the Axis (and their local collaborators) was not an option in communist Yugoslavia, and advancing any thesis on Partisan collaboration with the Axis or domestic quisling forces was dangerous. Thus, Samardžić’s book breaks a taboo and has the potential to broaden the perspective on events in Yugoslavia during the Second World War. That said, Samardžić fails to take advantage of the situation, and his approach is once again limited: he collected only the materials in the Archive of the Military Historical Institute in Belgrade that point to collaboration between the Partisans and the enemy. The bulk of his argument deals with the period from March to May 1943, during which the Partisan-German dialogue was most prominent. Finally, despite the author’s efforts, the book is not a lengthy one – a revealing fact in itself.

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25 His other primary sources include Chetnik and other Yugoslav émigré memoirs – not surprisingly, mostly quite biased – and Chetnik wartime newspapers and proclamations. These are often taken literally although they are clearly propaganda materials. The problem with Samardžić’s use of archival material is his process of selection and utilisation which mimics his post-Second World War predecessors in socialist Yugoslavia, albeit in the opposite direction.

26 To complete the picture, I examined work in the interwar period (Communist party newspapers, proclamations etc.) which reveals CPY ties with the Croatian Ustaša movement. My conclusions remain unchanged: Samardžić presents the Partisan collaboration with the Axis as an opportunistic device to grab power in the county. On the other hand, he presents the Chetnik collaboration as a pragmatic strategy that helped preserve Serbian lives and the Chetnik movement.
In spite of these methodological flaws and biases, Samardžić’s work is useful for my thesis in a number of ways. Samardžić’s two principal arguments are that the Chetniks were a true resistance movement, and at the same time the only genuine defenders of the persecuted Serb civilian population throughout Yugoslavia. The question of resistance and collaboration, while interesting, is not the primary focus of my study; the role of the Chetniks in the ethno conflict, however, is. Samardžić looks at the Chetnik role in the ethnic conflict with Croats, Slavic Muslims and Albanians as something natural, viewing a Chetnik Serb nationalistic stance as a positive quality. Yet he makes no attempt to analyse the deeper causes of the ethnic conflict itself, nor to trace and explain the Chetnik transformation from a Yugoslav resistance group to a Serb nationalistic organisation.

Samardžić’s multi-volume work on the general history of the Chetnik movement is presented in a chronological fashion (from the beginning of the war to Mihailović’s demise and capture), and the evolution of the Chetnik national struggle (running parallel to the struggle against the Axis) can be easily traced. The two volume work on the Chetnik struggle against the Germans and Ustašas is even more useful, because Samardžić selected all recorded instances where the Chetniks were directly engaged in an ethnic war. Because these two volumes are based almost exclusively on archival sources, they could be used as a guide for more comprehensive and critical analysis. While Samardžić’s work on the Partisan collaboration with the Axis and local quisling forces is the least useful for this thesis, it still provides a valuable source for studying the collaboration issue in the Second World War Yugoslavia.

Branko Latas is representative of a ‘counter-revolutionary’ school within the post-Yugoslav historiography. He is a member of the Society for Truth about the Anti-fascist People’s Liberation Struggle, mentioned previously. Members of the society are trained academic historians, unlike Samardžić, and this is evident in their tone and methodology. As a part of a series of works produced by the Society, in 1999, Latas published The Collaboration of Draža Mihailović’s Chetniks with the Axis Occupation Forces and Ustašas, 1941-1945. He uses the same archival repositories as Samardžić, albeit to prove a very different hypothesis, and he reproduces many of them in full.

The difference in methodology and style of writing notwithstanding, Latas’ book is evocative of Samardžić’s work on the Partisan collaboration with the Axis – but from the
opposing historiographical camp. Latas’ and Samardžić’s works, taken together, demonstrate the rift in historiography that emerged with the break up of Yugoslavia and the demise of the Titoist system, a rift still evident today.

**Original Contribution**

Instead of focusing on a ‘traditional’ set of issues – such as the mechanics of collaboration with the Axis and the war with the Partisans – my analysis of the Chetniks will focus on their connection with and role in the ethno-religious conflict that raged throughout occupied Yugoslavia from 1941 to 1945. For a variety of reasons, this approach has not been taken by any of the established historiographical schools.

Titoist historiography devoted a number of works to the Chetnik atrocities against the Slavic Muslims and, to a lesser extent, against the Croats. However, its superficial analysis eschewed a discussion of religion or ethnicity and was restricted to blaming the ‘Greater Serbia’ nationalism rooted in the interwar Serbian hegemony in Yugoslavia; it also aimed at proving that the Croatian Ustaša movement shared the Chetnik guilt by committing atrocities against the Serbs in the name of ‘Greater Croatian’ nationalism. This ‘parity of guilt’ approach promoted both the Partisan myth which posited that both Croats and Serbs had national traitors and the official state policy of ‘Brotherhood and Unity’. A more comprehensive analysis, such as examining the deeper causes of the Serbo-Croatian ethnic conflict, was undesirable because it might trigger a debate on the validity of the Yugoslav state.

Émigré works mostly avoided ethnic conflict altogether, preferring to focus on how Chetniks proved their loyalty to the Allies’ war effort. The post-Yugoslav historiography in Serbia also sought to redeem the Chetniks as a resistance group in the Allied camp. Many émigré authors emphasised the struggle of the Chetniks against the Ustašas but avoided other aspects of involvement in the ethnic conflict (especially after 2000) not only because of the atrocities themselves, but because parallels could be drawn to the events of the 1990s.

This thesis will look at the Chetniks in a new light – as participants in the multi-sided ethno-religious conflict – a ‘war within a war’ – that raged throughout occupied
Yugoslavia during the Second World War. It will show how the Chetnik wartime resistance movement transformed ideologically and functionally because of its participation in the ethno-religious conflict. This will supplement the existing historiography and explore new territory.
Historical Background

This section will familiarise the reader with major developments in South Slavic history, presented in a chronological fashion. It provides both a political and ideological framework for the creation of Yugoslavia, and explains the major tensions that existed internally among the Yugoslavs. The historical background includes some of the later constitutional developments in the interwar Yugoslavia that placed the country on a path to federalisation, providing context for the Chetnik wartime goal of establishing a separate territorial unit for the Yugoslav Serbs. Geographical notes on frequently mentioned rivers and mountains appear as well. The background section goes on to provide details on the Axis wartime occupation and division of Yugoslavia, as well as the military command structure and the order of battle for German and Italian forces in the area. The last part of this section offers a brief history of the Chetnik tradition among the Balkan Serbs, and a few notes on the early stages of Mihailović’s Chetnik movement.

Notes on Yugoslavia’s History

At the beginning of the nineteenth century, territories encompassing the region of the former Yugoslavia belonged to the Ottoman and Habsburg Empires. Between the First Serbian Uprising (1804) and the end of the First World War (1918), the region was thoroughly transformed as both Empires began to weaken, gradually losing their hold on the region. More specifically, the national awakening of the southern Slavic peoples in both imperial domains evolved into aspirations of independence. Between 1804 and the Congress of Berlin in 1878, Montenegro and Serbia achieved state independence from the Ottomans. By the end of the Balkan Wars (1912 and 1913), essentially all South Slavs still ruled by the Ottomans were liberated. In 1918, the Habsburg Empire disintegrated, and Serbia and Montenegro united with the South Slavic populated areas of Austria-Hungary, thereby uniting Slovenes, Croats and Serbs in a common state.
Despite numerous wars and hardships, the period between the First Serbian Uprising and the World War I marked significant South Slavic cultural, economic and political progress. Even so, the region was far from achieving the conditions common to western and central European states. The least advanced areas were those territories and populations that had remained under Ottoman rule longest, like Bosnia and Herzegovina (until the Austro-Hungarian occupation of 1878, and officially under Ottoman rule until 1908), and the areas liberated by Serbia and Montenegro in the Balkan Wars (1912-1913).

The Kingdom of Yugoslavia was created in 1918 and lasted until 1945\(^1\). It brought together South Slavic peoples who belonged to three major religions (Serbian Orthodox, Roman Catholic and Muslim), who spoke three Slavic languages (Serbian, Slovenian, Croatian) and who used two written scripts (Cyrillic for Serbian and Latin for Slovenian and Croatian).

Before this time, Serbs, Croats and Slovenes had never been united, and their historical experiences were markedly different. The Slovenes had independent principalities in the early middle ages, but these were conquered by the Germans and they remained in the possession of Austria until 1918. Both Serbs and Croats had had their own mediaeval states, but the Croat state lost its independence in 1102, when Croatia became part of Hungary. After 1526 Hungary was ruled by the Habsburg dynasty, and from 1868 Croatia was an autonomous entity in the Hungarian part of the Dual Monarchy (known as Austria-Hungary). This remained the case until 1918. Serbs enjoyed independent state life longer, but were gradually taken over by the Ottomans between 1371 and 1499. The Battle of the Maritsa River in 1371 was the first major Ottoman-Serb collision (followed by the less important but more famous Battle of Kosovo in 1389), and with the fall of Smederevo in 1459, the territories of modern day Serbia south of the Sava and Danube Rivers became Ottoman possessions. Mediaeval Bosnia was conquered soon after, falling to the Ottomans in 1463. The areas corresponding to modern day Montenegro and Herzegovina remained independent until 1499, but by the beginning of the sixteenth century almost all Serbs were under Ottoman control.

\(^1\) The state was officially known as the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes from 1918 to 1929.
**Origins of the Yugoslav Idea**

Under the influence of ideas of nationalism coming from Western Europe, the Serb, Croat and Slovene national identity began taking shape during the first half of the nineteenth century, although the process was not complete until the twentieth century.

The idea of a South Slavic cultural and political unity or *Illyrism* initially took hold in Croatia during the first half of the nineteenth century. This idea gradually evolved into the more recognisable *Yugoslavism*. In a number of ways, the movement for South Slavic unity was logical despite differences in language, religion and history. South Slavs were the subjects of two neighbouring imperial domains (Habsburg and Ottoman); only through unity could they resist further assimilation and achieve independence from Vienna and Istanbul, respectively.

From Croatia, the ideology of South Slavic unity spread to other Balkan areas, particularly among Serbs and Slovenes, but had little impact in Bulgaria\(^2\). Regional differences existed in terms of goals and aspirations, but the essence of Yugoslavism remained the notion that Serb, Croats and Slovenes were three different branches of the same Yugoslav (South Slavic) nation. Following unification, Yugoslavism, as a form of collective belonging it was hoped, would gradually replace separate national feelings of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes.

To a great extent, Yugoslavism grew out of the desire to instil and preserve a national identity in the face of the pressures of Germanisation and Hungarisation in the Habsburg domain. Strength would come from unity, and the resulting state entity would mirror what had already occurred in Germany and Italy. The popularity of Yugoslavism among the South Slavic masses is difficult to estimate, but for the political elites, the desire to create a strong and sizable Slavic state in the Balkans as a guarantee of independence was the primary motivator of the formation of Yugoslavia in 1918.

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\(^2\) Bulgarians never figured prominently in the Yugoslav ideology, even though they represented the fourth South Slavic nation in the Balkans.
South Slavs in the Common State

As soon as the Yugoslav state was created – thereby achieving South Slavic independence and negating threats of foreign rule – internal problems arose. For one thing, the ideology of Yugoslavism was immediately challenged by narrower South Slavic nationalisms. Every South Slavic group had a different vision of how the Yugoslav state should be organised internally. The Serbs wanted a centralist state and the preservation of their supreme position in Yugoslavia. The Slovenes were simply interested in gaining autonomy, while Slavic Muslims in Bosnia and Herzegovina wanted to maintain the borders of these two historical provinces. Meanwhile, in Montenegro, federalists wanted to re-establish Montenegro as one of Yugoslavia’s federal units.

The largest internal challenge to the newly established Yugoslav state in the interwar period came from the Croats. In fact, the ‘Croat question’ came to the fore as soon as the Kingdom’s borders were finalised in Paris in 1919. Croat historical experiences in Austria-Hungary had revolved around protecting their autonomy and traditional rights, which logically translated into a demand for Croatia to become a federal unit in the new state. The Serb centralist model which evolved in ethnically and religiously homogenous Serbia throughout the nineteenth century directly opposed the Croat vision. The former included the imposition of the system that had worked well in Serbia onto the new Yugoslav kingdom, and because the Serbs had the upper hand at the end of the First World War, they prevailed. This was not a perfect solution; tensions continued and a Serb-Croat compromise only began to materialize in late August 1939 in the form of the Cvetković-Maček Agreement, just days before the beginning of the Second World War.

In addition to internal discord, the new state was faced with the problem of ethnic minorities. Non-Slavs in Yugoslavia made up a greater percentage of the minority population than in any other country in Europe except the USSR. The creation of Yugoslavia was made possible by the breakup of the Ottoman and Habsburg empires, themselves multinational and multiconfessional states. Ironically, Yugoslavia became a

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3 For an an early discussion see: Dr. Marković, Lazar. Yugoslav State and the Croat Question. (Geca Kon: Beograd, 1925).
mini version of such a state. It inherited many of the problems that had plagued the
Ottoman and Habsburg empires and was unable to overcome them.

In the interwar period, many of the Slavs in Yugoslav Macedonia wanted to join
Bulgaria while Yugoslavia’s sizable ethnic Albanian minority was pulled towards
neighbouring Albania. Ethnic Hungarians in Vojvodina and a half-million ethnic Germans
in Vojvodina and Slavonia were difficult to integrate into the South Slavic state construct.
Finally, most of the non-Slavic minorities lived in border areas, thus rendering
Yugoslavia politically fragile.

Even more problematically, there was little religious cohesion in the new
Yugoslav state. According to the 1931 census, 48% of the population was Serbian
Orthodox, 37% Roman Catholic, 11% Muslim and the remaining 4% Protestant, Jewish
and minor religious denominations. As religious ties affected national belonging in the
Balkans and as relations between religious organisations were often fraught with
suspicion, competition and intolerance, religious diversity caused discord.

Yugoslav integration was also plagued by the long history of foreign rule.
Oppressed by foreign occupation for centuries, the South Slavs who united in 1918 were
eager to reinstate and reinvigorate their national identities, character and heritage,
national aspirations, religious and even regional identities – a surfeit of discordant
elements. The predominance of the Serbs in the new state was inevitable, given
Serbia’s state independence, its distinguished military record in the two Balkan Wars
and the First World War, its political credit for being on the winning side in 1918 and its
numerical superiority. This predominance was resented by other groups. In fact, a truly
integral Yugoslavism which called for the amalgamation of all South Slavic nations into
one Yugoslav nation had scant appeal to non-Serbs, resulting in the unresolved national
question that poisoned political life and undermined the country’s foundations.

Results were published in *Prethodni rezultati popisa stanovništva u Kraljevini Jugoslaviji 1931
godine.* (Direkcija državne statistike u Beogradu: Belgrade, 1934). This was the last census
completed before the Second World War. A census scheduled for 1941 was not held due to
imminent threat of war which materialized in April.
The Emergence of the Ustašas

During the 1920s, an extremely right wing, clerofascist Croat fringe group called the Ustaša emerged, anti-Serb and anti-Yugoslav to the core. Its origins can be traced to the early nineteenth century when Ante Starčević’s Party of Rights\(^5\) denied the existence of Serbs (let alone the existence of their political rights) even though Serbs comprised one quarter of Croatia-Slavonia’s population. In the 1860s, Josip Frank – a Zagreb lawyer of Jewish ancestry – pushed this anti-Serb policy even further. His followers became known as Frankovci. The label stuck; after Yugoslav unification during the interwar period, Croats with extreme anti-Serb and anti-Yugoslav views kept the name.

The Ustaša movement, led by Ante Pavelić, was thus a radical continuation of Ante Starčević’s general views. Its overall aim was to create a Greater Croatia from most Yugoslav lands that had been part of Austria-Hungary minus Slovenia\(^6\) and to eliminate more than two million Serbs from these lands. To strengthen the movement’s claim in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Slavic Muslims were proclaimed the ‘purest of Croats’ in Ustaša ideology\(^7\). During the interwar period, Ustaša party members fled Yugoslavia and operated as a fringe movement, running military camps in Italy and Hungary. But in 1941, they became Hitler’s weapon of choice for settling scores with the Serbs. To this end, ‘Greater Croatia’ was created (called the Independent State of Croatia\(^8\), hereafter referred to simply as the ISC) consisting of Croatia-Slavonia, some of Dalmatia and all of Bosnia and Herzegovina. The Ustašas decided to deal with two million Serbs in these areas by expelling one third to Serbia, converting another third to Roman Catholicism (thus making them Croats) and exterminating a final third in concentration camps and

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\(^6\) That is, by joining Croatia-Slavonia, Dalmatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Sandžak of Novi Pazar, Bačka, etc.

\(^7\) When the Ustaša party came to power in occupied Yugoslavia in 1941, many Slavic Muslims joined the Ustaša cause. The motivation was partly opportunism (to regain large land possessions lost by the agrarian reform in the interwar period), and partly traditional animosity between the Serbs and Slavic Muslims, dating back to Ottoman times.

\(^8\) In Serbo-Croat historiographical nomenclature ISC is shortened to NDH (for Nezavisna Država Hrvatska in Croatian). The abbreviation NDH is sometimes found in English language works as well.
through *ad hoc* rampages⁹. The resulting genocide was a key factor in the creation of mass resistance in the heavily Serb-populated areas of the ISC.

The Ustaša movement orchestrated the assassination of King Aleksandar Karađorđević in Marseilles on October 9, 1934, on his state visit to France. The assassin was a member of the IMRO (Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organisation, allied with the Ustaša movement at the time), whose main political aim was to make Yugoslav Macedonia a part of Bulgaria. King Aleksandar was succeeded by his young son, King Peter II Karađorđević; a three-person regency was set up, with Prince Paul, the late King's cousin, as the real decision maker. His rule was less strict than King Aleksandar's, and he revised the 1931 constitution to allow further scope for political life.

**The Communist Party of Yugoslavia**

The Communist Party of Yugoslavia (CPY) – which created the wartime Partisan movement – was established in 1919 with the merger of several Social Democratic parties¹⁰. In the 1920 elections, it won twelve percent of the popular vote, with more support coming from large cities. The CPY was responsible for a series of strikes in the country, including one that shut down the railway system in 1920. The Party also produced constant propaganda against the state and the social order. The government reacted in December 1920, restricting much CPY activity by a special decree. In June 1921, the CPY reacted by attempting to assassinate Prince Regent Aleksandar Karađorđević. In July 1921, the Party succeeded in assassinating the ex-Minister of the Interior (who had written the 1920 decree). The Yugoslav government outlawed the CPY in August 1921, and its deputies were removed from parliament.

This was the beginning of the CPY’s underground period, something which, in hindsight, provided excellent training for the occupation period. Despite constant police persecution, the CPY continued to function, albeit in a limited way. However, police actions took their toll, and by 1932, the CPY had diminished to only a few hundred

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members. Its Central Committee operated from abroad for most of the interwar period, during which time following Soviet directives remained of paramount importance.

In 1937, the Comintern installed Josip Broz (nickname Tito) as the head of the CPY. Broz was a capable and energetic leader who worked hard at rebuilding the party. Unlike Mihailović’s Chetnik movement – which had to rebuild itself from the ground up during foreign occupation – the CPY had a defined new hierarchical structure already in place at the beginning of the war and long experience in underground survival, both of which proved to be important assets.

**The Path to Federalism**

During the interwar years, Yugoslavia continued to be allied with France and Britain, but this was challenged by the rise of Nazi Germany. Yugoslavia tried to adopt a neutral course between its traditional Allies and the emerging Axis bloc, but after 1935, the country began leaning towards the Axis block (Germany in particular) due to economic and political pressure from Berlin.

Germany incorporated Austria in March 1938 (the Anschluss), and Yugoslavia became its immediate neighbour. The Italian occupation of Albania in April 1939 and the pro-Axis orientation of all Yugoslav neighbours meant that Yugoslav integration into the Axis system was just a question of time. Faced with the imminent arrival of another European war, Prince Paul decided to broker an internal Yugoslav deal with the Croats in order to strengthen the country; in this attempt, his partner was Vlatko Maček, the leader of the Croatian Peasant Party (CPP) – the largest Croat party at the time\(^\text{11}\).

Once Yugoslavia was surrounded by the Axis block, the government’s main concern was the territorial aspirations of its revisionist neighbours. Yugoslavia had little chance of withstanding such pressures without internal cohesion and national solidarity – both of which were in short supply by 1939. The Serb-Croat relationship was the key to Yugoslavia’s survival, especially in the event of a European war. In February 1939,

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\(^{11}\) See: Jelić-Butić, Fikreta. *Hrvatska seljačka stranka*. (Globus: Zagreb, 1983) for more details on the CPP.
Prince Paul removed Prime Minister Milan Stojadinović\textsuperscript{12} from power. Stojadinović had been in charge from 1935 and was seen as pro-Axis. His replacement was Dragiša Cvetković; the new Prime Minister’s first task was to broker a deal with the Croats.

Cvetković and Maček negotiated for almost half a year, and on August 26, 1939, the Sporazum (agreement) was signed\textsuperscript{13}. It was the first real Serb-Croat agreement since the creation of the Yugoslav state in 1918, and it set the Kingdom on a path of federalism that would have eventually resulted in the creation of three federal units (one each for Serbs, Croats and Slovenes). Because war began in Europe a few days after the agreement was signed, only the Croat territorial unit (called Banovina Hrvatska) came into official existence\textsuperscript{14}.

The Agreement was envisioned as a first step in the reorganisation of Yugoslavia. In the following months, Prime Minister Cvetković, together with a group of experts, drafted a plan to establish a Serb federal unit (called ‘Serb Lands’) with Skopje as the capital, encompassing the rest of Yugoslavia minus Slovenia. Slovenia was to form the third federal unit by simply transforming the existing Banovina Dravska into the Slovenian Banovina. The establishment of the Serb Lands and Slovenian Banovina was still in the planning stages when the Axis moved into Yugoslavia.

\textsuperscript{12} Stojadinović’s premiership was politically controversial because of his pro-German orientation; this did not go down well with his fellow Serbs. However, from 1935 on, Yugoslavia achieved significant economic growth by reorienting its exports of natural resources to Germany, something that made Stojadinović popular as well. After his removal from power, Stojadinović went to London where he stayed for the rest of the war. In his memoirs, he claimed that he had known how to keep Yugoslavia neutral and out of the war even beyond 1941.


\textsuperscript{14} The spirit of the Agreement was pro-Yugoslav, and the opening paragraph stated that Yugoslavia was the best guarantee of independence and progress for Serbs, Croats and Slovenes. A new constitution was also written and adopted to provide a wider framework for the changes. Croatian Banovina assumed jurisdiction of the administration of agriculture, trade, industry, forests and mines, judiciary, police (minus the gendarmerie), education, public health, public works, social welfare, and (partially) finance. The rest – state security, defence, foreign affairs, central banking and legislation was left to the Yugoslav government. The Croatian Banovina also got its own diet (called Sabor). The head of the government was called the Ban (mimicking the terminology that had existed in autonomous Croatia during the Austro-Hungarian period). The official representative of the King in the Croatian Banovina, the Ban, was responsible to both the King and the Sabor. The Croatian Banovina also had its own budget.
The Croatian Peasant Party took the opportunity to strengthen its (until then semi-legal) paramilitary units, namely, the Peasant Guard (Seljačka Zaštita) in the countryside and the Civic Guards (Gradska Zaštita) in the cities. In Zagreb, the Banovina’s capital, the Civic Guards were officially proclaimed auxiliary police forces. The CPP’s paramilitary units played an important part in the Yugoslav Army’s collapse during its brief war with the Axis in April 1941, through sabotage and mutiny.

The 1939 Agreement was largely an emergency measure, an attempt to overcome the main internal Yugoslav problem – the Croat question – in the face of the imminent war\(^\text{15}\). Given that Yugoslavia was occupied by the Axis just a year and a half later, it is difficult to judge whether it could have worked. However, the Agreement was significant in its silent abandonment of integral Yugoslavism as an unworkable state system and the need for the recognition of Serb, Croat and Slovene national identities by creating territorial autonomies within a federal framework.

In retrospect, internal Yugoslav tensions were the by-product of the region’s geostrategic location as a traditional crossroads of religious, cultural, political and economic forces of imperial powers and the competing aspirations of groups living in and around the region. Peaceful union was arguably an impossible task.

**Notes on Yugoslavia’s Geography**

The Kingdom of Yugoslavia was bordered by Italy and Austria to the northwest, Hungary and Romania to the north, Bulgaria to the east and Greece and Albania to the south. To the west, the country was bound by the Adriatic Sea. When it annexed Austria in 1938, Nazi Germany became Yugoslavia’s newest neighbour.

In geographical terms, Yugoslavia’s northern third comprised the Pannonian basin, an open flatland intersected by occasional isolated mountains. Most of the rest

\(^{15}\) Croat separatists were not happy with the Agreement, arguing that they received too little. Serb nationalists were equally unhappy, saying that the Agreement gave the Croats too much. Slavic Muslims in Bosnia and Herzegovina resented the fact that the traditional borders of these two provinces were not respected and that the Agreement now divided them. Nevertheless, a new government was formed with Dragiša Cvetković as Prime Minister and Vlatko Maček as Vice-Premier. The first Croatian Ban was Ivan Šubašić, another important figure in the Croatian Peasant Party (CPP).
consisted of hilly and mountainous countryside, many covered with virgin woodlands. The Dinaric Range, an essentially unbroken chain of mountains from Slovenia in the north to the Albanian border in the southeast, runs through the middle of the country, separating the Adriatic coastline from the flatlands in the north. The inaccessible Dinaric highlands have always posed a challenge to domestic integration and foreign conquest. This broken terrain, a natural fortress and hideout, has fostered bandits, brigands and guerrillas. As late as 1941, the area was highly underdeveloped in terms of its infrastructure, with very few roads and even fewer railways.

The Dinaric Mountains are occasionally broken by river valleys, running along the north-south axis, towards the Adriatic Sea or the Pannonian basin. These river valleys were (and still are) major communication routes. Thus, during the Second World War, the Axis forces focused on controlling the towns and main routes along the river valleys, leaving the rest (the villages and the countryside) to the guerrilla groups.

Certain river valleys are particularly important to this thesis. The longest and largest is the Morava-Vardar/Axios river valley, connecting the Danube to the north with the Aegean Sea to the south. This valley system was the transportation backbone of Serbia after 1913, and the Germans considered the control of it as essential to their war effort.

For most of its course, the River Drina represents the traditional border between Bosnia and Serbia, and with the Axis occupation of Yugoslavia, it became the border between the ISC and Serbia. The surrounding areas in both Bosnia and Serbia are known as Podrinje. On the Bosnian side (Bosansko Podrinje), there was mix of both urban and rural Serb and Slavic Muslim populations; the area saw some of the worst atrocities and ethno-religious fighting during the occupation.

The River Bosna forms the next important valley to the west. It runs through central Bosnia, an area with a Muslim and Croat majority. Mount Ozren was the exception, as it was populated almost exclusively by Serbs. West of the River Bosna are the Vrbas and the Una rivers. The area of Bosnia west of the Vrbas River is called Bosanska Krajina, and during the Second World War, it had a majority Serb population, with some Slavic Muslim and Croat enclaves. For its part, the River Una was the historical border between Bosnia and Croatia, as well as the western end of Bosanska Krajina. The Drina, Bosna, Vrbas and Una rivers all flow towards the north and into the River Sava, which runs through Ljubljana (the Slovenian capital) and Zagreb (the
Croatian capital) and separates Bosnia from the Slavonian lowlands to the north. The River Sava meets the Danube in a confluence in central Belgrade.

During the war, key Chetnik commanders in Bosnia separated their areas of responsibility by using these rivers to delineate operational zones (for example, Major Jezdimir Dangić defined his east-west reach as the area between the Drina and Bosna rivers). Their core territories were the mountainous areas between the rivers. Certain mountains, such as Romanija (eastern Bosnia, east of Sarajevo), Majevica (northeastern Bosnia, between the Drina and Bosna rivers) and Ozren (central Bosnia) feature prominently in Chetnik history. Not surprisingly, Chetnik units labelled their forces geographically according to major rivers or mountains.

Two additional geographical features that should be mentioned here are the River Neretva, flowing north to south and into the Adriatic Sea, separating Croat-populated western Herzegovina from Serb-populated eastern Herzegovina, and Mount Dinara, a historical border between Bosnia and Croatia in the southwest, located in a Serb-populated area. Herzegovina is very similar geographically to neighbouring Montenegro to the east; both are barren and inhospitable terrains with scarce resources. Eastern Herzegovina and Mount Dinara saw major Chetnik activity during the war.

While the Chetniks found the Serb-populated parts of Yugoslavia’s mountainous terrain a natural zone of operations with crucial support supplied by the local population, the northern flatlands posed a major challenge. Even in the Serb-majority areas in Slavonia (now in Croatia) and Vojvodina (present-day northern Serbia), Chetnik forces never developed beyond the embryonic stage. Instead, they found their niche in the highlands of Montenegro and Serbia, and in the Serb-populated highlands of Bosnia, Herzegovina and Croatia (in the areas west and southwest of Bosanska Krajina).

**War and Occupation**

**March 27, 1941, and the April War**

The Yugoslav government aimed at a neutral position in the European war after September 3, 1939, and for a while it succeeded. However, German pressure mounted, and Yugoslavia soon found itself encircled by Axis member states. Yugoslavia finally joined the Axis (the Tripartite Pact) on March 25, 1941, after major pressure from Nazi
Although the conditions of membership in the Tripartite Pact were arguably favourable (Yugoslav forces were not required to provide troops for Axis fronts, and there were guarantees that Yugoslav borders would not change), Yugoslav Serb public opinion was overwhelmingly against joining the Axis, and angry demonstrations spilled onto Belgrade’s streets on March 27. A military coup followed on the same day, toppling the government. The new government of General Dušan Simović did nothing to denounce Yugoslavia’s official entry into the Axis camp and made overtures to German representatives in Belgrade, but it was already too late. News of anti-Axis demonstrations in Belgrade infuriated Hitler, and he decided to crush Yugoslavia, wipe it off the map and punish the Yugoslav Serbs as the guilty party.

The Axis invasion that followed – starting with the indiscriminate bombing of Belgrade on April 6 and culminating with Yugoslav surrender on April 17 – is known in historiography as the April War. It lasted for only eleven days, and with the sole exception of the Albanian front where Yugoslav forces made advances against the Italians, it was characterised by complete Yugoslav disintegration. All fronts broke down quickly, and the Yugoslav forces collapsed in every part of the country. The speedy defeat was in sharp contrast to the forceful and prolonged Serbian resistance in 1914-1915, and it came as a shock to Mihailović and other officers of his generation. A scapegoat had to be found, and theCroats (Ustaša members and sympathisers, and Croat Peasant Party paramilitaries) were quickly singled out. While the Ustaša and CPP groups undoubtedly sabotaged the Yugoslav forces, rebelled from within, defected and openly attacked them during the April War, the fact remains that the Yugoslav state and its defenders imploded even in Serbia. It was a sign of fatigue; two decades of internal conflict had poisoned the life of the newly created state, and the outcome was, in many respects, inevitable.

**Axis Division of Yugoslav Territory**

After the Axis defeated Yugoslavia in the brief April war, they could have decided to simply occupy the country until the post-war peace treaty, something that was

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standard European practice in these circumstances. However, Hitler decided to disregard rules of war and set about dismantling Yugoslavia during the German-Italian conference in Vienna\textsuperscript{17} on April 20-22. Thus, sizable chunks of Yugoslavia’s territory were given to its Axis neighbours (with the exception of Romania), reducing Serbia roughly to its 1878 borders and turning it into a zone of German military occupation while the rest was divided into new Axis puppet states – the Independent State of Croatia and Montenegro. The details of this arrangement were decided almost entirely by Hitler himself, and they essentially remained in place until the end of the war (except for adjustments in response to the Italian capitulation in 1943).

Hitler partially restored the old Austrian border by incorporating a large part of Slovenia into the Reich itself. His Axis partners had to be rewarded with Yugoslav territory, first and foremost Italy, but minor partners such as Bulgaria and Hungary; were compensated as well. The Croatian Ustašas, as the most radical anti-Yugoslav element, were brought back from exile in Italy and installed as leaders of the Independent State of Croatia. However, in all cases where territory was given to Axis partners or became puppet states, the Germans retained the right to exploit their economic interests as they saw fit, regardless of the target areas’ theoretical ownership.

The ISC was split in half along a German-Italian Line of Demarcation (the Vienna Line), creating two separate Axis occupation zones – German in the northern half, and Italian in the southern half. The Vienna Line actually started in Slovenia (which was divided by Italy and Germany), continued through the ISC and into Italian-occupied Montenegro and German-occupied Serbia as well as Italian-run Albania and Serbia.

The Germans decided on the line in Slovenia and elsewhere without consulting the Italians, but Italian gains were nonetheless substantial. Italy directly annexed areas adjacent to their possessions in the eastern Adriatic, around Fiume (Rijeka), a strip of territory running along most of the former Yugoslav coast including Spalato (Split), most of the Yugoslav Adriatic islands and the Bay of Kotor. The Italians planned to turn Montenegro into a separate kingdom attached to the Italian crown, while Italian-occupied Albania was extended by adding small parts of Montenegro, most of Kosovo and the

\textsuperscript{17} For more information on the Axis occupation and division of Yugoslav territory see: Čulinović, Ferdo. Okupatorska podela Jugoslavije. (Vojno-izdavački zavod: Beograd, 1970).
western part of Yugoslav Macedonia. Among the minor players, Bulgaria annexed most of Yugoslav Macedonia and a part of eastern Serbia. Hungary annexed parts Bačka, Baranja, Međimurje and Prekomurje.

Unlike the ISC and Montenegro, Serbia was not resurrected as a puppet state. Rather, it was occupied by the Germans and placed under a German military government. Although the Germans gave the administration a local Serbian ‘face’, this system remained unchanged until the end of the occupation. The Banat region, a part of Serbia, was given to the local German population – the Volksdeutsche – to administer, even though they comprised less than twenty percent of the overall population. Starting on April 30, 1941, the German army of occupation began to administer the rest of Serbia through a group of Serbian ‘Commissioners’; then on August 29, they set up a government headed by General Milan Nedić (the former Yugoslav Minister of the Army and Navy). To free German troops for the Eastern Front, Bulgarian troops were brought into Serbia in two successive waves – these troops were under full German control.

The Independent State of Croatia was created by joining the historical (pre-1918) territories of Croatia (without Međimurje, some territory north of Fiume and certain Adriatic islands), Slavonia, parts of Dalmatia not annexed by the Italians, and the entirety of Bosnia and Herzegovina. The ISC thus incorporated a large number of Serbs (two million), who comprised a third of the entire population and were present on seventy percent of its territory. The Croats formed fifty percent of the population, while Slavic Muslims (proclaimed ‘Croats of the Islamic faith’ by the regime) were a further fifteen percent. The rest were minority groups, including Jews and Roma. Clearly, the ISC was a multiethnic and multireligious entity. However, the Ustaša regime decided to place the entire Serb population (as well as Jews and Roma) outside the law, not recognising their right to exist in the ISC; this led to horrible acts of genocide in concentration camps and throughout the countryside.

The fact that Germany and Italy each occupied half of the ISC led to increasing rivalry between the two Axis partners and hampered effective military actions against the resistance groups within ISC borders. In addition, the German and Italian military and political leadership was sharply divided over the partitioning of Yugoslavia and its occupation. German and Italian army leaders favoured the simple military occupation of the entire area of Yugoslavia, their argument being that giving territory to minor partners
and establishing puppet states was an unnecessary complication that reduced their freedom of action and range of influence. The political leadership viewed things differently. German Foreign Minister von Ribbentrop was a strong supporter of the ISC, arguing that driving a wedge between the Serbs and Croats and winning Croats over was more useful than simple military occupation. Hitler shared this view. Hitler also had to help Mussolini on the domestic front; this entailed various annexations of Yugoslav territory and an expanded zone of Italian influence through the establishment of new client states.

The systematic persecution of the Serbs in the ISC started soon after the Ustaša regime was installed. Ustaša rampages against Serb civilians quickly provoked a Serb backlash. Random clashes occurred in Bosnia as early as May 1941 (the first was reported on May 6 near Sanski Most in Bosanska Krajina region), and the first large scale uprising came in June in Herzegovina. In July, the rebellion swept across Serb-populated areas of Bosnia (both east and west, the latter known as Bosanska Krajina), now helped out by the Communist Party of Yugoslavia (CPY). The initial uprising was directed against the Ustašas but was otherwise apolitical; Mihailović sent officers and CPY party members to Serb-controlled areas to take over the leadership. Nevertheless for the first six months or so, the insurgents remained unified.

In Serbia, in contrast to the ISC, Mihailović’s Chetniks and Tito’s Partisans created separate formations from the outset, but they cooperated to present a united front against the Germans from July to late October 1941. At the end of October, the Chetnik-Partisan war broke out in Serbia, and over the next few months, it spilled over into neighbouring areas. In the ISC the rebels were split into two groups, the Chetniks and the Partisans, and ended up fighting each other.
The German Military and Civilian Administration

Serbia, roughly reduced to its pre-Balkan Wars frontiers, was the only region of occupied Yugoslavia where German military government was established\(^\text{18}\). Direct German control of Serbia was crucial for the Reich because of the River Danube route and Serbia’s railway network that connected central Europe with Bulgaria (to the east) and Greece and North Africa (to the south). Serbia also had a rich base of natural resources that could be exploited by the German war industry. In order to maintain order with the least possible expense in Serbia, the German military government created a Serbian puppet administration.

Field Marshal Walther von Brauchitsch, Chief of the German Army High Command (OKH), established the German military government in Serbia on April 20, 1941,\(^\text{19}\) making the Military Commander the head of the occupation regime. The Military Commander was subordinate to the Quartermaster General of the Army High Command and subordinate to the commanding officer of the German Second Army as long as it was in Serbia. His main tasks were to safeguard the railway between Belgrade and Thessaloniki and the River Danube route, to maintain law and order and to execute the economic orders of Reichsmarshal Hermann Goring.

On April 23, 1941 the position of the Military Commander in Serbia was further defined. His command was split into military and administrative staff, and the territory under his jurisdiction was divided into four areas and ten district commands. He had at his disposal four battalions for local defence (Landesschützen), distributed among the area commands. He also had one group of secret field police and another set of personnel for the organisation and administration of economic exploitation. The Military Commander in Serbia had no combat or garrison troops under his command. The first


\(^\text{19}\) The order became effective two days later. For excellent research on positions and chronology see Tomasevich, Jozo. The Chetniks. (Stanford University Press: Stanford, 1975), pp. 92-101.
individual to become the Military Commander in Serbia was Air Force General Helmuth Forster. Forster held his post for three months, and was replaced in June 1941 by Antiaircraft Artillery General Ludwig von Schroder. Schroder died in July in a plane crash, and was replaced by Air Force General Heinrich Danckelmann.

In June 1941, further changes were implemented in the region. Garrison troops were brought in, four understrength divisions, led by the Higher Command for Special Purposes LXV under the command of General of Artillery Paul Bader. The garrison troops were under the jurisdiction of the German Second Army until it moved to the Eastern Front; after its departure, the troops were under the authority of the Armed Forces Commander in South-East Europe who was located in Thessaloniki.

Of the four garrison divisions, three were deployed in Serbia (704th, 714th, 717th) and one was deployed in the ISC (718th). General Bader held a position parallel to that of the Military Commander in Serbia; while the latter could order General Bader to commence military operations in case of an uprising, he was not Bader’s military superior.

There was a clear need to have all German forces in the Balkans under a unified command, and this unity was established by Hitler’s directive on June 9, 1941. In this directive, Field Marshal Wilhelm List, the Commander in Chief of the German Troops in the Balkans20, was appointed Armed Forces Commander in South-East Europe and was directly subordinate to Hitler. Field Marshal List stayed in Thessaloniki, but his jurisdiction now included the Military Commander in Serbia, General Bader in Serbia, the Thessaloniki-Aegean area, and southern Greece. He was responsible for the security of all these areas and had the task of maintaining contact with German allies in the region, particularly the Italians. The described command structure, albeit with changes in personnel, remained in effect until December 31, 1942.

When the uprising broke out in Serbia in July 1941, the local Serbian gendarmerie and small German forces available to the Military Commander in Serbia were unable to contain it. In mid-August 1941, General Bader was put in charge (as the

20 The command post was known as Commander in Chief of the Twelfth Army until May 17, 1941.
head of the Higher Command for Special Purposes LXV). The three garrison divisions located in Serbia also proved insufficient for the task. The 126th Infantry Regiment (strengthened with an artillery unit) was brought in from Greece on September 4, 1941.

On September 16, 1941, Hitler ordered Field Marshal List to crush the uprising in Serbia. By the same directive, General Franz Bohme, the commanding officer of the 18th Army Corps in Greece, was transferred to Serbia. General Bohme was given a new title – Plenipotentiary Commanding General – and took command of all German troops in Serbia with the task of destroying the rebels. Two regular army divisions were also promised, if it proved necessary.

On the same day, the Armed Forces High Command (OKW) issued Hitler's order to emphatically suppress resistance movements; this order remained in effect for the next two years and became the legal basis for mass reprisals against civilians in Serbia. General Franz Bohme took over his new post on September 19, 1941, and General Danckelmann was relieved of his post as the Military Commander in Serbia (Bohme took over this post as well).

On September 20, 1941, the 342nd German Infantry Division was brought into Serbia from France along with a detachment of the 100th Tank Brigade, while the 113th Infantry Division was transferred from the Eastern Front in November. These German units, together with Serbian quisling forces, had subdued the uprising in Serbia by early December 1941. General Bohme and the 18th Army Corps were transferred to Finland, and General Bader took over the vacant post of the Plenipotentiary Commanding General in Serbia. On February 2, 1942, General Bader's power increased when following the order of the Armed Forces High Command, three separate commands in Serbia (the Plenipotentiary Commanding General in Serbia, the Military Commander in Serbia and the Higher Command for Special Purposes LXV) were consolidated into one office of the Commanding General in Serbia. General Bader as the Commanding General in Serbia was subordinate to the Armed Forces Commander in South-East Europe (located in Thessaloniki).

After the 1941 uprising in Serbia was put down, the Germans started moving troops to other areas where they were needed. In January 1942, they used Bulgarian troops in Serbia to free their own men for the Eastern Front; this allowed them to make
use of the Bulgarians who refused to send their men into battle against the Soviets. Bulgarian troops were brought into Serbia in waves, eventually occupying most of the region, with the exception of north-western Serbia.

In contrast to German-occupied Serbia, which was treated as the successor to the failed Yugoslavia, the Independent State of Croatia was recognised by the Germans as a fully sovereign state. The ISC was proclaimed as a state in Zagreb on April 10, 1941, and five days later, General Edmund Glaise von Horstenau was appointed German General in Zagreb, responsible directly to Field Marshal Wilhelm Keitel, Chief of the Armed Forces High Command. Glaise became Plenipotentiary German General in Croatia in mid-November 1941. His role was to protect German military interests in Croatia and to act as an advisor to the Croatian government and army.

He was not the only German representative in Zagreb; Siegfried Kasche became the German representative for economic and diplomatic matters. The division of responsibilities between the two was not always clear, however, and they often clashed – especially because Glaise was a strong opponent and Kasche a strong supporter of the Ustaša regime.

General Glaise had no troops under his command for more than year and a half, except the railway protection units stationed along the Zagreb-Belgrade line. German troops in Croatia were under General Bader’s command (in Serbia). The Germans did not want to commit troops to the ISC, but soon discovered that their role was ever-expanding both in terms of troop levels and direct involvement. The Serb uprising in the face of Ustaša atrocities – and the guerrilla movements that emerged out of it – meant more German troops were engaged in ongoing military operations in the region.

The Ustašas were not happy about the fact that German troops in the ISC were under Bader’s control in Serbia, so in November 1942, the position of the Commanding General of German Troops in Croatia (located at Slavonski Brod) was created. General Rudolf Lüters was put in charge, and the areas south of the River Sava to the Vienna Line (separating the German and Italian areas) were declared the operational zone. General Glaise was responsible for military operations in the reminder of the ISC’s territory, north of the River Sava (i.e. to the Hungarian border).
In economic terms, the entire territory of occupied Yugoslavia was plundered by the Germans for natural resources aimed at feeding the German war machine. As the war progressed, the importance of access to Yugoslav natural resources increased.

**The Italian Military and Civilian Administration**

The Italian occupation policy in Yugoslavia differed somewhat\(^{21}\). Both civilian and military branches of government were created in the parts of Slovenia and Dalmatia annexed by the Italians. The initial Italian plan for Montenegro was to create a client state by reinstating the deposed Petrović dynasty\(^{22}\), but that idea proved impossible to realise. Therefore, from mid-July 1941 on, the Italian military commander in Montenegro was in charge of both military and civilian administration. Albania, which was already an Italian client state before the Axis invasion of Yugoslavia, was expanded with the inclusion of Yugoslav territory in western Macedonia, most of Kosovo and small parts of Montenegro; it too had civilian and military governmental branches.

In the parts of the ISC assigned to Italy, the Italian military commander was in charge of the civilian and military branch of government. A number of treaties were signed between the Italians and the ISC in Rome on May 18, 1941, pertaining to the frontiers and the relationship between the two. These agreements and territorial concessions were humiliating to the Ustaša regime, especially since some of the core coastal areas of medieval Croatia were annexed by Italy. Italy and the ISC were also bound together by the Italian royal house when Italian King Victor Emmanuel named his nephew Aimone, Duke of Spoleto, King of Croatia. As guarantees of his safety could not be made, the newly crowned monarch never travelled to the ISC.

According to the Rome treaties, a strip of Yugoslav territory on the eastern Adriatic (together with most of the islands) was directly annexed by Italy. The rest of the territory between the new Italian border and the Vienna Line separating the Italian and German occupied parts of the ISC was subdivided into two regions – the one closer to the coast becoming a demilitarised zone. The Italians later labelled the annexed part

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\(^{22}\) For more information see: Petrović-Njegoš, Mihajlo. *How I Refused to Accept the Throne [in Montenegro]*. (Glasnik SIKD ‘Njegoš’: Chicago, December 1958).
Zone I, the demilitarised part Zone II, and the areas beyond it Zone III. Initially the Italians withdrew most of their forces from Zones II and III; in September and October 1941 they returned to these areas in a show of force – only to withdraw again in early 1942.

Technically speaking, the Italian soldiers in the ISC were considered troops in a friendly country rather than occupation forces. In reality, the Italian Second Army – the main Italian invasion force in April 1941 – was an occupation force between the Adriatic coast and the Vienna Line. The Italian Second Army was two hundred thousand men strong, and it remained in place until the Italian capitulation in September 1943. On May 9, 1942, the Italian Second Army was renamed the Superior Command of Slovenia-Dalmatia – ‘Supersloda’ for short. The Italian Second Army / Supersloda was under the command of General Vittorio Ambrosio until January 1942; he was succeeded by General Mario Roatta for the rest of 1942, and later by General Mario Robotti, the former commander of Italian troops in Slovenia.

The Italian reinstatement of military and civilian administration in Zones II and III in September and October 1941 was the result of a unilateral decision publicly announced on September 7, 1941. To safeguard the ISC government’s reputation, the Italians declared that the decision had been made in agreement with the Ustaša government. The ISC assigned an Administrative Delegate to assist the Italian commander in administration, but the ultimate outcome of the Italian reoccupation of Zones II and III was the removal of almost all Domobrani units (the ISC regular army) and Ustaša militia\(^\text{23}\) units from half of the ISC territory. The official reason for the reoccupation was the Serb uprising in the face of the Ustaša militia’s terror campaign, together with the necessity to establish law and order in an area conducive to possible British sea invasion. The Italians were also interested in keeping the area under tighter control so that it could become a launching ground for expansion into the resource-rich Danube Basin. The Ustaša regime made attempts to block the Italians by complaining in Berlin, but the Germans were not interested in antagonising the Italians over the ISC.

\(^{23}\) Ustaša milita is an established historical term used to describe Ustaša Party Army (Ustaška vojnica in Croatian). The ISC-affiliated Slavic Muslim paramilitaries are referred to as Muslim militia (Muslimanska milicija) in historical works. Following established historical terminology, these labels are used in this thesis.
In early 1942, the Italians made another policy change in Zones II and III. They concluded that they had overstretched themselves militarily in the Balkans, and during the summer of 1942 they withdrew almost half of the forces in Zones II and III. The withdrawal of Italian troops caused a vacuum and created a safe haven for Chetniks and Partisans alike.

At the time of Yugoslavia’s invasion, the Italian Ninth and Eleventh Army had been located in Albania. After the April War the Ninth Army moved to Montenegro, while the Eleventh stayed in Albania – whose borders, as noted above, had been expanded at Yugoslavia’s expense. After the initial Italian plan for an independent state of Montenegro failed in July 1941, General Alessandro Pirzio Biroli was given control of the area. On October 3, 1941, the post was renamed the Governatorio of Montenegro (with Biroli as Governor and Military Commander rolled into one appointment). On December 1, 1941, the 14th Army Corps of the Italian Ninth Army took over the command of the troops in Montenegro. This arrangement remained in place until September 1943.

Overall, the Italian forces in occupied Yugoslav territory were substantial. Supersloda had ten divisions, and there were three more in the Command of the Troops of Montenegro. In addition, the Italians brought in their own police forces and Blackshirt units, air force units and a separate naval command called Mari-dalmazia in the eastern Adriatic. The Italians also had an official envoy in Zagreb, much like the Germans. The position was first occupied by Raffaele Casertano, and later by Luigi Petrucci. Like the Germans, the Italian army had a representative in Zagreb – General Antonio Oxilia served until August 1942, when General Gian Carlo Re took over. The Italians had a representative of the Italian Fascist Party in Zagreb as well: Fascist Militia General Eugenio Coselschi.

The Independent State of Croatia was a German-Italian creation, but instead of being an example of Axis cooperation, it became a hotbed of Italian-German rivalry. As the war continued, however, the German position and its military commitment continued to grow while that of the Italians diminished. With the Italian capitulation, the Germans took over the entire ISC, replacing the Italians completely.
The Independent State of Croatia

As has been noted, the Ustaša party, whose members were exiled to Italy (with some also in Hungary and Germany) during the interwar years, were brought to power by the Germans and Italians in the newly created puppet state officially proclaimed in Zagreb on April 10, 1941\textsuperscript{24}. Ante Pavelić was brought from an internment camp in Italy with some three hundred Ustaša party members to become the leader in the ISC a few days later. The ISC included not only the historic regions of Croatia and Slavonia, but those parts of Dalmatia not annexed by the Italians and the entire area of Bosnia and Herzegovina. The border between the ISC in the west and Serbia and Montenegro in the east was thus the same as the Austro-Hungarian border had been before 1918. In effect, the River Drina became the border between the ISC and Serbia.

The Ustaša regime excluded Serbs, Jews and Romas from service in the armed forces although a few Serbs who had served in the former Austro-Hungarian army were allowed into the Domobrani forces and a few Serbs were drafted into the Domobrani forces as work battalions. They were also cut off from all levels of government employment, from political life (again with a few exceptions) and from work in the mass media and related professions. Their private companies were confiscated by the government or taken over by Croat-owned companies. Serb Orthodox Churches were closed, and new laws forbade the use of the Cyrillic alphabet. The Ustaša regime prepared a formula for the complete destruction of Serb presence in the ISC. The plan was put into effect quickly. The result was the death of several hundred thousand Serbs in concentration camps and \textit{ad hoc} massacres, the expulsion of almost a quarter of a million Serbs to Serbia and the forced conversion of almost as many Serbs to Roman Catholicism with the assistance of the local Croat Catholic clergy. The Ustaša regime also put to death a large number of Jews, Romas and Croat political opponents.

Appalling as these figures are, they would have been worse without the massive Serb uprising in the ISC in the summer of 1941. It was only the outburst of spontaneous

armed resistance that saved the Serbs in the ISC from complete destruction. This Serb resistance movement was initially apolitical but later split into Chetnik and Partisan camps. The Chetniks in the ISC were comprised of Serbs until the end of the war, and the same was true for the Partisans, although non-Serbs started joining them in greater numbers from late 1943 onwards. Serbs nevertheless remained in the majority in Partisan forces until the end of the war.

The ISC developed its armed forces with German and Italian help over time. Initially, the Ustašas had to rely on their own militia and paramilitary organisation of the CPP (Croat Peasant Party). Soon CPP forces were disarmed and replaced by regular army units (Domobrani) and the Ustaša Militia (Ustaša party army). In many localities in the ISC, eager local Ustašas and their sympathisers created the so-called ‘wild Ustaša units’ on their own initiative. These Ustaša units played a prominent part in the massacres and persecution of Serb populations.

The Germans planned to use the Croat armed forces to fight on the Eastern Front, and one Croat volunteer regiment made it to the USSR. Three other divisions, comprised of Croat soldiers and German officers, were organised as the Wehrmacht’s legionnaire divisions, intended for the Eastern Front. However, due to the Serb uprising and the subsequent Chetnik and Partisan guerrilla activity, the three Croat legionnaire divisions were ultimately stationed in the ISC. Moreover, the Germans had to send in several more divisions to deal with the increasing resistance in the ISC. At their peak in late 1943, the Croat armed forces had more than two hundred and sixty thousand men; of these, about twenty-eight and half thousand belonged to the Ustaša militia.

From January 1942 on, the Croat armed forces participating in German military operations in the ISC fell under direct German command. In German military operational areas (such as Eastern Bosnia), the German military commander had supreme executive powers and remained in charge of local administration; as in Italian zones, the Croat Administrative Delegate was attached to the German commander.

Domobran forces were numerically large, but they performed poorly in battle and were led by dispirited officers, many of whom were former Austro-Hungarian army personnel. The Ustaša Militia was a good combat force, but unruly and undisciplined, and always inclined to commit atrocities against the Serb civilian population. For these
reasons, there was constant tension between the Ustaša Militia and the German commanders in the ISC, as well as the Domobran commanders.

The ISC government was permitted little freedom of action by the Germans and Italians, except in daily matters dealing with the Serbs and those opposing the Ustaša regime. So too, the ISC armed forces experienced decreasing freedom of action as the war progressed.

**The German Military Government in Serbia**

Unlike the Ustaša regime in the ISC that was comprised of political exiles, the German-assembled puppet governments in occupied Serbia featured individuals who had held positions in the interwar Yugoslav state apparatus\(^25\). Those selected had advocated Yugoslavia's entry into the Axis camp (Tripartite Pact), were staunch anti-communists and believed in the Wehrmacht's military superiority. Despite their views and overall usefulness in providing a Serbian face to the German military regime, the Serbian administrators were never trusted by the Germans (first and foremost by Hitler) simply because they were Serbs.

The first Serbian administration established in Belgrade by the Germans was the Commissioner Administration (April 30, 1941). The Commissioner Administration was headed by Milan Aćimović, Belgrade’s chief of police during the interwar period and Minister of the Interior in Prime Minister Milan Stojadinović’s cabinet in early 1939. The Commissioner dealt with ordinary administration and basic police duties but was not able to handle the large-scale uprising in the summer of 1941. The military Commander in Serbia lacked the forces needed to suppress the uprising; after consulting Berlin, he decided to reconstruct the Serbian puppet administration by appointing a strong figurehead leader who would have influence over the general public. The Germans also decided to allow a larger Serbian force to be used against the insurgents, thereby preserving German manpower.

General Milan Nedić, former Minister of the Army and Navy, and Chief of General Staff, was chosen for this task. In November 1940, he had been relieved of his post for urging Yugoslavia to join the Axis camp (Yugoslavia did exactly that on March 25, 1941). During the Axis invasion of Yugoslavia in April 1941, General Nedić was in command of the Third Group of Armies, positioned in Macedonia against the Wehrmacht forces and in Kosovo and Montenegro against the Italian forces. These forces were the only ones to have military success during the April War, pushing the Italians across the border into Albania. Despite his prominent position in the Yugoslav military hierarchy, Nedić was not taken to prisoner of war camps in Germany but was held under house arrest in Belgrade.

Nedić accepted the offer to head the administration in Serbia and officially proclaimed his Government of National Salvation on August 29, 1941. He made a verbal agreement to cooperate with the German Military Commander in Serbia, General Danckelmann, but when the latter was dismissed in September, Nedić’s power and freedom of action began to slip. Nedić had a very difficult relationship with the Germans, made a number of threats to resign and had no authority to speak of by late 1943. Nevertheless, he stayed in office until the German withdrawal from Serbia in October 1944, when he withdrew with them into Austria, staying there until the end of the war26.

Nedić had a thankless job: he was a tool of the Germans, lacking any real authority, and yet not trusted by them either. His local popularity shrunk after the Bulgarian army was brought into Serbia in January 1942. He was constantly challenged by Mihailović’s Chetniks who succeeded in infiltrating all levels of his administration – especially the armed forces of the puppet government. Nevertheless, his efforts to accommodate Serb refugees pouring into Serbia from all directions were popular, as were his attempts to save Serb lives by advocating against acts of violence and sabotage that caused retributions and mass executions by the Germans.

26 The government of National Salvation was dismissed by Nedić on October 3, 1944. He surrendered to the British, who shipped him off to Partisan-controlled Belgrade. He died in 1946. The official account says he jumped to his death, but he was more likely pushed because his public trial was seen as potentially problematic given his popular wartime efforts feeding and housing Serb refugees pouring into Serbia from other parts of occupied Yugoslavia.
In the first year or so of Nedić’s period in office, Mihailović and his close circle were concerned that he would become a national leader and overshadow the Chetnik movement in the competition for the hearts and minds of the Serb people. Even as late as the autumn of 1943, Mihailović harboured these concerns because of Nedić’s efforts to transform Serbia from a zone of military occupation into an independent state within the Axis system and expand Serbia’s borders to the west, an outcome that would have certainly been welcomed by the Chetniks.

In terms of armed forces, Nedić established the Serbian State Guard with the permission of the German Military Commander in Serbia. It absorbed the gendarmerie in Serbia, and was under the command of former Yugoslav army officers. It was essentially a reinforced gendarmerie rather than an army force, something that the Germans would not allow in Serbia. According to German restrictions, the Serbian State Guard was limited to seventeen thousand men – and this number was never exceeded. Pećanac’s Chetniks (Mihailović’s early competitors) were ‘legalised’ by Nedić’s government to fight the Partisans and were officially auxiliaries of the Serbian State Guard which was divided into the Rural Guard (gendarmeries in the countryside), the Urban Guard (police forces in the cities) and the Frontier Guard at border posts. The Serbian State Guard was armed using stockpiles of captured weapons from all over Europe; thus, ammunition was limited.

The Serbian State Guard with its auxiliaries was not the only armed force of the Serbian puppet administration. The Serbian Volunteer Detachments (later Corps) of the ‘Ljotićevci’ under their ideological leader Dimitrije Ljotić (head of the interwar fascist ZBOR movement), were organised by the Germans in September 1941. As in the Serbian State Guard, a limited number of former Yugoslav army officers commanded the units. By January 1942, the Serbian Volunteer Detachments reached their maximum strength of around three thousand, seven hundred men. This paramilitary force used by Ljotić’s ZBOR movement was made up of volunteers who were fiercely anti-communist and anti-Chetnik. It was an effective fighting force, and the only one the Germans trusted among the Serbs. In late 1942 the Serbian Volunteer Detachments were reorganised and renamed the Serbian Volunteer Corps; the German Commanding General in Serbia took over and placed it under his direct command.
Nedić’s forces were at their peak during his first year in office, with approximately thirty-three thousand men: twenty-one thousand in the regular Serbian State Guard and Serbian Volunteer Detachments, and thirteen thousand as Serbian State Guard auxiliaries. However, in the autumn and winter of 1942, numbers started to drop, first with the direct German takeover of the Serbian Volunteer Detachments and then with German disbanding of Pećanac’s legalised Chetnik detachments. In the latter part of the war, Nedić’s control extended to the Serbian State Guard only. When peak periods are compared, the Serbian administration’s armed forces of thirty-three thousand men at their numerical zenith were much smaller than the Croat armed forces in the ISC, which peaked at two hundred and sixty thousand men.

Chetnik Historic Roots

The Hajduci of the 19th Century

Banditry has a long tradition in the Balkans and the South Slavic lands – especially in the mountainous areas of Serbia, Montenegro, Bosnia-Herzegovina and Albania. In these areas, banditry was a widespread form of resistance to Ottoman rule. Although this kind of lawlessness often only increased the oppression, the existence of banditry was important for the rebellious South Slavic spirit. In the folk epic poetry of the South Slavs, the glorification of bandits (called Hajduci) as those able to ‘strike back’ at the Ottomans attested the desire to be liberated from foreign rule. Needless to say, bandits in reality often directed their violence and criminal activities at locals, but folklore remains silent about these matters; when bandits turned their weapons against the Ottomans they were considered popular heroes, and this was all that mattered.

The Hajduci played a prominent role in the First Serbian Uprising in 1804, when small Hajduci companies (known as čete) attacked Ottoman outposts in the countryside at the outset of the rebellion. The Hajduci provided leadership figures, including the chief leader of the rebellion, Đorđe Petrović known as Karađorđe (Black George) – the founder of the future Serbian and Yugoslav Karađorđević dynasty. Their small

See also: Petrovic, Aleksandar. The Role of Banditry in the Creation of National States in the Central Balkans during the 19th Century - A Case Study: Serbia. (Simon Fraser University, 2003).
companies acted as a place of refuge for people fleeing settlements and the Hajduk companies became nuclei of larger rebel units. The First Serbian Uprising lasted from 1804 to 1813, when Serbia was reconquered by the Ottomans. In 1815 the Second Serbian Uprising started in a very similar fashion, this time led by Miloš Obrenović, founder of the rival Obrenović royal dynasty. Miloš succeeded in securing semi-autonomous status for Serbia in 1815, ordered in 1817 the successful assassination of Karađorđe and made the first national assembly proclaim him hereditary prince of Serbia.

Serbia became an autonomous principality within the Ottoman Empire with Russian guarantees in 1830, and in 1833 it acquired further territory. The principality had to pay tribute to the Sultan in Istanbul, but autonomy grew with each passing decade. The last Ottoman garrisons left Serbia in 1868, and the formal independence of Serbia as a state (with further territorial extension in the south-east) was achieved at the Congress of Berlin in 1878, though Serbia had essentially operated as an independent entity since 1830.

During the nineteenth century, the role – and mythology – of Hajduk resistance became ingrained in the national psyche, not least because of its inclusion in the school curriculum. Guerrilla warfare, an integral part of the Hajduk’s survival techniques, was studied in Serbia during this time, and two books were published on the topic, one in 1848 by Marija Ban and another in 1868 by Ljubomir Ivanović28.

**Serbian Chetniks 1904-1918**

Interest in guerrilla warfare in Serbia peaked in the early twentieth century. Serbia joined Greece and Bulgaria as the fourth party (Serbs, Greeks, Bulgarians and Ottomans) in the Macedonian Struggle from 1904-191229. Small units of men operating as guerrillas, trained, equipped and financed in Serbia, fought the Ottoman authorities and similar Bulgarian units in Macedonia in order to secure Serbia’s foothold in the region. These Serb units were known as the Chetniks (from the word četa, a military

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29 For information on the Serbian Chetniks during the 1904-1918 period see: Pešić, Miodrag D. *Stari četnici.* (Pogledi: Kragujevac, 2000). This study includes veteran Chetnik associations.
unit, with plural čete; thus četnici literally means ‘troopers’). The 1904-1912 Chetnik enterprise in Macedonia started as a private affair, but was taken over by the Serbian government. Officers of the Serbian army commanded the Chetnik units, and the soldiers were volunteers from the army ranks. From 1908 on, Serb volunteers from outside Serbia (many from Bosnia and Herzegovina) comprised many of the recruits. The whole Chetnik effort in Macedonia was popular in Serbia, and veterans of the struggle enjoyed enormous prestige in Serbia and later Yugoslavia until the beginning of the Second World War. They laid the foundation for the Chetnik tradition among the Serbs, and became known as the Old Chetniks after 1918.

The Chetniks played an important part in the First Balkan War by supplementing the regular Serbian Royal Army. These units were the vanguard of the regular army, used in the first round of the attack on the enemy. Chetnik units were used to infiltrate the enemy rear, committing sabotage, cutting off communications and causing widespread panic. They were also utilised as field gendarmerie in conquered areas. Chetnik units were led by Mountain Staffs (Горски Штаб), a nomenclature taken up by Mihailović’s Chetniks in the Second World War. They coordinated their activities with army commanders in the field and were subordinate to them.

The same formula was used in the Second Balkan War against Bulgaria in 1913. As a result of the two Balkan Wars, Serbia doubled in size and expanded into areas with Albanian and Bulgarian populations. To pacify these areas, the so-called ‘cruising’ Chetnik detachments were introduced to hunt down small Albanian and Bulgarian guerrilla bands that continued to resist; for example, ethnic Albanians rebelled in western Macedonia and were aided by Bulgarian guerrillas in their efforts.

The First World War arrived little more than a year after the end of the Second Balkan War. The Serbian army used the Chetnik detachments in a fashion much as they had in the Balkan Wars, launching units into eastern Bosnia to the outskirts of Sarajevo (the Montenegrins joined in similar efforts). After the 1915 offensive that followed Bulgaria’s entry into the war, Chetnik detachments joined the regular Serbian army and withdrew to Corfu via Albania, later joining the front in Salonika. However, in Bulgarian-occupied parts of Serbia’s south, new Chetnik units started forming without the initiative or knowledge of the Serbian government. Organised by officers who had stayed in Serbia, such as Kosta Vojnović, an officer who could not withdraw through Albania due
to his wounds, these Chetnik detachments made contact with the Serbian government in exile, a scenario repeated by Mihailović in the early months of the Axis occupation of Yugoslavia.

To establish control in occupied Serbia and to avoid massive reprisals in the event of a premature uprising, the Serbian army sent Chetnik Vojvoda (a title for the highest-level commander), Kosta Milovanović Pećanac, Mihailović’s future rival in 1941, to take over. His instructions were to prevent a large scale uprising in Serbia before the Serbian army advanced on the Salonika front. However, once the Bulgarian army in Serbia started drafting locals, a massive exodus of young men swelled the Chetnik ranks. As a result, a general uprising against the Bulgarians – known as the Toplica Uprising – erupted in February 1917 in southern Serbia. The leader of the uprising was Kosta Vojinović, and after Pećanac realised that his efforts to restrain the uprising had failed, he joined as well. Chetnik detachments attacked the Bulgarian army and liberated a large part of southern Serbia; Pećanac even ventured across the pre-war border to attack smaller towns in Bulgaria.

But by the end of March 1917, the Bulgarian military had quashed the resistance. Besides the regular army reinforcements, Bulgarians brought their own guerrilla units to confront Chetniks in the countryside. Massive bloody reprisals against the civilian population followed; this left a lasting impression on officers like Mihailović and made them wary of premature action in the Second World War.

**Interwar Chetnik Associations**

After the end of the First World War, the Chetnik detachments were disbanded, and those still in active service were redistributed to regular army units. The Chetniks started organising veteran associations. As those who had taken part in Chetnik activities between 1904 and 1918 were held in high regard by Yugoslav Serbs, Chetnik associations became one of the leading Serb patriotic groups in the interwar period. The first one formed was the Chetnik Association for Freedom and Honour of the Fatherland, created in 1921 in Belgrade. Its goal was to preserve Chetnik history, spread Chetnik patriotism and provide financial and other support to Chetnik widows and orphans as well as disabled Chetnik veterans.
In 1924, more politically radical elements of the Chetnik Association for Freedom and Honour of the Fatherland separated from the original association and created two splinter groups: the Association of Serbian Chetniks for King and Fatherland and the Association of Serbian Chetniks Petar Mrkonjić. The following year, the two organisations merged into the Association of Serbian Chetniks Petar Mrkonjić for King and Fatherland. The leader was Puniša Račić, a Serb from Montenegro; in 1928 Račić shot two Croat delegates in the Yugoslav parliament and provoked a major political crisis in the country. That same year, Petar Mrkonjić’s association ceased to function and was dissolved when royal dictatorship was established in 1929. The original Chetnik association continued to exist, however, and dissident members rejoined it.

Vojvoda Kosta Milovanović Pećanac became the president of the Chetnik association in 1932. He made efforts to expand the organisation by allowing new members to join, something which provoked strong opposition from the veterans. A number of older veterans, including Vojvoda Ilija Trifunović-Birčanin (who played a prominent role in Mihailović’s wartime Chetnik movement) left the association and created a new organisation called the Association of Old Chetniks. From 1934 to 1938, the Pećanac-led group expanded in a major way and registered half a million members. The association was formally banned in the Banovina of Sava, Primorje and Drava (Croatia and Slovenia) in 1935, but in the Serb-populated areas of all three Banovinas, it continued to unofficially function.

In political terms, the Chetnik association stood for integral Yugoslavism or the notion that Serbs, Croats and Slovenes are simply ‘tribes’ of one Yugoslav nation, and for the protection of Serb heritage in the Yugoslav state. It was also staunchly royalist, centralist and anti-communist. Despite the association’s massive membership, it was not a political party, and its influence was not proportional to its size.

Meanwhile, the Yugoslav army continued to express a limited amount of interest in guerrilla warfare during the interwar years. An internal manual called ‘The Handbook on Guerrilla Warfare’ was published in 1929. In 1938, the Yugoslav army revisited this topic by producing a special report on guerrilla warfare and the potential use of Chetniks in the event of war. In a major revision to the 1929 manual, but without diminishing the earlier Chetnik accomplishments in the Balkan Wars and the First World War, the report concluded that the usefulness of Chetnik tactics in contemporary warfare was negligible.
The role of attacking the enemy’s rear lines was now theoretically entrusted to airborne troops, and patrolling the countryside could be successfully done by the regular gendarmerie or army reserve troops.

The conclusions of the 1938 Yugoslav army manual indicate that the military leadership had no concrete plans for any guerrilla resistance in the event of Yugoslavia’s occupation; nor did it have a grand design for the Chetnik association as a whole. Yet in 1940, the Yugoslav army established the Chetnik Command, consisting of seven battalions (one under strength) whose manpower was drawn from the regular army ranks. The seven Chetnik battalions were each attached to an army and the Chetnik Command itself was located first in Novi Sad and then in Kraljevo. The Chetnik Command and Chetnik battalions suffered the same fate as the Yugoslav army during the Axis invasion of Yugoslavia in April 1941. The Chetnik Command surrendered to the Germans in Sarajevo on April 18, 1941, and the Chetnik Battalions collapsed with the rest of the Yugoslav army.

It seems, however, that the Yugoslav army leadership turned to Vojvoda Kosta Milovanović Pećanac just before the Axis invasion and gave him orders, money and weapons/ammunition to organise Chetnik units for guerrilla resistance. Pećanac mentioned these orders during his dispute with Mihailović over authority in the early days of the wartime Chetnik movement, though no archival materials have surfaced to confirm their existence.

**The Beginning of Mihailović’s Wartime Movement**

Mihailović’s Chetnik movement that appeared in occupied Yugoslavia in 1941 bore many similarities to the *ad hoc* Chetnik movement that emerged in occupied Serbia in 1917. A small group of Yugoslav Royal Army officers, non-commissioned officers and privates led by Colonel Dragoljub Mihailović Draža who was also Deputy Chief of Staff of the Yugoslav Second Army, refused to surrender to the Axis forces or to accept the April 17 armistice. Instead, they retreated to the safety of the hills.

Colonel Mihailović and the men around him mistakenly believed that the events of 1941 would take the same course as those of 1914. They decided to head towards Serbia’s interior; believing that a front line must continue to exist there, they intended to
join it. The chaotic trek east from Bosnia to Serbia took almost a month (April 17 to May 11), and during this journey, Mihailović’s group grew as it came across soldiers wandering aimlessly in the countryside. Along the way, they clashed several times with the Germans, and in Serbia, they fought with the local gendarmes. When they reached Serbia, they realized the resistance front that Mihailović was hoping to find did not exist, and a new plan had to be created.

Initially the Mihailović-led group grew rapidly, and by April 28, 1941, it numbered about eighty men. After that point, many soldiers and officers, realising that all the Yugoslav fronts had collapsed, left Mihailović. On May 11, Mihailović reached Ravna Gora, a grazing area with a few shepherds’ huts, on the western side of the Suvobor Mountain in western Serbia. Besides Mihailović, there were seven officers and twenty-four non-commissioned officers/soldiers. All were Serbs, with the exception of one Croat officer who left after a few days. The small group held a conference after a few days, debating whether to surrender to the Axis and face severe consequences or to form the nucleus of a guerrilla resistance movement. They chose the latter option, and the embryonic Chetnik movement, called the Ravna Gora movement (Равногорски покрет) by the Chetniks, was born.

Ravna Gora was selected as the centre of operations for various reasons: the group felt safe in an area of Serbia with a homogenous population, the Suvobor Mountain was a naturally sheltered area fairly close to Belgrade and located in a more or less central position in occupied Yugoslavia. Mihailović was familiar with the region because he had participated in the victorious Suvobor Mountain offensive in the First World War. Chetnik veterans proudly point out that the Ravna Gora movement was the first guerrilla resistance movement in Axis-occupied Europe.

Given the Yugoslav Royal Army’s chaotic implosion during the Axis invasion, many officers evaded the German round-up in April and went into hiding. Some of these men joined Kosta Milovanović Pećanac who was organising his own Chetnik movement, but many more came to Mihailović. The spring and early summer of 1941 saw an exchange of personnel between the organisations of Mihailović and Pećanac, until

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Pećanac joined the collaborationist camp in August; there was a final rush of officers from Pećanac to Mihailović’s camp at that point. Most of the men who joined Mihailović were of lower military rank and did not question his leadership (the exception was General Ljuba Novaković, who briefly joined Mihailović at Ravna Gora).

The Germans regarded Serbia as the defeated party; this was demonstrated in their treatment of the Yugoslav army officers at the end of hostilities. Only officers from Serbia were taken to POW camps in Germany. The rest, including Serb officers from outside Serbia, were released to their homes. As a consequence, Mihailović’s Chetnik movement had a significant number of officers from Montenegro and Bosnia-Herzegovina in key positions, although Serbians controlled the top level of leadership.

From the middle of May until August 1941, Mihailović’s Chetniks worked on discretely developing the organisation. This included surveying potential recruits, registering those willing to fight, preparing mobilisation lists of men who were of military age, collecting weapons and ammunition and hiding caches of it, and creating a general plan of resistance. The original Chetnik plan for resistance was to build up the organisation and its strength, and to prepare for a general uprising, which would be set into motion when the Axis finally started withdrawing from occupied Yugoslavia under the pressure of the approaching Western Allies. This plan was very similar to the Serbian army plan for the utilisation of Chetniks in southern Serbia in 1916-1917.

However, as in the 1917 Toplica Uprising in the Bulgarian-occupied part of southern Serbia, events outside the control of the Chetnik leaders resulted in a very different course of action. Developments in the Independent State of Croatia (the Ustaša genocide against the Serbs and the Serb uprising) and in Serbia (the Partisan-instigated uprising in the summer of 1941) transformed Chetnik strategy and ideology.

31 A report to Mihailović by Bajo Stanišić, commander of the Zeta Chetnik Troop (in Montenegro), on March 5, 1943, demonstrates pervasive Chetnik fears of a premature uprising and the lasting impression of the 1917 events in Toplica valley. Stanišić argued that a premature general Chetnik uprising would be another “Toplica catastrophe” (which resulted in some forty thousand civilian deaths). He noted that the occupational forces had Chetnik families (who stayed in their homes) within their reach; this had a significant impact on the Chetnik fighting morale. See: AVII, Ca, k. 133, Reg. No. 51/5.
Upon their arrival at Ravna Gora, Mihailović organised a command post called Mountain Staff Number One (Горски штаб бр. 1), and named his men the ‘Chetnik Detachments of the Yugoslav Army’ (Четнички одреди југословенске војске)\(^ {32} \). From this nomenclature came the wartime derivative ‘Chetniks’ for Mihailović’s men. Despite the title, Mihailović’s organisation was not rooted in the prewar Chetnik associations, nor in the 1940 Chetnik Command of the Yugoslav Army. Instead, the name ‘Chetnik’ reflected the traditions of the Old Chetniks (1904-1918) and the general practice of guerrilla-style resistance among the Serbs; as such, the name was well chosen because it resonated with the occupied Serb population in Yugoslavia.

Besides the military headquarters organised in May, Mihailović created a political arm of his organisation in August 1941 – a Central National Committee. This body was comprised of non-military personnel who found their way to Mihailović’s headquarters, and included individuals with some status in prewar Serb political and cultural life. Its purpose was to advise on political matters and to create an ideological foundation for the movement. The three most important individuals in the Central National Committee were lawyer Dragiša Vasić (the former vice-president of the Serbian Cultural Club), Dr. Stevan Moljević (a lawyer from Bosnia and a prominent member of the Serbian Cultural Club there), and Dr. Mladen Žujović, Vasić’s law partner. They were known as the Executive Council.

Dragiša Vasić was the only non-military member of the Committee of Three (with Lieutenant Colonel Dragoslav Pavlović and Major Jezdimir Dangić); he was designated as the movement’s leader if Mihailović died or was captured.

\(^ {32} \) In Chetnik documents, Mihailović shows up under a number of different titles in 1941: ‘Commander of the Mountainous Headquarters of the Yugoslav Army’, ‘Commander of the Chetnik units of the Yugoslav Army’ and ‘Commander of the Yugoslav troops in the Homeland’. Until June 1942, he was personally using the signature ‘Commander of the Yugoslav Army in the Fatherland’. From June 1942 on, Mihailović signed documents as ‘Chief of the Headquarters of the Supreme Command of the Yugoslav Army in the Homeland’ (shortened to ‘ВК ЈВуО’ in Serbian), or simply as the ‘Minister of Army, Navy and Air Force’. From June 1942 on, the label ‘Mountainous Headquarters’ (Горски Штаб‘) started to appear in the Chetnik military terminology for all headquarters and commands the size of a brigade and larger – Mihailović’s Mountainous Headquarters was assigned ‘Number One’ to distinguish it from the others. Aware of the growing mythology about him, on July 13, 1942, Mihailović ordered the creation of ‘look-alikes’, so that ‘the people would believe that this was me’. However, these individuals ‘should not say too much’ (to avoid influencing policy). Mihailović wanted to increase his reach while ensuring his security. AVII, Ca, k. 299, Reg. No. 3/1.
Dragoljub Mihailović: An Unlikely Guerrilla Leader

On a personal level, Mihailović was instrumental in the Chetnik movement’s conception, wartime evolution and ultimate fate. Although there were a number of important individuals in Mihailović’s close circle, his own views always remained paramount. Given his importance, it is worth looking at his life and military career before the Second World War.

Dragoljub Mihailović, nicknamed Draža, was born on April 27, 1893, in the town of Ivanjica in south-western Serbia. He entered the Serbian Military Academy in September 1910. He fought in the two Balkan Wars (1912 and 1913) as a cadet; in July 1913, he became a commissioned officer and was promoted to lieutenant, graduating at the top of his class. He fought in the First World War and retreated with the Serbian Army through Albania in 1915-1916. He then fought on the Salonika Front, earning a number of decorations. He continued to advance in the interwar period, attending the Graduate School of the Military Academy. In 1926, he shifted to the General Staff. From 1927 to early 1935, he was first Deputy of Staff and then Chief of Staff to the Commander of the Royal Guards. In 1935, Mihailović held a position in the Organisational Section of the General Staff; in June he was assigned the post of military attaché in Sofia (Bulgaria). He was promoted to colonel in September 1935. In April 1936, he was withdrawn from Bulgaria and reassigned to Czechoslovakia as a military attaché, remaining there until May 1937.

From May 1937 to April 1941, he held various posts in Yugoslavia: Chief of Staff of the Drava Divisional Region (Ljubljana, Slovenia), Commander of the 39th Infantry Regiment (Celje, Slovenia), Chief of the Fortifications Section in the Ministry of the Army and Navy. In addition, he taught at the Military Academy and became Chief of the General Department of the Office of the Inspector of the Army.

While his main military interest was infantry tactics, in the late 1930s, Mihailović began to express an interest in guerrilla warfare. In 1939, he got into political trouble when he wrote and submitted to his superiors a plan to reorganise the Yugoslav armed forces.

For a detailed biographical note on Mihailović and his prewar and wartime career see: Izdajnik i ratni zločinac Draža Mihailović pred sudom: stenografske beleške i dokumenta sa suđenja Dragoljubu-Draži Mihailoviću (Beograd: 2005), pp. 9; 12-38.
forces along national lines; more specifically, he conceived separate units comprised of
men of only Serb or Croat or Slovene origin. His explanation was that Serb-only, Croat-
only and Slovene-only units would improve the armed force’s cohesion and defensive
capabilities.\textsuperscript{34}

Mihailović’s plan for the trialistic reorganisation of the Yugoslav armed forces was
not received well by his commanding officers, and he was thrown in jail for thirty days on
November 1, 1939.\textsuperscript{35} By that time, the Cvetković-Maček agreement was already in place,
establishing the Banovina of Croatia and putting royal Yugoslavia onto the path of
federalism along ethnic lines.\textsuperscript{36} A year later, in November 1940, Mihailović was thrown in
jail for another thirty days for attending in uniform without permission an event organised
by the British military attaché in Belgrade. After the second arrest, Mihailović barely
escaped being forced into retirement.

In 1941, Mihailović held the post of Deputy Chief of Staff of the Sixth Army
Region (in Mostar, Herzegovina). During the Axis invasion of Yugoslavia, he was Deputy
Chief of Staff of the Second Army, located in northern Bosnia. Despite the impressive
sounding titles, both posts were insignificant, perhaps a reflection of Mihailović’s earlier
troubles in 1939-1940.

Mihailović was a somewhat above-average officer, but no one would have
predicted his emergence as the wartime leader of a guerrilla resistance movement. He
was a staunchly patriotic man, deeply devoted to the monarchy and Serbian national
traditions. During the war he saw himself as simply an officer, not a national leader; as a
professional soldier, he had no political ambitions. Yet he demonstrated stubborn

\textsuperscript{34} Interestingly, Mihailović tried to put this plan into motion at the end of the Second World War,
by issuing orders for the reorganisation of the Yugoslav Army in the Fatherland (the official
Chetnik name at that point) into Serb, Croat and Slovene segments. Separate Slavic Muslim
units were organised by the Chetniks during the war as well, and in the reorganisation plan
these were (as separate units) attached to the Serb armed forces segment. The Partisans
also had separate Slavic Muslim units during the war.

\textsuperscript{35} In 1940, another group of officers submitted a similar plan for separate units consisting of
only Serbs or Croats or Slovenes; now the idea included the exclusion of all ethnic minorities
from the Yugoslav armed forces.

\textsuperscript{36} Trialistic territorial federation, given that the Yugoslav royal government recognised only
Serbs, Croats and Slovenes as separate South Slavic groups.
determination and single-mindedness, not giving up in the face of Yugoslavia’s defeat, a determination seen again in 1945-1946 after the communist victory.\footnote{Mihailović was captured by the Yugoslav communist forces on March 13, 1946, and executed after a public trial on July 17, 1946. Remnant Chetnik groups continued to operate even after his capture and death. The last Chetnik group was eliminated by the Yugoslav communist state security forces on July 29, 1957 in northern Montenegro. Led by Vladimir Šipčić, it consisted of only seven members. See Samardžić, Miroslav. \textit{Draža i opšta istorija četničkog pokreta (Volume 16)}. (Una Press: Beograd, 2010), p. 66.}

\textit{Kosta Milovanović Pećanac’s Chetniks in Serbia}

While Mihailović was an unknown officer, Kosta Pećanac was a well-known Chetnik veteran and from 1932 on, the leader of the Chetnik Association. Not surprisingly, most Serbs expected some kind of action against the enemy from Pećanac. And with funds and supplies provided by the Yugoslav army, Pećanac did succeed in organising a force of a few hundred men just before the Axis invasion. This force was located in the River Toplica valley, the scene of the 1917 Toplica Uprising in which Pećanac had played an important part. When the Yugoslav army collapsed and the Germans occupied Serbia, his force was still intact. In fact, it continued to grow as its ranks swelled with Serb refugees fleeing Kosovo and Macedonia. While Mihailović was still quietly organising his men after their arrival at Ravna Gora, Pećanac sprang into action, clashing with ethnic Albanian bands at the Kosovo border (freshly included into Italian-controlled Greater Albania).

Thus, between April and August 1941, there were two Chetnik movements, one led by Mihailović at Ravna Gora and the other headed by Pećanac in the Toplica River valley. In the first few months of the occupation, it was Pećanac’s men who were widely known as and referred to as the Chetniks, not Mihailović’s men. This was logical, given Pećanac’s history and his well-known status as a Chetnik Vojvoda. Once awareness of Mihailović’s Chetniks grew among the population, the two Chetnik groups were distinguished by the terms ‘Pećančevi’ (belonging to Pećanac) and ‘Dražinovci’ (Draža’s men, from Mihailović’s nickname ‘Draža’).

Pećanac’s organisation was very rudimentary, but he was fully in control of it; further, due to Pećanac’s reputation, his organisation attracted many men in the first three months of the occupation. However, it seems that the only fighting was against
ethnic Albanian bands; Pećanac believed, as did Mihailović, that any action against the Axis would be premature before any shifts occurred on the major fronts.

Pećanac was a staunch anti-communist, and with the emergence of CPY-organised Partisan units in Serbia in July 1941 (following the German attack on the USSR) he decided to focus his struggle in this direction. On August 27, 1941, he reached an agreement with the Serbian puppet government and the German occupation authorities to fight the Partisans with their help. His Chetnik detachments were ‘legalised’ by the Serbian puppet government and integrated as auxiliary units of the Serbian State Guard. Through this integration, Pećanac's detachments received salaries, supplies and arms from Nedić’s government, not to mention trained officers. A German liaison officer was also assigned to Pećanac’s headquarters. His Chetnik detachments were formally organised territorially, each unit allowed to operate within a predefined area\(^{38}\). Their role was to chase Partisan groups in areas where regular army units had difficult operating. The maximum authorised size was eight thousand, seven hundred and forty-five men, and as of January 17, 1942, there were seventy-two officers and seven thousand, nine hundred and sixty-three men in Pećanac's organisation. This number likely included some two to three thousand of Mihailović’s Chetniks, who ‘legalised’ themselves in November 1941 by taking Pećanac’s label to avoid destruction by the Germans, though these men remained under Mihailović’s clandestine control.

Shortly before Pećanac joined the collaborationist camp on August 27, 1941, he received a letter from Mihailović suggesting the integration of the two Chetnik forces. In the letter (dated August 18, 1941) Mihailović offered a deal: Pećanac would be in charge of all Chetnik units south of the Western Morava River, and Mihailović would be in charge of the areas north. Pećanac showed little interest; he responded that he would be ready to offer Mihailović the position as his Chief of Staff if he disbanded his units and let all his men join the Pećanac organisation. Upon signing a deal with the Germans on August 27, Pećanac issued a proclamation urging all men presently in the detachments not under his control (alluding to Mihailović’s men) to join his forces or at least return to

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\(^{38}\) For more information on the military organisation of Pećanac's Chetniks see Petrović, Dragoljub. *Vojna organizacija četnika Koste Pećanca* (Vojnoistorijski glasnik, No. 3: Belgrade, 1969) and Kozić, Milorad. *Četnici Koste Pećanca u Drugom Svetskom Ratu*. (Prosveta, Niš, 2004).
their homes under pain of death. Pećanac’s integration with Nedić’s forces was a blessing in disguise for Mihailović; by serving the Germans so openly, Pećanac incriminated himself and effectively took his organisation out of the competition. It was only after Pećanac’s agreement with the Germans that Mihailović’s organisation started to successfully compete. The collaborationist agreement also led to a number of desertions from Pećanac’s to Mihailović’s camp.

By June 1941 there were ten units in total (about fifteen hundred men), peaking in April 1942 with thirty-five units (about eight thousand, five hundred men)\(^39\). However Pećanac’s career in the Axis camp did not last very long. German army commanders discovered that his force of more than eight thousand men was neither efficient nor reliable, and they had difficulty trusting them. Moreover, the Germans were aware that Mihailović had used Pećanac’s organisation to legalise and ‘hide’ his own men under their noses, but it was next to impossible to tell who was who. They decided to eliminate Pećanac’s organisation and incorporate the men into the regular Serbian State Guard. By March 1943, Pećanac’s Chetniks were disbanded as a fighting force, although Pećanac was allowed to keep a small entourage as his personal guard. Pećanac was assassinated by Mihailović’s small three-man team on May 25, 1944, in the village of Nikolinac in eastern Serbia.

**General Ljuba Novaković**

Mihailović’s other competitor – albeit a less serious one – was Brigadier General Ljuba Novaković\(^40\). Novaković, who was from Montenegro, was not taken to a German POW camp but was confined in a military hospital in Valjevo (western Serbia). He fled from the hospital in late May 1941, finding his way to Mihailović’s Ravna Gora headquarters in June. His reception was less than enthusiastic, as Novaković was a brigadier general and Mihailović a colonel. This was an awkward situation for everybody, and Mihailović and his men suspected that Novaković might use his rank to take over the leadership of the movement. Unable to fit in, Novaković left and joined Pećanac’s


organisation. Pećanac welcomed him and gave him command of the detachments in the Šumadija region of central Serbia, close to Mihailović’s headquarters. However, when Pećanac joined the collaborationist camp and as Mihailović was not planning any actions in the foreseeable future, Novaković decided to act on his own. On September 18, 1941, he issued a proclamation stating his objective as one of active resistance and separation from Pećanac’s organisation; he ordered the men under his command to assemble within four days for action. Few showed up, and as Pećanac had already dismissed him, Novaković found himself isolated once again.

Novaković decided to move to eastern Bosnia, where the Serb uprising against the Ustaša regime was in full swing. Once there, he started organising an independent Chetnik force of his own, fighting the Ustaša militia and working against the Partisans. In January 1942, the Partisans captured him and took him to their headquarters in Foča. He was kept under arrest, with the intention of using him as Mihailović’s rival Chetnik commander in the region. In March, a British military mission on its way to Mihailović arrived in the Partisan headquarters and took Novaković with them. Novaković found his way to his native Montenegro, where he began creating yet another Chetnik organisation. The Partisans captured Novaković for a second time at the end of 1943 in Montenegro; this time, he was executed.

Novaković was a true patriot, but despite his high military rank, his mercurial character and erratic behaviour ensured that he was neither able to fit into existing resistance organisations nor create a lasting organisation of his own. Nevertheless, he was a potential rival until late 1943, and Mihailović was likely relieved to learn of his demise.

The Partisans

The Communist Party of Yugoslavia remained inactive during the first three months of the occupation, from April 6 to July 4, 1941. The Ribbentrop-Molotov pact from 1939 was still in place, despite the Axis attack on Yugoslavia, and the CPY followed Soviet politics closely. Things fundamentally changed on June 22, 1941, when Nazi Germany attacked Russia. Following the German attack, Stalin issued an appeal to all the communist parties of Europe to relieve pressure on the Russian front by actively attacking the Germans and sabotaging them in any way possible. The Communist Party
of Yugoslavia held a leadership meeting in Belgrade on July 4, 1941, and decided to organise Partisan detachments in the countryside and instigate a general uprising. The conditions for this were favourable because the Germans had reduced their troop levels in occupied Yugoslavia to a minimum in order to utilise more men in Russia. The CPY was ready for this, given their almost two decade long experience in underground survival.

The first incident occurred a few days later, on July 7 (a date later celebrated in Socialist Yugoslavia) in the village of Bela Crkva in western Serbia, when CPY members killed two Serbian gendarmes. Incidents like this occurred throughout occupied Yugoslavia during July, but in Serbia the uprising reached massive proportions within a few weeks. Mihailović was caught off guard by the lighting speed of the uprising. However, he had to join to avoid losing resistance-minded individuals in his organisation. Initial successes were promising, but soon the Germans brought in reinforcements. Eventually, the German counteroffensive and massive reprisals against the civilian population convinced Mihailović that the uprising had to cease, and on October 31 he ordered his Chetnik troops to attack Partisan headquarters. Soon the Partisans were forced out of Serbia and relatively peaceful conditions were restored, but the Chetnik-Partisan war that lasted until the end of the occupation and beyond, had begun.

**Mihailović’s Chetnik Movement: Legitimacy in the Allied Camp**

A key element in the growth of Mihailović’s movement was its recognition by the Yugoslav government in exile in London as the legitimate continuation of the Yugoslav Royal Army. This led to the movement’s recognition by the Allied camp. Initially Mihailović made no attempts to get in touch with the Yugoslav government in exile, because he blamed the government of Dušan Simović and the Supreme Command for the humiliating implosion of the Yugoslav armed forces in the April War. At some point in July or August 1941, contact was established with Yugoslav representatives in Istanbul. Reports of the major uprising in Serbia in July-August 1941 appeared in the Belgrade press, and reached the British and the Yugoslav governments in London as well. Similar reports reached Moscow and were broadcast on August 8 by Radio Moscow. The official British reaction to the news of an uprising in occupied Yugoslavia was vocalised by
Hugh Dalton, the cabinet member responsible for Special Operations Executive (SOE) affairs in August41; the view that the best course of action was to delay a major uprising until the right moment was shared by the Yugoslav government in exile, and independently by Mihailović. That the government in exile was clearly opposed to the premature uprising was communicated to the Yugoslavs42 by Prime Minister Dušan Simović on BBC radio on August 12.

In early September, the British decided to investigate the situation by sending a small team to occupied Yugoslavia. The mission departed from Cairo on September 13 by air for Malta, and from Malta by submarine to the Montenegrin coast, where they landed on the night of September 22. The four-man team consisted of Captain Duane Hudson of the SOE, Yugoslav Air Force Majors Mirko Lalatović and Zaharije Ostojić (both Montenegrin) and Reserve Air Force Sergeant Veljko Dragićević as radio operator. They were given the task of establishing contact with the resistance and to report back with information on the key personnel and events on the ground. Hudson was fluent in Serbian, having worked as a mining engineer for a British-owned firm in Serbia and the Belgrade SOE unit before the war. The group made contact with the Partisans in Montenegro, and from there, they made their way to the Partisan headquarters in Užice, where they met Tito.

41 ‘The Yugoslavs [the government in exile in London], the War Office and we are all agreed that the guerrilla and sabotage bands now active in Yugoslavia should show sufficient active resistance to cause constant embarrassment to the occupying forces, and prevent any reduction in their numbers. But they should keep their organisation underground and avoid any attempt at large scale risings or ambitious military operations, which could only result at present in severe repression and the loss of our key men. They should now do all they can to prepare a widespread underground organisation ready to strike hard later on, when we give the signal.’ Reproduced in: Tomasevich, Jozo. The Chetniks. (Stanford University Press: Stanford, 1975), p. 142

42 ‘The royal government knows that a handful of unscrupulous men inflict great sufferings upon the people by their premature action. Innocent victims whom the Germans now shoot will be avenged both against the Germans and against those who are responsible for these victims. The hour of liberation is near, and the legitimate government from London will give the signal when the new struggle for liberty should begin.’ Reproduced in: Tomasevich, Jozo. The Chetniks. (Stanford University Press: Stanford, 1975), pp. 142-143
However, by that time radio contact with Mihailović was already established\textsuperscript{43}. On September 14, British radio monitoring services in Malta picked up a message from Mihailović’s Ravna Gora headquarters. The message was forwarded to the Yugoslav government in London on September 24. The British replied with a promise of aid.

On October 9, Hudson received orders from Cairo to move to Mihailović’s headquarters on Ravna Gora. The mission reached Mihailović on October 25, less than a week before the Chetnik-Partisan war started (October 31). By that time, Mihailović was in contact with the British in London and had already learned that the British had decided to recognise him as the sole legitimate commander of resistance forces in occupied Yugoslavia. This recognition was the turning point for Mihailović and his Chetnik movement. Mihailović and his men were now an arm of the Yugoslav royal government in London.

The presence of the British military mission in Mihailović’s headquarters was an enormous morale boost. It increased Mihailović’s prestige and was a visible sign that Mihailović was a recognised member of the Allied camp. A series of speedy military promotions by King Peter II Karađorđević followed; Mihailović was promoted from Colonel to Brigadier General on December 7, 1941, and to Division General on January 19, 1942. On January 11, 1942, he became a member of the Yugoslav government as Minister of the Army, Navy and Air Force\textsuperscript{44}. On June 17, 1942, he was promoted to the highest military rank of Army General and became the Chief of Staff of the Supreme Command, which was transferred from Egypt back to Yugoslavia\textsuperscript{45}. Military promotions and the ministerial seat made it possible for Mihailović to establish a level of control over

\textsuperscript{43} There are several different versions of the chronology. At his post-war trial, Mihailović stated that the radio link was established on September 26, 1941. According to British Intelligence, it was established in August 1941. See: AVII, Ca, k.240, Reg. No. 4/1, 9.

\textsuperscript{44} He was succeeded in the summer of 1944 by General Petar Živković. Nevertheless, Mihailović continued to be referred to as ‘Sir Minister’ in Chetnik sources after his dismissal.

\textsuperscript{45} AVII, Ca, k. 298, Reg. No. 2/1, Telegram No. 264. The Supreme Command was divided into operational, organisational and intelligence departments (led by Major Zaharije Ostojić); internal and external communication services (the latter concerning contacts with London and air drops from the Allies) led by Major Mirko Lalatović; propaganda section led by Dragiša Vasić together with Dr. Stevan Moljević; Mountainous Guard (a version of the pre-war Royal Guard, here assigned the task of protecting the headquarters and Mihailović, wherever they were located) led by Lieutenant Nikola Kalabić – and finally commander of the rear in the ‘given moment’ (i.e. the Chetnik general uprising at the end of the war) Colonel Dragoslav Pavlović.
the Chetnik resistance groups that appeared during 1941 without the participation of his officers in the Independent State of Croatia and Montenegro (and even in Slovenia). Mihailović’s recognition in the Allied camp went beyond his official position with the Yugoslav Government in Exile: British and Yugoslav propaganda presented him as an anti-Axis resistance hero.

46 AVII, Ca, k. 12, Reg. No. 52/3. According to the Ravna Gora newspaper, on February 15, 1943, Charles de Gaulle gave Mihailović the First Level Medal of the Legion of Honour. According to a memorandum of the Yugoslav government to Mihailović, issued on March 25, 1943, Charles de Gaulle also gave the Bronze War Cross to Chetnik Majors Zaharije Ostojić and Mirko Lalatović (among others). In a letter dated February 12, 1943, a number of Chetnik commanders congratulated Mihailović, presenting the medal as ‘a token of recognition to the Serb people as a whole’ (no Yugoslav reference was made). See: AVII, Ca, k.11, Reg. No. 18/1-4.

47 Similar factors contributed to the demise of Mihailović’s movement in the summer of 1944. His Ministerial position was taken away by the King’s decree on June 1, 1944, and he was stripped of his position as Chief of Staff of the Supreme Command on August 29. The biggest blow came on September 12, when the King, speaking on Radio London, instructed the Chetniks to join Tito’s Partisans.
Chapter 1.

Mihailović’s Chetnik Movement:
The New Historical Approach

This chapter provides some necessary background information on the new historical approach taken in this thesis. More specifically, in its discussion of the difficult issue of partial Chetnik wartime collaboration with the Axis, the thesis examines Chetnik strategy and ideology in the light of the ethno-religious conflict raging in the region. It is therefore necessary to look closely at the region – its politics and its people – before turning to a close-up look at the effects of the ethno-religious conflict. To this end, the chapter begins by investigating Mihailović’s initial vision for the resistance movement. It then turns to the effects of ethno-religious conflict on Chetnik strategy in the German zones of the ISC, first during the period of unified Chetnik-Partisan resistance, and then in the period after the start of the Chetnik-Partisan war. The discussion will also look at Chetnik strategy in the Italian zones of the ISC within the context of ethno-religious conflict. Finally, it will place Chetnik ideology and its post-war vision for Yugoslavia within the framework of the ethno-religious conflict.

Since the first Balkan revolutions and the subsequent formation of modern national identities in the early 19th century, the region covered by the former Yugoslavia has been in frequent turmoil. Not surprisingly, given the competition among emerging national ideologies, religious identities, state programs and a variety of powerful interests, periods of stability were frequently interrupted by brutal conflict. Even so, the Second World War1 stood out in infamy: in slightly more than four years there were more than one million fatalities, mostly Yugoslavs killed by other Yugoslavs. The wartime context of Axis versus Allies divided Yugoslavs into resistance and collaborationist

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1 Defined for the purposes of this thesis as lasting from April 6, 1941 (the Axis attack on the Kingdom of Yugoslavia) to May 9, 1945 (V-Day in Europe).
camps. In addition, there was a civil war between communists and royalists. Last, but by no means least, the area saw ethno-religious conflict which escalated to genocide.

Josip Broz Tito’s communist-led Partisans emerged victorious and assumed power in Yugoslavia at the end of the war. As noted earlier, they took it upon themselves to interpret the events of the war to the Yugoslav general public through the lens of the people’s resistance to and collaboration with the Axis – both involving all Yugoslav national and religious groups. This allowed them to clearly separate the patriots from the traitors. Moreover, the civil war between communists and royalists was simplified and set within the context of the resistance struggle, with the royalists (Chetniks) seen as collaborationist members of the Axis camp. In this interpretative network, being anti-Partisan (or anti-communist) was equated with being pro-fascist. Mass killings and other atrocities were also explained within the framework of resistance versus collaboration, or fascism versus anti-fascism. In should be noted that this work does not equate anti-communism with fascism; rather, it argues that the common anti-communist ground between the Axis and the Chetniks allowed them to cooperate against the Partisans but did not make the Chetniks necessarily members of the Axis camp. Further, the mass killings and other atrocities that South Slavs committed against each other are viewed here as part of the ethno-religious conflict.

The region played host to another ‘war within a war’, a conflict that emerged as a response to the initial wave of ethnic/religious atrocities. The ethno-religious struggle started in May 1941 and raged until the end of the Second World War. This conflict, for a variety of reasons to be explained in due course, was never properly studied in the post-Second World War period, either in socialist Yugoslavia or elsewhere. However, this conflict was very real, with a strong regional context and clearly defined territorial goals; the combatants, (Croat) Ustaša militia, various Muslim militias and (Serb) Chetnik forces, were all self-declared agents of their respective national/religious groups.

In short, the enormous death toll of the wartime period can be explained by the existence of these three parallel conflicts: the war against the Axis, the Chetnik-Partisan

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2 The Chetnik-Partisan war started on October 31, 1941 and continued until the end of the Second World War (and beyond); from early July to the end of October 1941 there was a period of joint Chetnik-Partisan resistance to the Axis.
war and the ethno-religious struggle. Most armed groups in occupied Yugoslavia, resistance and collaborationist forces alike, were engaged in two out of the three conflicts. However, the royalist Chetniks fought in all three conflicts simultaneously. Their complex and perilous position makes them a unique case study, especially in the historically unexplored terrain of the ethno-religious conflict.

The Chetniks were a unique wartime group because of their peculiar policy on resistance and collaboration. Essentially, this Serb force\(^3\) was an extension of the Royal Yugoslav Army\(^4\). The Chetniks were officially recognised by the exiled Yugoslav government in London – Chetnik leader Dragoljub Mihailović was granted a ministerial seat to cement the relationship – and, more importantly, by the Allies. Thus, the Chetniks were a resistance guerrilla group officially recognised by the Allies.

However, the outbreak of both the ethno-religious conflict and the war with the communist Partisans pushed the Chetniks into collaboration with their Axis enemies, in particular the Italians. Although a core resistance guerrilla group remained around Mihailović until the very end, various Chetnik units became legitimised in the eyes of the Axis armed forces as an anti-communist militia during the course of the Second World War. Because of this, the Chetniks were in the unique position of having sections that were either ‘legal’ (some official status granted by the Axis) or ‘illegal’ (guerrillas living in the forests and mountains), both under Mihailović’s real or nominal command.

Although Chetnik-Axis collaboration as such is not the topic of this thesis, a brief discussion of this topic is necessary because these alliances began as a Chetnik wartime strategy within the context of the ethno-religious conflict in the Italian zones of

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\(^3\) The Chetniks could be seen as a Serb and Slovene force, because of the Slovene composition of the Chetnik organisation in occupied Slovenia. However, Slovene participation in the Chetnik movement was not massive and was limited to Slovenia itself; the majority of men elsewhere in occupied Yugoslavia (commanders and regular soldiers alike) were Serbs. As Slovenia was a nationally homogenous area at the time (free of ethno-religious conflict) the emphasis will be on Chetniks in the rest of occupied Yugoslavia.

\(^4\) The Chetnik movement’s official name was the Yugoslav Royal Army in the Fatherland, to distinguish it from the Yugoslav Royal Army Abroad, remnants of the Yugoslav Army, Navy and Air force under British control that eluded capture after the Axis attack by reaching the Middle East.
The most controversial question about Chetnik-Axis collaboration is whether this strategy meant the Chetniks were members of the Axis camp, thus negating their status as a resistance movement.

Two important points need to be considered here. First, the Chetnik-Axis collaboration originated from contacts established between Serb rebels and the Italian army in response to the Ustaša terror against the Serb population. The Italian Army could (and did) provide protection from Ustaša rampages, and at the time, Serbs were concerned for their survival. This initial Italian assistance paved the way for later Chetnik-Italian cooperation against the Partisans and for Chetnik-Axis anti-communist cooperation in general.

Second, the Chetnik struggle against the Partisans, with or without Axis assistance, was never fought in the context of a pro-Axis or anti-Allied stance. The only common ground between the Chetniks and the Axis powers was anti-communism; primary source documents give no indication that the Chetniks had any sympathy towards or any desire to find a place within the Axis New Order.

Chetnik collaboration with the Axis forces against the Axis-resisting communist Partisans, even on a strictly anti-communist basis, is nevertheless problematic regarding the Chetnik stance as a wartime resistance group. More collaboration inevitably led to less active resistance, with the Chetnik-Partisan war seen as consuming most of the movement's energy, even though the resistance platform was never ideologically abandoned. The anti-Axis/pro-Allied policy never wavered as the Chetniks' purpose, but the Chetnik collaborationist strategy led to the group's demise; it slowly paved the way for a complete shift in Allied logistical support towards the Partisans and the eventual abandonment of the Chetniks (the last Allied military mission – an American one – left Mihailović's headquarters in November 1944). In essence, the Allies were most concerned about who was causing the greatest amount of damage to the Axis in the

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5 While it began this way, Chetnik-Axis collaboration deepened after the start of the Chetnik-Partisan war.
region. With hindsight, it is clear that the Chetniks’ chosen strategy was not the wisest, no matter how useful it may have seemed at the time.

In fact, the Chetnik wartime tactics were full of contradictions. For instance, they were a resistance group engaged in a civil war against another resistance group (ironically, with partial help from the common enemy). Moreover, they officially represented the armed forces and the continuation of the royalist Yugoslavia while participating in an ethno-religious conflict with the Croat/Slavic Muslim Ustaša and other militias, thereby acting as a Serb force. While Chetnik leaders explained collaboration as ‘functional’ (the enemy was simply being used to improve the overall Chetnik position and gain necessary supplies, a trickery allowed in war), they had trouble relating their nominally Yugoslav and factually Serb identities with the ethno-religious conflict, both ideologically and in terms of policies and actions on the ground.

This is to be expected, given the movement’s diverse roots. In occupied Serbia and Montenegro, the Chetnik movement was traditional and tied to the leadership of the army officers. In the Independent State of Croatia, the Chetnik movement, like the Partisan movement, grew out of a spontaneous apolitical Serb uprising against the initial wave of the Ustaša genocide aimed at eradicating the Serb presence. The Serb uprising in the Independent State of Croatia had a life of its own; in many cases, the leaders had little connection to the Yugoslav royal army. Chetnik and Partisan leaders had to send army officers and Communist Party members to take over and create Chetnik or Partisan units out of apolitical Serb insurgents – a challenging task, to say the least. The Chetniks tried to send officers with local connections in a given region, but often these were unavailable, and Serbs in Bosnia, Herzegovina and further west frequently refused to hand over the leadership to officers from Serbia and Montenegro, whom they labelled ‘foreigners’. The Partisans had similar challenges when selected Communist Party members (known as ‘professional revolutionaries’) tried to ideologically indoctrinate men

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6 The Chetniks justified their collaboration arrangements with the Axis as protecting the Serb population in agreed-upon areas, providing support against the Partisans in the civil war and allowing the Chetniks to survive and gain supplies for their planned general uprising at the end of the war, once the Allies reached the region.

7 Most of the Yugoslav army officers were captured at the end of the eleven-day April War (April 6-17, 1941); approximately three hundred and thirty-five thousand individuals were sent to prisoner camps in Germany. Those who eluded capture became the core of the Chetnik movement; a smaller number joined collaboration regimes established by the Axis.
who had fled their homes to save their own lives. Moreover, once Chetnik-Partisan tensions erupted into open conflict in Serbia, it was not easy to export the civil war to the Independent State of Croatia. The Serbs there comprised the majority of regular armed men in both the Chetnik and Partisan forces in 1941; they had no desire to fight each other and openly said so. Thus, the ethno-religious conflict and the Chetnik-Partisan war were intertwined and, at the same time, inextricably tied to the larger questions of resistance and collaboration.

This represented another challenge for the Chetniks (and the Partisans). In the case of the Chetniks, the troops that emerged from the initial Serb uprising in the Independent State of Croatia in 1941 saw the Ustaša militia and other Croat/Slavic Muslim forces as their main enemy – not the Germans or Italians or the Partisans. Chetnik troops essentially acted as a Serb protection force, focused on saving their families and properties from the Ustaša militia and similar formations. In the Independent State of Croatia, they identified themselves as exclusively Serb; even nominal Yugoslavism was a distant notion in that region.

Because the Chetnik movement as a whole had very diverse origins in occupied Yugoslavia, with the experiences of Serbs in occupied Serbia/Montenegro contrasting sharply with Serbs in the Independent State of Croatia, there was a dichotomy in its ideological approach to Yugoslavism and its vision for a post-war Yugoslavia. This dichotomy led to two different schools of thought emerging over time: a more radical one focused on the unification of all Serbs into one state (occupying a large segment of pre-war Yugoslavia) while a less radical one sought the resurrection of Yugoslavia and was reluctant to abandon its official policy of representing the government in exile. A compromise called for re-establishing Yugoslavia but only after the Serb question was solved by creating an internal Serb territorial unit and transforming Yugoslavia into a ‘trialistic’ ethnic federation (with Serb, Croat and Slovene territorial units).

This formula resolved internal Chetnik differences, but in the greater scheme of things, while the Chetnik wartime program had much to offer to Yugoslav Serbs and

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8 The Chetnik-Partisan civil war in the Independent State of Croatia started in early 1942.
9 Primary source documents include local commanders making enquiries to Headquarters about the general direction of the struggle both for Yugoslavia and for exclusively Serb matters.
Slovenes it offered little to Croats and almost nothing to other Yugoslav groups and national minorities. In fact, based on its actions and wartime program, the Chetnik royalist movement was only nominally Yugoslav and factually Serb. As such, Chetniks participated in the ethno-religious conflict as self-declared Serb agents. This strategy was compatible with the resistance movement that was fighting for Serb national freedom and with the Chetnik role in the ethno-religious conflict but not with the Chetnik-Partisan war, because the majority of Partisan soldiers were Serbs. Chetnik propaganda tried to overcome this contradiction by presenting the Partisans in national terms, as both non-Serbs and atheists, with non-Serb leaders (Jewish, Croat, etc.) and/or non-Serb soldiers (Muslims and Croats, mostly Domobrani deserters).

As indicated in the historiographical review, the ethno-religious conflict has never been a favoured topic of discussion\(^{10}\). Yet it shaped the Chetnik wartime strategy and ideology.

As will be shown, Chetnik leader Dragoljub Mihailović’s initial vision was conservative and traditional, in line with the overall Serbian military thinking of the times. Simply stated, he wanted to create a clandestine resistance organisation in occupied Yugoslavia and to be ready for a general uprising once the Western Allies reached the Balkans. There would be a guerrilla branch in the Yugoslav mountains and forests beyond the reach of the Axis. In more settled and urban areas, a network would be ready to target key facilities at the appropriate time. In addition, regular police forces, the gendarmerie and other collaborationist armed forces – including the collaborationist administration – would be infiltrated, so that they would be poised to turn against the enemy in a general uprising. In theory, this was an ideal plan. However it was challenged from the outset. Hitler was determined to wipe Yugoslavia off the map through annexation by neighbouring Axis states and the subsequent creation of puppet

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\(^{10}\) It should be noted that the ethno-religious conflict should not be equated with the post-war study of victimology; the literature on genocide, atrocities and war crimes conducted by various domestic armed groups is extensive (and quite politicised), but its ideological framework has always been very limited, especially in socialist Yugoslavia, where these events were simply explained within the fascism/antifascism context.
satellite states\textsuperscript{11}. The result of Hitler’s intentions varied widely across Yugoslavia, especially with regards to the treatment and position of the Serbs. This, in turn, called for the creation of Chetnik policies specific to each area.

An additional problem was that Mihailović was not the only candidate for the leadership of the national resistance movement. Others outside the reach of the Axis claimed to have better credentials, including General Ljuba Novaković, who outranked Colonel Mihailović. An even more serious challenge came from Kosta Milovanović Pećanac, one of the guerrilla leaders of the 1917 Toplica Uprising against the Bulgarians in the then-occupied Serbia, and leader of the interwar Chetnik organisation in Yugoslavia. For the first four months of the occupation, Mihailović and Pećanac competed in Serbia for leadership of the Chetniks. Finally, Pećanac took himself out of the race by officially attaching his forces to Milan Nedić’s Serbian collaborationist regime as anti-communist gendarmerie auxiliaries. Even after Mihailović emerged as the supreme head of the Chetnik movement, officially recognised by Yugoslav King Peter II, promoted to the position of General, and given a ministerial seat in the Yugoslav government in exile in London, there were command challenges in Bosnia and Montenegro, where local commanders had significant independence of action despite nominally recognising Mihailović.

Mihailović was a relatively unknown figure who faced the onerous task of creating a wartime movement at the beginning of the occupation\textsuperscript{12}. However, the difficult birth of the movement, the ensuing competition for leadership and the hierarchical challenges posed by independent-thinking commanders pale in comparison to the challenges to Mihailović’s vision, strategy and ideology posed by the ethno-religious conflict and the civil war with the Partisans.

The Ustaša regime in the Independent State of Croatia, officially created on April 10, 1941 following Hitler’s decision to dismantle Yugoslavia, was faced with the fact that

\textsuperscript{11}Puppet states included the Independent State of Croatia (divided into German and Italian zones of occupation) and Montenegro (within the Italian sphere). Serbia, despite the German introduction of a local Serb administration, remained a German military occupied zone until the end of the war.

\textsuperscript{12}The Communist Party of Yugoslavia which created the Partisan movement was in a much better position: it already had a clandestine network in place, because it was illegal in Yugoslavia for most of the interwar period.
the territory of this Axis satellite creation which included the entirety of Bosnia and Herzegovina contained two million Serbs, or thirty percent of the entire population. The approach taken to deal with this ‘Serb problem’ was genocide; accordingly, an attempt to eliminate the entire Serb population in the region via mass executions and expulsions into neighbouring Serbia began as soon as the Ustaša regime assumed power. While Croat-Serb relations could be best described as very strained during the interwar period (and there had also been tensions prior to 1918), mass murders of Serb civilians, regardless of their age and gender, by the Ustaša militia\textsuperscript{13} was a new development. News of mass executions of the Serb civilian population west of the River Drina and other horrors reported by the numerous refugees pouring into Serbia were initially met with shock and disbelief by Chetnik officers. By early June 1941, however, the Serb population in Herzegovina and Bosnia was already rising in spontaneous rebellion against these Ustaša atrocities.

In the Independent State of Croatia, Chetnik commanders who successfully took over leadership positions in existing Serb rebel units or set up new units soon found themselves on the frontlines against the Ustaša militia or organising revenge raids against Slavic Muslim villages. The Ustaša formations were part of the Axis, and the Chetnik forces were part of the Allies; while this kind of struggle could therefore be technically labelled ‘Axis versus Allies’ it was, in fact, a ethno-religious conflict, originating from regional grievances with a strong regional territorial context.

Engagement in the ethno-religious conflict in the Independent State of Croatia rapidly transformed the Chetniks into a regional Serb paramilitary force. This represented a major departure from Mihailović’s original vision for his resistance movement. It challenged the entire strategy, for example, developing a relationship with the Italian Army of occupation to keep the Ustašas out of Serb-populated regions. In addition, rather than establishing a clandestine network, as originally envisioned, the Chetniks were now actively protecting Serb settlements. Involvement in the ethno-religious conflict also had an impact on ideology, whereby the Chetniks west of the River

\textsuperscript{13} The Ustaša movement was a Croat one, but there was a significant Slavic Muslim participation in the wartime Ustaša militia in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Therefore, the Ustaša militia in Bosnia and Herzegovina will be treated as Croat/Slavic Muslim, not just Croat.
Drina developed a profound interest in Serb unification instead of the re-establishment of Yugoslavia.

The Ustaša atrocities and Serb uprising west of the River Drina\textsuperscript{14} meant that Mihailović's plans for the regions included in the Independent State of Croatia had changed by June 1941. However, the civil war with the Partisans that began in November 1941 challenged his vision for the entire territory of occupied Yugoslavia. Mihailović had no plans to fight in the ethno-religious conflict, nor had he plans to fight a civil war with the communists in the midst of the Axis occupation, yet he was forced to do both. Although the Chetnik-Partisan war is not the main focus of this thesis, the evidence provided here will demonstrate that the struggle against the Partisans transformed the Chetnik movement in terms of its wartime strategy and ideology. It completely frustrated Mihailović's resistance strategy, diverted attention from the ethno-religious conflict, pushed the Chetniks into deeper collaboration with the Axis (on an anti-communist basis) and consumed most of the energy's movement, eventually leading to its abandonment by the Allies and its final demise.

The German and Italian zones of occupation in the Independent State of Croatia, the resistance struggle, ethno-religious conflict and Chetnik-Partisan war were all intertwined in a manner that had complex and profound effects on the Chetnik movement and Yugoslavia as a whole. Even so, Chetnik strategies had different dynamics in the two zones. While both saw a Serb uprising against the Ustaša terror, for example, the Chetnik responses differed markedly. Contemporary German and Italian army reports (discussed in a later chapter) show that both occupying powers were well aware that the Serb uprising in the Independent State of Croatia had occurred as a reaction to Ustaša atrocities against the Serb population\textsuperscript{15} and that it was directed against the Ustaša militia and not the occupation forces. Moreover, both the German and Italian military intelligence knew exactly how to stop this course of events, namely, by removing the Ustaša militia. They also knew why these locally prescribed solutions

\textsuperscript{14} This started as early as May 1941 in various parts of Bosnia.

\textsuperscript{15} At the same time, this thesis will disprove arguments of socialist Yugoslav historiography that the late spring-summer 1941 rebellion in the region was an uprising against fascism directed by the Communist Party of Yugoslavia.
were never adopted\textsuperscript{16}. Nonetheless, the Serb uprising of 1941 that fuelled such conflict between the Chetniks and the Partisans was seen as a problem without a solution by the Germans, and as a great political opportunity by the Italians, responses that will be explained and explored in detail in due course.

German policies in occupied Yugoslavia in general, and in the Independent State of Croatia in particular, were crude, unimaginative and rigid, especially when compared to the Italian policies that were opportunistic, dynamic and flexible. As far as the Wehrmacht was concerned, this was not a problem that required the analytical skills of German intelligence agents. Indeed, because Hitler had approved the Ustaša genocide of the Serbs, any local German army commanders who could see ways of stopping the uprising were rendered powerless to do so. With no power to change local borders or replace the local regimes set up by Hitler, they attempted to pacify the area with limited forces and had very little room for manoeuvre. Indeed, the Wehrmacht’s wartime reports reveal that the local German commanders had a very real desire to bring to an end the Ustaša atrocities, not so much from humanitarian concerns or any real sympathy for the victims but as a means to stem the ensuing chaos. The limited attempts made by local German commanders included a failed agreement with Major Jezdimir Dangić, the Chetnik leader in eastern Bosnia, to partially hand over control. Proclaiming parts of Bosnia as a zone of military operations was another suggestion; this would entail direct German command of the Ustaša forces and the handing over of Bosnia and Herzegovina to the Italians (December 1941). However, all such plans failed because Nazi leaders in Berlin, including Hitler, had little desire to introduce radical changes into occupied Yugoslavia.

Because of the lack of flexibility in Berlin, the ethno-religious conflict continued to rage in the Independent State of Croatia until the end of the Second World War. The Wehrmacht redefined its strategic goals in the region by focusing on the security of certain key facilities and the Belgrade-Zagreb railroad north of the River Sava (i.e. north of Bosnia). The ethno-religious conflict and Chetnik, as well as Partisan, activity occurred mostly in Bosnia and Herzegovina, south of the River Sava. Letting the events south of the river run their course while protecting key facilities and lines of

\textsuperscript{16} Removal of the Ustašas was not possible because this conflicted with Hitler’s vision for the entire area.
communication seemed the best approach in 1941, but in the long run, it created a more serious problem for the Wehrmacht. German intelligence noticed a direct connection between the atrocities, fighting in the ethno-religious conflict and guerrilla activity. Mass killings, the burning of villages and overall insecurity uprooted an increasing number of people who sought revenge or saw little alternative but to join guerrilla groups. This was not lost on the Chetniks and the Partisans; in their internal correspondence, they both recognised that the return of peace could spell doom for their respective movements because most people (and therefore the bulk of their troops) would simply go home. The Partisans, in particular, favoured a policy of ‘the worse it gets, the better it is’ for their own security as a wartime movement.

Simply stated, the Wehrmacht’s non-interventionist approach to events south of the River Sava resulted in the exponential growth of both guerrilla movements. As demonstrated by the Wehrmacht’s anti-guerrilla operations, such as those on Serb-populated Mount Ozren in northern Bosnia, it was impossible to deliver a death-blow because of the difficult terrain and elusive nature of the resistance. Wehrmacht forces found themselves having to use valuable resources to fight both guerrilla movements in occupied Yugoslavia when these could have been better used elsewhere.

The German zones in central and western Bosnia saw the most controversial form of Chetnik collaboration; here, some Chetnik units officially became volunteer anti-communist militia units (VAMs), auxiliaries of the Domobrani forces. As Chetnik documents show, Mihailović disapproved of VAM agreements because they were propaganda material for both the Ustaša regime and the Partisans. However, it proved difficult to control the Chetnik commanders who independently signed such agreements.

The Italians fared much better. They saw the Serb uprising against the Ustaša terror as an opportunity. Although the Ustaša movement was nurtured in Italy during the interwar period, significant Italian annexations in Dalmatia following the occupation of Yugoslavia turned Croat public opinion against them and more importantly pushed the

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17 Domobrani forces were the regular army units of the Independent State of Croatia; the Ustaša militia was the armed force of the Ustaša party, and there are no recorded instances of any Chetnik-Ustaša agreements. In cases of joint anti-Partisan operations, Chetnik units never came into direct contact with the Ustaša militia because the repercussions would have been even more violent than the scenario of direct Chetnik-German contact.
Ustaša regime towards Germany. Noting that Serb rebels (later split into Chetniks and Partisans) were attacking the Ustaša militia and not the Italian army, Italian leaders decided to use the local Serbs to undermine the Ustašas. The Serb-Italian relationship in the Independent State of Croatia developed rapidly. Italians started removing Ustaša militia from the region and accepted fleeing Serbs (and Jews) into annexed parts of Dalmatia. Rebel Serb leaders called on Italians to occupy all of Bosnia and Herzegovina and allowed the Italian army to freely traverse Serb-controlled areas. The fact that there was no historical animosity between Serbs and Italians, and the Italians had a far better opinion of the Serbs than did the Germans, helped the relationship develop.

When the communist-royalist civil war reached the Italian zones, and the rebels divided into Chetniks and Partisans, the Italians reacted swiftly and skilfully. They welcomed many Chetnik units into the official fold, proclaiming them volunteer anti-communist militia (MVAC), essentially auxiliaries of the Italian Army, thus circumventing the Ustaša state completely. For the Chetniks, working with the Italians became part of their wartime strategy in this part of occupied Yugoslavia.

The ethno-religious conflict continued under the auspices of a collaborationist and anti-communist struggle in the German and Italian zones in the Independent State of Croatia. As Wehrmacht and Italian army reports show, the Ustaša militia continued to destroy Serb villages in the name of the anti-resistance struggle, or proclaiming them communist or Chetnik strongholds. In the Italian zones, those Chetniks who were operating as MVAC units also destroyed Slavic Muslim and Croat villages, accusing them of being Partisan. Axis occupation forces were aware of what was happening, but generally turned a blind eye. For collaborationist Chetniks in the Italian zones, collaboration became an integral part of the ethno-religious conflict strategy, not just their civil war strategy, given that their official status enabled protection of the Serb-populated areas they controlled and hostile action in non-Serb areas.

The Chetniks were a wartime Serb national force (sincerely royalist, but only nominally Yugoslav), as their preoccupation with the Serb question makes clear. Chetnik wartime documents and Chetnik postwar plans show that the prevailing sentiment among Chetnik leaders was that interwar Yugoslavia had been a disappointment and a failure. This feeling existed in prewar Serb intellectual circles, such as the Serb Cultural Club, the chief ideological precursor of the wartime Chetnik movement, but wartime
events bolstered it. Chetnik leaders believed that a mistake had been made in 1918 when Yugoslavia was created without first achieving Serb national unification. The main Chetnik postwar goal was focused on correcting this mistake through territorial unification of Yugoslav Serbs. Although details varied with respect to the name, territorial extent and internal organisation (unitary, federal) of this would-be Serb territorial entity, the primary focus on its creation was unfaltering. Whether this entity was to be a Serb territorial unit within Yugoslavia (albeit encompassing most of it) or a new state was of secondary importance.

This line of thinking set the Chetniks in occupied Yugoslavia ideologically opposed to the Yugoslav royal government in exile. The common understanding that the Chetniks simply represented the armed forces of the Yugoslav royal regime, at least until the summer of 1944 (when, bowing to British pressure, the King and his government started establishing official links with Tito and his Partisans) needs to be reformulated. While the Chetnik movement represented the continuation of royalist Yugoslavia and its exiled regime’s only realistic chance of a return to power in Belgrade, it was also a force of change. The Chetnik wartime leaders were highly critical of the pre-war Yugoslav political establishment, most of the dissatisfaction being directed against the August 1939 Cvetković-Maček Agreement that had established the Banovina of Croatia and paved the way for Yugoslavia’s federalisation, a development cut short by the war.

Nonetheless, the Chetnik leadership realised that the Cvetković-Maček Agreement represented the point of no return. Yugoslavia was already heading towards division by 1939, and the establishment of the Banovina of Croatia was the first step along this road. The Kingdom of Yugoslavia, originally named ‘Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes’, had officially considered Serbs, Croats and Slovenes to be Slavic tribes of one (Yugoslav) nation. By 1939, this unitaristic view was being quietly abandoned; Yugoslavia was about to be transformed into a federation, and the Serbs, Croats and Slovenes were on their way to establishing national federal units.

The wartime Chetnik leaders, despite staunch opposition to the Cvetković-Maček Agreement, were not opposed to this transformative course. It led, for example, to the much-desired resolution of the Serb question in Yugoslavia by establishing a Serb territorial unit. The dispute was not over the model but focused on territorial matters; Chetnik ideologists argued that the Yugoslav leadership had yielded too much territory to
the Croats in 1939, and it envisioned a significantly reduced Croatia after the war; the territories constituting Slovene lands in Yugoslavia were never in dispute. The horrors of the Second World War, especially the atrocities against Serbs in the Independent State of Croatia, inspired radical Chetnik visions of the future that included extreme territorial demands, the internal resettlement of Yugoslav groups and the expulsion of entire national minorities. In other words, the Chetnik postwar vision was a continuation of the transformative course that had begun in 1939 with Cvetković-Maček Agreement and was radicalised by brutal wartime events. In this regard, the ethno-religious conflict that followed Yugoslavia's occupation acted as an agent of radicalisation for the Chetnik ideologists.

The Chetnik territorial strategy in the ethno-religious war was tied to the establishment of the projected Serb Yugoslav entity / independent state after the war and is, in many ways, the best illustration of Chetnik goals. Chetnik actions against Slavic Muslim and Albanian paramilitaries in the historical area of the Sandžak of Novi Pazar (mostly found in wartime Montenegro, with a small chunk in Serbia) and also against Slavic Muslim and Croat militias in Bosnia and Herzegovina were part of the ethno-religious conflict and were strategically tied to their post-war visions and should be examined as such.

There were two schools in the Chetnik movement. The more radical faction had almost exclusively Serb views, little interest in Yugoslavia and its ideology, and was mostly represented by individuals from areas incorporated into the Independent State of Croatia (primarily Bosnia and Herzegovina); their views were greatly influenced by the wartime events in their home regions, and they had a strong desire for retribution. Those in the less radical faction were typically from Serbia and Montenegro; their more traditional and conservative views were in line with the Yugoslav government in exile, and they were more open to resurrecting Yugoslavia after the war.

The less radical faction carried the day at the St. Sava Congress, January 25-28, 1944, when the Chetnik postwar goals were officially defined. The competing Partisan

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18 Between June 1941 and January 1944, a number of Chetnik conferences were held. Their proceedings, together with the surviving correspondence between important figures in the movement, memorandums and other documents, complete the picture of the Chetnik movement’s ideological evolution.
movement had done the same at the Second Session of the AVNOJ (Anti-Fascist Council of the People’s Liberation of Yugoslavia) two months previously, November 21-29, 1943. Thus, the formal Chetnik gathering was a reaction to the Partisan move. Because of the challenge represented by the Partisans, including their federal postwar model that was attractive to Yugoslav non-Serbs, the Chetnik movement officials adopted a less radical vision of the future by embracing the re-establishment of royal Yugoslavia as an ethnic federation of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes. Ironically, the civil war with the Partisans had a dampening effect on the Chetnik radicalization that stemmed from their engagement in the ethno-religious conflict; Partisan successes with non-Serbs influenced Chetnik leaders to seek less radical solutions, pushing them once again on a more pro-Yugoslav course.
Chapter 2.

Mihailović’s Initial Vision

What Mihailović originally anticipated was far less complicated than the reality the Chetniks faced during the war. As will be demonstrated, some of Mihailović’s earliest surviving instructions and directives (when an ethno-religious war was erupting but a Chetnik-Partisan war was not yet on the horizon) paint a picture of a resistance movement focused on preparing during wartime for a general uprising against the Axis, linked to the arrival of the Western Allies into the region. Unfortunately for Mihailović, his plan was thwarted by the genocidal policies against the Serbs in the Independent State of Croatia1 which caused a Serb uprising and led to the eruption of an ethno-religious war in all the nationally and religiously heterogeneous areas of occupied Yugoslavia, followed by civil war with the communist Partisans across the occupied country a few months later.

The ethno-religious conflict in the areas of occupied Yugoslavia with a heterogeneous population reduced the Chetniks to a Serb national force (despite their official Yugoslav label) by drawing them into regional conflicts with the Ustaša and local Muslim militias; this development introduced a plethora of dynamics and strategies for the various regional Chetnik groups.

Mihailović’s original vision could – at least in theory – still have been implemented on a reduced scale in homogenous areas such as old Serbia and old Montenegro (defined in terms of their pre-1912 borders), because those regions were free of ethno-religious conflict. Indeed, during the first few months of the occupation, the original model was successfully introduced there; but this changed quickly with the eruption of the civil war with the Partisans, first in Serbia, then spreading to Montenegro.

1 Hereafter referred to simply as the ISC.
and the ISC, making the already complex situation in the latter even more difficult. This, in turn, led to the evolution of new strategies and dynamics.

This chapter will examine Mihailović’s original plan and consider why it could not have materialised, given the circumstances on the ground. It will argue that most new Chetnik strategies and wartime developments were reactionary in nature.

Terminological Challenges

Before proceeding, however, a terminological explanation must be provided for the wartime use of label ‘Chetnik’ and to whom this was applied in contemporary primary sources. In occupied Yugoslavia during the Second World War, a number of groups called themselves ‘Chetniks’, but apart from a common anti-communist stance, significant differences existed between them. Not all Chetnik groups will be discussed here – only those Chetniks, both ‘illegal’ and ‘legal’ who were (at least nominally) under Colonel/General Dragoljub Mihailović Draža’s supreme command.

Chetnik groups not under Mihailović’s command included Kosta Pećanac’s Chetniks in Serbia, Krsto Popović’s Montenegrin ‘Green’ Chetniks, and General Ljuba Novaković independent forces operating in the ISC. To further complicate terminological matters, even Mihailović’s officers used the Chetnik label to refer to other groups prior to the outbreak of the civil war with the Partisans (pre-November 1941 period): ‘Black

2 Legality in this context refers to the official standing (or lack thereof) in the eyes of the Axis occupation forces. Thus, the ‘illegal Chetniks’ were comprised of the core group around Mihailović as well as other ‘wild Chetnik’ troops elsewhere (to use a Chetnik contemporary term), all of whom were actively pursued by the Axis forces. Meanwhile the ‘legal Chetniks’ operated in the ISC as an anti-communist militia and as the quisling government’s auxiliaries in both Serbia and Montenegro, at all times hiding their actual links to Mihailović (although many of those links were well known to Axis Intelligence). Using the method of ‘license and registration’ with the Axis as local anti-communist troops in order to survive, supply and equip themselves, legal Chetniks adopted a variety of labels: MVAC (Milizia Volontaria Anti Comunista) in the Italian part of the ISC, VACM (Voluntary Anti-Communist Militia, registered with the ISC) in the German part of the ISC, Government Chetniks (utilising Pećanac’s Chetnik label) in Serbia, Montenegrin Chetnik Troops in Italian-held Montenegro, and German Serb Storm Corps at the end of the war in Slovenia (late 1944-1945). This double standing made the Chetniks a unique and complex group in the region.

3 ‘Green’ Chetniks were operating as the armed forces of the Montenegrin Italian-sponsored government; theirs was a federalist or even a separatist agenda. By using the 1918 analogy of Montenegrin Greens and Whites (i.e. those against the unconditional unification with Serbia, and those for it), Montenegrin Chetniks affiliated with Mihailović could be labelled as ‘White’ Chentiks.
Chetniks’ for Pećanac’s troops and ‘Red Chetniks’ for the Partisans. Before the civil war with the Partisans erupted, evidently for some of Mihailović’s officers the Chetnik label was a generic term used to describe all guerrilla groups operating in the region (‘Chetnik’ here simply signifying a ‘Cheta’ or troop member – a traditional guerrilla-style unit in the Balkans).

By way of example, the confusing terminology (‘Black’ and ‘Red’ Chetniks) can be found in a report from September 2, 1941 written by the Commander of the Chetnik unit ‘Boško Jugović’ (Major Boško P. Todorović) for Mihailović. The report was devoted to the military situation in eastern Bosnia and the Chetnik relationship with the collaborationist government in Belgrade. It should be noted that this report was written at a time when Chetnik-Partisan collaboration was still functioning (i.e. before the start of the civil war, which began on November 1, 1941 in Serbia) and when Nedić’s government in Serbia had just been installed.

Distinguishing between Chetniks (whose core comprised officers of the royalist Yugoslav army) and Partisans (whose core comprised Yugoslavia’s Communist Party members) is not a difficult task even during the period of joint Chetnik-Partisan resistance (early July to late October 1941). Primary sources show that during the period of joint resistance, soldiers were, in most cases, politically ambiguous; who was in charge of the unit (Yugoslav army officers or Communist Party members) was not so critical – although it often led to soldiers deserting and later joining other units during

4 Similarly, Chetnik commanders used the term ‘pink’ to refer to their own officers who had a tendency to cooperate with the Partisans after the start of the civil war.

5 AVII, Ca, k. 170, reg. No. 7/1.

6 Nedić and his government of National Salvation were installed on August 29, 1941. The report provides many interesting details about the formative days of the Chetnik movement. Major Todorović started his report by noting that he had decided to change the name of the unit because his own name (which served as an initial moniker) was not yet well known; See: AVII, Ca, k. 170, reg. No. 7/1. He asked for the HQ’s approval, because he was aware of the August order to name Chentik units by their commander; this unit’s naming example is an early illustration of the freedom local commanders enjoyed – many decisions like this were approved by the Supreme Command post facto, when the decision had already been made and implemented on the ground. The author also noted in his report that a system of codes was now in place to distinguish Mihailović’s Chetnik units from ‘red Chetniks’ and ‘black Chetniks’. Given that this was still the pre-civil war era, the ‘red Chetniks’ were the Partisans and the ‘black Chetniks’ were Pećanac’s Chetniks (who, by late August 1941 were integrated into the occupation system as auxiliary gendarmerie units of Nedić’s Serb State Guard in order to fight the communist insurgency).
early attempts of political indoctrination. However, other (i.e. non-communist) groups represent more of a historical challenge.

**Distinguishing between Mihailović’s and Pećanac’s Chetniks in Serbia**

Distinguishing Mihailović’s Chetniks from other (non-Partisan) units is a more difficult task. For the outside observer, the Chetnik units of Kosta Milovanović Pećanac in Serbia represent the biggest challenge. Pećanac’s Chetniks should not be confused with Mihailović’s forces, even though they also called themselves Chetniks throughout the war, considered themselves a Serb national and royalist force (albeit operating only in Nedić’s Serbia) and wore a very similar style of uniform and insignia.

Mihailović, for his part, became hostile to Pećanac by early September 1941. The introductory paragraph of a general order from that period differentiated his Chetniks from the Chetniks of Kosta Pećanac ‘and those who are like him’ (i.e. Nedić-related armed formations) who were serving the Germans. By this time, Kosta Pećanac’s rival Chetnik movement had joined the Nedić government as anti-communist militia, clearing the way for Mihailović to represent himself as the sole Chetnik leader in occupied Yugoslavia.

Before Pećanac’s legalisation by the Wehrmacht, the Germans were not sure what kind of relationship existed between Mihailović and Pećanac. It seems that at first German Intelligence viewed Mihailović and Pećanac’s organisations as a single (Chetnik) entity, even though the two organisations had developed independently since April 1941 and Pećanac’s forces collaborated with the Germans from August of that year. Kosta Pećanac was an interwar leader of the Chetnik Association; this fact was known to the Germans, and it is likely that their Intelligence believed all Chetniks stemmed from the interwar Chetnik associations (which was true for Pećanac’s organisation – but not for Mihailović).

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7 The Order of the Commander of the Chetnik Units of the Yugoslav Army (Dragoljub Mihailović) dated September 9th, 1941, AVII, Ca, k. 1, Reg. No. 2/2-1. Dated by referencing the order in other primary sources that refer to it.

8 AVII, Ca, k. 1, Reg. No. 2/2-1.
A report from the conference of German Generals in Belgrade and Zagreb from November 2, 1941 contains some general observations on the Chetnik movement, including Pećanac’s Chetniks9. The report notes that Serbian Chetnik commander Kosta Pećanac offered his help to Serbia’s quisling government and the Germans in the common struggle against the communists. The author of the report10 also says that some Chetniks led by Vojvoda Kosta Pećanac were fighting alongside the German units and Serbian gendarmerie against the communists. At the same time, it mentions mixed bands comprised of Pećanac’s Chetniks and Partisans on the enemy side11.

The author devotes a couple of paragraphs to Kosta Pećanac and his Chetnik movement. He says Colonel Pećanac offered (via an intermediary) the services of his forces to fight the communists in Serbia12. This eventually led to a three-way agreement between Pećanac, the government of Serbia led by Nedić and the German military authorities, according to whom Pećanac’s Chetniks were officially recognised and given the right to recruit and carry arms in public as long as they carried out their obligation to fight the communists.

Nevertheless, the author notes that Pećanac’s Chetniks participated in the conflict on the side of the ‘bands’,13 despite the agreement. Because of this, the commanders of the German division were constantly complaining that they were supposed to fight the communists but their orders prevented them from attacking

9 AVII, NAV-T-312, r. 454, s. 8039155-73.
10 The author signed the report at the end, but it is difficult to decipher the name.
11 AVII, NAV-T-312, r. 454, s. 8039155-73.
12 AVII, NAV-T-312, r. 454, s. 8039155-73.
13 AVII, NAV-T-312, r. 454, s. 8039155-73.
Pećanac’s Chetniks, even though in certain cases the two guerrilla groups appeared to be acting together.

Unlike Mihailović’s movement that found itself fighting three parallel conflicts – the resistance struggle, the ethno-religious war and the Chetnik-Partisan war, Pećanac’s Chetnik units were engaged only in the civil war with the Partisans, their initial conflict with armed ethnic Albanian groups in southern Serbia prior to their ‘legalisation’ notwithstanding. Unlike Mihailović’s Chetnik movement, Pećanac’s Chetniks operated only within the confines of Nedić’s Serbia. Following Pećanac's legalisation, his entire Chetnik force became a tool of the collaborationist government; there were no ‘illegal’ Pećanac Chetniks after the Bukulja Mountain meeting in August 1941. As noted, the two Chetnik forces in Serbia looked very similar (similar styles of dress, long beards and insignias) and shared much common ground, including Serb(ian) nationalism, royalism and anti-communism, but from Mihailović’s writings on the subject, it is evident that he considered Pećanac and his men enemies entrenched in the collaborationist camp.

Historians in post-war Yugoslavia made no particular effort to explain the differences between the two Chetnik camps, lumping them together as simply German collaborators and traitors. On the other hand, some of Mihailović’s commanders saw Pećanac and his Chetniks during the war as of potential utility, suggesting that their own troops might trick the Germans in critical moments by presenting themselves as Pećanac’s forces, even leaving Pećanac alone to deal with the Partisans in Nedić’s Serbia while focusing their energies in other regions. Pećanac and his core group did not

14 AVII, Ca, k. 299, Reg. No. 2/1. In due time, Mihailović also established connections with Nedić and his armed forces, viewing them as a potential asset similar to the Serbian Gendarmerie. There was one group of Serbian collaborators to whom Mihailović remained openly hostile until the end of the war – the so-called ‘Ljotićevci’, organised into Serbian Volunteer Detachments (later Serbian Volunteer Corps) and inspired by the Dimitrije Ljotić-led pre-war Yugoslav People’s Movement ZBOR. Although Ljotić and his followers shared with the Chetniks staunch (although much-more radical) anti-communist views, devotion to Eastern Orthodoxy and monarchism, they genuinely believed in the victory of the Axis and were trying to find a place for Serbia (and the Serbs) in the Axis’ European New Order. This separated them from the Chetniks (and Nedić-led collaborators, who saw their actions as a necessary evil) who had their roots in a pro-Western royalist tradition (Ljotić’s roots were tied to European political developments brought about by Mussolini and Hitler). A book of telegrams sent by Mihailović’s headquarters (May 10 to June 27, 1942) refers to this particular issue: on May 24, Mihailović underlined ‘once again’ that no connection should be established with Dimitrije Ljotić. Relentless hostility towards the ‘Ljotićevci’ was further illustrated in the July 30, 1942, entry: ‘removing all traitors in each of your zones, and removing Ljotićevci leaders’ was a priority of local commanders.
live long enough to see the concluding stages of the war, but it is very likely that they would have joined the collaborationist and Chetnik troops in Slovenia if they had a chance to evacuate Serbia.

In what follows, clarification of the Chetnik terminology will be provided in all cases where confusion might occur\textsuperscript{15}, but suffice it to say that the main focus is Mihailović’s movement. It should be noted that the terminological confusions regarding labels and their meaning were as vexing at the time as they are for historians today\textsuperscript{16}.

**Organization in Serbia and Montenegro: Imposing the Initial Vision**

In the Serbian and Montenegrin countryside, the Chetnik organisation was focussed on single villages. The village paramilitary model was most successfully implemented in occupied Serbia (essentially reduced to its pre-1912 borders). Here (as in central Montenegro) the population was nationally and religiously homogenous and ethno-religious conflict was not an issue. Each village was, in effect, a closed universe, independently governed and locally policed, walled off by choice from the outside world with only minimal links to it. The goal was to continue a traditional way of life while protecting the village and its population from outsiders, keeping out thieves, communist insurgents and occupation forces alike\textsuperscript{17}. The Chetniks were largely successful in this goal, more so in Serbia than in Montenegro where the Chetnik-Partisan war was raging more severely.

One of the earliest Chetnik documents that survived the war (from August 1941), the ‘Order of the Commander of the Chetnik Mountains Headquarters to create Chetnik

\textsuperscript{15} Arguably the most complicated terminological situation existed in Montenegro.

\textsuperscript{16} See: AVII, NAV-T-311, r. 175, s. 352-64. In a monthly report by the operative division of the commander of the Wehrmacht’s Armed Forces Southeast (dated October 31, 1942) appears Annex 24, titled ‘Regulation of the unified language in the Serbo-Croat area’. In order to avoid confusion, Annex 24 provided directives on terminology for the Chetniks, Ljotić’s volunteers (Serb Volunteer Detachments and later Corps), Eastern Orthodox volunteers, anti-communists, Mihailović’s supporters, communists, bandits and rebels.

\textsuperscript{17} Axis occupation forces generally stayed out of the villages in Serbia, except when conducting military operations and reprisals.
Units\textsuperscript{18}, provides detailed insight into the organisational matters of the movement. This order signed by Mihailović was issued in Serbia, but applied to the entire region of occupied Yugoslavia. Chetnik officers attempted to impose the model it prescribed throughout the country.

Stating that the Kingdom of Yugoslavia was still at war with the enemy (defined as ‘the Germans’), the order demanded the creation of units in all settlements\textsuperscript{19}. These units would comprise individuals twenty to thirty years of age; each unit was initially to be comprised of between thirty and forty conscripts. Each unit would have a commander (regardless of his position in the army hierarchy – clearly opening the door to non-military leadership in a situation where officers were not available), and the unit would carry the name of that commander. The formation of these units was to be conducted in full secrecy, including the supplying of conscripts with weapons and ammunition\textsuperscript{20}.

The units were to organise and train, but remain dormant until the ‘opportune moment’ arose. That moment, according to the Chetnik strategy, would be the arrival of the western Allies into the region, either by land or by sea – envisioned, in all likelihood, to be the British\textsuperscript{21}. In order to be ready for a general uprising, the units were to be alert, ready and mobile; each conscript was to carry a three-day food supply with him at all times.

The uniform was to be civilian clothing ('\textsc{народно одело}', i.e. traditional village attire), but a military-style cap with royal insignia had to be worn at all times\textsuperscript{22}. Until the commencement of the general uprising against occupation forces, the task of the Chetnik units was to guard the villages and continuously survey the surrounding areas to prevent plundering and violence against the local population. Thus, from the beginning there was a strong emphasis on territoriality, with Chetnik units acting as a grassroots self-protection paramilitary force from the villages from which the men were conscripted.

\textsuperscript{18} AVII, Ca, K. 7, reg. No. 15/1. The document has no date on it, but it was circa dated by other primary sources devoted to the organisational matters of the Chetnik units. See: AVII, Ca, k. 164, reg. No. 21/5 and k. 170, reg. No. 14/1 and 34/1.
\textsuperscript{19} AVII, Ca, K. 7, reg. No. 15/1.
\textsuperscript{20} AVII, Ca, K. 7, reg. No. 15/1.
\textsuperscript{21} AVII, Ca, K. 7, reg. No. 15/1.
\textsuperscript{22} AVII, Ca, K. 7, reg. No. 15/1.
Another stated goal of the Chetnik units was to ‘prevent destructive elements from spreading their influence’ (presumably the communists) but this was to be achieved by superior organisation rather than armed conflict; in the fall of 1941, this course of action was abandoned as an unworkable model, and open war was declared on the communist Partisans.

Before the general uprising, clashing with the Germans was something to be avoided whenever possible. However, in cases of violence and lawlessness – no matter who was responsible – armed resistance was to be used to protect the population. Anyone caught plundering was to be executed immediately. Patrolling in the vicinity of the settlement was to be done quietly. The order also prescribed military discipline; all violators were to be tried by a military tribunal, presumably using the military law of the Yugoslav Royal Army.

Besides the mobile units comprised of younger men, every settlement was ordered to create units of older men, thirty to forty years old. These units were to be comprised of fifteen to twenty men, or more, if the size of the locality so dictated. All directions issued to the units comprised of younger men also applied to the older men; the only difference was that the latter units were to be posted within the settlements; in other words, the older conscripts were to become permanent guards within the villages.

Besides guard duty, these units had a somewhat different role to play in the upcoming general uprising, namely, to take the administration of the village or town into their own hands, in case the local (collaborationist) administration proved unreliable or was compromised by the enemy. In the case of takeover, the units were to respect the laws of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia.

These units of older conscripts were to take over the all-important military and state buildings and installations, including post offices, police stations, railways and

23 AVII, Ca, K. 7, reg. No. 15/1.
24 AVII, Ca, K. 7, reg. No. 15/1.
25 AVII, Ca, K. 7, reg. No. 15/1.
26 AVII, Ca, K. 7, reg. No. 15/1.
27 AVII, Ca, K. 7, reg. No. 15/1.
stations, bridges and airports. These buildings and installations were to be defended against the enemy, and in the event that they could not be held, they were to be sabotaged and destroyed. All enemy traffic and communication was to be cut off. In larger settlements, these older troops were directed to confiscate all vehicles and hand them over to the mobile troops. The same was to be done with food stocks and storage facilities.

Mihailović’s order stated that all males of military age were to be considered conscripts and had to train to be ready for the general uprising; excuses such as field work or personal business were unacceptable. A special case was that of the officers, both active and reserve, of the Yugoslav Royal Army, who had to immediately join the mobile units. Once again, no excuses for absence (such as family problems) were acceptable. Mihailović decided to make the officers the foundation of the Chetnik movement, and he assigned them leadership roles in various regions; ideally they were to be sent to their home regions, with which they were most familiar and where they had the greatest number of connections.

Mihailović’s instructions contained a special directive about the Serbian gendarmerie; it was to play an especially important role in a general uprising. After the 1941 April War, the Serbian gendarmerie was created from the remnants of the Yugoslav gendarmerie in the territory of occupied Serbia. With the Wehrmacht’s approval, the Commissarial Administration of Serbia, created on May 1, 1941, formed the Serbian gendarmerie, first in Belgrade and then in the interior of Serbia. For the Chetnik movement, creating links with the Serbian gendarmerie was important from the outset. Mihailović’s orders explicitly stated this, demanding that local Chetnik

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28 AVII, Ca, K. 7, reg. No. 15/1.
29 AVII, Ca, K. 7, reg. No. 15/1.
30 For an example, see Mihailović’s order to Captain Jovan Jovanović from July 14th, 1941 to take charge of the Chetnik units in the Rudnik and Kosmaj region. AVII, Ca, K. 99, reg. No. 1/1. The Chetnik movement continued to evolve on the organisational side until the very end of the war. On 8th September 1942, Mihailović ordered the creation of the ‘Flying Brigades’ (non-territorial, mobile Chetnik troops) (perhaps because of Ostojić’s suggestions in this regard). Twelve months later (on 4th September 1943), the headquarters of the Supreme Command was also reorganised into an Operative Division, Intelligence Division, Division, Medical Division, HQ Command, Security Battalion for the HQ, Communications Centre and Command of the Rear. See Mihailović’s order for the reorganization at AVII, Ca, k. 2, Reg. No. 29/3.
31 AVII, Nedić Archival Fond, k. 19, reg. No. 5/1.
commanders establish clandestine communication with the gendarmerie’s district commanders to ensure that its operation harmonised with the goals of the Chetnik movement. The Chetnik stance on the Serbian Gendarmerie was an early illustration of the fundamental difference between the Chetnik and Partisan wartime philosophy on conduct with the enemy: for the Chetniks, the Serbian Gendarmerie was a potential asset that could be turned against the Wehrmacht and utilised; for the Partisans, the Serbian Gendarmerie was simply an enemy, part of the occupation system in Yugoslavia.

**Chetnik-Partisan War in Serbia**

Changes Chetnik Strategy

Mihailović’s original organisational plans were frustrated by communist actions from early July 1941 on, when the Comintern instructed the Communist Party of Yugoslavia to engage in open hostility against the occupation forces to alleviate the military pressure that USSR was under at the time. Drawn into what he saw as a premature open conflict with the occupation forces in Serbia during the summer of 1941 (in which Mihailović reluctantly joined to prevent the communists from attracting all resistance-minded individuals into their ranks) but then shocked by the Wehrmacht’s atrocities against the civilian population in the Serbian countryside (such as mass shootings), Mihailović turned on the Partisans, seeking to destroy them, calm the situation and revert to his original plan.

Once the civil war between the Chetniks and the Partisans erupted in Serbia from October 31, 1941 onwards, Mihailović immediately attempted to involve the Chetniks outside Serbia. His order (dated November 9, 1941) to the commander of the Bosnian Chetniks demanded that these Chetniks cross into Serbia to reinforce Serbian Chetniks fighting the Partisans in the vicinity of Užice and Kosjerić towns. Mihailović explained to the Bosnian Chetnik commanders that the Partisans had attacked the

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32 The Chetnik-Partisan civil war was the object of much study in the interwar period. This conflict is not the main focus of this thesis, but it provides contextual background.

33 AVII, Ca, k.170, Reg. No. 8/2.
Chetniks first (suddenly during the night of October 31/November 1), commencing civil war hostilities.\(^{34}\)

To win over Bosnian Chetniks, Mihailović added that they 'should be aware that the Partisans are led by Croat Ustašas, who want to generate a civil war among the Serbs and thus prevent retribution against the Croats.\(^{35}\) The inclusion of this line is significant for a number of reasons. Mihailović was aware that the Chetniks in the ISC were primarily a Serb self-protection force, created to defend local Serbs from Ustaša atrocities and avenge such atrocities where possible. For the Chetniks in the ISC, the struggle against the Germans and Italians, not to mention the Partisans, was secondary. For this reason, Mihailović had to deconstruct the Partisans and present them in national terms (as Ustašas, i.e. non-Serbs) to the Bosnian Chetniks. This Chetnik tactic became a motif of Chetnik wartime propaganda.

The order by the commander of the Toplica Chetnik Corps (dated February 17, 1943)\(^{36}\) to the commander of the 2nd Kosanica Brigade to attack the local Partisans provides valuable insight into the Chetnik wartime perception of their civil war adversary. The author, officer Milutin Radojević, underlined that there were many 'strangers' among the Partisans, while the Chetniks were all local people. Radojević contrasted the Chetniks and the Partisans in the following manner:

> While [the Partisans] are destroying the family and the church, we are defending both and fighting for the honour and right of our nation. [The Partisans] want a proletarian and the homeless, while we want a householder who is honourable and nationally correct\(^{37}\). [The Partisans] want a communist dictatorship, while we want democracy. They want 'a slave forever', just like Hitler and Mussolini – while we want a free man.

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\(^{34}\) See also: AVII, Ca, k. 122, Reg. No. 43/10.

\(^{35}\) See also: AVII, Ca, k. 122, Reg. No. 43/10. It is interesting to note how the Chetniks separated their friends from their foes along religious lines: the Serbs were Eastern Orthodox, which automatically meant that Roman Catholics (the Croats) and Muslims (today, Bosniaks) were associated with the enemy. This leaves open the question of Partisan classification in such a system; as the 'godless' atheists, it seems they came out worst.

\(^{36}\) AVII, Ca, k. 82, Reg. No. 17/2.

\(^{37}\) The term 'nationally correct' can be found in many Chetnik documents. It was used to describe individuals who were genuine Serb national patriots.
[The Partisans] want for a leader the foreigner Tito, while we follow the King from our national dynasty. As this document makes clear, the Chetniks perceived themselves to be a conservative national royalist force, not a socially destructive and disruptive group bound on undermining and changing the basis of society. For the Chetniks, the struggle against the Partisans was primarily a conflict between national and international (or non-national, even anti-national), not simply a conflict between royalists and communists.

**The German View of Mihailović’s Chetniks in Serbia**

The report of the ABWER command in Belgrade (written on August 8, 1941) occurs around the same time as the initial orders issued by Mihailović and offers insight into the German perception of the Chetniks. The report stated that the natural goal of the ‘Chetnik bands’ would always be to engage in the struggle against foreign occupation. The report noted the fluidity of the situation, stating that many individuals constantly switched between the Chetniks and the Partisans. The German commander in Serbia also said that atrocities in neighbouring Croatia, in particular the influx of Serb refugees expelled from Croatia, increased both the manpower and aggressiveness of guerrilla units; the population itself was not described as pro-communist, but many joined the communist-led band because of the terror they faced.

With regards to Serbia itself, the German commander in Belgrade noted that further unrest could be expected due to the additional shrinkage of Serbian territory – the

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38 AVII, Ca, k. 82, Reg. No. 17/2.
39 AVII, NAV-T-501, r. 267, s. 880-1. At the time of writing (August 12, 1941), the German military authorities still made no differentiation between Mihailović’s and Pećanac’s Chetnik movement.
40 AVII, NAV-T-501, r. 267, s. 880-1. Even at this early stage of rebel activities and despite Chetnik-Partisan cooperation, German commanders were aware of the Chetniks and Partisans as separate entities. According to the German commander in Serbia, most attacks on German soldiers, Serbian authorities, railway tracks etc. could be attributed to the communists.
41 AVII, NAV-T-501, r. 267, s. 880-1.
proposed handover of the Banat region to Hungary (which did not materialise)\textsuperscript{42} and of Belgrade’s Zemun suburb to Croatia (in October 1941)\textsuperscript{43}. The Kosovska Mitrovica region in Serbia was identified by the German commanders as another flashpoint, because local Albanians were engaged in an independence movement that could prove troublesome\textsuperscript{44}.

The report included a section on the insurgent movements in Serbia and the ISC. Part of the report devoted to Serbia provides the main reasons for the uprising (from the German perspective)\textsuperscript{45}. The first reason cited was the speedy recovery from the short war (referring to the April War), which had little or no effect on more remote parts of the country. It further noted Pan-Slavic (Yugoslav and/or pro-Russian?) or communist tendencies and the combining of remnants of ‘the Serbian army’\textsuperscript{46}. Last but not least, it commented on the side effect of the ethno-religious violence in the neighbouring Independent State of Croatia, which fuelled the insurgent ranks in Serbia (‘Serb refugees, who are expelled from the territories handed over to Croatia (one hundred and ten thousand), Hungary (thirty-seven thousand) and Bulgaria (twenty thousand), without any means and nowhere to go’)\textsuperscript{47}.

\textsuperscript{42} Hitler verbally promised Banat to Hungary’s leader Miklos de Hagyhanya Horthy, but he never gave a clear timeline for the realisation of this project. On August 6, 1941, a German-Hungarian conference was held in Budapest on the mechanics and implication of Banat’s annexation by Hungary. However, the last word on this issue came from Hitler. For a German report (written on August 9, 1941) from the Budapest conference see AVII, London 2, s. 297962-4).
\textsuperscript{43} AVII, NAV-T-501, r. 267, s. 880-1.
\textsuperscript{44} AVII, NAV-T-501, r. 267, s. 880-1.
\textsuperscript{45} AVII, NAV-T-312, r. 454, s. 8039155-73.
\textsuperscript{46} AVII, NAV-T-312, r. 454, s. 8039155-73. It is interesting here that the report uses the term ‘Serbian army’ rather than Yugoslav army.
\textsuperscript{47} AVII, NAV-T-312, r. 454, s. 8039155-73. Atrocities against the Serbs quickly changed Chetnik behaviour, especially outside Serbia, but also with Serbian Chetniks, creating another major challenge to Mihailović's original vision.
The main culprits of the insurgency were identified as the remnants of the former Yugoslav army, ‘communist bandits’ and ‘national units, the Chetniks’ \(^{48}\). The report gave the following assessment of the Chetnik organisation:

The Chetniks are a volunteer military-type organisation (Cheta = Schar, a company), which has existed since the wars of liberation against the Ottomans, and which following the Great War received official status with the creation of the Chetnik Association. The words spoken at the beginning of each secret radio transmission are: ‘These are not communists, these are national Chetniks who are ready to fight for the liberation of Serbia and Yugoslavia’ \(^{49}\). ‘...Vojvoda’ (the leader of the band) is the master of life and death with regards to his men, and his will is supreme \(^{50}\).

Concerning Vardar Macedonia, the report noted that all Serbs who came to the region after 1918 had to leave Bulgarian-annexed territories there \(^{51}\). Interestingly, it concluded that relations with ‘Macedonians’ were friendly \(^{52}\). It is unclear from this particular wording if the author used a geographic label (meaning the population of Macedonia), or whether

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\(^{48}\) AVII, NAV-T-312, r. 454, s. 8039155-73. The remnants of the Yugoslav army are listed separately from the Chetniks, indicating that the Germans believed the Chetniks came from pre-war Chetnik associations rather than the Yugoslav army (a logical but erroneous conclusion).

\(^{49}\) The civil war between the Chetniks and Partisans was breaking out at the time; this is probably why Chetnik radio transmissions started with a sharp distinction between the two. Interestingly, the citation lists Serbia first and Yugoslavia second; this corresponds to the established Chetnik ideological stance.

\(^{50}\) AVII, NAV-T-312, r. 454, s. 8039155-73. The rest of the report is devoted to other areas, Montenegro and Bulgaria (with the emphasis on former Yugoslav Macedonia). With regards to Montenegro, the report notes that the Serb General Ljuba Novaković was fighting the Italians and Croats in the territory of the former Sandžak of Novi Pazar and northern Montenegro. AVII, NAV-T-312, r. 454, s. 8039155-73. General Ljuba Novaković initially reached Mihailović’s quarters, but they parted ways. He acted (with men under his command) independently from both the Chetniks and the Partisans. Perhaps the report is calling the local Muslims ‘Croats’, and the reference should not be taken to signify Croat armed forces operating in Montenegro (there were none at that time).

\(^{51}\) AVII, NAV-T-312, r. 454, s. 8039155-73. The report states that the Turkish minority was being treated harshly by the Bulgarians, and their religious freedoms had been restricted.

\(^{52}\) AVII, NAV-T-312, r. 454, s. 8039155-73.
he was making an ethnic/national distinction between the Bulgarians and Macedonians\(^{53}\).

Despite the existence of the nominal framework, Nedić’s government had no effective control over the northern and southern periphery of Serbia; in Banat, local Germans were in charge of the (nominally) Serbian security forces, while in the part of the Kosovo region that was included in Serbia, local ethnic Albanians populated security and administrative positions under the watchful eyes of the Germans. The limits of Serbia (or rather Nedić’s regime) are evident from a historical distance, but it took some time for the Chetnik leadership of the day to establish exactly where those limitations lay.

A note from the presentation (held on August 29, 1942)\(^{54}\) of the commander of the SS and police in Serbia to the commander of the armed forces Southeast provides interesting information about the Chetniks in Serbia, and the situation in Banat. The note states that in the Banat region some two thousand Volksdeutsche had been trained for police roles – one thousand utilised as border guards, and the other thousand as town and village guards. In Serbia, Nedić’s forces were known as the Serbian State Guard (Српска државна стража), subdivided into Serbian Border Guards (Српска гранична стража), Serbian Town Guards (Српска градска стража) and Serbian Village Guards (Српска пољска стража)\(^{55}\). In the Banat region (Serbia north of Danube), the Serbian State Guard was known as the Banat Guard (and subdivided into border, town and village segments). The note explains that police authorities in the Banat region were in the hands of the local Germans (Volksdeutsche), although they were nominally subordinated to the Belgrade’s Ministry of Internal Affairs. The note also demonstrated the lack of trust Germans placed in their Serbian collaborators: the Serbian police were armed with (captured) arms from the Netherlands and France to keep tight control of the

\(^{53}\) The German ethnic map of the Yugoslav kingdom from 1940 found in the AVII distinguishes - besides Serbs, Croats and Slovenes – Slavic Muslims, Montenegrins and Macedonians. Curiously, this view mirrors that of the CPY in postwar Yugoslavia (Muslims were added in 1963).

\(^{54}\) AVII, NAV-T-501, r. 248, s. 586-93.

\(^{55}\) AVII, NAV-T-501, r. 248, s. 586-93.
ammunition supply, and although this was not explicitly stated, to track down any leaks in case these weapons were later captured from the Chetniks or Partisans.\(^{56}\)

Commenting on the political situation in Serbia, the note moves on to the Chetnik issue. It emphasises that Nedić’s government was carefully ensuring that the-so called government-loyal Chetnik units remained active and under its control (it is unclear if the units in question were those of Kosta Pećanac, the so-called ‘legalised’ Chetniks that came from Mihailović’s organisation and remained tied to him secretly)\(^{57}\). The author points out that the Chetnik units were often unknown, full of Mihailović’s men, and were using their ‘legal’ standing with the Serbian government to train the population according to the *Krümpersystem* (used in Prussia from 1807-1812 in order to quickly train the general population for warfare); these units, however, proved quite useless in their effectiveness against ‘the bands’ (presumably the Partisans)\(^{58}\). Moreover, the note states that the Chetniks lived like idlers, plundered the local population because of the scarce supply of food, and were to be regarded as candidates for an anti-German uprising at the opportune moment, as well as the source of manpower for patching up rebels operating in the ISC. According to the author, it was now proven that a number of these Chetnik units were being rotated in and out of the ISC’s territory\(^{59}\). Thus, these government-loyal Chetnik units represented a danger (the Germans never trusted them),

\(^{56}\) AVII, NAV-T-501, r. 248, s. 586-93.
\(^{57}\) AVII, NAV-T-501, r. 248, s. 586-93.
\(^{58}\) AVII, NAV-T-501, r. 248, s. 586-93.
\(^{59}\) AVII, NAV-T-501, r. 248, s. 586-93.
and the author believed that there was no justifiable reason for these troops to exist in an occupied country.\footnote{60}

The Struggle against the Rebel Movement in the area Southeast from June to August 1942, written by the higher military archival advisor Ernst Wisshaupt\footnote{61} at the request of the German commander of the armed forces Southeast provides a historical narrative of the given period from the German perspective. Regarding the situation in Serbia and Croatia at the end of June 1941, the document noted that a large number of soldiers and officers of the defeated Yugoslav royal army (estimated at 300,000 men) remained outside of Axis captivity. The largest part of the weaponry, ammunition and military equipment also remained in the country. At the beginning of July 1941, close to the town of Arandelovac (north-east of Topola) in Serbia, armed groups appeared for the first time. The author notes that even the generals of the former Yugoslav army joined these groups. Even west of the River Drina, in Herzegovina (east of Nevesinje) rebel groups started forming in the Italian sphere of influence. The report thus gives a simultaneous timeline with regards to the rise of guerrilla groups in Serbia and Croatia (although, as other research clearly shows, the reasons for these two rebellions were quite different). The author also made no differentiation between the Chetniks and Partisans at this point, nor was there any description of the political goals of the rebels.

\footnote{60} The note added that the volunteer corps (Serbian Volunteer Corps) were better disciplined, but the author stated that, in the long term, they would likely develop along similar lines and that they should therefore be disbanded as well. The movement of Mihailović was presented as encompassing the territory of the entire former Yugoslavia, that in Serbia the movement was engaged in the recruitment of the entire civil population and organisation of its own units, and that with its supporters the movement had managed to infiltrate Nedić’s government and his armed forces as well. The movement was described as a carrier of open resistance, active in Serbia on the organisational and propaganda fronts (fully aware that in case of massive instability in Serbia it would lose its organisational base). However, the note adds that in the ISC the movement was engaged in an open struggle (although it is not defined why and against whom). Taking all this into account, the German author recommended taking steps so that both Mihailović and Nedić were without any means to engage in armed resistance; he added that it was completely inappropriate to show any trust towards Nedić’s government because ‘the Serbs are always putting their money on two cards at the time’. Moreover, the author was strongly against the establishment of the Serbian national work service; according to the author, such an organisation would transmit the ‘national-socialist ideological good’ to the Serbs, including establishing organisations with political and pre-military training. The bottom line was that the head of the SS and police in Serbia expressed (and recommended) a complete mistrust of the Serbs, including Nedić and his government (as German-created occupation tools). AVII, NAV-T-501, r. 248, s. 586-93.

\footnote{61} A copy of the original is located in AVII, Na, Reg. No. 18/1, k. 70. The original document contained 247 pages, one detailed map of the area and numerous figures and illustrations.
With regards to the uprising in Serbia, the author noted the following:

In case the help of the Serbs is not wanted, then there is only one – very radical – measure, which is to allow neighbouring nations to enter Serbia itself and to create order there once the rebels are destroyed. Such a decision, which can be made only by Berlin, would be welcomed only by Hungarians, Croats, Albanians and Bulgarians. This would have as a consequence the removal of Serbia from the German sphere of influence. This option was apparently announced to the government of Serbia, and it was explained that in case of its uprising against the German occupational troops the country would face a downpour instead of a rain.62

This document is proof that the Germans contemplated dividing occupied Serbia after the rebellion erupted there in the summer of 1941 along the same lines they had implied for dividing occupied Yugoslavia in April 1941. Even if the threat of dividing Serbia had no prior backing by Berlin (i.e. if it was only a tactical move by local German commanders in order to scare Nedić and his associates into anti-communist action), the prospects of Hungarian, Croat (especially the Ustaša), Albanian and Bulgarian troops entering Serbia must have created a powerful effect in Belgrade. Nedić and Mihailović (the latter through his contacts with Nedić’s government in Belgrade) were pushed into a fierce response against the communists in Serbia, in order to prevent the pacification of Serbia by division among the neighbouring Axis states. Thus, it is very likely that the threat of Serbia’s divisions influenced Mihailović’s attack on the communists (in order to force them out of Serbia and quiet down the uprising), i.e. this precipitated the outbreak of the civil war between the communists and the royalists.63

The Report of the Commanding General and Commander in Serbia (dated March 7th, 1943)64 provides clues on the numerical strength of the ‘legalised’ Chetnik forces in Serbia. The report comments that the Wehrmacht disarmed 12,000 men who were in the so-called ‘legalised Chetnik battalions’ during 1942; the units had been abolished (except negligible remnants). It is unclear, however, if this number includes only the ‘legalised’ units under Mihailović’s command, or if the number combines Mihailović’s legalised Chetniks with Pećanac’s Chetnik forces.

62 AVII, Na, Reg. No. 18/1, k. 70.
63 A similar threat to divide Serbia among the neighbouring Axis satellite states was apparently used by the Germans to convince Nedić to form his government in the first place.
64 AVII, NAV-T-501, r. 249, s. 60-4.
The Wehrmacht started the reorganisation of the ‘legalised’ Chetnik units on October 4th, 1942, and completed it by the end of that year (this reorganisation was a general one, encompassing all collaborationist forces in German-occupied Serbia)\(^{65}\). The ‘legalised’ Chetnik units were disbanded during the reform, and the manpower was either transferred to the Serbian State Guard, taken to prisoner of war camps or given labour tasks (in Serbia itself, or taken forcefully to factories in Germany or Norway), or simply escaped back into the woods and mountains to rejoin Mihailović’s ‘illegal’ Chetnik forces.

The remainder of the report of the operative division of the military-administrational Commander of Serbia (dated August 27th, 1943)\(^{66}\) provides detailed information regarding the various armed forces operating in Serbia – including Mihailović’s Chetniks. The German police units were described as being composed of the regular police battalions and auxiliary police battalions comprised of Volksdeutche, Russian immigrants and ‘Albans in German police uniforms’\(^{67}\). It is unclear where the latter groups operated, but most likely ethnic Albanians were employed in Serbia’s part of Kosovo (and German police uniforms were most likely distributed to them so that they would not have to carry the Serb police insignia in Albanian settlements). Members of the Serbian State Guard (SSG) were described as being dressed in dark green uniforms; according to the German assessment, they were reliable only against the communists (another sign that the Wehrmacht had no trust in Serb collaborationist forces). The border guards (Grenzwache) – a branch of the SSG (Serbian Border Guard) – were described as equally unreliable except against the communists\(^{68}\).

The document noted that Serbia was only superficially peaceful. There were two permanent rebel movements in Serbia (discussed concurrently in the document): the movement led by Mihailović and the communist movement. Mihailović’s movement was described as ‘nationalistic’, with a commanding network throughout Serbia that was

\(^{65}\) For more information on the ‘legalised’ Chetnik formations, the Wehrmacht reorganisation of the collaborationist forces in Serbia and the fate of manpower from the disbanded units see: AVII, NAV-T-312, r. 464, s. 8056660-2, s. 80507172-8; T-315, r. 2258, s. 1049-63; r. 2242, s. 412-7; Ca, Reg. No. 1/1, k. 30; Reg. No. 2/4, k. 61; Reg. No. 1/3, k. 120; Reg. No. 1/15, k. 18.

\(^{66}\) AVII, NAV-T-313, r. 174, s. 7454202-6.

\(^{67}\) AVII, NAV-T-313, r. 174, s. 7454202-6.

\(^{68}\) AVII, NAV-T-313, r. 174, s. 7454202-6.
secretly mobilising. In various Chetnik headquarters there were ‘numerous English officers’ and the supplies gained through British airdrops were increasing (by that time, the opposite was true). With regards to strategy, the document stated that Chetnik ‘bands are still refraining from open hostilities against occupation forces (because of reprisals), but they are attacking Serb Volunteer Corps, members of the Serbian administration and the communists’\textsuperscript{69}. This assessment demonstrates that German Intelligence in Serbia had a fairly accurate portrayal of the Chetnik mindset and tactical reasoning, including the effects of previous German reprisals against the Serbian civilians. The communist movement was described as a weaker force in Serbia, but where it operated it acted ‘without any compromises’ (presumably attacking the German occupation forces without regard for subsequent reprisals carried out against the civilians).

There is also a general assessment of the Serb and Muslim population in Serbia. German soldiers were cautioned that they should always be on guard with regards to the Serbs: ‘Serbs are nationalists by nature, and they constantly think about the liberation of their homeland – the only differences are with regards to the method and tempo of that struggle’. In contrast to the hostile attitude of the Serb population, ‘the Muslims living in the Novi Pazar – Kosovska Mitrovica – Podujevo area are friendly towards the Germans’\textsuperscript{70} (here, the author obviously lumped Slavic Muslims and ethnic Albanians together). This document repeats recommendations for respectful behaviour of the German armed forces towards the Muslims (including visiting mosques only when invited, not taking any pictures and not making contact with Muslim women).

**Utilizing the Enemy: ‘All Trickeries Allowed’**

A book of telegrams received by Mihailović’s headquarters (from June 29 to July 19, 1942)\textsuperscript{71} contains insights into Chetnik strategic thinking in Serbia during the second year of the war. The entry for June 29 states that the Serbian State Guard (SSG) now had some fifteen thousand men in total, and that the Germans were planning to disarm

\textsuperscript{69} AVII, NAV-T-313, r. 174, s. 7454202-6.
\textsuperscript{70} AVII, NAV-T-313, r. 174, s. 7454202-6.
\textsuperscript{71} AVII, Ca, k. 275, Reg. No. 3/1.
all ‘legal’ Chetniks. Clearly the Germans trusted the SSG more than the legalised Chetniks – the SSG was a force they had created, whereas the legalised Chetniks were an independent entity inherited by the Germans.

A number of commanders learned that the Germans were planning to disarm and abolish all legalised Chetnik formations that did not belong to Kosta Pećanac’s organisation; they asked headquarters if the legalised troops should present themselves to the Wehrmacht as part of that organisation. While the German commanders might have been tricked because they could not tell the difference, this likely would not have worked because Pećanac and his men would have been fully aware of it.

A book of telegrams sent by Mihailović’s headquarters from June 29 to August 5, 1942 reveals more details about the whole affair. The entry for June 29 (sent to code name ‘Ilijev’) stated that ‘in order to hide the existence of the troops and to prevent disarming, all trickeries are allowed. As a last resort, take Pećanac’s label’. Although this was clearly Mihailović’s directive to one of his commanders in Serbia, the statement captured the quintessential Chetnik strategic line of thinking throughout occupied Yugoslavia. Given that ‘all trickeries’ were allowed, the Chetniks entered into collaboration with German and Italian occupation troops as well as their domestic quislings in Serbia, Montenegro and the ISC; Chetnik troops under a ‘double command’ (Axis nominal command and Mihailović’s hidden command) were hiding under a variety of labels: MVAC in the Italian areas, the SSG and even Pećanac’s troops in Serbia. As a result, Mihailović, in theory, had a significant force at his disposal nominally belonging to the Axis camp, but ready to join his core ‘illegal’ troops the moment a general uprising was proclaimed.

Theoretically, this plan provided a unique formula for preserving a Chetnik ‘secret army’ right under the noses of the occupational forces; the ‘secret’ Chetnik troops were continuously fed, armed and trained by their own enemies while waiting to turn against them at the decisive moment. However, the general uprising that Mihailović envisioned – conditioned by the arrival of the western Allies – never really came; instead, the Red

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72 AVII, Ca, k. 299, Reg. No. 3/1.
73 AVII, Ca, k. 299, Reg. No. 3/1. This presumably means that the Germans had ongoing difficulty telling the two groups apart.
Army which supported the rivalling Partisans entered Yugoslavia in October 1944. Because the Allied landing did not occur, it is impossible to assess how Mihailović’s strategy would have played out. While the collaboration approach certainly preserved the men from many hardships that the ‘illegal’ Chetnik troops suffered during occupation, the political side effects both at home and abroad were devastating; the units were not completely dormant because all of them, under different labels, continued to fight the Partisans, but their combat experience was significantly less than that of the Partisans and their ‘illegal’ Chetnik counterparts.

The biggest historical unknown here is the full extent of Mihailović’s ‘secret army’ in various parts of occupied Yugoslavia and the actual strength of his network. How successful the commanders were in keeping the ‘double command’ alive in the face of Axis Intelligence, how the men in the clandestine Chetnik units would have reacted to Mihailović’s order for a general uprising and how these secret Chetnik troops would have cooperated and coordinated with each other and with the illegal Chetniks in the final stage remain unknown.

Milan Aćimović, leader of the so-called ‘Commissioner Administration’ (the first collaborationist administration in occupied Serbia, lasting until August, 29, 1941) and later Minister of Internal Affairs in Nedić’s government, explained his views about the Chetniks and his relationship with them to Mihailović’s representatives in early 1944. This valuable insight from the other side, namely Serbian collaborationists, sheds light on the Chetniks in Serbia:

With regards to my view of the people of national orientation [as opposed to communist] in the woods, I’ll give you one example: at the very beginning of the occupation, in May or June [1941], the Germans started organising one large operation in order to mop up our forests from the remnants of the Yugoslav army. The main target was Mihailović and his group. I emphasised to the Germans the futility, even the harmfulness of such an action, explaining to them that during an occupation there will always be people going to the woods and that it was better for them to come under the influence of a national and sombre man than to end up

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74 AVII, Ca, k. 18, Reg. No. 49/7.
being influenced by the communists. The Germans accepted these reasons, and the action was cancelled.

Whether Aćimović had the clout to influence the Wehrmacht in such a way is doubtful. Nevertheless, it is interesting that Aćimović (if he is to be believed) presented the Chetniks as a sort of anti-communist asset to the Wehrmacht, clearly aware that this approach was the only common ground between the two.

Whatever the case may be, Aćimović stated that Mihailović's movement and Serbia's collaborators (arguably with the sole exception of the 'Ljotićevci') were not that far apart:

I always thought that Mihailović's goal must be our goal as well. Our work should be discreetly coordinated, and there should not be a conflict. Between me and Mihailović (that is, his men) there was constant contact. There should have been a meeting between Mihailović and myself near the town of Valjevo, but this never happened because the communists cut off the road. All of this was before the creation of Nedić's government [during the Commissioner Administration].

Even so, Mihailović's movement and Aćimović's (and later Nedić's) collaborationist administration had much common ground – from fierce anti-communism, to monarchism and Serb(ian) nationalism. With the exception of the Ljotić-influenced fraction, Serbian collaborators shared a background similar to that of Mihailović and his men, and many of their views overlapped. Their cooperation against the Partisans in Serbia was logical, and their cooperation against the Axis in case of Germany's demise was also expected. Aćimović, Nedić and the men around them (again, minus the 'Ljotićevci') collaborated with the Germans but would have gladly switched sides if that had been possible. Also, Serbian collaborators wanted to keep their contacts alive and all options open in case of an Axis defeat; for them the Chetniks represented a road to potential redemption.

75 AVII, Ca, k. 18, Reg. No. 49/7.
76 AVII, Ca, k. 18, Reg. No. 49/7. Besides this statement from Aćimović, no other records point to a potential meeting. However, Nedić and Mihailović met in person during the war (in 1944), and it is possible that attempts were made to organise an Aćimović-Mihailović meeting before this; the main difficulty would be that the Chetnik-Partisan split had not occurred. After the outbreak of the civil war, Mihailović became more interested in Serbian collaborationist help.
Mihailović, for his part, undoubtedly played on Serbian collaborator fears as much as possible (as well as the shared hostility against the Partisans) in order to extract ammunition and supplies. Serbian collaborators also allowed Mihailović to ‘infiltrate’ their administration and their armed forces as part of their double-dealing strategy, and ultimately Mihailović counted on their help in a general uprising against the Germans in Serbia.

Mihailović was able to organize his resistance movement the way he initially intended throughout occupied Yugoslavia only in Serbia and partially in Montenegro – and even that was only temporary. In other areas of occupied Yugoslavia, particularly in the Independent State of Croatia where ethno-religious conflict started soon after the April War ended, his initial model was impossible to implement, given the very different circumstances and goals of the struggle. In Serbia and Montenegro, the initial model was challenged from November 1941 onwards due to the escalation of the Chetnik-Partisan civil war. Thus, the initial Chetnik strategy for occupied Yugoslavia had to be changed in response to circumstances almost as soon as it was defined, and nowhere was this discrepancy between vision and reality more evident than in the Independent State of Croatia.

The only exception until the retreat of the Chetnik troops to Slovenia at the end of the war was Dimitrije Ljotić’s-inspired Serbian Volunteer Detachments/Corps. For the German point of view see: ‘Report of the Commanding General and Commander in Serbia’ (dated March 7, 1943), AVII, NAV-T-501, r. 249, s. 60-4. The author noted that in his recent reports Mihailović had prioritised the struggle against the Serb Volunteer Corps (‘Ljotićevci’, hereafter SVC), placing the Wehrmacht itself as a lower priority. From Mihailović’s point of view, this made sense because clashes with the SVC would not lead to German reprisals against the civilians. Meanwhile, Mihailović could present himself as actively fighting the enemy, because the SVC represented a Serbian branch of the New Order, even though the historiography produced in Socialist Yugoslavia blurred the line between Mihailović’s Chetniks and Ljotić’s SVC (lumping together both groups as ‘domestic traitors’ and collaborators). Presenting Mihailović’s Chetniks and the SVC in the same category was not particularly difficult, because both groups were devoted to Serbdom and the monarchy in their rhetoric. However, the Chetniks were rooted in the pro-Western world of the interwar era, while Ljotić’s Zbor was searching for Serbia’s place in the Axis New Order; thus, the two groups were worlds apart, and the only common ground was their anti-communism (it remains unclear what views Ljotić had on the ongoing ethno-religious conflicts in the region, particularly the events taking place in the ISC, and his territorial vision for Serbia in the New Order). The report notes that the SVC had about three thousand, two hundred men under its command. It is interesting to note that the Germans noticed strained relations between the SVC and Nedić’s Serbian State Guard (hereafter SSG), mainly because of secret ties between the SSG and the Chentiks. Mihailović, in his plans for a general anti-German uprising in Serbia ‘at an opportune moment’, counted on the SSG’s defection to his side.
Chapter 3.

The Chetniks and Ethno-religious Conflict in the German Zones of the ISC during the Period of Unified Chetnik-Partisan Resistance

This chapter examines Chetnik strategy in the German zones of the Independent State of Croatia with regards to ethno-religious conflict there before the onset of the Chetnik-Partisan war. Because the Chetniks during the period of unified resistance (which lasted in the ISC until January 1942) were not yet engaged in the civil war with the Partisans, their strategic response to ethno-religious conflict was in its purest wartime form. This chapter also examines the Axis (German and Italian) response to Ustaša atrocities against the Serbs and the Serb uprising that followed, including different perspectives of the local German army commanders and the Nazi leadership in Berlin.

The Ethno-religious Conflict and Axis Reaction

The conflict between the Ustaša militia (alongside the ISC\textsuperscript{1}-affiliated Muslim militias) and the Chetniks can be placed within the overall context of the Second World War as an Axis (Ustaša alongside ISC-affiliated Muslim militias) versus Allies (Chetniks) struggle\textsuperscript{2}. This aspect of the conflict is just one facet; another way to view it is in national terms. Seen this way, the Ustaša militia acted as Croat national agents while the

\textsuperscript{1} ISC is an abbreviation of Independent State of Croatia.

\textsuperscript{2} Strictly speaking, this would be part of the resistance struggle when viewed only in this light. This issue becomes more complex when this conflict occurred with Chetnik groups legalised by the Italians or the ISC as anti-communist militia.
Chetniks acted as Serb national agents. When the regional context of this struggle is highlighted, together with the actual goals of the campaign (the expulsion and extermination of the ‘other’ while simultaneously ensuring the survival of one’s own population), it becomes evident that the ethno-religious component was much more important for the majority of both sides than the international Axis versus Allies dimension.

This same Croat versus Serb situation can also be seen through a Roman Catholic versus Eastern Orthodox lens. Both the Croat and Serb national identities were deeply rooted in and directly connected to a certain faith; thus, the conflict had strong religious overtones. As will be shown later, the Ustaša regime classified the ISC’s South Slavic population according to its religious affiliation – Roman Catholics and Muslims as Croats, Eastern Orthodox as Serbs – and directed its terror accordingly.

To the usual ‘Croats as Roman Catholics’ and ‘Serbs as Eastern Orthodox’ approach one must add the Slavic Muslims of the region; their main conflict was with the Serbs. The Ustaša regime simply proclaimed all Slavic Muslims to be Croats; if taken at face value, this would have simplified the national struggle aspect of the conflict as a two-sided Croat-Serb affair personified by Ustaša/Muslim militias versus the Chetniks. The reality was that the Muslims acted as a separate religious-based agent and that any Muslim nationality had not yet crystallised.

Setting aside the Axis versus Allies aspect of the conflict for a moment, the ethno-religious war as a label for the conflict between the Ustaša and Muslim militias against the Chetniks can be justified in the following way: it was national because it represented Croats versus Serbs, and religious because it represented Roman Catholic together with Muslim versus Eastern Orthodox.

The Axis reaction to the emergence of the Chetnik movement was complicated, and it varied in different parts of occupied Yugoslavia. German army commanders were aware that Ustaša atrocities had been the main cause of the Serb uprising in the ISC. The Wehrmacht was concerned about the Serb uprising in the ISC not only because of

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3 That being said, I am not equating Croats with Ustašas nor Serbs with Chetniks; Ustašas and Chetniks proclaimed themselves agents of Croat/Serb national interest, regardless of the overall level of popular support they had among the Croats and Serbs.
the resulting local disturbances, but also because the events west of the River Drina fed into unrest in German occupied Serbia⁴.

The German commanders made it clear that their interest in restraining atrocities in the ISC was purely pragmatic; they wanted to pacify the region merely to preserve their manpower and supplies, not because they had any sympathy towards the victims. For their part, in their contacts with the Italians and the Wehrmacht, the Chetniks always emphasised that their rebellion was initiated as a reaction to the Ustaša atrocities and not directed against the Axis powers as such⁵.

The logical course of German action in the ISC was to restrain or even disband the Ustaša militia, assuming that with its disappearance most armed Serbs in the woods and mountains would simply return to their homes. The Wehrmacht commanders had no doubts that the genocide caused the rebellion, and without the Ustašas, only small-scale guerrilla resistance was likely in the ISC. The vast majority of the rebels were Serbs who left their settlements to escape the atrocities rather than to fight against the Axis. With respect to the Partisans, the conclusion drawn by the Wehrmacht was that Serb peasants were no more likely to be communists than were Croat or Muslim peasants, and that any ideological indoctrination of the population was a miniscule factor in the entire affair as well. Rather, people were uprooted from their settlements because of the Ustaša violence, and joined whomever they came across first (Chetniks or Partisans) once they had fled.

While the Wehrmacht leaders in the ISC advocated the anti-Ustaša course of action, not out of any true compassion for the Serbs, but simply because the ongoing rebellion was a security threat for local German interests, the Nazi leadership in Berlin was not ready to remove the Ustašas from the picture. Two possible reasons for this can be hypothesised. One is the ‘who else?’ argument, which together with the ‘Ustašas are the ISC’ view, led to the rejection of Maček and his party (CPP) as the most likely choice

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⁴ Countless refugees coming into Serbia with horror stories as well as Serb armed groups under pressure crossing the River Drina into Serbia fuelled local unrest and destabilised the situation in Serbia.

⁵ In this regard, distancing or simply not acknowledging the affiliation with Mihailović who was seen by the Germans and Italians as a hostile figure until the end of the war became the norm during negotiations; sometimes this affiliation was real, at other times nominal, but it was always officially denied.
for replacement, given his overall liberal-democratic orientation. The second is the ‘Hitler as Austrian’ factor, or more specifically Hitler’s Austro-Hungarian opinions about Serbs that allowed Pavelić and the Ustašas to continue their genocidal policies and stay in power.

Hitler was of paramount importance to German ISC-related policies and views; his personal opinions overrode all other views, and these never wavered from their initial position. He was instrumental in keeping the Ustaša regime in place throughout the war, and he did not allow the Italians to occupy any additional territory in the ISC as they had intended at the end of 19416.

The local Wehrmacht leaders were aware that their proposed anti-Ustaša solution for the ISC was not going to be adopted by Berlin or, more specifically, Hitler. With that in mind, they tried to do what they could on the ground. The measures taken included the proclaiming of eastern Bosnia as a zone of military operations *indefinitely* under the direct control of the German commander in Serbia7. Concurrently, there was a move to put ISC armed forces under German command in the entire German zone of the ISC in order to limit their independent action. The Nazi wartime policy towards Serbs, such as the radically different positions of Serbs in the ISC compared to those in Serbia, was noticeably incoherent, and the local Wehrmacht commanders openly said so. Recommendations to create an overall regional policy towards the Serbs, however, came to nothing.

The Wehrmacht’s most important strategic interest in the ISC was the security of the Zagreb-Belgrade railway. The railway was – and still is – located in Slavonia, north of the River Sava, i.e. north of the region where most of the atrocities and fighting occurred, that is, Bosnia and Herzegovina. Because of these strategic realities and Berlin’s

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6 The Italians removed the Ustaša militia from the zones of occupation in 1941, the immediate effect being the end of the Serb uprising in those areas. If the Italians had been able to occupy more (or the entire territory) of the ISC, the wartime history of the region would have been very different.

7 The creation of the zone of military operations in eastern Bosnia meant that all armed forces (German and non-German) were placed under direct control of the Wehrmacht officers, thus circumventing the ISC and its policies completely. The creation of a military zone of operations in eastern Bosnia was followed by an aborted agreement with regional Chetnik commander Jezdimir Dangić and recommendations to expand Serbia’s border in the west to the River Bosna.
opposition to change, the Wehrmacht simply let events run their course, intervening only when absolutely necessary.

The German Policy of Non-interference and Its Consequences

The uprising of the Serbs in the ISC, an upheaval that made both guerrilla movements possible, was a direct reaction to the Ustaša atrocities against the Serb civilian population. The reasons why the Serbs took up arms in the ISC were clear to the Axis forces, as will be demonstrated through a later review of their reports. However, German occupation forces decided upon a policy of non-interference which allowed events to escalate unchecked. While the German policy of non-interference helped save its manpower and resources in the short term, it proved problematic for local German strategic goals in the longer term because it prevented the pacification of the entire area. German reports also clearly indicated a discrepancy in views between local German commanders and the Berlin leadership. While the latter advocated a hard line, local German commanders were poised to adopt solutions that could have potentially solved or at least considerably deflated the conflict but were prevented from so doing by Berlin.

In the German-controlled zones of the ISC, the ethno-religious conflict escalated quickly, erupting into war by the early summer of 1941. The report of the ABWER command in Belgrade (dated August 8, 1941) about the uprising in occupied Yugoslavia said the following:

In Bosnia and Lika (the territory to the southwest of Zagreb) [the uprising is], according to all available reports, a reaction of the local Serb population to bloody and inhuman measures of extermination by the Croat Ustašas. This resistance movement by the Serb population, in the areas mentioned (which in part belong to Croatia, and in part to Italy) are partially supported by segments of the Croat population that do not approve the present Croat government. These are in part Maček’s supporters, and in part leftist radicals⁸.

⁸ AVII, NAV-T-501, r. 267, s. 880-1.
Clearly, the German military authorities were aware both locally and on the leadership level of the main causes of the uprising; the fact that they did nothing of substance to prevent it is significant.

The report describes the Chetnik movement as: ‘a purely national Serb fighting movement within the Hajduk tradition which is embedded in the population, led by military figures and organised by former officers’9. The report also has a separate section about ‘Croat-Bosnian territory’, where it once again categorised the rebel movement as directed against the Ustaša government (yet again directly linking the policies of the Ustašas and the uprising). Concerning the communists, the German report noted that their actions started after the commencement of the German-Russian war10, and noted that there was a unified (Communist-Chetnik) leadership11.

In its concluding remarks, the report directly states the reasons for the ongoing uprising in the territory of the Independent State of Croatia:

[T]he realisation that the criminal Ustašas in Bosnia and Herzegovina will rob them, expel them, slaughter them together with their women and children, or that they will lose their lives and properties from the bandit elements or as a random object of German retribution, brought even the peaceful, politically indifferent and loyal parts of the Serb population into an embittered and desperate state which is forcing them into the ranks of any rebel group.12

In short, as this report makes clear, the Germans were fully aware of the causes of the disturbances.

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9 AVII, NAV-T-501, r. 267, s. 880-1. The report states that the Chetniks in the region of historic Sandžak of Novi Pazar came into conflict with the ethnic Albanian gendarmerie north of Kosovska Mitrovica. The Germans recruited ethnic Albanians for the local gendarmerie in parts of Kosovo and Sandžak of Novi Pazar that were allocated to occupied Serbia.

10 AVII, NAV-T-501, r. 267, s. 880-1. A note on banditry appears at the end of the report. At this time, due to the complete breakdown of state and social order, armed groups of men lived by plunder, completely uninterested in political and ideological matters. In essence, these groups were resurrections of traditional Balkan banditry – the Hajduci – in its purest form. Independent from existing structures and from each other, these brigand groups sometimes represented themselves to the local population as Chetniks or Partisans, but they were neither. See: Dedijer, Vladimir. Dnevnik, Volume I, p. 3 and Čolaković, Rodoljub. Zapis iz oslobođenog rata, pp. 158, 250-251.

11 AVII, NAV-T-501, r. 267, s. 880-1.
The record of the advisory conference between the German General in Zagreb and the representative of the Commander of Serbia, held on August 12, 1941, concerning ways of putting down the uprising in the Independent State of Croatia, provides further clues about the ethno-religious conflict and the German responses to it. According to the document, the Führer’s directive was that the Croats must resolve their internal tensions on their own. In essence, the ethno-religious conflict was not the business of the German armed forces, and German units should act only where security, supplies, communication lines and the reputation of Wehrmacht units were threatened. This meant that the ethno-religious war, undoubtedly present because of German political decisions, was (according to Hitler) something that was happening independently from and outside the interests of German occupational forces:

Present disturbances in Croatia are caused by frictions between Croats and Serbs, which are very difficult to tell apart, practically only by religious affiliation. The Ustašas, nurtured in Italy, engulfed with the most intense hatred towards the Serbs, have become the main source of trouble for the country. With their arbitrary persecution of everything that is Serb, they cause large unrest in the country. The population, which is defending itself, have kept the old weapons of the Yugoslav royal army. We are hoping that these wild activities will be constrained by the authorities, and that the unbearable expulsion of the Serb population from Croatia will stop in the future.

No German action was recommended, an obvious compliance with Hitler’s wishes.

German comments on and insights into the ethno-religious war and atrocities in the Independent State of Croatia can sometimes be found in unexpected places, such as a report by Arthur Hefner, the officer responsible for transport and attached to the German General in Zagreb, written for German Intelligence Service [ABWER] (dated August 27, 1941). Hefner’s ‘Report Regarding the Political Situation in the Croat State’ demonstrates how the ethno-religious conflict prevented the pacification of the region,
and that this was in the overall German interest. To Hefner, it was clear that the Croat government did not have enough troops to quash the rebellion in Bosnia and Herzegovina; it was equally obvious to him that the ‘Serb population, which escaped into the woods because of numerous Ustaša atrocities’ should be called to return to their villages (which had been plundered and burned by the Ustašas) and surrender their weapons, receiving guarantees of safety in return\textsuperscript{17}.

Any attempts to pacify Serbs with promises fell on deaf ears because the Serbs refused to trust the Ustaša government ‘whose members for months openly call for the complete eradication of the Serbs, who have lived in those regions for centuries’\textsuperscript{18}. The directness of the Hefner report is further proof that the Germans were fully aware of the intents of the Ustaša regime, the atrocities happening on the ground and the reactions of the targeted populations. Hefner says:

The Ustaša regime in the very beginning made an unforgivable mistake by overlooking the fact that the Croat state within its present borders is comprised of multiple nationalities, and that within it the Croats represent barely fifty percent of the population, while the Serbs comprise thirty percent of the population. This fact could not be changed by attempts, which are without any foundation, to proclaim the Muslims – which represent twelve percent of the population – as Croats. The belief that a Croat national state could be created by force is a mistake\textsuperscript{19}.

He adds that only the Italians were reaping benefits from this ‘unrealistic policy’; they were using conflict between the Serbs and the Croats and Muslims for their own political ends in the region\textsuperscript{20}.

Of the ethno-religious conflict, Hefner says:

The results of the unreal policy of the Ustaša regime are disastrous. It is claimed that there are already two hundred thousand Serb victims of the savage behaviour of the Ustašas. Whether or not this number is too high

\textsuperscript{17} AVII, NAV-T-501, r. 265, s. 000286-7. German sources note the internal tensions between the Croat army and the Ustaša militia, something that continued until the end of the war; the Ustašas refused to grant army officers the power to influence internal policies, including those towards the Serbs; the call to surrender had to come from the Ministry of Internal Affairs.

\textsuperscript{18} AVII, NAV-T-501, r. 265, s. 000286-7.

\textsuperscript{19} AVII, NAV-T-501, r. 265, s. 000286-7.

\textsuperscript{20} AVII, NAV-T-501, r. 265, s. 000286-7. Hefner also noted that the Italians had no real means of securing peace and order.
or too low is something that can be ascertained only in the future. However, it is already proven that the Ustašas have murdered a large part of the male Eastern Orthodox population in towns in Bosnia and Herzegovina where the Eastern Orthodox used to be in the majority. Now rebel Serbs are doing the same with Croats and Muslims, destroying their villages in the same way the Ustašas were destroying Serb villages\textsuperscript{21}.

This remark captures the essence of the ethno-religious war, the root cause of the Serb uprising (ethno-religious violence rather than occupation itself) and the vengeful ‘eye for an eye’ tactics employed by the Serb rebels. Hefner adds that any attempts by the Croat government to explain Ustaša atrocities as a ‘destruction of the communist mob’ should not be trusted, because Serb peasants were no more inclined to support communism then Croat peasants\textsuperscript{22}. Hefner concludes that the communists and other elements hostile to the Germans used the desperation of the local population for recruitment, adding that without Ustaša crimes no propaganda could win over Serb peasantry to fight for life or death for communist goals\textsuperscript{23}.

At the end of his report, Hefner recommends that the Reich must realise that German soldiers should be sacrificed only for German ideals and interests, not to shore up an unsustainable regime\textsuperscript{24}. Ninety percent of the local population, he says, regardless of their nationality, had agreed that the only solution was a complete German takeover of the entire country and the imposition of martial law\textsuperscript{25}. The Ustaša regime had completely backfired in the political sphere, causing chaos on the economic front\textsuperscript{26}. He concludes with the following:

\textbf{[T]he attacks of the Serbs on German forces in Serbia are surely caused by propaganda claims that the Reich is approving the atrocities of the Ustaša regime committed against the Serbs...on the other hand, that same propaganda is causing many Croats to join the Ustašas for...}
opportunistic reasons, believing that the German state guarantees the militia’s survival\textsuperscript{27}.

Hefner’s report illustrates the dichotomous German views of the ethno-religious violence in the Independent State of Croatia. On the one hand, German commanders constantly complained about Ustaša atrocities and the subsequent Serb uprising. On the other hand, Hitler supported the Ustaša regime and gave Pavelić the go-ahead for his anti-Serb course. The army generals were fully aware of the problem, but Hitler had the last word.

\textbf{The Initial Chetnik Strategy in Eastern Bosnia}

The earliest Chetnik reports from this region indicate that the first action was directed against the Ustaša militia within the context of the ethno-religious war, rather than against the German occupation forces (civil war with the Partisans was not yet on the horizon). At the same time, Nedić’s regime in Serbia was seen as both an asset and competitor for the national cause by the local Chetnik leadership.

A report by the Commander of the ‘Boško Jugović’ Chetnik unit, Major Boško P. Todorović, to Mihailović (September 2, 1941)\textsuperscript{28} is devoted to the military situation in eastern Bosnia and the Chetnik relationship with the collaborationist government in Belgrade. It states that the enemy was completely passive with the exception of the Ustašas, and that the Muslims were ready to surrender their weapons in exchange for good treatment\textsuperscript{29}. Todorović demanded fifty to one hundred officers for organising new units in the region (including penetrating deep into Bosnia). The lack of officers, most of whom ended up in POW camps in the aftermath of the April War, was a constant source of frustration for the Chetniks, who believed that professionally-trained military leadership was essential for the movement. By way of contrast, among the Partisans, successful guerrilla resistance was led mostly by individuals who were not professional soldiers\textsuperscript{30}.

\textsuperscript{27} AVII, NAV-T-501, r. 265, s. 000286-7.
\textsuperscript{28} AVII, Ca, k. 170, reg. No. 7/1.
\textsuperscript{29} AVII, Ca, k. 170, reg. No. 7/1.
\textsuperscript{30} AVII, Ca, k. 170, reg. No. 7/1.
With respect to national policy, Todorović says: ‘It is very important for Serbdom to achieve an Ustaša-free Bosnia through Chetnik military action before our semi-free government in Belgrade achieves the incorporation of Bosnia into Serbia by diplomatic means’ 31. This statement is both naïve and telling. Todorović’s belief that Nedić’s government could achieve Serbia’s territorial expansion by diplomatic means was unrealistic, to say the least. Nevertheless, if he managed it, the feat would boost his popularity and diminish Mihailović’s at the stroke of a pen32 and this clearly bothered Todorović.

Some of the report’s terminology is intriguing. While the general population should be informed that the time had not yet come for offensive action in Serbia, in Bosnia it was time to fight to achieve ‘semi-freedom and incorporation into a semi-free Serbia’33. The Chetniks were evidently more flexible than the uncompromising communist Partisans. For them, ‘semi-freedom’ meant an Ustaša-free Bosnia (given that the Germans could not be defeated at that time), and Nedić’s ‘semi-free’ Serbia was seen as an asset rather than the enemy’s creation. For the Chetniks, unlike the Partisans, there were many possible courses of action and combinations right from the outset.

The Chetnik willingness to entertain different possibilities is evident in the section of the report devoted to the practical matters of organising the anti-Ustaša struggle in Bosnia. Stating that Pećanac’s Chetniks who by that time had reached an agreement with the German occupational authorities would now take over the role of protecting the population by fighting the communists and criminal bands in Serbia (something that Mihailović’s forces had been doing until that point), Todorović recommended that all Serbian Chetniks who were now free should come to Bosnia and join the cause there34. He also recommended sending Serbian Chetniks from their local duties to Macedonia (‘Southern Serbia’). Given that the civil war with the Partisans was not yet happening

31 AVII, Ca, k. 170, reg. No. 7/1.
32 Needless to say, any expansion of Nedić Serbia’s borders to the west would automatically remove the Ustaša militia from those regions.
33 AVII, Ca, k. 170, reg. No. 7/1.
34 AVII, Ca, k. 170, reg. No. 7/1.
and any struggle against the Germans was deemed premature, Todorović was clearly preparing for an ethno-religious war in eastern Bosnia.

**Different Approaches within the Axis Camp**

The spread of the ethno-religious war in the ISC complicated the situation for the Wehrmacht forces, with conditions worsening as 1941 came to a close. At the critical moment when every Wehrmacht unit was needed on the Eastern Front, the intensity of the conflict was growing in the ISC. The situation could not be resolved because of German political unwillingness, even though this ran contrary to Germany’s longer-term strategic interests. Letting the ethno-religious conflict run on meant feeding both guerrilla movements with manpower; this led to large-scale military operations that required additional Wehrmacht troops that could have been better utilised in other operational theatres. In this way, the German political leadership was, so to speak, shooting its own military in the foot. Atrocities in the ISC also fed the uprising in Serbia, and large military operations against the (still combined) Chetnik-Partisan forces in Serbia fed the uprising in eastern Bosnia as guerrilla units fled west across the River Drina. To make things even more complicated, documents show that the Germans and Italians had different regional policies on the whole situation and were not harmonious in their views as Axis partners.

German military reports continued to document the ethno-religious war in the ISC. ‘The Struggle Against the Rebel Movement in the Southeast Area from June 1941 to August 1942’, written by the higher military archival advisor Ernst Wisshaupt at the request of the commander of the armed forces Southeast provides a historical narrative of the period from the German perspective. Section IV of the report is entitled ‘The Spread of Guerrilla War in Bosnia from August to December 1941’. Wisshaupt notes that the situation faced by the new Croat state is worsening for the following reason:

> [T]he Croats wanted to rule in their young state by the principle of a one-nation state. However, it is true that sometimes, among the influential

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35 Copy of the original located in AVII, Na, Reg. No. 18/1, k. 70. The original document has two hundred and forty-seven pages, a detailed map of the area and numerous figures and illustrations.

36 This section also contained a map.
people in Zagreb, the realisation came that the new Croatia was not some kind of one-nation state, but a state of multiple nations\textsuperscript{37}.

More specifically, two million Serbs were living in disjointed regions, and the Croat state neither was able nor wanted to establish a cordial relationship with its national minorities. The report portrays Ante Paveli\v{c} as less radical than his associates, trying to redefine the state along class lines, including the recognition of equality of the Eastern Orthodox segment of the population. However, these attempts were futile. Wisshaupt notes the religious aspect of the problem: "besides the national tensions there was also the religious intolerance of the Roman Catholic Croats towards the Eastern Orthodox and Muslim citizens in Bosnia"\textsuperscript{38}. Here as elsewhere, the German analysis establishes Ustaša atrocities as the main cause of the uprising in the ISC:

Persecution of the Serbs by the Ustaša troops became the main reason for the rebel movement, which soon engulfed the entire country...There are constantly new reports about Ustaša atrocities, murders and plundering, which immediately causes further spreading of the rebel movement in the regions threatened by the Ustaša\textsuperscript{39}.

The report contains a chronological overview of the struggle against the rebels from August to October 1941. According to German observations ‘armed bands’ appeared in Bosnia in significant numbers for the first time in mid-August 1941; these bands were local in character, but after the German onslaught on the rebels in Serbia many units crossed into Bosnia in order to avoid destruction. The crossing of these armed bands from Serbia into Bosnia started in late August 1941, fuelling the uprising in Bosnia.

The report has a chronology of Italian actions during this time as well. On October 9, 1941, the strong Italian forces of the Italian 2\textsuperscript{nd} Army (under the command of General Ambrozio) reoccupied Italian Zone 3 all the way to the German-Italian demarcation line. The German General in Zagreb was alarmed by this Italian move, because he was concerned that the Chetniks would end up in the German occupied part of the ISC instead of being surrounded and captured by the advancing Italian columns.

\textsuperscript{37} AVII, Na, Reg. No. 18/1, k. 70.  
\textsuperscript{38} AVII, Na, Reg. No. 18/1, k. 70.  
\textsuperscript{39} AVII, Na, Reg. No. 18/1, k. 70.
If this were to happen, the incoming Chetniki would strengthen those already operating in the German sphere, thereby increasing the threat to the Banja Luka-Prijedor and Banja Luka-Sarajevo railways. Interestingly, Wisshaupt notes that many Montenegrin Chetnik leaders left for Albania where the local population accepted them; the concern was that they might create a large anti-Italian uprising in the spring.40

Returning to the theme of Bosnia, Wisshaupt says that a large influx of rebels crossed from Serbia at the beginning of October 1941, the start of the main German operations against the combined Chetnik-Partisan forces in Serbia. Thus, the Chetnik movement covered the entire territory between the River Sava and German-Italian demarcation line in the ISC. The numerically weak German forces in Bosnia did not have the strength to deal with the rebel issue and the usefulness of the Croat armed forces was diminishing.41

The report discusses the behaviour of the Italians in eastern Bosnia, particularly their relationship with the Croat armed forces. Noting the example of Višegrad, a town in eastern Bosnia that was in the German occupation zone, Wisshaupt states that the Croat armed forces asked for the help of the Italian army in their struggle against the rebels because the German forces were not available. Once the commander of the German forces Southeast approved the Italian presence in the German occupation zone (so that they could relieve besieged Croat armed forces), the Italians moved in. However, when they entered Višegrad on November 8, 1941, the Italians ordered the Croat armed forces to leave42.

Wisshaupt devotes a section of his report to the Croat Armed Forces. He estimates the strength of the Croat Armed Forces at the end of 1941 as the following. The Domobrani forces (regular military) comprised of forty-six battalions were organised in six divisions, subdivided into three corps. There were fifteen battalions of Ustaša militia, plus one mountain battery; the Poglavljenik’s personal guard consisted of one infantry regiment and one squadron, and there were four special battalions: the railway

40 AVII, Na, Reg. No. 18/1, k. 70.
41 AVII, Na, Reg. No. 18/1, k. 70.
42 AVII, Na, Reg. No. 18/1, k. 70.
security and Volksdeutsche units\textsuperscript{43}. He notes that the armaments of the Croat army came exclusively from Germany, from the cache of weapons captured from defeated countries, but the Italian supply was less impressive. The battle morale of the Domobrani forces was low, he says, including the refusal to fight in the war ‘for whose outbreak and spreading the primary responsibly lies with the savagery of the hated Ustašas’\textsuperscript{44}. If Wisshaupt’s assessment of the Domobrani behaviour is correct, it indicates that large segments of the regular ISC army had anti-Ustaša leanings: they ended up entangled in a large-scale guerrilla war that came about as a direct result of Ustaša atrocities.

The next segment of the report is devoted to the continuation of the guerrilla war in Bosnia from October to December 1941. Simply stated, the guerrilla war continued because the Chetniks kept crossing the border from Serbia. Wisshaupt notes that the main obstacle to solving the Chetnik issue was the presence of the Italians; he quotes General Gles von Horstenau who reported that in the Italian Zone 3 (after October 9, 1941), in towns like Bihać and Mostar, one could see Italian commanders and Chetnik leaders engaged in friendly conversations, strolling in the main town squares\textsuperscript{45}. Coming from the neighbouring hills and mountains, the rebels would enter towns to buy supplies in the local shops – sometimes with an armed Italian escort – returning unopposed once the purchases had been made. Wisshaupt also quotes Horstenau as saying that the Italian hostile stance towards the Ustaša regime was also seen through other measures which are ‘approved of by the local Croat population’, thus paralysing the Ustaša\textsuperscript{46}. The Chetniks, for their part, showed their gratitude to the Italians by allowing them to travel through the Chetnik-controlled regions without harassment. In the report cited by Wisshaupt (November 21, 1941) Horstenau said that there had been no reports of Chetnik-Italian fighting for a long time. Clearly, the Italian compromise with the Chetniks was a source of frustration for the Germans, and especially infuriating to the ISC’s Ustaša leadership. Horstenau complained that the Italians had nine divisions in their occupational zones of the ISC, but that they had no intentions to use their strength to

\textsuperscript{43} AVII, Na, Reg. No. 18/1, k. 70.
\textsuperscript{44} AVII, Na, Reg. No. 18/1, k. 70.
\textsuperscript{45} AVII, Na, Reg. No. 18/1, k. 70.
\textsuperscript{46} AVII, Na, Reg. No. 18/1, k. 70.
deal with the Chetniks. His conclusion was that the position of the Italian occupational troops in the ISC was ‘completely Serbophilic’ 47.

Numerous German documents demonstrate tension, competition and an incompatibility between the German and Italian strategic approaches in the ISC. Local ethno-religious groups were caught in the middle of this ‘intense’ 48 relationship which created both challenges and opportunities. German commanders were aware of the successes of the local Italian policies, but even if they had wanted to adopt a similar course, their hands were tied due to lack of flexibility in Berlin. Generally speaking, the Italian policy in the ISC was far more flexible, dynamic and imaginative than the German one – and arguably more successful. The Italians succeeded in their divide and conquer approach by playing local Serbs against Croats and Chetniks against the Partisans in the ISC, preserving their own manpower in the process.

The ‘Report of the Intelligence Section of the Command of Armed Forces in the Southeast to the Supreme Command of the Wehrmacht’ on the military and political situation in occupied Yugoslavia (November 2, 1941) provides statistical information about the region 49. The second part of the report is devoted to the overview of the situation in the Independent State of Croatia. At the time of writing, the borders of the ISC were still not completely defined 50. The entire territory of the ISC was divided into German and Italian occupation zones, and as mentioned above, the relationship between the two occupying powers was ‘intense’. There is also a statistical overview of the population; the population of the ISC is estimated at roughly five million citizens, around two million of these being Serbs 51.

A list of problems and disturbances to normal operations follows, two principal causes of these being the Ustašas and the uprising of the persecuted Serbs 52. A

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47 AVII, Na, Reg. No. 18/1, k. 70.
48 AVII, NAV-T-312, r. 454, s. 8039155-73.
49 AVII, NAV-T-312, r. 454, s. 8039155-73.
50 AVII, NAV-T-312, r. 454, s. 8039155-73. The report states that after the Serbian handover of Zemun on October 10, 1941, the ICS’s borders were finalised. However, the question of Medjimurje was not settled because Hungarian troops were occupying the region and the ICS was claiming it.
51 AVII, NAV-T-312, r. 454, s. 8039155-73.
52 AVII, NAV-T-312, r. 454, s. 8039155-73.
separate part of the report devoted to the Ustašas explains the political side of the movement which grew out of the party and the Ustaša militia; further, the Ustašas are described as ‘fanatical enemies of the Serbs’. ‘After Dr. Pavelić came to power’, the report says, ‘the movement acquired a bad reputation due to the uncontrollable practices by numerous Ustašas, primarily against the Serbs’. In a subsection devoted to the ‘Jewish and Serb questions’ in the Independent State of Croatia, the author notes that tension had always existed between Roman Catholic Croats and Eastern Orthodox Serbs. As a consequence:

The young Croat state issued with the greatest speed laws modelled on the Nuremberg Jewish laws, equally applied to Jews and Serbs. This led to the most severe persecution of the Serbs, and turned into a religious war against the Eastern Orthodox Church. Thousands of Serbs were expelled across the [Serbian] border and all their property was plundered in the process.

Evidently German Intelligence recognized the religious component of the ethno-religious conflict.

The last part of the report discusses the insurgency:

The reasons for the uprising are, in part, artificially heightened bitterness against the Serbs, the communists and British agitation...the uprising is being stirred up by the undisciplined Ustaša units, Serb and communist bands. The uprising is fed by atrocities committed by both sides....

Again, a local German report identifies the atrocities and the subsequent ethno-religious war as the main reason for guerrilla activity. Interestingly, the Italians are given credit for their policies in their own occupational zones; with the arrival of numerous Italian divisions (the reoccupation of Italian Zones 2 and 3) things became more peaceful. The fact that the Italians removed the Ustaša militia from these areas and made agreements with the Chetniks along the way is not mentioned, however.

53 AVII, NAV-T-312, r . 454, s. 8039155-73.
54 AVII, NAV-T-312, r . 454, s. 8039155-73.
55 AVII, NAV-T-312, r . 454, s. 8039155-73.
56 AVII, NAV-T-312, r . 454, s. 8039155-73.
57 AVII, NAV-T-312, r . 454, s. 8039155-73.
**Internal ISC Tensions: Problems without a Solution**

German documents betray pessimism regarding the ISC’s conflict with its Serb population. Analytically speaking and due to the unwillingness to drastically change policy, the conflict was presented as a problem without a solution. The Wehrmacht’s response to the situation in the ISC was to come up with a narrow definition of the German strategic interests in the ISC, and then let events run their course.

The ‘Report of the Operative Division of the Authorised Commander in Serbia regarding the Military and Political Situation in Serbia and the ISC’ (December 5, 1941) provides additional insight into the German understanding of the Chetnik movement in both regions at the time. Part of the report analyzes the situation in the Independent State of Croatia. The assessment recognizes that the difficult situation in the ISC stemmed from the fact that there were ‘barely fifty percent Croats’ in the entire country and more than two million Serbs. At the moment of writing, the Croat state had not been able to (in fact not even tried to) establish a tolerant relationship with the national minorities. This report, like others, identifies atrocities as the main cause of disturbances in the ISC:

The main reason for the spread of the insurgent movement on the Croat territories are Ustaša persecutions of the Serbs, as well as the insurgents that escaped from Serbia into Croatia because of the German actions. In the spring, a wide uprising in Croatia is to be expected, and this will without doubt cause trouble for Serbia’s territory as well.

And like other reports, although it identifies the cause of the problems, this report fails to suggest solutions.

The report’s conclusion spells out the principal German strategic interest in the region, namely, protecting the Zagreb-Belgrade railway running through the Slavonia

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58 AVII, NAV-T-501, r. 246, s. 628-30.
59 AVII, NAV-T-501, r. 246, s. 628-30.
60 AVII, NAV-T-501, r. 246, s. 628-30.
61 AVII, NAV-T-501, r. 246, s. 628-30.
62 In all fairness, it is likely that author’s job was to record the situation, not to recommend a solution.
In the writer’s view, to secure this important transport thoroughfare and line of communication only five German battalions were needed (with the help of the local Croat forces). This strategic assessment is important to understand why the Ustaša’s ethno-religious atrocities continued – and the Serb armed revolt that followed – with the Germans merely looking on. German occupation authorities had limited strategic interest in the area; the Zagreb-Belgrade railway was located in Slavonia north of the River Sava (north of Bosnia and Herzegovina, where in 1941 most of the ethno-religious atrocities and rebellion took place), and the German army was not interested in utilising men and resources to stifle regional ethno-religious violence. Given that the Nazi regime was not driven by any humanitarian considerations, atrocities and war could continue unchecked as long as the main German strategic points (or troops) were not in harm’s way.

In a December 1941 report to the Supreme Command of the Wehrmacht, Colonel Rössler, commander of the armed forces in the southeast, commented on the situation in eastern Bosnia. In his report, Rössler asked the Supreme Command to appoint a German commander to quell the uprising. To achieve this goal, the commander would need the authority to issue orders to German, Italian and Croat troops engaged in the struggle against the insurgents. He recommended the complete demilitarisation of the region, or rather the disarmament of all individuals and organisations, including all Ustašas, who did not belong to the armed forces or regular police forces. While the report does not explicitly state why the Ustašas should be disarmed, they are the only group to be specifically mentioned in the report. Clearly the author saw the Ustaša militia as the main culprit behind the ethno-religious atrocities in the region and, as a consequence, the ongoing rebellion of the local population.

The tactic could have pacified the region and, if expanded, might have pacified the entire German ISC zone, with the sole exception of the communist guerrilla forces. Most of the rebels in the ISC were local Serb civilians who were escaping persecution.

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63 AVII, NAV-T-501, r. 246, s. 628-30.
64 AVII, NAV-T-501, r. 246, s. 628-30.
65 AVII, NAV-T-312, r. 465, s. 8053707-11.
66 AVII, NAV-T-312, r. 465, s. 8053707-11.
67 AVII, NAV-T-312, r. 465, s. 8053707-11.
68 AVII, NAV-T-312, r. 465, s. 8053707-11.
and the vast majority would have probably returned to their villages if the threat to their lives and properties had been removed. The exceptions were the tightly controlled Partisan forces.

Besides the Berlin leadership, the ISC had local allies, such as Zigfrid Kasche, Germany’s official representative to the ISC. With this support, the Ustaša regime remained in power until the end of the war. German wartime documents demonstrate that local commanders saw their areas of responsibility as their local ‘fiefdoms’, something that placed the local commanders in Belgrade and Zagreb at odds and complicated the situation on the ground even further.

Zigfrid Kasche was a passionate supporter of the Ustaša regime. In a letter to Harold Turner, the chief of military headquarters in Serbia, dated January 1942, Kasche says the following:

The Croats are a nation that...is proving that it cannot be even considered Slavic... it is not reacting to Pan-Slavic, Russian-supported, tendencies...such Croatia, on April 10, 1941, with the Führer’s blessing, became an independent state. The Führer and the Reich accepted the Poglavnik [Ante Pavelić] and the Ustašas as the ruling force. These forces represented the thought of national freedom; some, including the Poglavnik, had many political ideas that corresponded to our own. Many of those sharing ideas were [Pavelić’s] supporters – terrorists and rebels, as we would call them. After coming to power, they ruled in their own way. This type of rule in many cases should be condemned as deeply unacceptable. I do agree that on many fronts their activities ended up being harmful to the Croat state and the Croat people as a whole. However, better forces could not be found. Maček’s party was a democratic-liberal creation.69

This statement comes close to openly criticizing Ustaša policies, but there is an apologetic tone. Rather than portraying the uprising in the ISC as a reaction to the Ustaša policies, Kasche emphasises foreign influence, calling the British and Yugoslav army officers who were airdropped into the region instigators.70 He adds that the rebels skilfully played one Axis force against another.71 Seeking an advantage, they might

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69 AVII, NAV-T-501, r. 250, s. 585-93.
70 AVII, NAV-T-501, r. 250, s. 585-93.
71 AVII, NAV-T-501, r. 250, s. 585-93.
temporarily lean towards Germany or Italy, but they remained enemies of both. Because of this, and because of ‘the historical truth’, Kasche argues against ‘the thesis that the entire blame is on the Ustaša side’. His wording indicates that this opinion was widespread in German circles; other sources cited here show the same thing.

A common theme in the German wartime documents is the tension between the so-called ‘Belgrade Germans’ and the ‘Zagreb Germans’. This tension made it difficult to adopt a policy on the ethno-religious war in the ISC. A number of German commanders suggested in early 1942 that the best course of action in eastern Bosnia – an area of severe ethno-religious conflict at the time – was to change the local borders. Eastern Bosnia between the Rivers Drina and Bosna could be excluded from the ISC and given to Nedić’s Serbia, and Chetniks from the region (led by Major Jezdimir Dangić) could be utilised to pacify the region and rid it of the Partisans. Although the proposal was a non-starter because it would never have been approved by Berlin, it provides a number of valuable insights into the German view of the Chetniks in the region.

The fact that the Germans were considering utilising the Chetniks by binding them to Nedić, and that the Chetniks were responsive to this, demonstrates that Chetnik motivation was national above anything else. If the price of reducing the ISC borders meant some kind of formal agreement with the Germans (and Nedić), the Chetniks were willing to pay it regardless of what that meant in the overall context of resistance to the Axis, simply because such a development would serve the Serb national cause at that instant. And as has been pointed out, the Chetniks were first and foremost a Serb national royalist force.

In many ways, the interplay between German commanders and administrators in Belgrade and those in Zagreb took the form of regional rivalry between different fiefdoms of the same kingdom, with each group defending its own satellite creation and filling up the local power vacuum by becoming local rulers competing for power and influence. In this context, Kasche (cited previously) criticised Milan Nedić’s puppet regime in neighbouring Serbia and its attempts to expand the territory of Serbia into Bosnia, west

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72 AVII, NAV-T-501, r. 250, s. 585-93.
73 AVII, NAV-T-501, r. 250, s. 585-93.
of the River Drina in order to win legitimacy in the eyes of the Serb people. Kasche, from his perspective in Zagreb, seeing the ISC as a ‘fiefdom’ of his own, passionately opposes this development in the following:

Extending Serbia into eastern Bosnia would hand over more Croat Muslims than the Eastern Orthodox. In such a case these Muslims, whom the rebels have already killed or expelled in their thousands, would all suffer this ultimate fate. In Croatia, as well as in the entire Islamic world, the consequences would be of the worst kind.

Kasche goes on to give an overview of the latest religious developments in the ISC:

A few days ago the Poglavnik decided to put a stop to the attempts to convert [the Eastern Orthodox] to Roman Catholicism. He cannot allow the Serb Orthodox Church to exist in these regions. However, he will create an Orthodox church in Croatia [i.e. The Croat Orthodox Church] in order to reopen churches for the Eastern Orthodox...in the new Sabor [Parliament] a few Orthodox will be represented as well.

This refers to an attempt by the Ustaša regime to create a Croat Orthodox Church by confiscating properties of the Serb Orthodox Church and utilising non-Serb Orthodox priests (such as Russian émigrés). Interestingly, Kasche’s use of religious terminology in his report is similar to the terminology used in Croat reports.

The ‘Report by the Authorised Commander in Serbia to the Commander of the Armed Forces Southeast regarding the Situation in Eastern Bosnia’ (January 27, 1942) provides a number of insights into the Chetniks and the nature of the rebellion in the region. The report estimates that there were ten thousand Chetniks under Major Jezdimir Dangić’s command and some three thousand ‘communists’ in the theatre of

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74 AVII, NAV-T-501, r. 250, s. 585-93.
75 AVII, NAV-T-501, r. 250, s. 585-93. Interestingly enough, German reports from Bulgarian-occupied Yugoslav Macedonia record abuses of the Turkish minority (including constraints on their religious freedoms); these violations would most likely have had a more negative impact on the Muslim world – primarily Turkey – than events in Bosnia and Herzegovina. However, Macedonia was outside of Kasche’s area of influence and concern.
76 AVII, NAV-T-501, r. 250, s. 585-93.
77 The head of the COC was Germogen, a Russian émigré.
78 AVII, NAV-T-501, r. 247, s. 783-6.
The Chetnik formations are described as well dressed (albeit not all in uniform) and armed with rifles and machine guns; the report says four cannons were captured by Chetnik forces. It notes their will to fight and expresses confidence that they will ultimately succeed.

The report includes some operating details. Chetnik units, it says, appeared only when called up. Otherwise, the men were dispersed in local settlements as peaceful residents. It acknowledges that some of Dangić’s units were instructed not to resist the Germans, leading four hundred men to surrender without struggle. More generally, the rebels successfully avoided contact with advancing German forces, using the vast inaccessible terrain to melt away into local villages. Croat troops were unable to prevent this, and renewed rebel action against the Croat troops could be expected to commence again soon. According to the German commanders on the ground, the local population remained friendly towards the German troops, and in certain areas, the population was quite concerned about the imminent departure of the German soldiers and the arrival of the Croat troops, fearful that Croats will continue with atrocities. According to our troop reports, this has already started again.

This report indicates that the Serb uprising in this part of the ISC came as a reaction to the atrocities of the Ustašas, and that the Ustaša militia was the main enemy of the insurgents. Ironically, the German troops were perceived as a symbol of security by the local population, because they potentially could restrain or even break the cycle of violence. The report recommends a permanent presence of German occupation troops in the region, although even this measure could not pacify the region completely because insurgents could successfully blend into the local population when faced with superior German forces. The report concludes that in the interests of pacifying the
regain, any further use of the Ustaša militia should be ‘out of the question’\(^{86}\). Rather, according to an agreement reached with the Croat government, the pacification of the region should be attempted by proclaiming eastern Bosnia a zone of military operations until further notice with the additional measure of placing it under the authority of the German commander in Serbia, including local Croat troops\(^{87}\).

The Chetnik Dilemma in the ISC: Preservation of Serbs vs. Resistance

Chetnik documents illustrate the thinking in the ISC on the strategically sensitive area of eastern Bosnia. For the Chetniks acting as a Serb national force in the region, preserving the local Serbs was more important than forming any immediate resistance to the Axis (a very different formula from the Partisans). The Italians turned numerous Chetnik units into MVAC units to fight the Partisans, and the Chetniks tried to utilise their MVAC status as much as the Italians tried to utilise the Chetniks. (In terms of using each other, the Chetnik-Italian relationship was a two-way street, even though the Italians were arguably getting a better deal.) The Italians used the Chetniks to fight the Partisans and to oppose the ISC’s consolidation, while preserving their own manpower. The Chetniks, for their part, used the Italians to remove the Partisans as competitors, to protect local Serbs from the Ustašas and to secure their own survival.

The ‘Directive of Chetnik Commander Boško Todorović of the Operative Units of eastern Bosnia and Herzegovina’ (January 9, 1942)\(^{88}\) to subordinate Chetnik officers on the possibility of Italian and German attack offers further insight into the Chetnik mode of thinking, this time from the Chetnik perspective.

Todorović’s directive spells out the danger of an imminent Italian-German offensive in the region, adding that the scope of enemy forces was such that resistance was futile. Because the local population was in danger, part of the Chetnik forces should be evacuated, while another part should ‘stay with the local population as Serb volunteer

\(^{86}\) AVII, NAV-T-501, r. 247, s. 783-6.

\(^{87}\) AVII, NAV-T-501, r. 247, s. 783-6.

\(^{88}\) AVII, Ca, K. 170, Reg. No. 46/3.
Chetnik units\textsuperscript{89} even if it has to collaborate with the occupiers'. Local commanders should decide which soldiers were to remain behind 'in order to protect the local Serb population' as volunteers\textsuperscript{90}. Once again, preservation of the local Serb population was more important than resistance, and switching between 'illegal' Chetniks and MVAC unit status was seen as a useful device.

The 'Report by the Command of the Operative Units of eastern Bosnia and Herzegovina' (January 26, 1942)\textsuperscript{91} written for Mihailović further detailed the ethno-religious war in the region and growing tensions with the Partisans. Accusing the communists of extreme Radicalism, the report says that the Partisans were recruiting by force, pushing the local population into civil war or towards the collaborationist camp.

Section V of the 'Struggle Against the Rebel Movement in the Southeast Area from June 1941 to August 1942' by Ernst Wisshaupt\textsuperscript{92} is devoted to the struggle against the uprising in Bosnia from January to March 1942 and covers the same period as the Chetnik reports above. Wisshaupt notes that the influx of rebels from Serbia continued during this period (he uses the term 'Old Serbia' from the German point of view, here referring to pre-1912 Serbia). In addition, the Italians did not energetically oppose the rebels operating in Herzegovina, Montenegro and Dalmatia. Rather, to spare themselves casualties, the Italians entered negotiations with the rebels, created friendly relations, 'used them against the Ustašas' (indirectly helping the rebels by doing this) and 'encouraged Serb national Chetniks to fight the Croats'\textsuperscript{93}. Wisshaupt says this created tension between the Italians and the ISC government and prevented the Croat armed forces from pacifying the country (presumably, this is a comment on the ISC's inability to deal with the Chetnik threat due to Italian policy).

\textsuperscript{89} Presumably MVAC; AVII, Ca, K. 170, Reg. No. 46/3.
\textsuperscript{90} AVII, Ca, k. 231, Reg. No. 15/6. Major Todorović was interested in creating mobile Chetnik units ('shock troops') in the region. At the end of December 1941 in eastern Bosnia, there were two shock units. The first unit was created in Čačak (central Serbia) from the Serb refugees who fled Bosnia and Herzegovina on October 1, 1941 (by the end of the month it became ISC territory). No information has been found on the second. For more information see: AVII, Ca, k. 127, Reg. No. 42/10 and k. 170, Reg. No. 17/4 and k. 175, Reg. No. 1/1.
\textsuperscript{91} AVII, Ca, k. 170, Reg. No. 16/4. The report was written by Major Boško Todorović.
\textsuperscript{92} AVII, Na, Reg. No. 18/1, k. 70.
\textsuperscript{93} AVII, Na, Reg. No. 18/1, k. 70.
Due to very difficult terrain in the mountainous parts of the ISC and a general lack of infrastructure there, the Wehrmacht was unable to eradicate Partisans and Chetniks through military operations. Both guerrilla groups successfully evaded the Wehrmacht in areas such as Ozren. With regards to anti-guerrilla operations in the Ozren Mountain region during this period, Wisshaupt notes that '[German] forces captured two hundred rebels, took weapons and burned one Chetnik camp'\textsuperscript{94}. What is particularly interesting here is the reference to a 'Chetnik camp', because in other sources (especially in the Yugoslav historiography) the Ozren operation is described as essentially anti-Partisan. It is possible that events in the region were more complex than previously thought, or that German operations directed against the Partisans also eliminated any Chetnik forces they came across (the Ozren Mountain region is a Serb-majority area). Anti-guerrilla operations in the Ozren area were a failure, however. According to the German military, destruction of the rebels could have been achieved only by encircling small individual units – and this, in reality, would have been impossible, given the near-inaccessible terrain and the rebels' understanding and ease of negotiating it.

While strikes by the German army were damaging, they could not solve the problem. Various alternative solutions were sought, including a redrawing of the borders of the local satellite creations. The 'Report by the Authorised Commander in Serbia to the Command of the Armed Forces in the Southeast' (February 13, 1942)\textsuperscript{95} provides more comments on the ethno-religious conflict, the security concerns rising out of it, and recommendations on how to solve those issues, as for example, the following:

Moving the Serbo-Croat border in the west to the River Bosna, in order to provide Serbia with the necessary basis for economic and national development. At the moment, approximately half (more than three million) Serbs live outside of Serbia's borders. These Serbs are constantly facing their heaviest persecutions by the Ustaša units – especially in eastern Bosnia – and these disturbances, which are manifesting themselves in a flood of tens of thousands of refugees across the River Drina (the border), are causing unrest in Serbia too\textsuperscript{96}.

\textsuperscript{94} AVII, Na, Reg. No. 18/1, k. 70.
\textsuperscript{95} AVII, NAV-T-501, r. 257, s. 1116-8.
\textsuperscript{96} AVII, NAV-T-501, r. 257, s. 1116-8.
General Bader’s recommendation to change the borders of Serbia and Croatia to stop the atrocities (and deflate the uprising) was strongly opposed by Zigfrid Kasche and his Ustaša hosts in Zagreb. More importantly, it would never have been approved by Hitler, given his views on Balkan matters.

When the initial Ustaša impulse to eradicate the Serb presence in the ISC by mass killings and expulsion was met with spontaneous armed resistance, it became clear that getting rid of thirty percent of the ISC’s population was not going to be easy. Alternative solutions were sought, including the idea of organising a Croatian Orthodox Church to replace the Serbian Orthodox Church in the area. The Croatian Orthodox Church, which was set up by the Ustaša regime with no regard for the canonical rights of the Eastern Orthodox Church, was envisioned as a temporary solution to the ‘Serb problem’ in the ISC; it allowed some integration of the local Serbs into the Croat national body by proclaiming the Serbs as Orthodox Croats. The church itself was eventually supposed to recognise Papal authority, become Uniate and ultimately Roman Catholic. The episode demonstrates the significance of the religious component in the ethno-religious conflict in the ISC.

On February 25, 1942, General Gles von Horstenau submitted a lengthy report on the military and political situation in the ISC97. As might be expected, this report is full of comments on Croat-Serb matters. The report says that Pavelić had recreated the Sabor (the old Croat national diet from the Austro-Hungarian days); the new Sabor consisted of two hundred and five members, including ‘fifteen Muslims and three Eastern Orthodox’98. The Ustaša regime was not interested in yielding any real power; it recreated the diet to gain legitimacy and had every intention of using it as a rubber stamp99. Noting that the Eastern Orthodox are ‘still’ one third or more of the entire population, Horstenau says that he talked to the representatives of the Ustaša regime

97 AVII, NAV-T-501, r. 268, s. 476-91.
98 AVII, NAV-T-501, r. 268, s. 476-91.
99 The Sabor was created on January 24, 1942, by Pavelić’s proclamation and was in session from February 23 to December 28, 1942. During this time, its only important decision was to issue a proclamation affirming the creation of the Independent State of Croatia. For more information see: Ćulinović, Ferdo. Okupatorska podela Jugoslavije. (Vojno-izdavački zavod: Beograd, 1970), pp. 264-267. Horstenau notes that the last time the Sabor (for the Kingdom of Croatia-Slavonia) held a meeting was October 29, 1918; it was disbanded before having a chance to declare its position on Yugoslav unification (proclaimed on December 1, 1918).
about the Serb issue (‘the Orthodox question’, as he calls it), and was informed that the
government was not looking for a solution by forcing conversion to Roman Catholicism;
instead, it wanted to revive the Eastern Orthodox church, but with a separate patriarch
residing in Croatia and completely separated from Belgrade100.

As Horstenau’s report underlines, in early 1942, the leadership of the ISC was
looking for alternative ways of solving ‘the Serb question’, coming to the realisation that
exterminating/expelling two million Serbs (a third of the ISC’s entire population) was not
a realistic option – especially in the face of the armed revolt such policies provoked. One
alternative was to create the Croat Orthodox Church, which would be outside Serb
influence. The ISC government created a draft of a law on the legal status of the
members of the Eastern Orthodox Church in the ISC, and on June 5, 1942, it created the
statute of the Croat Orthodox Church. Horstenau speculates that the establishment of
this organisation will take time, due to the shortage of priests ‘most of whom had been
murdered, as well as churches, most of which are in ruins’101.

Most members of the ISC government were hoping the Orthodox population
would accept union with Rome. In the light of this desire, Horstenau considered the
creation of the Croat Orthodox Church (COC) an in-between step, with the final goal of
the COC being union with Rome and becoming part of the Roman Catholic world102.

Horstenau says that during the Orthodox Christmas, entry was forbidden to the
few Orthodox churches still standing, and that local Catholic priests were active pro-
Ustaša supporters103. Interestingly, the Vatican refused to recognise the ISC, and there
were no formal relations between the two. For this reason, he says, Slavko Kvaternik,
Commander-in-Chief of the Croatian Armed Forces, did not visit the Pope during a visit
to Rome104. Horstenau’s report openly states that the position of the Orthodox
population had not improved and resentment of the Muslims was on the rise – the main
interest of the latter being autonomy for Bosnia and Herzegovina, as articulated in a

100 AVII, NAV-T-501, r. 268, s. 476-91.
101 AVII, NAV-T-501, r. 268, s. 476-91.
102 AVII, NAV-T-501, r. 268, s. 476-91.
103 AVII, NAV-T-501, r. 268, s. 476-91.
104 AVII, NAV-T-501, r. 268, s. 476-91.
letter with strong pan-Turanian undertones sent to the Grand Mufti of Damascus, Amin Al Husseini\textsuperscript{105}.

**Wehrmacht Attempts to Pacify Eastern Bosnia**

The Ustaša responsibility for the Serb uprising is plainly set forth in German wartime documents. Given that the political leadership in Berlin was opposed to redrawing the borders of the Balkan satellites, the local Wehrmacht commanders had to improvise with other solutions that could defuse the situation within the existing political framework. For the volatile area of eastern Bosnia where the ethno-religious war was raging with particular intensity, the Wehrmacht proposed a solution that would turn the entire region into an operational zone with no fixed end date. This would, in effect, directly subjugate all the armed forces including the Ustaša militia to German command – a move no doubt designed to keep an eye on the militia’s activities. The Wehrmacht also distanced itself from the whole mess in the ISC by proclaiming limited interest in the region; it was interested only in the protection of the main thoroughfares and a few economically important spots.

Horstenau points to Ustašas as the source of the ongoing problem when he says, ‘It is not easy to persuade even the pure Croat public that uprisings south of the River Sava would not have erupted had atrocities not been committed by the Ustašas’\textsuperscript{106}. He makes a direct correlation between Ustaša activities and insurgent activity when he states: ‘North of the River Sava, in Slavonia, the insurgent movement was thus far limited to small-scale attacks, which were usually caused by prior Ustaša actions’\textsuperscript{107}. He underlines the difficulties of fighting a guerrilla enemy in the mountainous regions (like Ozren), explaining that the enemy can simply avoid contact and return to its previous positions when German forces move out\textsuperscript{108}. Horstenau recommends the following for the region of eastern Bosnia (the most troublesome part of the ISC):

\textsuperscript{105} AVII, NAV-T-501, r. 268, s. 476-91.
\textsuperscript{106} AVII, NAV-T-501, r. 268, s. 476-91.
\textsuperscript{107} AVII, NAV-T-501, r. 268, s. 476-91. What is interesting here is that insurgent activity comes second, as a reaction to the Ustašas.
\textsuperscript{108} AVII, NAV-T-501, r. 268, s. 476-91; Horstenau adds that German action could make things worse, because some uprooted local villagers joined the Partisans or the Chetniks.
Guaranteed pacification would be possible in principle only if the entire male population of the rebel region was taken away or placed under the closest supervision; however, in eastern Bosnia besides the Eastern Orthodox there are Croats and Muslims too, and the Orthodox cannot be placed in the same bag as the rebels because workers in various military factories around Sarajevo are comprised of the Orthodox in most cases (and these people are willing to work)...if the authorised commander in Serbia wishes to neutralise this contested region of eastern Bosnia with regards to the Croat Ustaša government, which did not choose its methods carefully, that desire can be fully understood. Leaving eastern Bosnia in the status of an operational zone under the military command of a German general should serve this purpose. There are numerous reasons, however, against the idea that the rebels under the control of major Dangić should participate in the pacification of the region109.

Interestingly, Horstenau provides his own assessment of Croat state (the ISC) when he says: ‘The construct of the Croat state is (according to the old Hungarian template) being built on the concept of one Croat nation which does not recognise minorities’110. Like other German and Italian commanders in their reports, Horstenau was separating the Serbs and Montenegrins111. In line with his Austrian background, he looked into past Austro-Hungarian engagements in the region of occupied Yugoslavia for guidance; the pacification of Bosnia in 1878 was achieved by creating a dense network of garrisons which constantly threatened rebel territory; during World War I, Serbia and Montenegro were kept under control by army reserve units112. If a repetition of these measures was impossible in the present circumstances, Horstenau recommended that German troops (limited in numbers) simply control main thoroughfares that were important for the Reich and leave the rest for the Croats to manage113. This tactic was, in fact, exactly what the Germans in the ISC ended up doing, focusing on the Zagreb-Belgrade railway and leaving the rest for Croatian (and, south of the demarcation line,

109 AVII, NAV-T-501, r. 268, s. 476-91.
110 AVII, NAV-T-501, r. 268, s. 476-91. Horstenau is talking about the Hungarian approach to the national question during the Austro-Hungarian era, which recognised only one political nation (Hungarian) on Hungarian soil.
111 AVII, NAV-T-501, r. 268, s. 476-91.
112 AVII, NAV-T-501, r. 268, s. 476-91.
113 AVII, NAV-T-501, r. 268, s. 476-91.
forces to deal with. This tactic allowed the ethno-religious war to run its course on the ground.\textsuperscript{114}

German wartime documents testify to the fact that the Ustaša regime was unpopular among the Croats; they had been a fringe group before the war when compared to the Croatian Peasant Party. In fact, the popularity of the CPP was high until the end of the war (even though the CPP was abolished after the occupation started, and its leader Maček placed under house arrest). German politicians and military figures alike saw Yugoslavia as Greater Serbia, and praised the Croat uprising in the Yugoslav Royal Army during the April War as a major contributing factor to the quick collapse of Yugoslavia’s military; the Chetniks blamed the Croats, echoing German arguments but putting them in a very different light. While the Croats were seen by the Germans as allies, the Serbs were seen as the enemy. However, there was no general German policy towards the Serbs, a fact not lost on the local Wehrmacht commanders.

Perhaps the most interesting part of Horstenau’s report is entitled ‘The Croats and Germany’; here he comments on the views held by the general Croat population towards the Germans and the Reich.\textsuperscript{115} The position of the Croats towards the Reich and its representatives had always been cordial, but there were signs of a chill because of the German policy towards Italy, German support for the very unpopular regime and finally the

[German] role of being a silent observer regarding the Ustaša atrocities, which are sometimes even referencing invented German directives...skilful propaganda with a favourite leitmotif that the Germans

\textsuperscript{114} AVII, NAV-T-501, r. 268, s. 476-91. Horstenau comments on the antagonism between the regular army in the ISC (Domobrani) and the Ustaša militia when he says: ‘In evaluating the Croat armed forces special attention is devoted to the antagonism between the land army and Ustaša groups, which is turning into ever deeper hatred from day to day. Ustaša troops are, morally and economically, very favoured – I could even say spoiled – by the state authorities. These troops, as well as the Poglavljak’s personal guard, live a comfortable life in the cities, and show up on the front only from time to time, as if on a guest tour, in spotless uniforms besides hungry soldiers in worn-out uniforms, only to return after a few days (or even few hours) into their easy lives in the city. Favouring the Ustašas is evident even with small things. For example, in recent days, when the armed forces were utilised in order to clear the snow build-up, not a single Ustaša could be seen with a shovel in his hands’.

\textsuperscript{115} AVII, NAV-T-501, r. 268, s. 476-91.
took away all the food stocks and the population now has to starve because of it\textsuperscript{116}.

In his concluding remarks, Horstenau confirms a favourite Chetnik theory about the Croat ‘stab in the back’ during the April War when he says that ‘the uprising of the Croat soldiers within the Yugoslav royal army in April of last year significantly contributed to the stunningly fast downfall of Yugoslavia, i.e. Greater Serbia’\textsuperscript{117}. It is interesting that Horstenau equates Yugoslavia with Greater Serbia. On this point, he was diverging from the Chetnik view, which held that interwar Yugoslavia ended up being a state in which the Serbs were in constant retreat. Arguably, he was allowing his ‘Austrianess’ to come to the surface.

At the end of his report, Horstenau recommends the adoption of a new German policy in the region of the former Yugoslavia, reminding his superiors that with the introduction of the new order in the region, the Germans ‘missed the opportunity to adopt a general policy towards the Serbs, which resulted in completely opposite principles on each side of the River Drina – something that is not a fortunate solution from the standpoint of the Reich policy either’\textsuperscript{118}.

Besides seeing the obvious contradiction – the Serbs faced radically different treatment on the two sides of the river, being outlawed and persecuted west of the river and tolerated east of it – Horstenau was aware that the persecution of the Serbs in the ISC was causing unrest on the east side of the Drina. (This is documented in a number of other German reports.) Nevertheless, ‘full abandonment of Croatia [to the Italians] would cost Germany its (still) best friend in the Balkans’\textsuperscript{119}.

**Chetnik Major Dangić from the German Perspective**

German documents often portray Chetniks in a very different light from the image established in the Yugoslav post-war historiography. Similarly, the German analyses of Chetnik strategy, such as the comments of Major Jezdimir Dangić in eastern Bosnia who

\textsuperscript{116} AVII, NAV-T-501, r. 268, s. 476-91.
\textsuperscript{117} AVII, NAV-T-501, r. 268, s. 476-91.
\textsuperscript{118} AVII, NAV-T-501, r. 268, s. 476-91.
\textsuperscript{119} AVII, NAV-T-501, r. 268, s. 476-91.
was anti-Ustaša and anti-Communist, paint a very different picture from the accepted post-war view. Wehrmacht reports generally take a grim view of eastern Bosnia and present the ISC as the biggest security threat in the Balkans; the Nazi political leadership, however, chose to ignore these reports.

The ‘Report by the Authorised Commander in Serbia to the Commander of the Armed Forces Southeast regarding the Negotiations with the Chetnik leader (Major Jezdimir Dangić) in Eastern Bosnia’ (February 5, 1942)\(^\text{120}\) is one of the most important German documents with regards to the German perception of the Chetnik and rebel purpose. It also illustrates the futile attempt by the local Wehrmacht commanders to address the disorder caused by the ethno-religious war in the region.

Major Dangić (‘the Serb Major’, as he is described in the introduction\(^\text{121}\)) is portrayed in the report as a good commander with a large number of followers, many of whom were trained soldiers. The report notes that German intelligence had received no information about Dangić’s contacts with the Partisans\(^\text{122}\). It says that (surprisingly) Dangić’s units avoided confrontation with the German troops and were not firing on them; the captured Chetniks kept repeating to their German investigators that Dangić forbade them to fight against the German troops. However, the report also states that Dangić could have inflicted serious casualties on the German troops if he had wanted to\(^\text{123}\). Destroying Dangić’s units was an impossible task given their evasiveness, and the report states that his troops would simply return to their positions once the German army left the area\(^\text{124}\). In short, the enemy had successfully circumvented German troops on difficult terrain and could not be caught.

\(^{120}\) AVII, NAV-T-501, r. 256, s. 1087-97.

\(^{121}\) Jezdimir Dangić came to eastern Bosnia on August 16, 1941. AVII, NAV-T-501, r. 256, s. 1087-97.

\(^{122}\) AVII, NAV-T-501, r. 256, s. 1087-97. Major Jezdimir Dangić attended a number of conferences with the local Partisan leaders in eastern Bosnia during the fall of 1941. For the record of Dangić’s conferences with the Partisans from October 1 to November 16, 1941 from the Partisan perspective see: AVII, Arhiva NOP-a, reg. No. 13/1, k. 1701; for the records from the Chetnik perspective see: AVII, Ca, reg. No. 46/6, k. 220; reg. No. 16/2, 21/2 and 35/4, k. 170 and reg. No. 15/4 and 17/4, k. 222.

\(^{123}\) AVII, NAV-T-501, r. 256, s. 1087-97; A unit of some 400 Chetniks that simply surrendered to the Germans is mentioned.

\(^{124}\) AVII, NAV-T-501, r. 256, s. 1087-97.
The report moves on to analyze the ethno-religious conflict between Croats, Muslims and Serbs in eastern Bosnia – the most dangerous conflict spot in the ISC\textsuperscript{125}.

The Croats are without any doubt attempting to physically destroy the entire Serb population. It is well known in which form this is happening. The Serb population that is not fit for war, the women and children, as well as the men who cannot fight, in order to avoid the evil fate that awaits them, are saving themselves by escaping across the River Drina into Serbia. Completely plundered, beaten and tortured, these refugees are constantly causing unrest in Serbia\textsuperscript{126}.

The author estimates that the region would need six full divisions working for six to eight weeks to pacify it completely and even so, it would have to remove every male capable of carrying a weapon regardless of his national or religious affiliation\textsuperscript{127}. However, ‘even if the last male capable of carrying a weapon disappeared from eastern Bosnia, one could still expect that the women would start killing each other’\textsuperscript{128}.

The satellite state created by Germany is not portrayed in a positive light, to say the least: ‘The Croat state is a fact that exists and which cannot be discounted, despite the fact that it is the source of disorder and that – from a purely military point of view – it represents the biggest threat to the military situation in the Balkans’\textsuperscript{129}. Once again, local commanders freely analyzed the problems at hand. However, their solution rested with the politicians, with Hitler having the final say.

The report’s most interesting part is its analysis of negotiations with Major Dangić. The author says that according to Dangić, his Chetniks were not involved ‘in an uprising against the German authorities’. Rather, Dangić wanted ‘to destroy the communists in eastern Bosnia, to protect the lives and properties of his countrymen, and

\textsuperscript{125} AVII, NAV-T-501, r. 256, s. 1087-97. Eastern Bosnia was the main region in Bosnia and Herzegovina where Slavic Muslims had a significant rural presence. The Ottomans resettled Serbian Muslims here from 1800-1830, to create a ‘living wall’ against Serbia’s expansion towards the west.

\textsuperscript{126} AVII, NAV-T-501, r. 256, s. 1087-97. The report estimates that there were some 40,000 refugees in the vicinity of Kosovska Mitrovica, some 4,000 south of Zvornik, and that ‘thousands upon thousands’ were on the move towards the border ‘in order to avoid Croat atrocities’.

\textsuperscript{127} AVII, NAV-T-501, r. 256, s. 1087-97.

\textsuperscript{128} AVII, NAV-T-501, r. 256, s. 1087-97.

\textsuperscript{129} AVII, NAV-T-501, r. 256, s. 1087-97.
to put an end to the slaughter of women and children by the Croats’. The report adds that following the withdrawal of the German troops, ‘the Croats started doing this again’.

Dangić told his German hosts that he would ready himself (and his men) to destroy the communists in eastern Bosnia and to preserve peace so that the refugees could return to their homes. Clearly, Dangić was presenting himself as anti-communist first and foremost, rather than anti-Ustaša, which was probably more the case. This seems logical, not to say opportunistic, given the German struggle against Russia. In addition, the ISC was a German creation and its (para)military forces were German allies. Dangić also told the Germans that he would recognise the ISC’s suzerainty (albeit not as final) if the bureaucracy were divided among the Croats, Muslims and Serbs based on the respective prewar population proportions in each locality. With regards to military and security matters, Dangić pointed out that the main precondition of his cooperation was complete German takeover and military government control. Dangić also asked that the eastern part of the region towards the River Drina and Serbia’s border remain free of Croat troops, while regular Croat troops (the Domobrani – but not the Ustaša militia) could be present in the western part towards the River Bosna. Dangić’s final statement to the Germans said: ‘The Ustaša formations of any kind, complete or as individuals (militia or party members), are impossible to imagine in eastern Bosnia anymore, because their presence will cause a struggle towards annihilation.’

During the second meeting between the German representatives and Dangić, many of the same points were repeated. Dangić underlined that the largest difficulty in

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130 AVII, NAV-T-501, r. 256, s. 1087-97.
131 AVII, NAV-T-501, r. 256, s. 1087-97.
132 AVII, NAV-T-501, r. 256, s. 1087-97. Needless to say, German occupation authorities were not interested in such democratic experiments in the Balkans.
133 AVII, NAV-T-501, r. 256, s. 1087-97.
134 AVII, NAV-T-501, r. 256, s. 1087-97. Dangić’s operational zone, as defined by the Germans during the negotiations, comprised the region between River Drina in the east, River Bosna in the west, River Sava in the north and the German-Italian demarcation zone in the south.
135 AVII, NAV-T-501, r. 256, s. 1087-97. Dangić added that ‘it will be extremely difficult’ to explain to his men and the local population of eastern Bosnia that the region had to remain a part of the ISC, and they must tolerate the presence of the Croat administration and Croat troops.
the eyes of his men would be his cooperation with the Croats (ISC), even in a limited form.\footnote{AVII, NAV-T-501, r. 256, s. 1087-97.} It seems, however, that Dangić had no concerns of this kind with regards to his cooperation with the Germans. He pointed out that his potential cooperation with the Croats (ISC forces) could be used by the communists for propaganda purposes, and that he could lose his men to the Partisans.\footnote{AVII, NAV-T-501, r. 256, s. 1087-97.} The German record of the meeting emphasised that Dangić kept repeating that the Bosnian peasants were not communists by nature, and that all he wanted was to preserve his homeland and property and the lives of women and children from the Ustaša terror.\footnote{AVII, NAV-T-501, r. 256, s. 1087-97.} Dangić pointed to the possibility that some of his men might desert to the communists ‘out of their hatred towards the Croats, and in order to get their revenge for massacres committed’ if his conditions were not met.\footnote{AVII, NAV-T-501, r. 256, s. 1087-97.} In the end, Dangić recommended the removal of all Croat troops from Bijeljina, Zvornik, Vlasenica, Sokolac, Rogatica, Kladanj, Srebrenica and Višegrad.\footnote{AVII, NAV-T-501, r. 256, s. 1087-97.}

The Axis Conference on Eastern Bosnia:
The Germans Tie Their Own Hands

The Wehrmacht in the ISC arguably tied its own hands by consulting ISC officials on its deal with the Chetniks in eastern Bosnia. The fact that German commanders felt obliged is another iteration of the ‘Berlin versus local generals’ theme. The ISC’s opposition to the Chetniks was predictable, especially given the fact that Dangić was not hiding his anti-Ustaša orientation from the German negotiators. The whole affair demonstrated that solutions which could stop the ethno-religious war could not be implemented by the Wehrmacht due to political considerations.

The next step in solving the situation in eastern Bosnia included inviting representatives of the ISC and German representatives in Zagreb to consultations in

\footnote{AVII, NAV-T-501, r. 256, s. 1087-97.}
\footnote{AVII, NAV-T-501, r. 256, s. 1087-97.}
\footnote{AVII, NAV-T-501, r. 256, s. 1087-97. It is interesting that Dangić uses a regional term here, rather than talking about the Serbs explicitly.}
\footnote{AVII, NAV-T-501, r. 256, s. 1087-97. Although this alarmist statement was a tactical move by Dangić, by presenting the Partisans as an alternative force to fight ‘the Croats’, he acknowledged the fact (also well known by the Germans) that most of the local Partisans were Serbs.}
\footnote{AVII, NAV-T-501, r. 256, s. 1087-97.}
Belgrade; the Germans felt that Croat input was necessary given that negotiations involved ISC territory\textsuperscript{141}. Vjekoslav Vrančić, in the name of the government of the ISC, stated that any move in the direction Dangić proposed was simply out of the question\textsuperscript{142}. He also pointed out (mirroring Dangić’s own view) that any cooperation with Dangić was impossible for the ISC; moreover, in eastern Bosnia (and other regions) any diminishment of the ISC’s powers would lead to widespread destruction of the Croat population, resulting in increased Reich engagement to protect them\textsuperscript{143}.

German participants, with the sole exception of Kasche who maintained a strong pro-Ustaša course until the end of the war, tried to persuade Vrančić that

one insignificant step away from the sovereign rights of the Croat state under the control of General Bader is better for both the state and Croat prestige than one successful revolt which could engulf most of the country and cost hundreds of thousands of human lives\textsuperscript{144}.

But the German generals were unsuccessful, and the Croat opposition deal with Dangić had to be cancelled.

The fact that a satellite state such as the ISC could stand its ground in the face of pressure from German generals is important. Vračić suspected (or knew) the generals had no clearance from the very top, and indeed, Hitler, who created the ISC, brought the Ustaša regime to power and his support for it remained strong until the end. The whole episode is illustrative of the tension between, and different perspectives of, the German political and military circles, or more precisely between Hitler and his generals. The generals felt that they had to respect the ISC wishes as a German-created ‘sovereign’ state; this tied their hands and limited their field of action.

Once attempts to get the ISC government on board had fallen through, Dangić was told that there would be no agreement with the Germans. Understandably upset, he

\textsuperscript{141} AVII, NAV-T-501, r. 256, s. 1087-97. Local German representative Zigfrid Kase, ISC state secretary Vjekoslav Vrancic and Dragoslav Fedor (representing Domobrans, i.e. the ISC’s army forces) arrived from Zagreb.

\textsuperscript{142} AVII, NAV-T-501, r. 256, s. 1087-97.

\textsuperscript{143} AVII, NAV-T-501, r. 256, s. 1087-97.

\textsuperscript{144} AVII, NAV-T-501, r. 256, s. 1087-97.
told the Germans that his only course of action was to ‘commence an active struggle
against the Croats’:

… because if Dangić does not then the communists will... Dangić would
look like a coward, traitor and bribed criminal, and would lose all
influence. Dangić’s men would most likely join the communists, because
they would not understand why their women and children should be killed
without any protection145.

Dangić also said that if any German personnel, let alone troops, were assigned
to, or mixed with, Croat troops he would have no choice but to attack them too146. In this,
he was attempting, as before, to separate the Germans and their allies on the ground,
arguing that his struggle was against the Ustaša regime, not the Germans.

Dangić tired again to drive a wedge between the Axis allies, this time between
the Germans and Italians, by telling his German contacts that the Italians had already
attempted to contact him. Further, he could not understand why the ISC government had
accepted the Croat troop withdrawal from all areas occupied by the Italian army, but the
same was not true for German occupied areas147. Dangić added that he could have
received ammunition and supplies from the Italians easily if he had wanted to, and that
now with the local Chetnik-German agreement falling through, he had no choice but to
make a deal with the Italians148. He repeated that pacification of Bosnia could result in
the widespread pacification of all Serb regions, and that it would be ideal for the Serbs to
have no border of any kind on the River Drina149. Peace in Bosnia, he said, would
strengthen General Nedić’s government in Serbia, even if Nedić had no active role in it.
For Dangić, all that remained was ‘a struggle for the fatherland against the Croats’,150
and in this struggle he would be joined by men from Serbia, Herzegovina, Albania

145  AVII, NAV-T-501, r. 256, s. 1087-97.
146  AVII, NAV-T-501, r. 256, s. 1087-97.
147  AVII, NAV-T-501, r. 256, s. 1087-97. This was a legitimate question, and the difference is in
Hitler’s support of the Ustaša regime, a situation that had no equivalent on the Italian side of
the demarcation line in the ISC.
148  AVII, NAV-T-501, r. 256, s. 1087-97.
149  AVII, NAV-T-501, r. 256, s. 1087-97.
150  AVII, NAV-T-501, r. 256, s. 1087-97.
(presumably Albanian-annexed regions of occupied Yugoslavia) and Montenegro. Such a struggle would prove fatal for the Croat side.

The Wehrmacht and the ISC’s armed forces could not eradicate the guerrillas (Partisans and Chetniks) in the mountainous regions of the ISC, as reports from the Ozren Mountain region in Bosnia showed. This particular area, inaccessible and economically unviable (as well as further away from Serbia) saw the emergence of local Chetnik-ISC agreements that were not possible in eastern Bosnia. Echoing the Italian MVAC model, local Chetniks in Ozren and areas further west ‘legalised’ directly with the ISC as VAM (Volunteer Anti-Communist Militia). The creation of the VAM in the German zone of the ISC deflated the ethno-religious conflict, because they represented ‘live and let live’ agreements; however, such arrangements were very fragile.

German assessments of operations against guerrilla groups in occupied Yugoslavia provide interesting insights into their opponents’ tactics and capabilities. One such assessment comes from the ‘Note of the Higher Command No. 65 for Special Operations’ (February 10, 1942), written by General Bader to divisions under his command, regarding the results of the ‘Ozren’ operation against the Partisans (some assessments, which will be included below, were also valid for other German anti-guerrilla operations against both the Partisans and the). General Bader paints what he calls the ‘usual picture’:

Even an attack with strong German forces brings a barely worthwhile result, because the enemy – due to its well developed scouting capabilities – successfully avoids contact with superior German forces...the Ozren mountain region represents one closed and naturally well isolated sector. This sector was closed by ten Croat battalions...on the western border of the closed zone one armoured train is also positioned.

The results of these efforts were, however, less than impressive:

Smaller enemy bands, despite the extensive use of Croat forces for blockades, managed to retreat from the area by the cloak of darkness...other enemy groups managed to pass between our attacking

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151 AVII, NAV-T-501, r. 256, s. 1087-97.
152 AVII, NAV-T-501, r. 250, s. 585-93.
153 AVII, NAV-T-501, r. 250, s. 585-93.
columns, which had to use mountain trails heavily covered with snow; meanwhile the enemy moved across inaccessible terrain which can be used only by those who were well familiar with local mountain conditions...it should also be noted that the reports regarding the number of bandits in the Ozren mountain region were overblown, and appear to be (as always) exaggerated (this can be ascertained by the rather small quantity of food and materiel captured in mountain hideouts)\textsuperscript{154}.

General Bader concludes that the scenario ‘which repeated itself frequently’ would play out again after German forces left the mountain positions; the enemy would simply return to their starting positions which they had been forced to abandon\textsuperscript{155}. General Bader’s frustration is repeated in all German reports on anti-guerrilla operations in occupied Yugoslavia. Due to the poor infrastructure and difficult terrain, most Partisans and Chetniks remained outside German reach until the end of the war.

However, the same report notes that the Croats (most likely Domobrani) transported one thousand Chetniks from Doboj to Petrovo Selo in the Mount Ozren region by train. A strategically sensitive area where the Chetnik-Ustaša conflict was kept raging, the Mount Ozren region saw local Chetnik-ISC agreements and anti-Partisan cooperation. The report’s details of fighting between the Chetnik and ISC forces in central Bosnia south of the Mount Ozren (between Zenica and Zavidovići), demonstrates that the relationship between the Chetniks and the ISC had a strong regional context and was heavily dependent on local conditions.

For Chetnik and Partisan guerrilla groups, inaccessible mountain regions provided adequate protection during the war. The lowlands, such as most of Slavonia and Vojvodina, represented a different challenge.

**Chetnik Challenges in Slavonia and Vojvodina**

For the Chetniks, the two largest strategic challenges were operating in lowlands, such as most of Vojvodina and Slavonia, and operating in non-Serb areas. They were never able to break out into the lowlands, while non-Serb areas called for a change of

\textsuperscript{154} AVII, NAV-T-501, r. 250, s. 585-93. The report also notes that many men used individual tracks in the snow while moving in order to conceal their numbers.

\textsuperscript{155} AVII, NAV-T-501, r. 250, s. 585-93.
ideological postulates. In such areas, the Chetniks had to shift from a purely Serb to a broader Yugoslav platform to find recruits.

Slavonia\textsuperscript{156} and Vojvodina\textsuperscript{157} had very different regimes during the war. Slavonia (with Srem) was in the ISC as part of the German-occupied zone. Vojvodina was divided, with Bačka and Baranja annexed by Hungary and Banat attached to Nedić’s Serbia, albeit with a separate, locally-run Volksdeutsche administration.

Despite the existence of three different regimes in Slavonia and Vojvodina, the two areas shared similar geographic features: unlike the mountainous and wooded areas further to the south, they were part of the Panonian lowlands. The terrain was not conducive to Chetnik wartime strategies which required forests and mountains as hideouts, and the heterogeneous nature of the local population hindered Chetnik recruitment. Thus, the Chetnik cause never truly established itself there during the war.

The ‘Report by Captain Žarko Milurović to Major Boško Todorović’ (February 13, 1942)\textsuperscript{158} describes attempts to organise Chetnik forces in Slavonia (in modern day Croatia). In it, Milurović states that following his return from German captivity, he decided to devote his energies to coordinating and integrating smaller guerrilla units operating in Croatia and Slavonia without an overall plan and lacking mutual connections. His stated goal was to operate in western Slavonia and in doing so cut off ISC communications with eastern Bosnia and Srem, or at least make them difficult. To achieve this goal, Captain Milurović organised the Slavonian Chetnik Unit of some three hundred men in Belgrade. The unit was comprised of refugees whose families had been killed, and they came from both western and eastern Slavonia. The plan was to leave Belgrade by trucks in mid-March 1942, going through an undisclosed village in Srem into Slavonia, presumably posing as labour, though Milurović does not state this explicitly. The operational zone was to be the Serb-populated mountainous region in western Slavonia (Papuk, Psulj, Bilo Gorje, etc.).

\textsuperscript{156} As a historical region in its pre-1918 Austro-Hungarian context.
\textsuperscript{157} With Baranja in the interwar Yugoslav context; for the purposes of this thesis without Srem which was included with Slavonia in the ISC.
\textsuperscript{158} AVII, Ca, k. 151, Reg. No. 1/1.
Milurović adds that while training and equipment issues were only partially solved, the weapons and equipment of the recruits who had come from various Nedić-related forces (the Serb State Guard, gendarmerie, police etc.) represented a major asset (another illustration of the value of Nedić’s armed forces to the Chetniks). Captain Milurović has devised the following strategy for the region:

While [our] action in Bosnia has a completely Serb character, the actions of my own [Slavonian] unit will have a Yugoslav character for the following reasons: in the areas where I will be operating there is an overall Croat majority (they are barely thirty percent Serb, many of whom are now refugees or in camps). In the [western Slavonian] mountains there are a large number of Croat soldiers who deserted to avoid being sent to Russia...and it seems that some of them were pro-Yugoslav in their orientation.

In the event of atrocities against the Serbs, Milurović says he would ‘reciprocate twice as much against the Croat population’ (the Chetnik ‘eye for an eye’ attitude). Further, he would be able to reciprocate in the event of German atrocities, because there were as many as ten thousand Volksdeutsche living in Slavonia. Regarding his attempt to cut Slavonia into two by means of his military success in the western Slavonian mountains, Captain Milurović says that the organisation of civil authorities could not be achieved without the participation of Yugoslav-oriented Croats, and he already had a few who had fled the Ustašas. It is evident that Milurović’s Yugoslavism was not ideological but simply a means towards an end. Finally, regarding retribution, Milurović openly states:

Revenge and slaughter will be conducted on the Ustašas and officers traitors – for this I will use Croat Chetniks whenever possible; I will replace the Ustaša authorities with Yugoslav-oriented Croats and Serbs, and the whole process I will represent as ‘an internal Croat matter’.

Ultimately, for the Chetniks in the ISC, local conditions determined their local strategy. This meant that the Chetniks in the German zone of the ISC could be honouring agreements in one spot and engaged in open conflict at another. In cases of open hostility, the Wehrmacht simply had no resources to deal with the guerrillas.

159 AVII, Ca, k. 151, Reg. No. 1/1.
160 AVII, Ca, k. 151, Reg. No. 1/1.
161 AVII, Ca, k. 151, Reg. No. 1/1.
Meanwhile, regarding the continuation of the war with the ‘bands’ in Bosnia through February and March 1942, the ‘Report on the Struggle Against the Rebel Movement in the Southeast Area from June 1941 to August 1942’ by Ernst Wisshaupt\textsuperscript{162} notes that, in most cases, the rebels proved superior to the Croat armed forces sent against them. The report also contains details indicating that clashes with the rebels produced significant casualties to the German Wehrmacht (at least occasionally). More specifically, on March 10, 1942, in the Italian zone of occupation near Mostar (close to Stolac), a German column was ambushed by the rebels (the Partisans). The ambush was quite successful, with twenty-nine German soldiers dead, twelve wounded and forty-five captured and taken away. The Italians reacted with their own troops, but arrived at the scene too late.

In a subsection devoted to operational details on the ground, Wisshaupt’s report contains contradictory news on the Chetnik relationship with the Croat armed forces. For example, in the Sarajevo region and areas to the east (the Romanija mountain area, Rogatica and Vlasenica) there was an ongoing conflict with the Croat armed forces, especially along local roads. The report also describes instances of contact and negotiations in the same area (for example, between Ustaša Colonel Stipković and Chetnik Commander Dušan Celović about a truce), and Chetnik-Ustaša contacts for the same purpose in the Olovo-Kladanj area (Chetnik Commander Relja Vasković). Finally, there is a mention of joint Domobrani-Chetnik operations against the Partisans in the Zvornik area (Chetniks commanded by Dusan Kovačević).

With regards to enemy tactics, Wisshaupt comments on the elusive nature of resistance in Bosnia. The enemy was spread along a wide geographic area, too large for the numerically limited Wehrmacht troops to isolate and besiege them. For this reason, only small parts of the guerrilla enemy were hit at any given time. Even then, the enemy would engage in fighting only when conditions were favourable to its own forces; if the danger was too great for them, the enemy units simply split up into small groups and melted into the inaccessible countryside. The Wehrmacht forces were not able to cope with this fluidity and mobility. For one thing, the German forces – despite their superiority

\textsuperscript{162} AVII, Na, Reg. No. 18/1, k. 70.
in weapons and other equipment – were much slower and highly influenced by the terrain. For another, the German soldiers were untrained in mountain warfare.

**Eastern Bosnia from the Chetnik Perspective**

The Chetniks in the ISC suffered acute command structure problems, partly due to their geographical isolation. In eastern Bosnia, where the ethno-religious war raged with particular intensity because of its strategic location bordering Serbia, hierarchical problems made the already difficult situation worse. The civil war between the Chetniks and Partisans was imported from Serbia, a process that can be traced through Chetnik documents. The imposition of the civil war on the Bosnian Chetniks by Serbian officers was not an easy task, given that local Serbs were very reluctant to fight each other in the face of Ustaša atrocities. Nevertheless, the civil war eventually spread west of the River Drina; one of the immediate effects of its introduction into the ISC was the disruption of the anti-Ustaša front as two guerrilla groups turned on each other.

The ‘Ten Day Report for the Commander of the Armed Forces Southeast’ (March 10, 1942), written by General Bader in his role as Commanding General in Serbia, refers to the Chetnik involvement in eastern Bosnia. Commenting on the ‘Operative area of eastern Croatia’ (eastern Bosnia, under Bader’s command), Bader says that not only were the rebels acquiring reinforcements from neighbouring Serbia and Montenegro, but ‘the Eastern Orthodox population is being forcefully recruited and forced to fight against the Croats’. Clearly, there was an ethno-religious war going on. Equally obvious is the fact that the Chetniks were targeting not German units but the ISC forces.

A report by Major Radoslav Durić to Mihailović (March 26, 1942) details the military and political situation in eastern Bosnia from the Chetnik perspective. Reporting

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163 AVII, NAV-T-501, r. 247, s. 983-6.
164 AVII, NAV-T-501, r. 247, s. 983-6. ‘The Croats’ here refers to ISC forces, comprised of both Croats and Muslims.
165 The Chetniks were almost certainly behind this development; Bader would have mentioned communists or Bolsheviks if the Partisans had been involved.
166 AVII, NAV-T-501, r. 247, s. 983-6.
167 AVII, Ca, k. 15a, Reg. No. 25/3.
on the forces of Major Jezdimir Dangić, Major Đurić states that there were around four and half thousand men under his command. However, the word ‘command’ was questionable because ‘local commanders were quite independent and only on rare occasions do they follow orders from above’\textsuperscript{168}. The problem of establishing and respecting the command hierarchy was acute for the local Chetniks.

Transplanting the civil war from Serbia into Bosnia was not easily accomplished, even four months after its outbreak. Đurić notes that when certain officers asked their men if they would fight the incoming Partisans, all (except Račić’s men, which arrived from Serbia) replied that they would ‘not fight against the Partisans because they were Serbs, and they came to fight the Ustašas only’\textsuperscript{169}. The officers who came from Serbia had to withdraw from Bosnia. The Partisans, in the meantime, entered the town of Vlasenica, and ‘invited Muslims to write down the names of those [Chetnik] officers who had murdered and mistreated them’\textsuperscript{170}.

Major Đurić’s impression of Major Dangić differed from that of the Germans. To Đurić, Dangić was a man without any understanding of military matters, very impressionable and ready to take anybody’s advice thus leading to the chaos created by indecision. Nevertheless, ‘he was a good soul and a decent human being’\textsuperscript{171}.

Commenting on the Majevica region (near Tuzla), Major Đurić says that Colonel Milan Damjanović had recently destroyed the Partisans, killing their leaders and capturing their archives. In these archives, the Chetniks found the Partisan plan to destroy the Chetniks in Bosnia by personally targeting officers who were leading them. Adding that ‘the Partisans were pushing all the Chetniks on the front line against the Ustašas, while they sit in the rear’\textsuperscript{172}, Đurić expresses his concern that they would recruit and arm all Muslims who remained in their villages.

\textsuperscript{168} AVII, Ca, k. 15a, Reg. No. 25/3.
\textsuperscript{169} AVII, Ca, k. 15a, Reg. No. 25/3.
\textsuperscript{170} AVII, Ca, k. 15a, Reg. No. 25/3.
\textsuperscript{171} AVII, Ca, k. 15a, Reg. No. 25/3.
\textsuperscript{172} AVII, Ca, k. 15a, Reg. No. 25/3.
It is evident from the surviving wartime documents that German and Italian military commanders in the region were fully aware that Ustaša atrocities against the Serbs were the main reason for the Serb uprising in the Independent State of Croatia. It is also clear from Axis and Chetnik documents that Chetnik strategic response was to fight the Ustaša militia to protect Serb settlements and properties, but to avoid open conflict with the Germans, as this would only make things worse for the Serbs. Axis awareness that Ustašas policies were primarily responsible for the Serb uprising made German-Chetnik cooperation to pacify the region possible (pacification by getting rid of the Ustaša militia in eastern Bosnia), but higher levels of Nazi leadership in Berlin shut down these attempts and the turmoil continued.
Chapter 4.

The Chetniks and Ethno-religious Conflict in the German Zones of the ISC during 1942

Chetnik-Partisan War Undermines Chetnik Strategy in Eastern Bosnia

The Chetnik-Partisan war in eastern Bosnia took the focus and energy away from the anti-Ustaša struggle, which had been the essence of early Serb resistance in the region. The local Chetniks blamed the Partisans for the collapse of the anti-Ustaša front in many places, and labelled the civil war the ‘second stab in the back’\(^1\). Chetnik sources documented the general lack of enthusiasm for the civil war among the men. The civil war with the Partisans also resulted in infamous agreements between certain Chetnik detachments in central and western Bosnia and the Independent State of Croatia on an anti-communist basis, a development that caused friction with Mihailović's headquarters in Serbia.

A report written by Lazar Trkulja in the second half of March 1942\(^2\) to Mihailović was entirely devoted to the military and political situation in eastern Bosnia. He states that Partisans comprised of Serbians from the Sandžak region entered eastern Bosnia and attacked the Chetniks; they disarmed the soldiers and executed the officers they captured. According to Trkulja:

Chetnik units in the rear were very weak, because the bulk of forces were positioned on the front towards the Ustašas and it was impossible to resist the Partisans at the same time. Local villagers consider the front

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\(^1\) See: AVII, Ca, k. 236, Reg. No. 8/9.

\(^2\) AVII, Ca, k. 173, Reg. No. 17/5. Dated by content and references in other documents.
towards the Croats the main one and they had no intention of opening another one against the Partisans³.

The result was that the Partisans gained valuable ground just behind the frontline fighting with the Ustašas; they also gained control of communication lines and settlements that could become vital strongholds in the ongoing struggle. While the bulk of Chetnik peasant soldiers stayed on the front line, the Serbian Cer Chetnik unit led by Captain Dragoslav Račić, who was the only one to express a determination to fight the Partisans, withdrew from the area – first towards the north, then into Serbia.

This particular episode illustrates how the Chetnik-Partisan war interfered with the ethno-religious war on the ground, diverting, in this case, Chetnik attention and energies from the former to the latter. The Partisans were able to use to their advantage a situation where the Chetniks were busy with a different enemy, although the collapse of the Chetnik-Ustašas line might eventually endanger the Partisans even more. At any rate, the ‘second stab in the back’ theory remained a prominent feature of the pro-Chetnik historiography.

Local Serbs in eastern Bosnia were not at all keen on fighting a civil war with the Partisans. This is evident from another report written in the region at the time. In this report (March 23, 1942)⁴, Predrag Marković Alimpije, Commander of the Independent Volunteer Unit Žagubica, is inquiring about the views of the local population in eastern Bosnia and records the following response by a local villager as typical. The villager says:

‘Sir, the Partisans were our folk, they were fighting the Ustašas, we have our locals among them, and we do not fight with them. Only certain officers who came from Serbia to wage politics, they want to fight the Partisans – but our Bosnian Chetniks do not want that fight. That is the general view of the Bosnian Serbs⁵.

Clearly, in view of the persistent danger from the Ustašas, the local Chetnik recruits had no enthusiasm for the civil war and saw it as an imported imposition by Serbian Chetnik officers.

³ AVII, Ca, k. 15a, Reg. No. 25/3.
⁴ AVII, Ca, k. 175, Reg. No. 24/4.
⁵ AVII, Ca, k. 175, Reg. No. 24/4.
Problems of hierarchy are evident in Trkulja’s report mentioned above, a common complaint in reports from the region. Trkulja says Jezdimir Dangić had to ask for help from all directions to sustain his forces. Although he was apparently receiving a significant amount of help from Nedić’s government in Serbia, ‘only a fraction of that help actually ended up serving the common good, while most of it was taken by individuals for personal gain’\(^6\).

Trkulja predicts two scenarios that could play out in eastern Bosnia. The first scenario was that German forces would remain passive; thus, on the fronts that we were holding against the Croats our troops will use up all their ammunition, there will be no help from Serbia, the Ustašas will make a breakthrough and slaughter will follow\(^7\). The second possibility was that the Germans would send an expedition and commit atrocities themselves or let the Ustašas do it for them. Whichever scenario unfolds (the Germans, in fact, attacked) the author recommends destroying the communists quickly. Further,

It is weighing heavily on the soul of the people that internal conflict has been imported from Serbia.... [A]lmost all Partisan units are from Serbia and Montenegro. This fact also creates a moral obligation of Serbia to help\(^8\).

In his concluding remarks, Trkulja says the most important thing is ‘preserving from slaughter the population that has already been thinned out’\(^9\). In other words, preservation comes before politics – this typifies Chetnik philosophy.

In Bosnia the situation was still unclear with regards to the civil war, and Trkulja says that ‘smaller segments of the Chetniks and Partisans are still cooperating, while the Partisans [in eastern Bosnia] are systematically attacking [Jezdimir] Dangić’s forces’\(^10\). Even worse, the Partisans were cooperating with the Ustašas: ‘Ustaša authorities are conducting reconnaissance flights and informing the Partisans, and they are letting Partisan units pass through their lines in order to fight the Chetniks’\(^11\). Whether this was

\(^6\) AVII, Ca, k. 175, Reg. No. 24/4.
\(^7\) AVII, Ca, k. 175, Reg. No. 24/4.
\(^8\) AVII, Ca, k. 175, Reg. No. 24/4.
\(^9\) AVII, Ca, k. 175, Reg. No. 24/4.
\(^10\) AVII, Ca, k. 175, Reg. No. 24/4.
\(^11\) AVII, Ca, k. 175, Reg. No. 24/4.
the case is difficult to ascertain, but there is no doubt that the ISC authorities wanted to see civil war between the Chetniks and Partisans and actively worked to achieve it.

Two Conflicts Merge into One in Eastern Bosnia

German documents confirm the Chetnik observations that the Chetnik-Partisan war undermined resistance to the Ustaša militia. The Germans also complained that the Chetniks and Partisans used the Italian zone of occupation in the ISC as a guerrilla refuge, and that the lack of cooperation between the Italians and Germans allowed guerrillas to survive. The fact that two Axis partners controlling the ISC were not in agreement regarding them created a crack through which the Chetniks could opportunely slip.

The ‘Ten Day Report by the Commanding General in Serbia Regarding the Military and Political Situation in Serbia and the ISC’ (April 20, 1942)\textsuperscript{12} contains interesting comments about Dangić’s Chetniks and their activities in eastern Bosnia. Apparently, the advance of Ustaša Colonel Francetić all the way to the River Drina turned into a destructive hit on Dangić’s main forces\textsuperscript{13}. Interestingly enough, the Partisans in the region were fighting against Dangić’s men, but not against the Ustašas\textsuperscript{14}. The report also comments on the humanitarian situation, stating that the crossing of the Serb refugees (mostly ‘women and children’) across the River Drina into Serbia could not be prevented due to the weak occupation forces on the riverbanks. The report adds: ‘Croat Ustašas slaughtered a large number of refugees who were trying to reach the River Drina, and threw some of them into the water’\textsuperscript{15}.

Chaos existed on the ISC-Serbia border with the flood of Serb refugees, and the report says that exchanges of fire had occurred between the Ustaša militia on one side, and the German armed forces and Russian industrial protection corps on the other\textsuperscript{16}.

\textsuperscript{12} AVII, NAV-T-501, r. 247, s. 1163-6.
\textsuperscript{13} AVII, NAV-T-501, r. 247, s. 1163-6.
\textsuperscript{14} AVII, NAV-T-501, r. 247, s. 1163-6. The document states that ‘according to the available reports, the Ustašas apparently fought together with the Croat communists against Dangić’.
\textsuperscript{15} AVII, NAV-T-501, r. 247, s. 1163-6.
\textsuperscript{16} AVII, NAV-T-501, r. 247, s. 1163-6.
The German armed forces attempted to block the eastern bank of the River Drina from the surge of refugees coming from the interior\textsuperscript{17}. Although the report does explain why the German forces stopped Serb refugees from crossing into Serbia, it may have been an attempt to contain unrest on ISC territory; arguably, the Serb refugees from the ISC in Serbia could feed the turmoil and augment the guerrilla units\textsuperscript{18}.

As is typical of such reports, there is a section devoted to the Italians and the state of affairs in the Italian zone of the ISC. The Italian sphere of interest is described as the birthplace of the rebellion. Evidently, the strongest Chetnik units and the strongest Partisan units were operating there; in both cases, they were units of ‘disturbing size’. Chetnik units from Serbia seemed to be crossing the River Drina and burning Muslim villages in the ISC territory. The report lists a series of clashes between the Chetniks and the Croat forces (mostly Ustašas) in eastern Bosnia, including the burning of villages by the Chetniks and their attempts to approach representatives of the Wehrmacht for negotiations. Finally, it describes fighting between the Chetniks and the Ustašas, including the passing of control from one side to the other in several small towns.

‘The Evil Spirits...Have Become Stronger than Those Who Summoned Them’

Opposition to the ISC’s policies by Wehrmacht General Gles von Horstenau in Zagreb often echoed the views of his colleagues in Belgrade and was equally futile. Horstenau viewed the German armed forces as a pacifying force in the ISC. This of course is somewhat paradoxical, given that the ISC was a German creation. As an Austrian, Horstenau drew parallels between the conflict in the ISC and the Austro-Hungarian experiences in the region in 1878, although this comparison was questionable at best. His frustration with the Italians and their ‘fine political game’ (regarding the Serbs in general and the Chetniks in particular) also echoed the views of his colleagues in Belgrade, but the manoeuvring space allowed by Berlin to deal with the

\textsuperscript{17} AVII, NAV-T-501, r. 247, s. 1163-6.

\textsuperscript{18} See AVII, NAV-T-501, r. 251, s. 178. The Order of the Commanding General in Serbia from May 10, 1942, says that refugees should be prevented from crossing the River Drina from the ISC into Serbia. It mentions units of ethnic Albanian gendarmerie under German command in southern Serbia. It adds that Dangić’s Chetniks who crossed the River Drina into Serbia to avoid destruction were captured and disarmed; three copies of the ‘Manual for Guerrilla Warfare (sabotages and ambushes)’ issued by the Yugoslav army were seized.
Italians was once again limited. Despite complaints, however, it was evident to German generals like Horstenau, that the ISC was organically tied to the Ustaša regime and its fate; their view that any attempts to transform the ISC by removing and replacing the existing regime was next to impossible allowed the ethno-religious war to continue until the end of the Second World War.

A report by General Gles von Horstenau (May 19, 1942)\(^{19}\) contains a lengthy analysis of the ethno-religious conflict in the ISC. Horstenau reports that certain important figures in the ISC (albeit not all of them) were realising that the course of action decided upon at the very beginning, namely, the ‘destruction of the Serb part of [the country’s] population’, was flawed\(^{20}\). As proof, General Horstenau notes that a few Serbs were accepted in the Sabor (the ISC parliament) and a ‘Croat Eastern Orthodox Church’ (separate from the Serb Eastern Orthodox) was created. According to Horstenau, the creation of the Croat Orthodox Church was achieved with the encouragement of the Germans. As further proof, he notes the futile attempts to enable the return of those Serbs who had fled to the woods and mountains. The ISC army was trying to push this through but was constantly sabotaged by the Ustaša militia\(^{21}\).

However, as Horstenau notes, ‘the evil spirits, once summoned, have become stronger than those who summoned them’\(^{22}\), indicating that the ethno-religious conflict had developed a life of its own. According to the reports of the German generals located in Sarajevo, he says, the destruction of the ‘Serb element’ (still some one and a half million people) remained the principal goal of the middle and lower segments of the Ustaša movement regardless of the signs of change in course at the top\(^{23}\). Horstenau is certain that this policy was constantly reigniting conflict, ‘whose flame is crossing the

\(^{19}\) AVII, NAV-T-501, r. 266, str. 79-92.
\(^{20}\) AVII, NAV-T-501, r. 266, str. 79-92.
\(^{21}\) AVII, NAV-T-501, r. 266, str. 79-92. Horstenau, like many others, noted the tension between the army and the Ustašas in the ISC. Wehrmacht documents clearly indicate internal tensions between the Domobrani and the Ustašas. They show the tensions between Berlin and the local commanders in Belgrade, as well as between German officials in Zagreb (Siegfried Kashe) and the military commanders in Belgrade. In addition, there was policy tension between professional Wehrmacht segments and political segments such as the SS.
\(^{22}\) AVII, NAV-T-501, r. 266, str. 79-92.
\(^{23}\) AVII, NAV-T-501, r. 266, str. 79-92.
River Drina [into Serbia]\textsuperscript{24}. He has no doubts that the policy of extermination by the Ustašas caused the rebellion in the ISC, and that this rebellion was endangering the pacification of Serbia. Thus, local German leaders were aware of the root causes of the uprising in the ISC and set them out quite clearly in their reports to Berlin. But the Berlin leadership (especially Hitler) decided to override the generals for political reasons.

According to Horstenau, Marshal Eugen Kvaternik was one person in the ISC government who was more lenient towards the Serbs:

When [Kvaternik] was recently congratulated on the successes of the Croat railway service, he pointed out that the service personnel consisted of forty percent Eastern Orthodox – by doing this he openly criticised the government’s policy towards other nationalities\textsuperscript{25}. Regarding the course of fighting, Horstenau noted that the Ustaša unit of Francetić achieved successes northeast of Sarajevo, but also added that this success was besmirched by …bloody atrocities of any kind imaginable\textsuperscript{26}.

Horstenau returns to the motif of the German army as the force of protection in the ISC when he says:

General [Paul] Bader was very engaged in the pacification process; his approach and the approach of his units created among the civil population the feeling of being protected – something that we are hoping Croat policy will not spoil. Among the Chetniks there is a strong desire to return home. Besides the unconditional surrender of their arms, nothing stands in the way of their desire except the possibility of revenge by their political opponents\textsuperscript{27}.

Horstenau (together with his main ally, General Bader) presented the Germans as a force of pacification when compared to the Ustaša militia. He, like others, was frustrated that the hands of the generals were tied with regards to the ISC – not because of the strength of the Ustašas compared to the Germans, but because of the pro-Ustaša stance in Berlin.

\textsuperscript{24} AVII, NAV-T-501, r. 266, str. 79-92.
\textsuperscript{25} AVII, NAV-T-501, r. 266, str. 79-92.
\textsuperscript{26} AVII, NAV-T-501, r. 266, str. 79-92.
\textsuperscript{27} AVII, NAV-T-501, r. 266, str. 79-92.
In his comments on military operations, Horstenau pointed out that the Ustašas that were participating in fighting were more 'interested' in the civilian population than anything else, and that their arrival traditionally resulted in the uprooting of the Serb population into the local woods, thereby swelling both Chetnik and Partisan ranks\textsuperscript{28}.

Horstenau’s report, of course, considers the issue of the Italians; by calling their policy ‘a fine political game, which is not always producing results’, Horstenau openly expresses his displeasure to his superiors\textsuperscript{29}. The Second Italian Army, he says, led by the ‘highly political’ General Roatta, was openly showing its antipathy towards the Croat part of the ISC’s population\textsuperscript{30}. According to Horstenau, the Italians were making every effort to encourage the Serbs on both sides of the River Drina to fight the Croats\textsuperscript{31}. Despite an Italian-German agreement (reached in April 1942 in Ljubljana) which stated that there would be no military cooperation with the Chetniks, recent reports said that in Herzegovina the Chetniks fought side by side with the Italians against the communists\textsuperscript{32}. A high-ranking officer of the Italian army located in Dubrovnik gave a speech to the local Serbs, telling them to fight against the Partisans and the Ustašas, adding that Serbs should not fear Croats, because a new Italian-Serb state which would replace the ISC was in the making\textsuperscript{33}. In Horstenau’s view, these activities were in line with Italian attempts to get their troops stationed in Sarajevo and to establish links with Nedić’s government in Belgrade\textsuperscript{34}. He mentions an Italian propaganda leaflet which the Germans had recently discovered; directed at the Chetniks, it was disseminated by airplane over Herzegovina. In the leaflet, the Chetniks were called to give up their role in

\textsuperscript{28} AVII, NAV-T-501, r. 266, str. 79-92. Horstenau also recognised the role of the Volksdeutsche in Bosnia, mentioning that the Volksdeutsche battalion proved its worth in protecting German settlements in the region east of Mount Kozara The German settlements in question – dating from Austro-Hungarian days – were located in Bosnia south of the River Sava, and south of Bosanska Gradiska town. These settlements were Šibovska, Glogovac (Schutzberg), Prnjavor, Nova Topola (Windhorst) and Dubrava (Königsfeld). The German (Volksdeutsche) population from these settlements was expelled by Yugoslav communist authorities after the war.

\textsuperscript{29} AVII, NAV-T-501, r. 266, str. 79-92.

\textsuperscript{30} AVII, NAV-T-501, r. 266, str. 79-92.

\textsuperscript{31} AVII, NAV-T-501, r. 266, str. 79-92.

\textsuperscript{32} AVII, NAV-T-501, r. 266, str. 79-92.

\textsuperscript{33} AVII, NAV-T-501, r. 266, str. 79-92.

\textsuperscript{34} AVII, NAV-T-501, r. 266, str. 79-92.
the uprising, ‘With the belief in God and Serb freedom!’ Horstenau argued that this appeal was directed against the Croat state.

Horstenau felt that the Croats, Muslims and many Eastern Orthodox persons hated Italy; he cites the insulting comments shouted at Italian soldiers, the occasional shootouts (as in Slavonski Brod, located in the German zone) and numerous other examples of hostility. He notes the harsh criticism of Poglavnik (Pavelić), who had been accused (according to Horstenau, completely unfairly) of ‘selling’ Croatia to Italy. Horstenau’s conclusion is that the Italian approach was extremely unfortunate, and that larger Axis interests called for friendly German advice.

However, among the Croat masses (less among the Muslims) the initial strong sympathies towards the Germans were lessening for the ‘usual’ reason, namely, the impression that Germany ‘betrayed’ Croatia to Italy (this was not being actively denied by the Germans), and that the German plundering of natural and other resources was responsible for the difficult economic situation.

Added to this, Horstenau recognises Croat-Hungarian tensions in the north, something that had existed for centuries and manifested itself in unsuccessful border negotiations. Because of this, the ISC established closer ties with Slovakia and Romania, and closer ties with Bulgaria (this latter case was clearly about hostility to Serbia). Thus, some of the pre-war geopolitical developments were echoed in the German satellite system of the Second World War, although these states had little manoeuvring room and, in the event of German victory in the war, would almost certainly have had none in the future.

Regarding the state of the ISC’s armed forces, Horstenau points out that most members of the ISC government believed that the survival of the state in the face of internal enemies depended on the Ustaša militia, and that the regular Croat army (Domobrani) were essentially useless. The ISC leaders who took this line, he says,

35 AVII, NAV-T-501, r. 266, str. 79-92.
36 AVII, NAV-T-501, r. 266, str. 79-92.
37 Horstenau adds that this opinion was being inflated by the Italian propaganda – which was, in itself, a recognition of a hostile act by a German ally; clearly there was a significant amount of backstabbing between the two main Axis partners in the Balkans.
frequently pointed to the ‘revolutionary ideas which are driving the Ustašas’ and underlined the advantages of volunteer troops in a state that was still forming compared to conscription-based troops; further, the Ustašas were seen as having favourable results in eastern Bosnia while the Domobrani forces were regularly blamed for failures.

Horstenau, however, also points out that the general Croat population was much more in favour of the army which was led by the old – sometimes too old – former Austro-Hungarian officers, and that people hated the Ustašas because of their total lack of discipline, their arrogance and endless atrocities. Because the regime itself (including Pavelić) was directly tied to the fate of the Ustaša movement, it was impossible to disband the Ustašas. Because of this, the ISC would have to continue carrying the economic burden of two armies – the regular one (Domobrani) and the Ustaša militia. In Horstenau’s view, the Ustaša militia should be seen as a separate issue from the Ustaša party, a unified political force that was, in fact, the state.

On the conscription front, Horstenau says that out of twenty thousand conscripts who received the call, less than fifty percent showed up, and that not only the Serbs but also the Croats frequently ran away to avoid military service. Bringing his Austrian heritage into play, Horstenau repeats that the Croat armed forces needed to follow the examples of Austro-Hungarian days in the region and reorganise (in Bosnia and Herzegovina) into mountain brigades consisting of four battalions each. By way of contrast, Horstenau notes that the Ustaša militia (according to Croat sources) at the time of writing, May 1942, had approximately fifteen thousand men.

German documents indicate that the elimination of all Serbs in the ISC was the initial state policy. Ustaša atrocities created armed Serb resistance, sparking the ethno-religious war, and the armed resistance made this goal impossible to reach. The Wehrmacht, while allowing the Ustaša regime to carry out this policy, was not necessarily condoning it; for its local leaders, the connection between the atrocities and peace was evident, and in areas like eastern Bosnia, the German army was ready to issue orders to open fire on the Ustaša militia. The security situation in central and eastern Bosnia, including the dynamics of the ethno-religious war, were very different; the Ustaša regime was particularly keen to eradicate Serbs in eastern Bosnia, because it was a border region with Serbia.
A note from the Conference of German Generals held in Sarajevo on May 6, 1942 comments on the national policies in the ISC and the ethno-religious conflict. General Bader says:

The goal of the Croat government was the extermination of all Serbs in Croatia. Now this has proved impossible, the government is now ready to change course and yield. The government remains only a theory, because it has no influence on its subordinates. Atrocities of the Ustaša are still continuing. In the future, I will order German troops to shoot the Ustašas committing atrocities, not out of consideration for the Serbs, but to establish order and because the Ustaša in the arc of Drina are committing these atrocities under German command.

He adds that German units assigned to the task of closing the Drina border were letting the Serb refugees pass into Serbia. Horstenau echoed General Bader’s view:

Until the atrocities in Croatia stop, there will not be any peace. While on the territory of Mount Ozren there are negotiations and concessions are given (recognition of the Serb minority, freedom of religion, participation in the struggle against the communists), the slaughter of the Serb population in eastern Bosnia is continuing.

A different relationship between the Serbs (as well as the Chetniks) and the ISC in different regions was a reflection of strategic concerns. Ozren was a less sensitive area than eastern Bosnia, which bordered Serbia and where the ISC planned to remove/destroy the entire Serb population.

Regarding the Italians, General Bader was of the opinion that the Italians were not interested in fighting; they merely wanted to secure a supply of wood from eastern

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38 AVII, NAV-T-501, r. 247, s. 1163-6.
39 AVII, NAV-T-501, r. 247, s. 1163-6.
40 AVII, NAV-T-501, r. 247, s. 1163-6. The negotiations mentioned and concessions arranged were between ISC authorities and the Ozren Chetnik Corps of Cvijetin Todić, Trebava Chetnik Corps of Sava Bozic and Majvica Chetnik Brigade of Radivoje Kerović. For more information on these negotiations see: AVII, Ca, reg. No. 1/2, 2/2, 3/2, k. 234; reg. No. 1/8, k. 233; reg. No. 1/13 and 5/4, k. 235.
Bosnia. The Italians were avoiding clashes, letting the Chetniks fight instead, and were supporting the uprising41.

Ustaša atrocities and the ethno-religious war produced the largest number of casualties in the ISC. However, the civil war between the Chetniks and Partisans also produced a significant number of casualties, most of them Serbs, given the composition of both forces at the time. The ‘Report by the Commanders of the Group of Chetnik Units’ (May 6, 1942)42 to Mihailović details events in Bosnia, specifically the Partisan slaughter of the Chetniks (on March 8) in Borike, where fifty-four people were killed (including a handful of officers). With this slaughter ‘the Partisans came into conflict with the local Serb population’ 43. An account of the conflict with the Ustašas follows and includes the following details. On Stari Brod (the River Drina) the Chetniks had to secure the riverbank ‘in order to secure the flight of the Serbs excepting the Ustašas and the Muslims across the Drina into Serbia’44. The advance of the Ustašas (under Wehrmacht protection) meant the ‘destruction of all things Serb’ 45. The villages of Kusače and Jelovac near Han-Pijesak were destroyed and the Serb population slaughtered. Chetnik commanders reported the worse atrocities in the village of Sjeversko, where the Ustašas killed seventy-five women and children:

Before killing everybody, they raped all adolescent girls in front of their parents before killing them. We know this because we have a witness, a twenty-year old village girl Vojka Šuka who managed to escape. Another witness is Vidojević Miloš from Sokolović, who was roasted alive but somehow managed to escape and is now in the hospital in Užice [in Serbia]46.

The authors secured the transfer of some seven thousand Serb refugees across the River Drina into Serbia. These refugees lacked any possessions. Frequently,

41 AVII, NAV-T-501, r. 247, s. 1163-6. On the Italian issue, General Varlimont added that Germans would never give up on northern Croatia, thus reiterating earlier plans – abandoned by Hitler – to let the Italians occupy the rest of the ISC.
42 AVII, Ca, k. 171, Reg. No. 39/1.
43 AVII, Ca, k. 171, Reg. No. 39/1.
44 AVII, Ca, k. 171, Reg. No. 39/1.
45 AVII, Ca, k. 171, Reg. No. 39/1.
46 AVII, Ca, k. 171, Reg. No. 39/1. This level of barbarity during these atrocities was typical of the region at the time.
children were left alongside the muddy roads because the parents had been killed attempting to reach the Serbian side of the river. The report concludes:

The present situation is very difficult. The Chetniks have decided to fight until the end, against every enemy of Serbdom. We believe that the struggle of the Bosnian Chetniks is the most difficult one. They have to fight the Ustaša and the Partisans47.

Most certainly the Chetniks in the ISC, especially in eastern Bosnia – unlike the Chetniks in most of Serbia and Montenegro – were facing a difficult situation: they had to fight the ethno-religious war and the Chetnik-Partisan war at the same time.

Uprising in Eastern Bosnia from the Chetnik Perspective

The Serb uprising in eastern Bosnia from the Chetnik perspective supplements the picture that can be pieced together from the German wartime documents. Similar to German reports, Chetnik documents argue that Ustaša atrocities ignited the Serb uprising in the ISC. The initial Serb uprising was apolitical in nature, simply aimed at survival. The Chetniks (and the Partisans) worked hard to reach leadership positions and to politicise it to their own ends. Interestingly, the local population had little enthusiasm for continuing guerrilla activities, indicating that without the atrocities there would not have been an uprising. This meant that both guerrilla groups faced potential disappearance due to desertion if the situation improved and the violence ended. The ISC could have solved its security problem simply by doing nothing, but sadly this proved to be ideologically impossible. Paradoxically, both the Chetniks and the Partisans needed an ethno-religious war to feed their ranks, and arguably the Chetniks needed the civil war as the rationale for the collaboration agreements which become part of their overall strategy.

The ‘Report by Captain Milorad Momčilović to Major Petar Baćeović’ (June 7, 1942) covers events in eastern Bosnia from June 1941 to June 194248. This lengthy report is devoted to the origins of the Serb uprising in Bosnia, the ethno-religious conflict there and the Chetnik-Partisan war.

47  AVII, Ca, k. 171, Reg. No. 39/1.
48  AVII, Ca, k. 175, Reg. No. 28/4.
Regarding the ‘Bosnian uprising’, Captain Momčilović says Mihailović and the people around him were not in possession of the correct information with regards to the development and partial failure of the uprising in Bosnia, judging by the documents issued by the Chetnik Supreme Command. Indeed, this perception prompted Captain Momčilović to write this lengthy report in the first place. The first part of his report is devoted to the origins of the uprising. Commenting that Ustaša outposts had been created in all Bosnian towns with the downfall of Yugoslavia and the establishment of the ISC, he says that these camps were comprised of ‘those who hated the Serbs the most’. Moreover,

the Ustašas are all the Croats, and the largest part of the Turkish scum. The Croats joined the Ustašas mainly because of their hatred towards the Serbs, while with the Turks the main reason was the promise of land held by the Serbs.

Thus, according to Captain Momčilović, the motivation of the Croats was primarily nationalistic while the motivation of the Muslims was chiefly economic.

A plan for the complete extermination of the Serbs had been created in Zagreb, with the first wave of hostility to be directed against the Serb urban and rural intelligencia, followed by the targeting of wealthy Serb peasants. Momčilović notes a surprising lack of reaction among the populace when the attack began:

While the urban population was being destroyed, the rural population was not reacting at all – there was even a partial satisfaction. Once the villages became a target there was no resistance, because the Ustašas were transporting the arrested outside of their settlements.

While ‘the arrestees were supposedly transported from Vlasenica to Tuzla, Momčilović says, ‘they were slaughtered during the night at Rašića Gaj near Vlasenica’.

This state of affairs continued until two victims managed to flee one night when they saw a hole dug out for them. News of events spread with great speed, and those who felt threatened fled to the woods:

49 AVII, Ca, k. 175, Reg. No. 28/4.
50 AVII, Ca, k. 175, Reg. No. 28/4. The Turks in Chetnik reports are Slavic Muslims.
51 AVII, Ca, k. 175, Reg. No. 28/4.
Persuasion, force, and even trickery caused the rest to join the uprising, but still the uprising remained limited to Srebrenica and Vlasenica districts, Majevica and Mount Ozren. From all of this it is evident that the uprising did not erupt from any other reason than to save our own lives\textsuperscript{52}.

Thus, the eruption of the Serb uprising in this part of Bosnia was a direct reaction to atrocities committed by the Ustašas; at the outset it was apolitical and aimed at survival.

The second section of the report is devoted to the development of the uprising. Long term planning and conspiratorial work was not possible because of the threat of a quick and complete destruction of everything Serb. Nor was there enough time to organize. Having professional officers was critical, but ‘there was no one who could organise things in advance, because the officers and intellectuals were either killed or in Serbia’\textsuperscript{53}. The villages were left to their own devices, and for the rural population ‘nothing else remained but to grab a gun and flee to the woods’\textsuperscript{54}.

Those who were threatened, as well as those ‘inclined towards freedom, and the rebellious individuals’ started organising units. However, as soon as the ‘Ustaša pressure started decreasing somewhat out of the fear from those in the woods’\textsuperscript{55}, the local population became far less mobile and was reluctant to join the uprising. The description of the population’s behaviour suggests that without atrocities there would have been no local uprising, and if these atrocities had stopped at any point during the war the uprising would have disappeared entirely. To keep the momentum, fake news was disseminated that ‘the Serbians were crossing the River Drina, the Montenegrins were coming from the south, and that Allied paratroopers had landed’\textsuperscript{56}. Captain Momčilović says that with such propaganda ‘as well as violent measures’ the uprising continued\textsuperscript{57}. The rebels started disrupting communications, and soon attacks started against gendarmerie outposts and certain (presumably non-Serb) villages.

\textsuperscript{52} AVII, Ca, k. 175, Reg. No. 28/4.
\textsuperscript{53} AVII, Ca, k. 175, Reg. No. 28/4.
\textsuperscript{54} This process is strikingly similar to the initial stages of the First Serbian Uprising against the Ottomans more than a century earlier.
\textsuperscript{55} AVII, Ca, k. 175, Reg. No. 28/4.
\textsuperscript{56} AVII, Ca, k. 175, Reg. No. 28/4.
\textsuperscript{57} AVII, Ca, k. 175, Reg. No. 28/4.
News about the existence of the Chetnik organisation, as well as the fabricated news that Serbians and Montenegrins had arrived in the region 'paralysed the Croats and Turks'\textsuperscript{58} with fear. The rebels took the town of Srebrenica, and the Croat armed forces despite their numerical superiority evacuated the towns of Vlasenica and Han Pijesak. The Croat armed forces focused on defending Zvornik, Romanija, Rogatica and Višegrad, 'leaving the rest to the Turks'\textsuperscript{59}. This section of the report concludes with an overview of the situation in September 1941, with the rebels controlling the countryside from Mount Romanija in the west to the River Drina in the east, and from Višegrad in the north to Zvornik in the south 'with the exception of a few Turkish villages'\textsuperscript{60}.

Turning to the command and leadership of the uprising, the report notes the overriding chaos: 'the uprising erupted and the organisation of it came afterwards, not the other way around'\textsuperscript{61}. According to Momčilović, four leaders eventually emerged: Major Jezdimir Dangić (who arrived from Serbia, but was from the region), Aćim Babić (a wealthy local peasant, of whose personal qualities Momčilović was most critical), Major Boško Todorović, and Franc Vainer (also known as 'Slaviša' or 'Čiča', a communist party member of Jewish origins who had arrived from Sarajevo; after the Chetnik-Partisan split he led the local Partisans). Beside these four main leaders, there were numerous local leaders. Problems of integration, hierarchy and command structure were acute: 'each commander considered himself to be a local warlord. Each one had a personal guard (of pure bandits) and an insatiable ambition and desire for riches'\textsuperscript{62}. Before the four main commanders emerged, each leader of a local band acted independently in the vicinity of his village. The roles of these units included 'small ambushes and protection of the village'\textsuperscript{63}. Thus, the initial rebel units were a village protection paramilitary force, but in time, they made connections with each other, organising into a wider movement 'as far as the personal ambition of the local commanders allowed it'\textsuperscript{64}.

\textsuperscript{58} AVII, Ca, k. 175, Reg. No. 28/4. The Turks in Chetnik reports were Slavic Muslims.

\textsuperscript{59} AVII, Ca, k. 175, Reg. No. 28/4.

\textsuperscript{60} AVII, Ca, k. 175, Reg. No. 28/4.

\textsuperscript{61} AVII, Ca, k. 175, Reg. No. 28/4.

\textsuperscript{62} AVII, Ca, k. 175, Reg. No. 28/4.

\textsuperscript{63} AVII, Ca, k. 175, Reg. No. 28/4.

\textsuperscript{64} AVII, Ca, k. 175, Reg. No. 28/4.
By the end of September 1941, almost all local units recognised the authority of one of the four commanders. However, problems continued: ‘Sometimes one of the four commanders issued an order to a particular unit, but the unit was not happy about the task and simply decided to disobey’\textsuperscript{65}. For example, Major Dangić ordered a unit to leave one front line and join another, but reluctant to do so, it headed to Aćim Babić’s area and recognised his authority – and the men were given an indefinite leave of absence. Beyond this, ‘the destructive work of the communists’\textsuperscript{66} added to the overall chaos.

In the second half of September 1941, a group of officers came from Ravna Gora (eight in total). Together with a group of Bosnians that accompanied them, Major Dangić assigned them positions in the Srebrenica and Vlasenica Units. Major Dangić’s influence spread to the units commanded by these officers. In the end, these officers had to leave their units, partly because of communist intrigues but more importantly ‘because of the ambitions of local popular leaders who wanted to stay in command’\textsuperscript{67}. Nevertheless, things started to improve on the ground, and the organisation acquired military characteristics. Discipline, however, continued to be a problem.

During the initial phase of the uprising, there was no plundering of any kind. But in time, the ‘leaders’ themselves (including Aćim Babić, one of the ‘big four’) began to steal and plunder. Soon the practice spread throughout the region, resulting in a transformation of certain battalions into real brigands and criminal bands\textsuperscript{68}. The Derventa Battalion, for example, was led by the pre-war criminal Rajko Čelonja; just before Christmas, he entered Srebrenica and ‘plundered both the Serbs and the Turks’\textsuperscript{69} and the local Chetnik commander had to hide. As Momčilović notes, certain villages and areas had to be captured a number of times because ‘the first time everyone would just plunder, and the Turks would return afterwards’\textsuperscript{70}.

According to Momčilović, the urge to plunder also had ethno-religious overtones:

\textsuperscript{65} AVII, Ca, k. 175, Reg. No. 28/4.
\textsuperscript{66} AVII, Ca, k. 175, Reg. No. 28/4.
\textsuperscript{67} AVII, Ca, k. 175, Reg. No. 28/4.
\textsuperscript{68} AVII, Ca, k. 175, Reg. No. 28/4.
\textsuperscript{69} AVII, Ca, k. 175, Reg. No. 28/4.
\textsuperscript{70} AVII, Ca, k. 175, Reg. No. 28/4.
At the very beginning of the uprising there were no killings of the Turks en masse. Only the Ustašas were killed as well as those who committed evil. Serb neighbours were protecting their Turk neighbours, while the Serb leaders were protecting the Turk leaders. Everyone was securing himself for any possible outcome – a custom from the Ottoman times. This went so far that Aćim Babić kept under his bed in Vlasenica one of the [Muslims] who committed horrendous acts against the Serbs, a person called Zajdija. Many others were doing the same for money. Everybody was protecting his own neighbour, but nobody was protecting somebody else’s neighbour. For reasons of plunder and out of hatred, everyone was soon killing the Turks en masse in the areas where they had no personal connections. Some individuals had a few hundred on their lists. Thus, the extermination of the Turks was occurring, unless their neighbours took them (for money or out of love) to the edge of the Turkish zone.71

Momčilović returns to the overall problem of discipline and overall mentality:

Bosnians from this area are anarchists by nature, and they do not recognise any authority easily – except the one that is imposed by force. They have worked with all their might to prevent the creation of a solid organisation. Certain units rejected the officers altogether (they asked for their help only in cases of extreme danger). They elected leaders among themselves, or their leaders became the criminals, robbers and brigands of the worst kind. Here we have the case of Stojan Popović, who stripped bare the offices and soldiers of the Yugoslav Royal Army at Stari Brod [a crossing point between Bosnia and Serbia on the River Drina] during the April catastrophe, then he did the same to the refugees – and then he became a leader of a unit. Other elected leaders who were soft and without strong will could do whatever they wanted. Anyone who wanted could create his own unit.72

The author also pointed to the distribution problems, citing the case of the Srebrenica battalion with one hundred and ten rifles and four units – but one unit had sixty-eight rifles (the remainder was divided between the other three units).

Nevertheless, certain battalions asked for and received officers, though these officers merely acted as advisors while the men did all they could to sabotage any attempt to establish real military discipline. These attempts to establish discipline and prevent looting often ended in men leaving for other units, deserting to the Partisans (or vice versa) or separating into their own bands. An officers was killed by his own men in Rogatica when he attempted to prevent looting, and Major Boško Todorović almost

71 AVII, Ca, k. 175, Reg. No. 28/4.
72 AVII, Ca, k. 175, Reg. No. 28/4.
suffered the same fate when he stood at the door of a house to prevent it from being looted; in the end, he had to back down.

Captain Momčilović paints a bleak picture of the local population: ‘The largest segment is without national consciousness and non-receptive to any ideology or ideals. They would gladly follow anybody who could guarantee their lives’.73 If he is correct, this could explain the support for both the Chetniks and the Partisans in the region.

Mobility and territoriality and the ability to conduct larger-scale military operations were major problems:

When an offensive is planned, those units from the villages that were already free would not participate at all, or if they participated they would do so grumblingly and they would use the first possible excuse to go home. Their explanation would be: ‘We freed ourselves, so let the other villages do the same on their own’. Guerrilla action and the struggle in the enemy’s rear was impossible, for the simple reason that one could not find people who would do this. Not a single unit would agree to leave their own village. The men considered defending their village as enough74.

Clearly most units were territorial paramilitary forces, tied to their locality and motivated to protect their own homes only.

Enforcing rules prescribed by the Chetnik leadership was nearly impossible. For example, orders were issued numerous times to the men to have a reserve set of clothing on hand, but almost no one did so; following these orders meant losing a reason to go home occasionally. Because of this, half of the men were ‘on duty’ at any given time, while the rest were at home ‘changing clothes’.

Momčilović reports that some units sat at home for weeks and even months, while a mountain battalion, upon receiving orders, discussed the orders for a week and replied that they would move out only if they received very generous food supplies. In case of an attack, the orders were always to fall back to the initial position and hold that line. However, only the commanders would remain in such cases; the men would flee on foot to their homes which were two or three days away.

73 AVII, Ca, k. 175, Reg. No. 28/4.
74 AVII, Ca, k. 175, Reg. No. 28/4.
While this bleak picture is not necessarily illustrative of all Chetnik-Partisan rebels at the time, it depicts an extremely chaotic region. But according to Captain Momčilović, this was not the case at the beginning:

The initial stages of the uprising were heroic times. Individuals would march on the enemy with pitchforks and sickles. Unbelievably heroic acts happened. Each unit had a few people who were motivating and pushing forward the entire unit. In pitch battles most of these individuals were killed\textsuperscript{75}.

Although Serbian Chetniks promised to help, only a few Chentik units arrived: two led by a certain Dakić (one of those units joined the communists), and the Ličko-Krajiški unit led by Captain Lapčević from the west\textsuperscript{76}. These non-regional units under-performed and provoked panic among the local forces. All of this, together with battle fatigue, had caused a serious crisis in morale by March 1942.

Captain Momčilović identifies two additional problems in the region’s command structure: ‘fake officers’ and popular leaders. The ‘fake officers’ were individuals who presented themselves as officers of the Yugoslav Royal Army to attain leadership positions; in fact, they had been dismissed from the army before the war, had never finished military school, or had been in non-leadership positions (military doctors etc.). As Momčilović notes, these men did not possess the necessary skills to successfully lead the guerrilla effort. Captain Momčilović, like many of his colleagues, believed that a professional military background was obligatory for leadership roles – despite Partisan proof to the contrary throughout the war. Equally problematic were the popular leaders from the wealthy peasant class, or ‘white peasants’. These individuals naturally wanted to assume leadership positions in their localities, even though they had no military background of any kind. They represented one of the biggest obstacles to the officers, whom they saw as rivals.

Captain Momčilović concludes his overview by stating that the whole action in the region had failed not only because of the efforts of a few individuals, but also because of

\textsuperscript{75} AVII, Ca, k. 175, Reg. No. 28/4.

\textsuperscript{76} For more information on these units see: AVII, Ca, k. 175, Reg. No. 24/4 and AVII, ANDH, k. 62, Reg. No. 12/2.
‘the inertia of the Turks and the complete incompetence and zero value of the Croat Domobrani forces’

The second part of Captain Momčilović’s report is devoted to the problem of the Partisans. Initially, he says, there was neither an agreement nor friction between the Chetniks and the Partisans. While Partisan propaganda was present from the beginning, ‘there were no communist slogans yet’. Everyone was fighting his own small war locally but the fighting men were peasants, while the leaders were covert communists. Apparently, Franc Vainer ‘Čiča’ openly denied that he was a communist and claimed connections with the royal family.

**The Beginning of the Chetnik-Partisan War in Eastern Bosnia: The Chetnik Perspective**

The arrival of the Partisan Headquarters into eastern Bosnia from Serbia marked the true beginning of the Chetnik-Partisan war in the ISC. The civil war was imported from Serbia where it had originated, and it undermined the Serb anti-Ustaša front as a result. As has been noted, atrocities uprooted the local Serbs, who rebelled in an apolitical fashion against the Ustaša militia. The Partisans and the Chetniks then competed to politicise the rebels, finally separating them into two groups and placing them on the collision course of war.

On October 1, 1941, the Communist Headquarters for Bosnia-Herzegovina arrived in the region following Tito’s directives. The HQ included three prominent individuals all three of whom were officially proclaimed heroes after the war: Rodoljub Čolaković, or ‘Ročko’ who, according to Momčilović, ‘translated [Marx’s] Das Kapital with some Jew’; Slobodan Princip, or ‘Seljo’ who gained popularity because of his last name, the same as that of the famous Sarajevo assassin Gavrilo Princip who triggered the First World War in 1914; and Svetozar Vukmanović, or ‘Tempo’. They entered negotiations with the Chetniks, and Major Jezdimir Dangić reached an agreement of cooperation with them. Momčilović adds that at the beginning the Partisan units had fully cooperated with

77 AVII, Ca, k. 175, Reg. No. 28/4.
78 AVII, Ca, k. 175, Reg. No. 28/4.
79 AVII, Ca, k. 175, Reg. No. 28/4.
80 AVII, Ca, k. 175, Reg. No. 28/4.
the Chetnik units, including launching joint attacks against the enemy, holding a common frontline and so on, and he cites the attack against the town of Olovo as an example\textsuperscript{81}. In his opinion, the manpower of Chetnik and Partisan units was the same, being comprised of local villagers (about whom the communist leaders ‘could not care less’)\textsuperscript{82}.

The problems started not on the front line where full cooperation continued, but in the rear. In all Chetnik-held settlements, communist propaganda departments began to emerge, as well as political demonstrations. Momčilović says they targeted hospitals, spreading propaganda via nurses working there. Major Jezdimir Dangić became alarmed by these developments and forbade further political demonstrations. The Partisans, for their part, gave a large amount of money to Aćim Babić ‘to undermine Dangić’s authority’\textsuperscript{83}.

To address these issues, Major Dangić organised a Chetnik-Partisan conference in Vlasenica, but without success. The Partisans left the conference, the Chetnik-Partisan cooperation agreement was abandoned and the Chetniks organised their own Provisional Administration of Eastern Bosnia. Momčilović argues that people assigned to various positions in this administration were not up to the challenge, with some individuals too ‘pink’ – a Chetnik expression for members of their own ranks who still favoured cooperation with the Partisans after the split. Nevertheless, a unified Chetnik command was created, headed by Major Boško Todorović who was named the head of the administration’s Operative Division. The results soon started to show on the ground, with successful Chetnik conquests of the towns of Foča, Goražde, Čajniče, Olovo and the preparation of an offensive on the River Sava.

As this was happening, local Partisan units were breaking up, with the men deserting to Chetnik units, due to the ‘increased and open communist propaganda, denouncing God, faith, the Slava\textsuperscript{84}, forbidding access to priests for funerals, accepting the Turks and Croats into the Partisan ranks and confiscation of property’\textsuperscript{85}. The

\textsuperscript{81} For more information on the Chetnik-Partisan attack on Olovo see: AVII, Ca, k. 174, Reg. No. 38/3 and 4/5.
\textsuperscript{82} AVII, Ca, k. 175, Reg. No. 28/4.
\textsuperscript{83} AVII, Ca, k. 175, Reg. No. 28/4.
\textsuperscript{84} Worship of a particular saint as a protector of the family and household amongst the Serbs.
\textsuperscript{85} AVII, Ca, k. 175, Reg. No. 28/4.
Chetniks also infiltrated numerous Partisan units and spread propaganda leaflets among the men, all of it resulting in the break up of Partisan units or the defection of entire battalions to the Chetniks. Thus, at the end of December 1941 the Romania Partisan Corps was reduced from fifteen hundred to just two hundred and fifty men, while the Šeković unit was reduced to just a dozen individuals. At this time, even though there was no open hostility between the Chetniks and the Partisans in the region, there was a worrisome, ever-increasing tension.

During the first week of January 1942, the Proletarian Division arrived in the region, entering Bosnia from Sandžak. The incoming Partisan force disarmed all Chetnik units in their path, executing all the officers that they captured (Momčilović gives examples for Romanija and Vareš). To further complicate matters, news of the German punitive expedition arrived on January 11, 1942. After some deliberation, the Provisional Administration for eastern Bosnia issued an order not to resist the Germans, hoping that the Germans would act only against the Partisans, and fled to Serbia, leaving local units were left to their own devices. The Wehrmacht captured around seven hundred men, including a few officers. Wehrmacht forces stayed in the region only for a few days, and the ISC armed forces moved out shortly afterwards, but the Chetnik front was broken: ‘Olovo, Sokolac and Rogatica were retaken by the Turks, the Croats took Foča, the communists took Goražde and Čajniče’86.

Not everything was lost, however. Once the Wehrmacht forces left the area, the Chetniks simply retook their old positions in the countryside (with the exception of the towns mentioned above) and re-established control. The German offensive seemed to have had a positive effect as well:

People woke up and now accepted the officers without reservations. Orders were carried out more readily and more precisely. The Provisional Administration for eastern Bosnia was abolished, only the Operative Headquarters and the Command of the Rear remained87.

86 AVII, Ca, k. 175, Reg. No. 28/4.
87 For the order establishing these changes see AVII, Ca, k. 170, Reg. No. 35/4.
The Četnik Corps from Serbia was assigned the task of establishing order in the rear. Its radical village-to-village measures ensured that ‘many of those who had never seen the front line ended up on it’\(^8\), and the overall situation improved drastically.

Ironically, it was the German anti-guerrilla offensive that prevented the Chetnik-Partisan war in eastern Bosnia. The Chetniks accused the Partisans of attacking the rear while they were holding the front lines against the Ustaša militia and subjecting more settlements to atrocities. It is evident from the Chetnik reports that local Serbs in eastern Bosnia did not want a civil war among themselves, and that the main benefactor of the Chetnik-Partisan war was the Ustaša militia.

The German offensive also postponed the imminent outbreak of the civil war between the Chetniks and the Partisans in the region. The Proletarian Division fled in the face of the Germans, while the local Partisan leadership went into hiding. Local internal Chetnik intrigues continued nevertheless, with squabbling for positions of power. A group of would-be leaders even defected to form an independent group outside the region, in a neighbouring part of Serbia. Also, individuals from Serbia kept showing up in the region determined to assume local leadership. Captain Momčilović specifically mentions the mysterious ‘Captain’ Dakić who commanded two units (each one hundred and sixty men strong) and had the Chetnik insignia and red star ready for each individual.

The Ustaša offensive then occurred, with Captain Momčilović attributing responsibility to the ‘Ustaša Black Legion’. Containing Croat and Muslim refugees dressed in black uniforms and led by the former exile Jure Francetić, the unit ‘was comprised of the worst, and they conducted atrocities which were sickening even to the regular Ustaša militia’\(^9\).

At the end of February 1942, the Ustaša offensive moved from Sokolac towards Han Pijesak. Heavy fighting occurred around Žljebovo, Kram and Han Pijesak, with the latter being captured by the Ustaša and then besieged by the Chetniks. The Ustaša attempted to keep the road from Romanija to Han Pijesak under their control, but they

\(^8\) AVII, Ca, k. 175, Reg. No. 28/4.
\(^9\) AVII, Ca, k. 175, Reg. No. 28/4. The Ustašas also organised a heavily armed railway protection corps.
were not able to completely do so. At that time, the Partisans showed up at the rear (around March 16, 1942), causing a complete breakdown of the Chetnik front.

The Partisans reappeared around February 15 distributing leaflets. Clearly, certain Chetnik units (especially those ‘who had defected from the Partisans, and knew first hand whom they were up against’) were preparing for open conflict.\(^90\) The Chetniks captured and executed a few Partisan couriers carrying appeals for help from the Partisan central command. Nevertheless, it seems that other couriers managed to sneak out undetected and reach the Partisan HQ. As a consequence, on March 8, 1942 (in the middle of the Ustaša offensive) two Proletarian battalions entered the region and attacked the Chetnik headquarters near Borike. The Chetniks lost fifty-four men, including six officers.

The Proletarian battalions continued their advance, and on March 16 almost captured the Chetnik Operative HQ in Milići. Momčilović comments that the two Proletarian battalions were comprised of ‘Serbians, Montenegrins, Sandžalians [people from the Sandžak region] with a lot of Muslims and Gypsies’\(^91\). The Partisans kept saying that they would not harm the ordinary Chetnik conscripts but would execute the officers. According to Momčilović, this is exactly what they did.

The biggest obstacle to dealing with the Partisans was the common attitude of the Chetnik conscripts ‘not to fight with “their brothers”’ (quotation marks in original)\(^92\). Instead of following orders, the soldiers refused to confront the Partisans and simply left for their homes. The officers were left alone, and in the company of a few loyal Chetniks, they had to leave for Serbia), while the Partisans simply captured towns in the area with minimal resistance. Clearly the Partisans had no reservations about their own actions against the Chetniks. Momčilović adds that the Partisans executed a number of Chetniks when no resistance was offered.

Ultimately, it was the Ustašas who benefited from the growing civil war between the Chetniks and the Partisans. They renewed their offensive and managed to capture

\(^{90}\) AVII, Ca, k. 175, Reg. No. 28/4.
\(^{91}\) AVII, Ca, k. 175, Reg. No. 28/4.
\(^{92}\) AVII, Ca, k. 175, Reg. No. 28/4.
all larger settlements, while the Partisans left the area, and the Chetniks were in disarray.

**The End of the Serb Uprising in Eastern Bosnia**

The Serb uprising in eastern Bosnia lasted for a full year (from June 1941 to June 1942) before collapsing. Momčilović’s report provides a valuable analysis of the uprising’s failure from the Chetnik perspective. For Momčilović, the Chetnik-Partisan war was the main culprit in the uprising’s collapse, because it took away the energy and focus from the anti-Ustaša struggle. Momčilović blamed Partisan radicalism – introduced by the communist party’s ideological indoctrination – for igniting the civil war in the region.

The final section Momčilović’s report is entitled ‘The Final Demise’. It details how the officers returned and made an attempt to reorganise the front, but this proved difficult because Major Dangić had been arrested in Serbia by the Germans and sent to a POW camp abroad. The Ustaša offensive had impact on the morale of the locals: ‘those whose properties were completely burned to the ground openly stated that they have nothing left to fight for. Truly, ninety-five percent of the men had no other ideals to draw from’93. Once again, the apolitical self-protective core of the Chetnik movement in the ISC manifested itself, this time through bad troop morale.

The officers realised that motivating men was futile, and ordered the evacuation of the non-combat population. Women and children were sent towards the River Drina to cross into Serbia, but Wehrmacht soldiers blocked the river and even returned those women and children who had managed to cross into Serbia back to the Bosnian side. Due to the chaotic nature of the evacuation, a large number of women, children and Chetniks were captured and slaughtered by the Ustašas on the banks of River Drina itself (mentioned earlier). The evacuation lasted from May 2 to May 6, 1942. On the Serbian side, a significant number of officers and soldiers were arrested by the Germans and taken away; others melted away into the villages along the Serbian side of the river. Momčilović says that approximately three thousand armed men were left in the

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93 AVII, Ca, k. 175, Reg. No. 28/4.
mountains of eastern Bosnia, disjointed and lacking a common command. This marked the end of the year-long Serb uprising in eastern Bosnia.

Captain Momčilović concludes his lengthy report about the uprising by summarising the points that contributed to its failure: (i) the mentality of the people, namely, the described ‘anarchism’ of the Bosnians; (ii) the insufficient number of officers, especially at the outset; (iii) the inability of those in charge to exercise full and proper authority, which as Momčilović says is ‘an issue stemming from point (i) [i.e. the mentality of the people]’; (iv) the ‘popular leaders’, who were corrupted, greedy or simply thieves and brigands; (v) the treatment of the ‘Turks’, presumably a reference to the killing and looting, which heightened the conflict; (vi) widespread looting; (vii) various intrigues and ambitions of the locals and those coming in from Serbia; and (viii) the role of the communists, in other words, the Partisans.

In his report, Captain Momčilović elaborates only on the last point, saying that ‘without the communists, the Croats would never have seen the Drina’. The communists ‘deliberately work[ed] on provoking the total collapse of the effort, in order to create Proletarians out of Bosnians’. In Momčilović’s view, the communists pursued a policy of ‘the worse, the better’ in eastern Bosnia, so that the population would become even more radicalised and join the communist effort in sheer desperation. This echoed Chetnik accusations; Mihailović accused the Partisans of deliberately provoking massive German retributions against the civilian population in Serbia in order to radicalise and uproot as many as possible so that they would join the Partisan ranks.

Chetnik Activities in the Bosanska Krajina Region

Chetnik reports from the Bosanska Krajina region of western Bosnia paint a similar picture. As in eastern Bosnia, Ustaša atrocities were named as the main reason for the Serb uprising. The Chetniks accused the communists of highjacking the Serb
national struggle by attempting to ideologically indoctrinate the initially apolitical Serb rebels; before long, a Chetnik-Partisan war seemed inevitable. A number of regional Chetnik groups, physically isolated from Serbia (unlike those in eastern Bosnia, which borders Serbia), started collaborating with the ISC – arguing that the civil war had forced them into this.

The ‘Minutes from the Conference of Chetnik Units from the Vrbas Region’ (held on June 7, 1942)\(^{98}\) provide invaluable insights into the Chetnik view of the situation in that part of the ISC at the time. The local commanders from the Bosanska Krajina and the surrounding areas were all present at the conference. The commanders agreed that ‘the Serbs rose in a rebellion because they were attacked only for being Serbs, and the Serbs then decided to defend themselves in order to protect their lives, national name, their honour, their faith and their national traditions’\(^{99}\). Like other Chetnik wartime sources, this document explains the uprising in reactionary terms, thus suggesting that most ISC Serbs would have remained dormant had they not been targets of Ustaša atrocities.

However, as soon as the uprising began, the commanders say that ‘suspicious people whose origin and past were not known to the people’ started infiltrating the rebels and ‘under fake names started posing as leaders’ (presumably meaning that many were not Serbs, or at least not locals)\(^{100}\). These ‘suspicious people’ wanted ‘to divert the Serb national struggle’\(^{101}\) from its path, and to subjugate it to the interests of one political force, namely, the Communist Party. To reach this goal, they started killing officers and for this reason, ‘a split inevitably arose in what had started as a unified national struggle’ (the Chetnik-Partisan split)\(^{102}\). Over time, ‘the need arose to defend the Serbs from the Proletarian Battalions as much as from the Ustašas’\(^{103}\). Consequently, a new era of the civil war commenced in which ‘the Proletarian units were always the attackers, while the Chetniks were always in the defensive position with regards to both their own lives and

\(^{98}\) AVII, Ca, k. 233, Reg. No. 1/8.
\(^{100}\) AVII, Ca, k. 233, Reg. No. 1/8.
\(^{101}\) AVII, Ca, k. 233, Reg. No. 1/8.
\(^{102}\) AVII, Ca, k. 233, Reg. No. 1/8.
\(^{103}\) AVII, Ca, k. 233, Reg. No. 1/8.
the lives of the population\textsuperscript{104}. The commanders protested that ‘Many among us made every possible effort to keep a unified front until the end of the war, not to pose any questions of party politics until then\textsuperscript{105}. But the communists had different plans, and this pushed the Chetniks into collaboration with the ISC:

The open conflict among the Serb fighters, provoked by the communists, forced the leaders of the Chetnik units to secure their positions with regards to the Croats, and in doing so protect the people from further atrocities and their properties from plunder and burning. This is how the agreements with Croat authorities came about in Mrkonjić Grad by commander Uroš Drenović, in Banja Luka by [Uroš] Drenović and [Vukašin] Marčetić, and [Lazar] Tešanović made a similar agreement for his own sector\textsuperscript{106}.

The Chetnik commanders acknowledged that these agreements recognised the ISC – something that ‘should not have been done after everything the Croats had done to the Serbs’\textsuperscript{107}. However, the blame for making agreements with the ISC was put squarely on the communists. These agreements did nothing to diminish the Chetnik determination to exercise retribution at the end of the war: ‘we cannot forgive and forget the atrocities that the Ustašas committed against the Serbs. Sooner or later, they will pay for it’\textsuperscript{108}.

The Chetnik commanders expressed complete mistrust in the agreements reached with the ISC authorities, arguing that the interest of Zagreb government was to win the Chetniks over against the Partisans (and once the Partisans were gone, they would turn on the Chetniks). The goal of basic preservation was reiterated: ‘in the conflict with the Partisans the lives of Serb fighters should be preserved; propaganda should be used to get them to join us so that we can fortify our ranks for the final confrontation with the Croats\textsuperscript{109}.

The Chetnik commanders agreed on the importance of the upcoming Vidovdan holiday (June 28, the anniversary of the 1389 Battle of Kosovo) and recommended a

\textsuperscript{104} AVII, Ca, k. 233, Reg. No. 1/8.
\textsuperscript{105} AVII, Ca, k. 233, Reg. No. 1/8.
\textsuperscript{106} AVII, Ca, k. 233, Reg. No. 1/8.
\textsuperscript{107} AVII, Ca, k. 233, Reg. No. 1/8.
\textsuperscript{108} AVII, Ca, k. 233, Reg. No. 1/8.
\textsuperscript{109} AVII, Ca, k. 233, Reg. No. 1/8.
massive attack on the Ustašas ‘in order to propagate our ideals and goals to the population’110.

Due to their roots as a Serb territorial paramilitary force, the Chetniks in Bosanska Krajina (like those in eastern Bosnia) had serious integration challenges, both on the regional level and in the Mihailović-led centre located in Serbia. In Bosanska Krajina, the eruption of the Chetnik-Partisan war broke through the anti-Ustaša front in the same fashion as in eastern Bosnia.

An acute problem was the lack of interconnection among Chetnik units in the region; as noted above, local commanders were at least semi-independent and only nominally belonged to a single Chetnik movement. Another issue was the complete lack of connection with Serbia, indicating that following Mihailović was theoretical at best; Mihailović had neither the awareness of local conditions nor the ability to issue commands to these units.

As the minutes of the conference reveal, commander Marčetić created an agreement with the ISC authorities. With the arrival of spring, the communists had left the lines they had held during the winter and attacked the Chetniks; the ISC forces used this opportunity to advance and started burning local Serb villages111. According to Marčetić, the first goal of the agreement was to protect the people; as proof, he cited a speech by Slobodan Jovanović on Radio London about doing everything possible to protect the lives of the common people. The second goal was to obtain the release of as many arrested Serbs as possible. The third was to secure food and ammunition supplies; Marčetić himself had received a significant amount of ammunition from the ISC armed forces, which he intended to use ‘against them’ when the time came112. The Chetniks should make every attempt to win over ‘honest Muslims...and pro-Yugoslav Croats’, as communist propaganda was quite successful in turning Muslims against the Chetniks. Because the Muslims considered the Chetniks ‘beasts’, many Muslims were joining the Partisans113.

111 AVII, Ca, k. 233, Reg. No. 1/8.
112 AVII, Ca, k. 233, Reg. No. 1/8.
113 AVII, Ca, k. 233, Reg. No. 1/8.
From the Chetnik side, clearly there was no intention of helping the Partisans: ‘the fighting in Kozara and Grmeč, where the Partisans are concentrated now, should not be seen as a struggle against the Ustašas. We only have to work in winning over the Serbs in the Partisan ranks to our side’\textsuperscript{114}.

Returning to the collaboration with the ISC, at the conference, Marčetić said the Croat side wished to see the Chetnik organisation transformed into an anti-communist volunteer force (presumably along MVAC lines) that would pledge loyalty to Pavelić. But this was something that ‘the Chetniks cannot ever accept’\textsuperscript{115}. When officials in Banja Luka offered salaries to Marčetić’s men, he refused, saying, ‘All we need from the ISC is to extract as many weapons and ammunitions as possible’\textsuperscript{116}. His conclusion:

I consider Bosnia and Serbia to be one land and I do hope that everyone non-Serb will be cleared out of Bosnia. We need to establish connections with eastern Bosnia and Serbia and learn what the plans of our government in London are\textsuperscript{117}.

Commander Tešanović’s comments on the agreement with ISC authorities that he signed in the name of his Chetnik unit also appear in the conference minutes. He agreed that it was unfortunate that this had been done, because the Chetniks ‘recognised the ISC after ten months of struggle’\textsuperscript{118}. Nevertheless, Tešanović agreed with his fellow commanders that the communists had forced the Chetniks’ hand, because they ‘could not simultaneously wage war on two fronts’\textsuperscript{119}. Tešanović pointed out that in his sector eleven villages fed the entire Chetnik force, and these villages had been burned and deserted. Because of the agreement he reached with the ISC, the villagers were able to return to their homes in all eleven settlements. According to Tešanović, ‘This is enough to justify the agreement. If we fight, we fight for the people; I
haven't done this against the will of the population, but because the people needed it and the people wanted it\textsuperscript{120}.

**Controversies Regarding Chetnik-ISC Agreements**

Chetnik-ISC agreements, documented examples of which come from central and western Bosnia, were essentially local in nature, but they arguably stained the entire Chetnik movement, given that they were skilfully used both by the ISC government and the Partisans in their anti-Chetnik propaganda. Moreover, the agreements became an important part of the post-war Chetnik image created in socialist Yugoslavia. That said, because the Chetnik wartime documents from the regions where Chetnik-ISC agreements were reached survived, we can see the reasoning of the local Chetnik commanders, including their concern over their inability to connect with the Chetnik stronghold in Serbia.

Of all the Chetnik collaborationist episodes during the Second World War, these agreements with the ISC in western Bosnia were (and still remain) the most controversial. The background uneasiness of the players and their need to justify their actions comes through loud and clear in the Chetnik documents. Briefly stated, controversy arose because the ISC represented the antithesis of everything the Chetniks stood for, and the Chetnik movement came about as a reaction against ISC policies.

The local Chetnik commanders in the Bosanska Krajina region and the surrounding areas believed that these agreements were a necessity for their survival once the civil war with the Partisans began. While entering into agreements certainly could not have been an easy decision, it remained a local one. The Chetnik commanders in other areas, including Mihailović's headquarters, never acknowledged these agreements, and wanted them annulled. The fact that they were not able to simply order the local commanders to do so, illustrates the structural problems of the Chetnik movement mentioned previously.

\textsuperscript{120} AVII, Ca, k. 233, Reg. No. 1/8.
Both the ISC newspapers who readily published these agreements and the Partisan propaganda had a field day. The ISC newspapers declared that the Chetniks had recognised ISC sovereignty, a propaganda victory for the Ustaša regime. The Partisans – and, after the war, pro-regime historians – used these agreements to prove that the Chetniks were traitors and collaborators of the worst kind. Thus, these local agreements by a handful of Chetnik commanders ended up smearing the entire Chetnik movement for the duration of the war and long afterwards, despite the benefits to the local Serb population. To counter the combined effect of the ISC and Partisan propaganda, the Chetniks in other areas of the ISC (and beyond) simply denied the existence of the agreements, presumably because they believed they were indefensible.\footnote{For an example, see the proclamation titled ‘To the Serbs of Bosnia and Herzegovina’, issued at the beginning of June 1942 in Mostar (Herzegovina) by the Serb National Chetnik Committee there. The proclamation simply denies that these agreements ever existed. A copy is located at: AVII, Ca, k. 225, Reg. No. 13/5.}

As the minutes record, commander Uroš Drenović spoke at length about the issue of collaboration with the ISC, saying he had sent couriers to Serbia from the beginning and collaborated with the Italians because he was ordered to do so, though it is unclear by whom.\footnote{Obviously, Drenović’s sector was south of the German-Italian demarcation line in the ISC.} Here it should be noted that the kind of collaboration the Chetniks could establish with the Italians in their zones in the ISC was not an option north of the demarcation line with the Germans. North of this line, collaboration agreements were possible only with the ISC itself due to the German policy on the Chetniks described previously.\footnote{AVII, Ca, k. 233, Reg. No. 1/8.}

Commander Drenović stated that with his policies he had managed to remove the Ustašas from Mrkonjić Grad in his area. However, because of the agreement, ‘the Ustašas claim that we surrendered, while the Partisans claim that we betrayed the national struggle and that we were Serb Ustašas’.\footnote{AVII, Ca, k. 233, Reg. No. 1/8.} With regards to the Partisans, Drenović underlined that he had made no attempts to kill them because there were many Serbs in their ranks ‘who have been seduced’. Thus, if there were no proof that...
the captured Partisans were engaged in any criminal act or atrocity, Drenović’s unit would let them go.

Regarding his views ‘about the Croats’, Drenović stated that ‘our action against the Croats is a simple matter – as long as the external [Axis] fronts are strong, there is little that we can do because their allies would help them and we have to be careful about that. Had we continued to fight, airplanes would be bombing us now... We have to utilise this policy as long as possible, until the fronts break down’.125

At the conference, Drenović argued the Chetniks should be connected as much as possible (a given for the Partisans). He admitted the possibility that some Chetnik units would not recognise the ISC agreements. Drenović argued that ‘everything possible should be taken from the ISC’126 (including pay for the Chetniks). However, no one else at the meeting shared that viewpoint; other argued that the potential benefits were not worth the harm of being seen as Pavelić’s mercenaries.

Everybody agreed that a connection with Serbia must be established, and that the Chetnik leadership in Serbia had to become aware of the local conditions in the region. Further emphasis was given to the need of establishing Chetnik propaganda, which had been non-existent in the region, thereby implicitly acknowledging the effectiveness of Partisan propaganda.

Central Bosnia was another area where the Chetnik-ISC agreements existed (beside Bosanska Krajina). The reasons for reaching these agreements in central Bosnia were similar to those found further west. Accordingly, the commanders also discussed a proposed agreement between the ISC and the Ozren Chetnik Unit in central Bosnia.127 The representative of the Ozren Chetniks stated that the agreement was only theoretical, and that it could be torn up at any point. Minutes show that the commanders also proposed setting up a wider conference to include the Chetniks of the Bosanska Krajina region and the Chetniks from the Ozren, Trebava and Majevica regions.128

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125 AVII, Ca, k. 233, Reg. No. 1/8.
126 AVII, Ca, k. 233, Reg. No. 1/8.
To avoid the generalisations common to the existing historiography, it should be noted that not all local commanders shared the same views on collaboration agreements with the ISC. Commander Rade Radić was against recognising the ISC in any form, because ‘the Croats do not recognise the Serb people’\textsuperscript{129}.

The final remarks include a unanimous decision to send the minutes of the conference together with a detailed report on local conditions to the Supreme Command in Serbia. In this way, local Chetniks voluntarily acknowledged that they were part of the one Chetnik movement led by Mihailović. A request for professional officers was also to be included, ‘primarily for officers who were from Bosanska Krajina region’\textsuperscript{130}. Obviously, there were reservations about accepting officers who did not have local roots.

**Mihailović’s Headquarters and Local Chetnik-ISC Agreements**

The main Chetnik HQ was aware of the Chetnik-ISC agreements in western and central Bosnia, as well as the reasons for their establishment. There was also awareness that these agreements could damage the reputation of the entire Chetnik movement, both in occupied Yugoslavia and abroad. However, due to the very isolation that had led to these agreements in the first place (according to the local Chetnik commanders on the spot), the Chetnik headquarters did not have sufficient authority to order their dissolution.

The book of telegrams received by Mihailović’s headquarters (from June 29 to July 19, 1942)\textsuperscript{131} mentioned above contains more insight into the Chetnik strategic thinking, and how that thinking was changed by the ongoing civil war with the Partisans specifically with regards to the issue of collaboration with the Axis on an anti-communist basis. On a telegram dated July 11, the author code-named ‘505’ comments on the controversial agreements of certain Bosnian Chetnik troops with the ISC:

\begin{quote}
It is true that the Chetniks on Mount Ozren and Mount Trebava created an agreement with the Croats regarding a common struggle against the communists. The reason is that they were fearful of destruction after the events in eastern Bosnia. The fighters are against these agreements, and
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{129} AVII, Ca, k. 233, Reg. No. 1/8.
\textsuperscript{130} AVII, Ca, k. 233, Reg. No. 1/8.
\textsuperscript{131} AVII, Ca, k. 275, Reg. No. 3/1.
Botić is now going there. On Mount Majevica, the negotiations have not been concluded yet. In the Rogatica district, more than a hundred Chetniks are maintaining order together with the Croats. They were taken towards Sarajevo. All of them [who had entered agreements with the ISC] claim that the goal is to buy more time, however all of this is very dangerous and one result has been the photographs [discussed below]. The only remedy is to provide these troops with weapons\textsuperscript{132}.

During 1942, more evidence of Bosnian Chetnik collaboration with the ISC reached Mihailović’s headquarters. Returning to the book of telegrams\textsuperscript{133}, the entry for July 7, 1942, from code ‘101’ to code ‘505’ (the former is presumably Mihailović) asks: ‘We are getting reports that the Chetniks in Bosnia were photographed with the Croat soldiers. Please report what this is about’\textsuperscript{134}. If code name ‘101’ is Mihailović, it indicates that he knew about the agreements that certain Chetniks commanders in northern Bosnia had reached with ISC authorities and learned about them through enemy propaganda (photographs).

Mihailović had been informed about the Chetnik-ISC agreements by certain commanders in Bosnia. The local nature of the agreements was clear, as was their possible use in negative propaganda. And in fact, the ISC and Partisans used them extensively for this purpose throughout the war. Indeed, these agreements, along with photographs of Chetnik and Domobrani personnel posing, laughing and drinking together, was utilised in post-war socialist Yugoslavia to implicate the entire Chetnik movement as Ustaša collaborators; the latter was perceived as much worse than German wartime collaboration. Any temporary gains and local reprieves these agreements brought to the areas where they applied paled in comparison to the overall damage they inflicted on the entire Chetnik movement both during and after the war.

The Chetnik documents provide valuable insight into Chetnik-German negotiations in the ISC. Anti-communism always provided the only common ground between the Chetniks and the Wehrmacht, and cooperation between the two groups could exist only in the face of this common Partisan threat. Chetnik wartime documents also confirm the observations in the German documents that Croat popular support

\textsuperscript{132} AVII, Ca, k. 275, Reg. No. 3/1.
\textsuperscript{133} AVII, Ca, k. 299, Reg. No. 3/1.
\textsuperscript{134} AVII, Ca, k. 299, Reg. No. 3/1.
remained with the Croatian Peasant Party during the war years, and not with the Ustaša regime.

The ‘Report by Captain Pavle Grubač to Major Petar Baćović’ (July 23, 1942)\(^{135}\) provides more details on the activities of the mountainous HQ of the Bosnian Chetnik troops and the situation in eastern Bosnia. In his report, Major Baćović says he had spoken with a Croat Lieutenant who served with the Domobrani forces; he claimed the Ustašas regime had a narrow popular base in Croatia and the vast majority of population still supported Maček’s CPP\(^{136}\).

The ‘Report by the Headquarters of the Majevica Chetnik Group’ (July 18, 1942)\(^{137}\) to the troops under its command provides details on Chetnik-German negotiations in Tuzla. The German commanders made it perfectly clear that Germany considered the ISC an ally, and that the Wehrmacht troops were ready to defend the ISC and its government in that capacity. After the nature of the German-ISC relationship was stressed to the Chetnik delegation, they were asked if they were willing – and, if so, under what conditions – to cooperate with the German Wehrmacht and the Croat Domobrani against the communists. Anti-communism was the common ground between the Wehrmacht, the Croat Armed Forces and the Chetniks. Anti-communism was the common ground between the Wehrmacht, the Croat Armed Forces and the Chetniks. It should also be noted that the German commanders mentioned their own forces and the Domobrani (the ISC’s regular army) but not the Ustaša militia (this would clearly have been a non-starter)\(^ {138}\).

The report says that the Chetniks gave a set of conditions to the German commanders after lengthy deliberation among themselves. The first Chetnik condition was the removal of all Ustašas and other volunteer formations from the territory of Bosnia and Herzegovina and the direct subordination of the Domobrani forces to the German command. The second Chetnik demand was the immediate release of all Serbs

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\(^{135}\) AVII, Ca, k. 236, Reg. No. 3/9.

\(^{136}\) AVII, Ca, k. 236, Reg. No. 3/9. This information is confirmed in other wartime sources, particularly German ones. According to the Domobrani Lieutenant, among the Croats there was marked tension between ‘the Mačekovci’ (supporters of the outlawed CPP) and the Ustaša supporters. Grubač’s Domobrani source also claimed that many among their ranks were ready to cooperate with the Serbs, and they asked the Chetniks not to target Domobrani forces.

\(^{137}\) AVII, Ca, k. 233, Reg. No. 17/2.

\(^{138}\) AVII, Ca, k. 233, Reg. No. 17/2.
in Croat captivity; most had been persecuted ‘simply because they were Serbs’\textsuperscript{139}. Even though they conceded that there could have been individual cases of criminal activity, these needed to be independently investigated by the Germans.

The third Chetnik demand was a detailed one, calling for the end of persecution of the Serbs in the ISC\textsuperscript{140}. The Chetniks demanded the return of the Serbs to all places of employment that they had held at the moment of Yugoslav capitulation. In addition, all Serbs who had been forced to flee or whose property had been damaged, destroyed, or confiscated should have the right to return to their properties and/or to receive compensation. Further, Serbs should have safety guarantees for their lives and properties, and the right to cultural, religious and economic freedoms. Properties should be confiscated from those who had profited from the persecution of the Serbs, and Serbs should be compensated for the properties destroyed or damaged by the Croat Armed Forces. In short, the overall persecution of the Serbs had to stop in all its numerous forms. In return the Chetnik forces promised loyalty, cooperation with the Wehrmacht and Domobrani forces, and the maintenance of peace and order in the areas under their control:

We do hope that the German authorities will realise the just nature of our demands, and that they will help prevent useless bloodletting. We hope that they will allow us to continue peaceful and productive lives on our properties to the benefit of the People and the State and the entire European community\textsuperscript{141}.

The report concludes by mentioning that the Chetnik and German representatives had an informal discussion, during which the Chetniks explained what had happened to them since the creation of the ISC – their wrongful persecution had forced them to take up arms. Once again, the reactionary nature of the Serb uprising in the ISC was verbalised, this time to the Germans. Local Chetniks were identifying themselves to the Germans as Serb territorial paramilitary force, carefully omitting any pro-Allied rhetoric or stance. During their contacts with the Axis, the Chetniks were always emphasizing that they were anti-communist Serb territorial protection force and

\textsuperscript{139} AVII, Ca, k. 233, Reg. No. 17/2.
\textsuperscript{140} AVII, Ca, k. 233, Reg. No. 17/2.
\textsuperscript{141} AVII, Ca, k. 233, Reg. No. 17/2.
denying they were a resistance group linked with the Allies, because they knew that
gamegment in the civil war with the Partisans and ethno-religious conflict would not put
them on an immediate target list.

The Chetnik wartime collaboration with the Axis and local quislings is a highly
controversial historical issue, given that it brings into question the resistance aspect of
the Chetnik movement\(^\text{142}\). For this reason, Chetnik collaboration needs to be explained
in its proper, anti-communist, context. Chetnik anti-communism which resonated with
Axis anti-communism and provided the only common ground between the two parties
should not be equated with pro-Axis or worse, anti-Allied orientation, even though the
Partisans were on the Allied side.

Both direct and indirect Chetnik collaboration with the German and Italian Axis
forces, as well as domestic Axis collaborators in Serbia, Montenegro and the ISC, came
as a combined reaction to the massacres by the Ustaša militia\(^\text{143}\) and the escalating civil
war with the Partisans, whose activity was the key to the Chetnik collaboration
throughout occupied Yugoslavia, in that it gave the Axis side a reason to tolerate and
utilise the Chetniks. In other words, if the Partisans had not existed, Axis occupation
forces and their domestic collaborators would have risen against the Chetniks in full
force from the outset – there simply would have been no reason to collaborate with the
Chetniks.

Chetnik collaboration undoubtedly saved numerous Serb lives, for example, in
the Serb-populated areas of the ISC where local Chetnik commanders signed
collaboration agreements that prevented the entry of the Ustaša militia into the region.
But one should bear in mind that the number of lives saved through collaboration is
offset by the number of lives lost in the Chetnik-Partisan war, although which figure is
greater is impossible to say.

\(^\text{142}\) Yugoslav post-war historiography placed a strong emphasis on the Chetnik collaboration with
the Axis, arguing that by this collaboration the Chetniks not only became traitors but part of
the Axis camp.

\(^\text{143}\) These massacres turned many ISC Serbs towards the Italians as protectors.
Bosnian Chetnik Regionalism

Chetnik documents from 1942 on demonstrate that Bosnian Chetnik regionalism – exercised through autonomism with regards to Mihailović’s centre – represented an alarming trend to Chetnik headquarters. There are no indications that there was any ideological background to this autonomism as such; simply put, it was resistance to the imposition of officers from Serbia and Montenegro who had no local connections and more importantly showed up in the aftermath of the initial Serb uprising in the region. Paradoxically, due to collaboration developments in the ISC and the tendency of the local Serbs to return to their homes when atrocities paused, the Chetniks’ fate was tied to the existence of their enemies.

Returning to the book of telegrams, an entry dated July 10, 1942, indicates the tensions between various Chetniks groups on the regional level:

[T]he Bosnian headquarters has people with political ambitions. These headquarters even have a Bosnian government; my intention is to chase them out, and create a military organ instead of it... [A]ll political action in Bosnia and everywhere else should be prevented. I repeat: prevented 144.

Mihailović clearly wanted to postpone discussion of any political matters, especially hints of regionalism in his own ranks, until the end of the war.

Telegrams received by Mihailović’s headquarters from July 19 to August 3, 1942 include some very interesting pieces of information. On July 19, Stevan Botić, illustrating regional concerns and tensions among the Chetniks, sent the following telegram:

Bosnia has no more understating. From Serbia everybody would like to command, but nobody is providing any help...Sir, in Bosnia the uprising erupted in order to save the Serb people from total destruction – and without anyone’s help. We were not fighting here so that we could get somebody’s recognition and decorations later on; we will not tolerate anybody’s absolutism and we will not allow anyone to throw mud on hundreds of thousands of victims and our fighters who are still fighting for freedom and the honour of the fatherland. Thus, we will continue to criticise everything that we do not consider to be right 145.

144 AVII, Ca, k. 299, Reg. No. 3/1.
145 AVII, Ca, k. 299, Reg. No. 3/1.
Although it remains unclear to what incident(s) Botić was responding, his sharp words directed at Mihailović show the regionalist structure of the Chetnik movement.

The 'Report by Major Petar Bačović to Major Zaharije Sokolović' from early August 1942 reveals more about the Chetnik methods in eastern Bosnia and Herzegovina. It also provides further evidence of the problems of command and integration in the face of regionalism. Bačović says: ‘In the Majevica region, [the Chetniks] were refusing to accept the leadership of Steva Damjanović, because he was not elected by them’. The Chetnik leadership was showing disunity and local commanders were doing as they saw fit:

[Commander] Kerović is working independently and has created an agreement with the Ustašas [the ISC], giving them [the town of] Lopare and allowing them free use of the Tuzla-Brčko road. On the other hand there is Colonel Bižić, who is tied...to the Serbian State Guard.

Integrating Chetniks into a single movement was difficult, to say the least.

Bačović was particularly concerned about the ISC agreements, because ‘they contributed to the ISC’s stabilisation, and if this happens the result would be the eradication of the Chetnik action’. Arguably, the same result would follow if the Partisans were destroyed. Paradoxically, the Chetniks ‘needed’ their enemies to survive; the end of the persecution of the Serbs and the eradication of the Partisans in the ISC would have meant the end of the Chetniks in the ISC. As has been mentioned, at the core, ISC Chetniks were a self-protectionist territorial paramilitary force.

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146 AVII, Ca, k. 222, Reg. No. 47/5.
147 AVII, Ca, k. 222, Reg. No. 47/5. In the Rogatica district (eastern Bosnia) a Muslim Partisan group was led by ‘the notorious Muja Hodžić’. Hodžić was the leader of the Muslim Unit of the Romanija Partisan Regiment, a fact demonstrating that the Partisans – as far as the Muslims were concerned at least – had some nationally-based units. It is also interesting to note that Bačović recorded the existence of two purely bandit groups – led by Rajko and Miloš Čelonja with some four hundred people under their command, ‘plundering local Turkish villages’. The author also added that more than a week earlier, ‘the Turks and the Ustašas’ had attacked Batura and ‘slaughtered some two hundred and fifty women and children’.
148 AVII, Ca, k. 222, Reg. No. 47/5.
149 AVII, Ca, k. 222, Reg. No. 47/5. The last segment of Bačović’s report is devoted to the Partisans and their movements; apparently, the Muslims were joining the Partisans and assisting them in many different ways.
The ‘Report by the Commander of the Command of the Operative Troops of Eastern Bosnia’ (dated the first half of August 1942)\textsuperscript{150} is also devoted to the numerous regional problems faced by the Chetniks in this part of the ISC. The report is especially interesting because the author notes that Captain Ambrozić (who was possibly a Croat), appointed by Mihailović to be in charge of the Čajniće district, surrendered to the Domobrani forces and joined their ranks in a rare instance of Chetnik defection to the Croat Armed Forces.

\textbf{Chetnik-Muslim Conflict in Eastern Bosnia}

The ‘Book of Reports Received by Mihailovic’s Headquarters from February 7 to 24, 1943\textsuperscript{151}’ records that Chetnik action in the Čajniće region (eastern Bosnia) had led eighteen thousand Muslim refugees who fled towards Sarajevo. The report says that some two thousand Muslims from the Čajniće region shared a common front with the Croat forces in the vicinity of Goražde town and were threatened by offensive action. Here, one sees the escalation of the ethno-religious conflict: the attack of Muslim militiaman in the Sandžak region (mostly in wartime Montenegro) against a Serb village prompted Chetnik retaliation in that area, as well as eastern Bosnia, binding together the Muslim militia and the Croat ISC forces in retribution against the Chetniks. The Serb-Muslim/Croat conflict was spiralling, with the Italians (in whose area of occupation all of this was happening) playing a lesser role. The Italians were helping all sides (the ISC armed forces, the Muslim militia, the Chetniks) at various moments, heightening the ethno-religious conflict in the process but ensuring that energy was directed at either the ethno-religious war (Serbs vs. Croats/Muslims) or the civil war (Chetniks vs. Partisans) not the Italian occupation forces.

The behaviour of the Italians proved crucial to the fate of both the Chetniks and the Partisans. The Italian move into Zone 3 in the fall of 1941 gave a boost to the Chetnik presence in the region; their move out of Zone 3 in the summer of 1942 created a vacuum upon which the Partisans capitalised to move in and avoid German pursuits. The Germans, meanwhile, continued to blame the Ustaša for igniting the guerrilla uprising in the ISC – and the Italians for perpetuating it with their political and military

\textsuperscript{150} AVII, Ca, k. 222, Reg. No. 49/.
\textsuperscript{151} AVII, Ca, k. 289, Reg. No. 8/1 (Book XXXII).
decisions. Evidently political differences in the Axis camp between the Germans, Italians and the ISC was a catalyst in the guerrilla problem they dealt with for the remainder of the war.

The ‘Report by the German General in Zagreb (Gles von Horstenau) to the Supreme Command of the Wehrmacht’ (August 19, 1942)\textsuperscript{152} gives a glimpse into the security situation. Regarding eastern Bosnia, Horstenau reports that the uprising had slowed down to such an extent that there was no danger except in the event of the arrival of Chetnik reinforcements from Serbia.

Horstenau also notes that in the territories north of Sava and west of Una, the Partisans held areas in predominantly Croat populated regions, and that the local Croat peasantry – pro-Maček and anti-government in their orientation – were not resisting them very actively. Interestingly enough, Horstenau adds that the Partisans north of the River Sava were constantly attacking the Volksdeutsche settlements, and that all captured Volksdeutsche, as well as all captured Ustašas, were executed (other prisoners were being robbed and released)\textsuperscript{153}. In his report, Horstenau notes the above-mentioned vacuum that was created by the departure of the Italian 2\textsuperscript{nd} Army from their occupation of Zone 3; the Partisans quickly moved their Montenegrin, Herzegovinian and Dalmatian units into the area. Horstenau described this Partisan force; approximately six to seven thousand armed men, the vast majority carrying Italian rifles and equipment (with a few artillery pieces), were followed by women and children. He estimates the strength of the Italian forces, now confined to the narrow coastal zone, at about one hundred and twenty thousand men, adding that with the sole exception of Italian-garrisoned towns, most of the Italian zones in the ISC has been in the hands of the rebels. Horstenau concludes by pointing out that Italian sympathies tended towards the Serbs. What remains unclear today is how direct the line of communication has been between the supreme command of the Wehrmacht and Hitler (and the important individuals around him). In other words, did Horstenau’s reports reach the top political level?

This report explains the reasons for the uprising in the ISC, as Horstenau saw it:

\textsuperscript{152} AVII, NAV-T-501, r. 268, s. 203-6.
\textsuperscript{153} AVII, NAV-T-501, r. 268, s. 203-6.
In the part of the report concerning the Ustašas it is completely true that they carry the main blame for the spread of the uprising...if there were no influx of the Serb population which the Ustašas terrorised, the guerrilla war would have been destroyed while still in its infancy. The fact that there was a mass-scale uprising can be attributed to the Ustaša terror\textsuperscript{154}.

In his concluding remarks, Horstenau says that the ISC government made a mistake by not gaining the support of the CPP without bringing Maček into play.

**German Strategies in Dealing with the Chetniks**

The Chetniks were, in contrast to the Partisans, a Serb paramilitary force first and foremost. This fact was not lost on the Germans, who used it to deal with the Chetnik threat when needed. One of the documented tactics the Germans used to force the Chetniks into submission was blackmail using Serb hostages. The fact that the Chetniks responded by yielding shows their priorities: they were a Serb national force at heart, and in ideological terms, preserving the Serb population in the ISC was their main task.

An order by the Commander of the Majevica Chetnik Brigade (early August 1942)\textsuperscript{155} to the Commander of the Drina Battalion provides another example of Chetnik strategic thinking about Axis occupation forces, specifically the Germans. The incident that prompted the entire episode was a Chetnik attack on the Bijeljina-Zvornik road in eastern Bosnia, including an attack on a German truck convoy travelling along it. In a knee-jerk reaction, the Germans immediately arrested approximately one hundred and fifty prominent Serbs in the towns of Bijeljina, Zvornik and Tuzla, threatening to execute them if the Chetniks did not immediately unblock the road\textsuperscript{156}. This German response illustrates at least two facts: the Germans equated the Chetniks with the local Serbs and the Germans knew that the Chetniks would respond to the threat against Serb civilians. This strategy would have been futile in the case of the Partisans, and was not even attempted against them. However, taking Serb civilians hostage was a very successful

\textsuperscript{154} AVII, NAV-T-501, r. 268, s. 203-6. Horstenau adds an interesting observation: the persecution of the Serbs was becoming more severe with each passing month, but the persecution of the Jews (something that interested the Germans) was winding down.
\textsuperscript{155} AVII, Ca, k. 210, Reg. No. 35/2.
\textsuperscript{156} AVII, Ca, k. 210, Reg. No. 35/2.
policy, influencing Chetnik behaviour in the ISC. Backing up this contention, earlier Chetnik reports spoke of Chetnik troop restraint against the ISC’s Armed Forces in the Foča town region, because local Chetnik commanders were concerned that the Serb town folk would be slaughtered in response to their attack.

The author of the report, the Commander of the Majevica Chetnik Brigade, was most concerned about the prospect of a punitive expedition to Mount Majevica. If that happened, ‘none of the villages would avoid destruction, and only one tenth of the population might survive...the Germans are waging war more against the civilians than against the combatants’157.

In the following, the Commander elaborates on the rationale of the local Chetniks:

We did not pick up weapons only to save our own lives, but to protect the people of Majevica and with actions like these we can only destroy the people instead. Even our supreme commander Mihailović – who is without doubt completely hostile to the Germans – ordered that we keep the truce until the decisive moment arises when the struggle will be taken up in all of Yugoslavia... If we do things without proper consideration, independently, for our own personal ambitions and without thinking about the consequences, the end result might be that Majevica will not join this action because there won’t be a single Serb left in it to act. While other [Chetniks] are utilising the truce to arm themselves, to organise and completely prepare for the general uprising, we could with such rash actions only provoke our own doom158.

This particular Chetnik line of thinking was labelled cowardly and collaborationist in post-war socialist Yugoslavia, especially in the light of the wartime Partisan strategy of continuous, uncompromising resistance with no regard for the civilian casualties that such a policy might have incurred. Indeed, one might argue that such tactics helped the Partisans, because the reprisals against the civilians only fed their ranks with desperate individuals. Arguably the Chetnik strategic thinking was more in line with the policy of other non-communist groups in occupied Europe which engaged in open hostility (the equivalent of the Chetnik general uprising) only at the final, critical moment.

157 AVII, Ca, k. 210, Reg. No. 35/2.
158 AVII, Ca, k. 210, Reg. No. 35/2.
The Chetnik commander plays the national card when he states that ‘the Turks [Slavic Muslims] and Croats would end up with an absolute majority’\textsuperscript{159} in the region if the local Serb population were further thinned out by Chetnik action and German counteraction. He concludes:

I don’t allow anybody to hate the Croats, Ustašas and Germans more than I do, and with my work and my struggle up to this point I have proved this more than enough; however, I am aware of the new circumstances and now is the time to work with one’s head, through politics, more with deceit that with weapons – which we shall use only when the sign has been given by our supreme command\textsuperscript{160}.

Bosnian Chetniks wanted to retain control of their own affairs while nominally recognising Mihailović as their supreme commander. Mihailović, on the other hand, wanted direct control, and to this end, he sent officers to take over as commanders. It should be noted that submission to Mihailović’s officers was essentially a voluntary act on the part of the local Chetniks; there were no attempts to take over the leadership by force. The issue of Bosnian Chetnik regionalism was disturbing to Mihailović, and he was not ready to compromise, even though his options were limited at best.

A letter from Stevan Botić (August 7, 1942)\textsuperscript{161} to Lazar Trklja and Bora Mitranović explains the conflict with Mihailović over the issue of command in Bosnia. Botić says that the Chetnik commanders of the Majevica Brigade held a conference during which Vojvoda Radivoje Kerović was elected as leader. However, Captains Račić and Damjanović (with thirty men in their escort) arrived on the same day. At the conference, Račić announced that Mihailović had sent them, and that the supreme commander did not recognise the commander of the Bosnian Chetnik troops or his headquarters. Moreover, Račić accused his Bosnian colleagues of being autonomists, even separatists. In his opinion, they were advocating a political agenda during a time of war. Račić wanted Damjanović to be elected leader, his motives being to have somebody in charge who was completely loyal to Mihailović and who was ready to obligingly follow his orders to the letter; needless to say, he failed to accomplish this.

\textsuperscript{159} AVII, Ca, k. 210, Reg. No. 35/2.  
\textsuperscript{160} AVII, Ca, k. 210, Reg. No. 35/2.  
\textsuperscript{161} AVII, Ca, k. 204, Reg. No. 17/6.
Stevan Botić responded to this ‘unitarist’ attempt by saying:

We are not separatists, but we do wish to preserve the unity of the Chetnik action in Bosnia, and we are not going to allow interference into our Bosnian matters from individuals who played no part in the Bosnian uprising, nor are familiar with local conditions here in Bosnia\(^\text{162}\).

Račić’s retort was that he had unrestricted authority given to him directly by Mihailović to break up the Bosnian headquarters and the regional grouping. Some local commanders recommended disarming Račić and Damjanović, and expelling them beyond the River Drina into Serbia, but Botić argued against this course of action:

Bosnia has its own special problems, and not a single Bosnian would like to see tutors imposed from the side; also, we – the Serbs of Bosnia – have no desire to create a separate Serb community just for us, as they falsely believe – but Račić is a crude, politically uneducated man... he believes that he can impose on us Bosnians whomever he likes\(^\text{163}\).

Botić stopped short of blaming Mihailović completely: ‘Mihailović is morally guilty for this incident, because he comes under the influence of various amateurs who have no real insight into the local conditions here’\(^\text{164}\). But he instructed Mitranović to convey the following message to Mihailović, in diplomatic terms: ‘We will not allow imposition from the side... [W]e have had enough of your tutoring, and will not tolerate it anymore’\(^\text{165}\).

This episode yields an important insight into the Chetnik organisational and hierarchical/command structure, more specifically, its weaknesses. Nominally all Chetniks considered themselves part of one organisation headed by Mihailović. However, subordinating to his will, especially in the areas which were further away from Mihailović’s headquarters, was a different matter. As the Bosnian example shows, subordination of local commanders to Mihailović was by choice; Mihailović could (and did) send representatives and/or officers with the task of taking over, but they had no real power if the local commanders and their men were not willing to submit on their own. Nominally one organisation, the Chetnik movement was a collection of independent

\(^{162}\) AVII, Ca, k. 204, Reg. No. 17/6.
\(^{163}\) AVII, Ca, k. 204, Reg. No. 17/6.
\(^{164}\) AVII, Ca, k. 204, Reg. No. 17/6.
\(^{165}\) AVII, Ca, k. 204, Reg. No. 17/6.
or semi-independent local organisations with varying levels of integration and a
Mihailović-headed centre.

Botić also recorded that local commanders in central Bosnia, the Trebava, Ozren
and Borje Regiments, all known for signing collaboration agreements with the ISC,
created a unified command and headquarters led by Rade Radić, a former Partisan from
Jošavka (near Banjaluka)\textsuperscript{166}. This headquarters were separate from Botić’s own
headquarters/command for east Bosnia in the Mount Majevica region. Couriers were
sent between the two, and Botić expressed his intention to travel there with troops to
establish better connections. As Botić’s report makes clear, the Chetniks in eastern
Bosnia and central Bosnia were independent or semi-independent entities with regards
to each other and Mihailović, and they shaped their own policy regionally.

Botić, however, recognised that such a state of affairs was ultimately damaging
to the Chetniks: ‘our lack of organisation is being used by the Ustašas, who are
negotiating only with certain individual units...they are attacking certain units, and we are
making this possible by armistice agreements in other areas\textsuperscript{167}. The independent
actions by individual local commanders and the lack of common vision and coordination,
meant the Chetniks’ enemies could engage them one at a time, and the Chetniks were
unable to respond as a unified movement.

\textbf{Chetnik Headquarters and Central Bosnia}

Chetnik-ISC agreements in central Bosnia (like those in western Bosnia),
together with the Bosnian Chetnik regionalism there, represented a political and
propaganda challenge for the Chetnik leadership. The report by Major Petar Bačović and
Dobroslav Jevđević to Mihailović (August 8, 1942)\textsuperscript{168} explains the situation in eastern
Bosnia from the Chetnik perspective. Bačović and Jevđević recommended that the
central Bosnian districts of Visoko, Zenica, Doboj and Tuzla be placed under their
responsibility for the following reason:

\textsuperscript{166} AVII, Ca, k. 204, Reg. No. 17/6.
\textsuperscript{167} AVII, Ca, k. 204, Reg. No. 17/6.
\textsuperscript{168} AVII, Ca, k. 170, Reg. No. 57/2
In those areas [local Chetnik commanders] have made fatal collaboration agreements with the Ustašas [the ISC], which has as a consequence created some sort of ‘Croat-Chetniks’ and coats of arms of Chetnik commands with Croat insignias – something that I am illustrating with the attached document (such a stamp was used by the Zenica Chetnik Regiment among other units in central Bosnia).\textsuperscript{169}

The report says this was very useful to the ISC in its struggle against the Chetnik movement in general – especially to the communists – and they attached an ISC propaganda leaflet that used the agreements in central Bosnia to discredit the Chetnik movement.

Chetnik-ISC agreements in central Bosnia had local significance, and because of their value for anti-Chetnik propaganda, they harmed the entire Chetnik movement. They were an extreme expression of the weakness of the Chetniks’ overall organisational structure: if local commanders had less independence of action, this would not have happened. They were also a logical extension of the Chetnik collaboration strategy in general. Collaboration with German and Italian occupation forces and Serbian/Montenegrin forces created a mindset that eventually led to collaboration with the ISC forces against the Partisans; it was only a matter of time before this line was crossed.

Baćović and Jevđević complained about the Chetniks in central Bosnia, noting that ‘there is now talk of some kind of Bosnian movement, and they are not even mentioning you anymore’\textsuperscript{170} (referring to Mihailović). They were preparing to go to the region to investigate the situation and intervene before matters went too far.

A memorandum from the Majevica Chetnik Group Headquarters (August 10, 1942)\textsuperscript{171}, directed at the German command in Tuzla (written in the Latin alphabet, presumably as a courtesy) explains the conditions for any Chetnik-German cooperation against the Partisans. While expressing their joy at the fact that the Wehrmacht had taken direct command over all Croat Armed Forces in the area (Domobrani, Legionnaire units, gendarmerie, Ustaša militia) and the civil authorities, the Chetniks explained that

\textsuperscript{169} For a visual example see: AVII, Ca, k. 195, Reg. No. 21/5.
\textsuperscript{170} AVII, Ca, k. 170, Reg. No. 57/2.
\textsuperscript{171} AVII, Ca, K. 233, Reg. No. 29/2.
they could not hand over their weapons under any circumstances for the following reason:

[O]nly our weapons guarantee our lives, and they are the only means by which we can protect our Serb population and properties. Given the circumstances, we would rather die with weapons in our hands than allow Muslims to slaughter and plunder us while we stand defenceless.172

The nature of the Chetnik force as a grassroots paramilitary force of self-protection is emphasised here, and the ongoing ethno-religious war on the ground is exposed in the accusation that Slavic Muslims were local Ustašas. Nevertheless, the memorandum suggests:

We could hand over our weapons only if all 'wild' [volunteer?] Ustašas and Muslims are disarmed. We are entirely convinced that the Muslims would attack us the moment we hand over our weapons, and before the German or Domobrani forces could arrive there would not be any Serb or Serb village left on the ground. We have had very bad experiences with [the Muslims], and we cannot trust them for a moment. Regarding the [Domobrani] Croat Army, their behaviour can be trusted.173

It is interesting that the Chetnik memorandum, rather than using anti-Partisan terms is composed of arguments relating to the ethno-religious conflict, and that the main Chetnik enemies in the region were the Muslim Militia, Muslim Ustašas and those who were pro-Ustaša in their orientation. It seems evident that the Mount Majevica region was a flashpoint of the Serb-Muslim ethno-religious war in this part of the ISC, with the Chetniks representing the Serb side in the conflict.

The ‘Minutes from the Joint Conference of the Supreme Headquarters of the Bosnian Chetnik Troops and the Mountainous Headquarters of the Bosnian Chetnik Troops’ (held on August 21, 1942)174 describe the creation of a joint command for the entire Bosnia region. This meeting brought together Stevan Botić and Rade Radić; both recognised the need for integration and a joint command, as well as recognising Mihailović as their supreme leader. The commanders agreed that any form of organised attack by the Croat Armed Forces (Domobrani, Ustaša, gendarmeries, militias, police,

172 AVII, Ca, K. 233, Reg. No. 29/2.
173 AVII, Ca, K. 233, Reg. No. 29/2.
174 AVII, Ca, k. 204, Reg. No. 24/6.
volunteers etc.) on any Chetnik troop in the region would be considered an attack on all Chetnik troops who were under the joint command regardless of whether the units had a collaboration agreement with the ISC. This was ‘the basic right of the Serb people for self-defence’\(^{175}\). With this conference, the delineation of authority in Bosnian Chetnik ranks became entrenched.

**The Borje Chetniks and Mihailović’s Headquarters**

The Chetniks in western Bosnia faced turmoil within their own ranks, not just with regards to their relationship with Mihailović’s headquarters. Interestingly, Mihailović’s officers suggested to their leader that the Bosnian Chetniks could establish a closer relationship with Nedić in Serbia. Repeatedly, Nedić’s Serbia was seen as an asset, illustrating the very different mindset of the Chetniks and Partisans.

Problems nevertheless remained on the lower levels. On August 24, 1942,\(^{176}\) reports from the commanders of the Chetnik battalions ‘Karađorđe’ and ‘Voja Tankosić’, Jovo Kitić and Teodor Arsenić, to the commander of the Borje Regiment stated their intentions of splitting into a separate unit because of political differences with headquarters. The authors claim to be alarmed by the statements of one of their superiors who said that ‘in the case of the re-establishment [of Yugoslavia], if the new state resembled the old one he would become a Serb separatist’\(^{177}\). Another alarming incident occurred in the village of Pribinići, where the same person stated in a public speech to a crowd of locals that ‘all Turks should be exterminated’\(^{178}\). Not unexpectedly, this caused immediate problems for the Chetniks with the local Muslim villages. A few days later this unlucky individual reiterated his contention, this time in a Chetnik unit, that ‘all peoples in Bosnia and Herzegovina except the Serbs should be exterminated’\(^{179}\). Kitić and Arsenić comment that this ‘was Hitler’s way of thinking and we will not stand for it’\(^{180}\). Alarmed by such extremism in a member of the Borje Regiment headquarters, these local commanders decided to separate from it. It is interesting to note that the

\(^{175}\) AVII, Ca, K. 233, Reg. No. 29/2.

\(^{176}\) AVII, Ca, k. 213, Reg. No. 21/2.

\(^{177}\) AVII, Ca, k. 213, Reg. No. 21/2.

\(^{178}\) AVII, Ca, k. 213, Reg. No. 21/2.

\(^{179}\) AVII, Ca, k. 213, Reg. No. 21/2.

\(^{180}\) AVII, Ca, k. 213, Reg. No. 21/2.
Borje Regiment was one of the Chetnik groups that signed the controversial collaboration agreements with the ISC.

The ‘Order of the Commander of the Majevica Chetnik Brigade of August 27, 1942’ portrays the Germans as protectors of the Serbs, and a force that would restrain the local Muslims. In it the Chetnik commander states that the German army will march down Sapna-Lopare road ‘to show to the Muslims that the era of their independent action is at an end, that the Germans are ready to confront it in the future, and to show the local Serbs that the German army is strong enough to protect them’.

A report by Majors Petar Baćović and Dobroslav Jevđević to Mihailović from the end of August 1942 was devoted to Nedić related matters. Both men emphasised the need for the Bosnian Chetniks to maintain active contacts with Nedić’s government in Serbia, because ‘the official Serbia is secure and a place of refuge for the fleeing Bosnians, and without this further action in Bosnia could not be undertaken’. The Chetniks saw Nedić’s ‘semi-free’ Serbia as an asset – restrained and constricted, certainly, but an asset nevertheless. The local Chetnik commanders in Bosnia (such as Stevan Botić) also argued that their movement should not be publicly associated with Mihailović but should present itself as an independent one. The reason was tied to the ethno-religious conflict: ‘[Mihailović] is a member of the London government, and as such he cannot accept the eradication of the Turkish and Croat elements from Bosnia’.

Thus, Mihailović and the Yugoslav government in London were seen as obstacles for the more radical members of the Chetnik movement. The report by Baćović and Jevđević also notes the tension in Bosnia regarding the appointment of mostly Montenegrin ‘foreigners’ as commanding officers among the Bosnian Chetnik troops.

Bosanska Krajina Chetniks and the Partisans

Throughout occupied Yugoslavia after the beginning of the civil war, the Chetniks portrayed the Partisans in national terms as an anti-Serb force. This was done for effect,

181 AVII, Ca, k. 210, Reg. No. 26/2.
182 AVII, Ca, k. 213, Reg. No. 21/2.
183 AVII, Ca, k. 222, Reg. No. 56/5.
184 AVII, Ca, k. 222, Reg. No. 56/5.
185 AVII, Ca, k. 222, Reg. No. 56/5.
Despite the reality that most Partisan manpower was comprised of Serbs. The Chetnik commanders in their reports expressed worry about Partisan-Domobrani links, which were seen as a serious danger because any influx of Domobrani deserters could potentially lend a non-Serb character to the Partisan force, thereby realising Chetnik propaganda.

The Order of Rade Radić, commander of the Bosnian Chetnik Troops (August 27, 1942)<sup>186</sup> comments on aspects of Serb-Croat relations in the Bosanska Krajina (western Bosnia) region. Commander Radić says:

The Croats [presumably Domobrani] are frequently surrendering [to the Partisans] with their weapons without resistance, which gives us proof that they are overwhelmingly pro-communist and that they wish to support [the communists] in their destruction of the Serb nation<sup>187</sup>.

This indicates that the Chetniks saw the Partisans as a national (anti-Serb) enemy, not an ideological enemy. In the Chetnik view, Domobrani soldiers defecting to the Partisans simply changed their political allegiance and not their ultimate anti-Serb goal. Radić also comments that the Bosanska Krajina region was a major communist stronghold in which communists from all over occupied Yugoslavia were concentrated.

Radić emphasizes the need to arm Serbs, because the local Croats and Muslims were fleeing to the Partisans, who armed them. He complains about the inability of his troops to confront the communists: ‘We are forced to keep most of our troops at home in order to protect our homes, children and women from the atrocities of the Ustaša’<sup>188</sup>. The local Chetniks were fiercely opposed to the Partisans, but their priority was to keep their settlements secure from the Ustašas.

The report lists Chetnik goals in the ‘Western zone’<sup>189</sup> as<sup>190</sup>: (i) to destroy the communists<sup>191</sup>; (ii) to organize troops and youth and establish a secure and stable

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<sup>186</sup> AVII, Ca, k. 233, Reg. No. 26/8.  
<sup>187</sup> AVII, Ca, k. 233, Reg. No. 26/8.  
<sup>188</sup> AVII, Ca, k. 233, Reg. No. 26/8.  
<sup>189</sup> West of the Bosnia-Neretva river line. It is interesting that these two rivers were marked as separating the east and west zones, although in occupied Yugoslavia as a whole this line would be the east-west median.  
<sup>190</sup> AVII, Ca, k. 233, Reg. No. 26/8.
physical connection between all regions; (iii) to create the strongest possible propaganda and intelligence service, as well as other services; (iv) to organise the command structure (this point, as well as points two and three, indicates the region’s serious structural challenges); (v) to protect the armed forces and the people from all enemies (undoubtedly this would have been the first point on the list at the beginning of the war); (vi) attracting the Muslims and Domobrani, then destroying Pavelić’s state. There were three more points on the list, but they mentioned minor local concerns.

**The German View of the Chetniks in 1942**

Chetnik agreements with the Italians in the ISC became an integral part of their strategy for two years, from the summer of 1941 to the Italian capitulation. The leadership of the Chetnik movement in the ISC believed that Italian-Chetnik agreements should be extended into the German zones of occupation. They attempted to approach the Wehrmacht about this, but no agreement could be reached due to German objections. German wartime documents indicate that the Chetniks were aware of Partisan-ISC links via captured correspondence and reported these to both the Italians and Germans. Anti-communism was the only common ground between the Chetniks and the Wehrmacht and created the basis for cooperation against the Partisans. In a somewhat similar fashion, the struggle against the Chetniks as the common enemy provided the basis for ISC-Partisan cooperation.

What was happening in the ISC amounted to a political game in which all parties tried to use their enemies to reach their goals. The Italians utilised the Chetniks to eradicate the Ustaša militia when needed; ironically, this meant working with the enemy to get rid of an ally. For their part, in the areas where there were no Chetnik-ISC agreements, the Chetniks were ready to tolerate the presence of the ISC’s regular army, the Domobrani, but not the Ustaša militia; there were also to be no direct dealings with the ISC, only indirect contact through the Italians or, if possible, the Germans.

In the end, attempts to reach a Chetnik-German agreement in the ISC via Jevđević failed, just like the earlier ones that Dangić had overseen; the ideological gap

191 Clearly by late March 1943 the Chetnik-Partisan war was becoming the primary concern, rather than the ethno-religious war.
between the Serb royalists and Nazi leadership was far greater than a shared anti-communism. The scope of German-Chetnik cooperation ended up being limited to Germans providing information on Partisan movements via radio contact. The German reports on negotiations also noted that the Chetniks were armed with Italian weapons; one can conclude that to their Axis observers, the Chetniks appeared to be an anti-Ustaša and anti-Partisan force, or, as the war progressed and priorities changed, an anti-Partisan and anti-Ustaša force.

The ‘Report of the German 718th Infantry Division’ (September 5, 1942)\textsuperscript{192} about the results of the negotiations between the German representatives and the political delegation led by Vojvoda Dobroslav Jevđević of the Chetnik supreme command contains detailed a description of the German impression of the Chetniks. According to the report, contact was initiated by Jevđević who wished to clarify certain issues regarding the standing of his group with the Wehrmacht command. Jevđević’s goal was to prevent conflict with the German armed forces. In a zone – assigned by the Italians – between Montenegro and the German-Italian demarcation zone in the ISC, Jevđević was commanding an official MVAC force of twelve thousand men. Equipped with Italian arms and ammunition, this force had the task of keeping peace and order. The report adds that there were no Partisans left in the zone assigned to Jevđević.\textsuperscript{193} It seems that Jevđević’s forces had killed six hundred and fifty communists (mostly Serbs) while combing the area; their goal was to pacify all of Bosnia and Herzegovina. The report adds that Jevđević sent to the Italians captured letters written by the Partisans to Croat commanders asking for help and ammunition to fight the Chetniks.\textsuperscript{194}

This German report sheds additional light on the ongoing Chetnik attack on Foča. It says that the attack was conducted by the Chetniks with Italian permission because the Ustašas did not want to evacuate the town. Croat forces – with machine guns and artillery – surrendered to the Chetniks after a short struggle, or simply ran away.

According to the report, Jevđević initiated talks with the Germans to enquire about the possibility of expanding his operations across the German-Italian demarcation

\textsuperscript{192} AVII, NAV-T-315, r. 2270, s. 456-8.
\textsuperscript{193} AVII, NAV-T-315, r. 2270, s. 456-8.
\textsuperscript{194} Partisan-ISC links were strongly denied in the Yugoslav post-war historiography.
line in the ISC, including the protection of the Sarajevo-Višegrad railway. He promised peace, order and fair treatment of the local population. His troops would show no hostility towards the German forces. He agreed that the regular Croat Domobrani army could stay in the region but the Ustaša militia would have to leave. Jevđević had twice rejected the offer of the ISC (presented to him via state treasurer, Dr. Vladimir Košak) to hold civil power and lead armed forces in the region if he recognised the sovereignty of the ISC. Jevđević openly told the Germans that he could not recognise the ISC as legitimate in the territories with Serb majorities, and that the Ustaša, who were persecuting the Serbs, led this state.

According to the report, all suggestions by Jevđević were flatly rejected. German-Chetnik negotiations again led nowhere. The Germans told Jevđević that the crossing of his units into the German-occupied zone of the ISC would cause an open retaliatory attack, but he was promised information if the Partisans made attempts to cross into the Italian-occupied region. An exchange of information in the other direction was also expected, and contact was to be maintained by radio. Despite turning Jevđević down, the Germans were impressed by Jevđević’s Chetniks:

The Chetniks that accompanied Jevđević as escorts were roughnecks, looking soldierly, well fed and disciplined. Their weapons consisted of Italian rifles and machine guns. Their combat value obviously far exceeds that of the Croat units and the Ustašas.

**German-Jevđević Meeting from the Chetnik Perspective**

A Chetnik report from their negotiations with the Germans in the ISC indicates that they pointed out to the Wehrmacht officers the reasons for the Serb uprising in the region, especially the Ustaša atrocities. While this was true (and was nothing new to the Germans, who had reached this conclusion themselves), it deflected the Chetnik pro-Allied stance during the negotiations. According to their own sources, Chetnik demands

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195 AVII, NAV-T-315, r. 2270, s. 456-8.
196 AVII, NAV-T-315, r. 2270, s. 456-8. Jevđević cited atrocities committed by the Ustašas: in the vicinity of Čapljina his units found a pit (called Šumarica) containing the bodies of one thousand, seven hundred and sixty Serbs slaughtered in April 1941; he also said that in Foča, the Ustašas killed one hundred and fifty seven women and children. He discovered this when his units conquered the town.
197 AVII, NAV-T-315, r. 2270, s. 456-8.
for an anti-Partisan cooperation agreement with the Germans asked for no official recognition of the ISC and the removal of the Ustaša militia from Serb-populated areas (the occupation forces and Domobrani could stay). One of the more interesting suggestions made by Jevđević to the Germans was to pacify eastern Bosnia by adding it to Nedić’s Serbia. Jevđević, like many Chetniks, saw Nedić’s Serbia as a potential asset within the occupation system. The Chetniks also suggested the removal of the Ustaša militia from Bosnia and the extension of the Italian zones – while denying their links with Mihailović in Serbia. Nevertheless, negotiations failed because once again Berlin would not allow changes in the region.

The ‘Report by the Chief of the Intelligence Service of the Commander of Operative Units of the Command of Eastern Bosnia and Herzegovina’ (September 4, 1942) explains the details of the meeting between Dobroslav Jevđević and the representatives of the German 718th Infantry Division from the Chetnik perspective. At the meeting, Jevđević enumerated the atrocities committed by the Ustaša against the Serbs in the ISC and explained the reasons for the Serb uprising:

Besides the previously stated reasons for the large uprising of the Serb people, the most important one was psychological, the condition in which the Serb people found themselves after the collapse of the state. Humiliated and insulted because of the Croat treason, the Serbs felt the need to correct the wrong of such a shameful capitulation. With great sacrifices in the uprising, the Serbs corrected this wrong. Today, the Serb people feel the need to peacefully wait for the end of the war in order to survive. We were ready to recognise the occupational troops in eastern Bosnia, even the regular [Domobrani] troops of the Croat Army as occupational troops and to tolerate the latter in certain garrisons until the end of the war. However, we will not recognise the sovereignty of the ISC, and we will fight against this to the last man.

Despite being located in the German occupational zone of the ISC where the Chetniks had a more difficult existence than in the Italian zones, Jevđević was not ready to collaborate with the ISC directly, unlike some of his counterparts in northern Bosnia,

198 This was, needless to say, something that the Wehrmacht could not be fooled into believing.
199 AVII, Ca, k. 236, Reg. No. 8/9.
200 Here referring to the Chetnik theory of the Croat ‘stab in the back’ as the chief cause of Yugoslavia’s collapse.
201 AVII, Ca, k. 236, Reg. No. 8/9.
perhaps because eastern Bosnia was located in a less isolated part of the ISC, bordering Serbia.

The report says Jevđević pointed out that the possibilities of rebellion among the hungry population and the danger of the ‘Bolshevisation’ of the Serb areas in the ISC were very real, and that the only way to prevent this would be to add these areas to Nedić’s Serbia\textsuperscript{202}. If changing the ISC’s borders was not an option, however, the Chetniks would have to reach the same kind of agreement with the Germans in the German zone as they already had done in the Italian zones. He also suggested that the Chetnik units from the Italian zones should have the ability to cross the Vienna Line into the German zone if they were chasing the Partisans. Moreover, Jevđević accused Domobrani forces of cooperating with the Partisans, pointing to the case – apparently known to the Germans as well – of a captured communist courier who had a letter for Domobrani officers. Jevđević’s final suggestion was to move the Vienna Line to the north, presumably to the River Sava, so that the Chetniks could be in charge there\textsuperscript{203}.

The report includes the German response. They were members of the military, they said, and had no jurisdiction over border questions that were political matters. They added that ‘political changes can only come from Berlin; the Führer is very stubborn and there is very little chance that he would accept any policy changes in the region\textsuperscript{204}. The only point that open for discussion was the local cooperation between the Chetniks and Germans against the Partisans, but without Chetnik violations of the Vienna Line in either direction. The Germans also complained about Chetnik attacks led by Sava Derikonja, who argued that the Ustašas were dressed in German uniforms to operate in the Chetnik territory – an accusation that the Germans flatly denied.

In turn, Jevđević suggested that the Germans ‘turn a blind eye’ to the events in eastern Bosnia for ten days or so, to allow the Chetniks to deal with the Ustaša militia in the region. The Germans scorned this suggestion, responding that ‘once they became interested in the region again, they would find only corpses there\textsuperscript{205}.

\textsuperscript{202} AVII, Ca, k. 236, Reg. No. 8/9.
\textsuperscript{203} AVII, Ca, k. 236, Reg. No. 8/9.
\textsuperscript{204} AVII, Ca, k. 236, Reg. No. 8/9.
\textsuperscript{205} AVII, Ca, k. 236, Reg. No. 8/9.
Jevđević utterly denied that he had connections with Mihailović, or that he would attack the Germans if he received a command to do so, though needless to say, as the report makes clear, the Germans did not believe these denials. German officers also reprimanded Jevđević for hijacking Serb conscripts who ended up as Domobrani forces in the Jahorina region, an indication that Domobrani were recruiting local Serbs into the army. The Chetniks tried to grab them and their weapons for their own units, presumably after they had received military training.

While the report says that cooperation against the Partisans was agreed upon and contacts were to be maintained for this purpose, the Germans expressed their intention to preserve the political status quo in eastern Bosnia. The Partisans were the common enemy, but the Germans could not tolerate Chetnik actions against the Ustašas, because ‘the Ustašas were the supporting columns of the ISC, and the Germans were allies and protectors of that state’. This was certainly true. The only change could come from Berlin itself – and this never happened.

The last segment of the report is entitled ‘The Question of our Relations with the Croats and the Germans’. The author stated that ‘we [the Chetniks] will categorically never operate together with [the Croats and the Germans]’, and that despite legalisation by the Italian authorities the Chetniks cannot forget ten thousand of our independent Chetniks in the German-Croat zone to defend their homes and families from atrocities and crimes. The only way to pacify Bosnia is to remove completely the Ustašas from it and to hand it over to the Italian administration.

This was a Chetnik call for Italian expansion all the way north to the River Sava across the Vienna Line to encompass all of Bosnia.

The most interesting point here is the direct recognition of the connection between the legal and illegal Chetniks in the ISC. Although the Chetniks who had legalised themselves with the Italians officially became MVAC (i.e., Italian auxiliaries),

206 AVII, Ca, k. 236, Reg. No. 8/9.
207 An officer of the Domobrani forces, as the representative of the ISC, was also present at these talks.
208 AVII, Ca, k. 236, Reg. No. 8/9.
they never hid the fact that they remained Chetniks and had ties with the ‘independent’ Chetniks in the German zone of the ISC. The only thing the legalised Chetniks in the Italian zones denied was their link with Mihailović’s headquarters, although this denial was pointless as the Italians were well aware of the situation. Even so, an open admission of this link would have been dangerous because the Italians, like all Axis troops, considered Mihailović to be their enemy.

**German Interpretation of Chetnik Strategic Goals**

The Serb essence of the Chetnik movement was evident to the Germans, as witnessed in their wartime reports. Although the Chetniks believed they were using the Italians and Germans for their own goals, the Axis powers saw through Chetnik trickery and never trusted them.

A report by the commander of the 718th Infantry Division (October 13, 1942)\(^\text{209}\) is an extremely insightful document. Recognising that the Chetniks operating in the ISC were an important factor, the Commander explains their origin. They were created, he says, by the Serbs who had been in the former Yugoslav Royal Army as well as the volunteers from the local Serb population who joined because of the Ustaša terror, for their own personal reasons, and from their desire to be in a guerrilla movement. The author also notes that the Chetniks now included segments of the region’s destroyed Partisan groups\(^\text{210}\). The political goals of the Chetnik movement had the ideal of creating a large independent Kingdom of Serbia. According to this German analysis, the Chetniks tried to achieve this goal by establishing a temporary friendship with the Italians in order to secure arms and ammunition. In addition, they expressed loyalty towards the Germans so that their organisational efforts could continue without interruption. Finally, they began apparent negotiations with ISC authorities to get additional supplies of ammunition without interference. The report adds that the Chetniks did not consider the Croat Domobrani army to be a serious enemy, and tolerated these troops in their territory. In contrast, the Chetniks fought bitterly against the Ustašas\(^\text{211}\). The Chetnik

\(^{209}\) AVII, NAV-T-315, s. 652-6.
\(^{210}\) AVII, NAV-T-315, s. 652-6.
\(^{211}\) AVII, NAV-T-315, s. 652-6.
organisation is described as based on military principles. Chetnik weaponry is described as very diverse; apparently, most of it consisted of the armaments of the former Yugoslav army, a significant part of which was acquired from the disarmed Partisans and Domobrani, and a small quantity came from Allied airdrops. Additional ammunition was usually acquired by disarming the Domobrani; although not directly stated in the report, this could have been one of the reasons why the Chetniks tolerated the Domobrani. Despite these various sources, the acquisition of ammunition represented the largest challenge to the Chetniks. The report says the Chetniks managed their ammunition supply with the utmost care.

Interestingly, the German report praises the commanding cadre in the Chetniks’ limited guerrilla operations. While the Chetniks did not have enough trained commanders for large-scale military operations, ‘the Chetnik units were far superior to Domobrani and Ustaša units of the same size’.

In ‘Present Relations with the Chetniks’, the report explains how the Chetniks were being dealt with in the Italian and German-controlled zones of the ISC. In the Italian zone, the Italian forces used the Chetniks to fight the Partisans so that they did not have to do it themselves. They were actively engaged in forming Chetniks units, and were delivering weapons, ammunition and food to them. Chetnik commanders and Serb politicians, like Dobroslav Jevđević and Todor Perović, were frequent guests of the Italian headquarters, ‘although they were not hiding at all that their struggle was first and foremost against the Ustaša Croat state’. As an example, the report states that the Chetnik units of Dobroslav Jevđević attacked and destroyed Ustaša forces in Foča on August 19, 1942, in front of the Italians. Likewise, there were reports of Chetnik attacks against Croat railway personnel and passengers on the Sarajevo-Mostar railway, again, right in front of the Italians.

Various Wehrmacht documents describe the Chetnik strategy on the ground in the ISC. In that region, the Chetniks were essentially a Serb territorial paramilitary force, hostile towards the Ustašas and the Partisans while avoiding the Wehrmacht and

\[^{212}\text{AVII, NAV-T-315, s. 652-6.}\]
\[^{213}\text{AVII, NAV-T-315, s. 652-6.}\]
\[^{214}\text{AVII, NAV-T-315, s. 652-6.}\]
maintaining an uneasy truce with the Domobrani forces. Because of their anti-communist / anti-Partisan stance, the Wehrmacht was ready to turn a blind eye to the Chetniks in the ISC as long as they were not attacking German troops. Nevertheless, it is evident that the various Axis powers did not agree about the Chetniks. Meanwhile, for their part, the Chetniks collaborated with Axis elements, but by no means with the entire Axis. The Wehrmacht presented a number of options on dealing with the Chetniks, hoping that everybody in the Axis camp would agree. The most effective option seemed to be to destroy the Chetniks, but this could not be done because of the Italians.

In the German-controlled part of the ISC, things were somewhat different, as illustrated in a report written by the commander of the 718th Infantry Division (October 13, 1942)\(^{215}\). The commander says that in the Serb-populated regions there were numerous Chetnik groups whose position was unclear. In the area secured by the German 718th Infantry Division, the ISC government presented a number of documents that could be considered armistice agreements with the Chetniks\(^{216}\). However, neither side was honouring these agreements and war between the Chetniks and Domobrani was starting once again. Indeed, the report says, ‘warfare between the Chetniks and Ustašas never stopped’, a fact confirmed by the smaller attacks on Croat outposts\(^{217}\). The Chetniks were, at the same time, avoiding conflict with the German 718th Infantry Division, and various segments were offering their help in the struggle against the Partisans as some Chetniks were in close contact with local German commanders. The report says the Division made no promises to the Chetniks, and that not a single bullet had been given to the Chetniks. Although the Chetniks were constantly underlining ‘that their struggle [was] directed only at securing Serb villages, and that the Chetniks will fight only against the Ustašas, Muslim militia and the Partisans’\(^{218}\), the commander recommends caution. In his view, the Chetniks were simply buying time to organise and strengthen their structures while waiting for the general Serb uprising.

\(^{215}\) AVII, NAV-T-315, s. 652-6.
\(^{216}\) The ISC armistice agreements in question are those with the ‘Ozren’ and ‘Trebava’ Chetnik units (signed May 29, 1942, in Lipac village), ‘Borja’ Chetnik unit (signed June 14, 1942, in Banja Luka and Prnjavor) and ‘Majevica’ Chetnik unit (signed June 15, 1942, in Lopara village).
\(^{217}\) AVII, NAV-T-315, s. 652-6.
\(^{218}\) AVII, NAV-T-315, s. 652-6.
On the operational side, the commander notes that cooperation with the Chetniks was possible only in areas free of the Ustašas and Muslim militia. In Chetnik regions where the Ustašas and Muslim militia had no presence, conditions of peace prevailed. In those areas, the Germans had utilised the Chetniks against the Partisans twice: to secure supply routes, and to block areas of escape and perform scouting missions. He praises the Chetniks for their usefulness and trustworthiness. Evidently, some Chetnik units were being used against the Partisans, with solid results.

The third part of the report is titled ‘Possibilities’. Here, the commander argues that the Chetnik question required an overreaching solution. The current state of affairs was dangerous: the Chetniks were absolute friends in the Italian sphere of influence, allies in the struggle against the Partisans in the areas of the German 714th Infantry Division, rejected as allies in the areas of the German 718th Infantry Division, deadly enemies for the Ustašas and partners in negotiations with ISC government representatives. Quite understandably, Chetnik commanders were left with the impression that German, Italian and Croat civil and military authorities were not in agreement, and could be played against each other. In the light of these circumstances, a common policy towards the Chetniks (applicable to all Axis forces and authorities) needed to be established before it became too late.

The author presents three possibilities to his superiors. The first was the adoption of the Italian solution, namely, full cooperation with the Chetniks, including supplying them with weapons and ammunition. This solution was immediately discarded, however, because of the political implications; taking this course would have represented an open struggle against the Croat state. The second proposed solution was the full rejection of and open hostility towards the Chetniks, until all Chetnik units were destroyed and disarmed; this solution was fairly straightforward, and no elaboration is provided. The third possible solution was a compromise between these two extremes and was clearly the most complicated one: it called for conditional cooperation with the Chetniks. The conditions were as follows: the Chetniks had to recognise the Croat state; they had to surrender all insignias (such the Serb double-headed eagle) and rhetoric which was reminiscent of resurrecting the Great Serb kingdom (though unstated, most

219 AVII, NAV-T-315, s. 652-6.
220 AVII, NAV-T-315, s. 652-6.
likely Yugoslavia was implied, less likely Greater Serbia) such as traditional Serb greetings, naming units ‘King Peter II’, etc; and the Chetniks had to take an oath to the Croat state. The author says that, knowing the Serb mentality, it was quite possible that some Chetniks would do all this just to get weapons and ammunition, only to rise up at the opportune moment in an open rebellion. Going back to the third solution, he notes that the ISC would have to promise the Serbs (and the Chetniks) that it would treat them as loyal citizens, that the Ustašas would leave all Serb-populated regions, that all Serbs who were in being held in concentration camps would be released, that families of prisoners of war would be taken care of, that food would be distributed and that ammunition for the struggle against the Partisans would be provided. During the summer of 1942, these concessions were made to certain Chetnik groups with whom the Croat government reached an agreement. Nevertheless, at the time of writing neither side was honouring those agreements.

The commander indicates that the first and third solutions were quite dangerous to adopt. The Chetniks would not only use the time (and peace) to organise and would destroy any remnants of authority the Croat state had in Serb-populated regions. As proof, he points to the increased attacks of the Chetnik groups with whom the Croat government had already signed agreements. He concludes by saying that the best solution was the military one – the disarmament and complete destruction of all Chetnik groups. To achieve this, certain conditions would have to be met. For example, the Italians would have to agree. Common action against the Chetniks should proceed as follows: disarmament and abolishment of the Italian Chetnik units (presumably MVAC Chetniks) at the same time as the disarmament and destruction of all Chetnik units in the German sphere of influence. Common military actions would have to be taken, and for this reason, a joint German-Italian military command covering the entire territory of the ISC would have to be created.

221 AVII, NAV-T-315, s. 652-6.
222 AVII, NAV-T-315, s. 652-6.
Chetnik Integration from the German Perspective

Meanwhile, the Chetniks were also working on achieving integration on the ground in the ISC. German documents conclude that the Chetnik movement in the ISC grew out of the initial Serb anti-Ustaša movement, essentially by the process of planting officers appointed by Mihailović to key positions among the rebels. Apparently there were also instances of Ustaša-Partisan anti-Chetnik cooperation, although it seems that the Partisans in question were comprised of non-Serbs. These reports, like so many others, indicate the ongoing German frustration with the seemingly contradictory Italian policies. Nevertheless, despite the criticism and in spite of German awareness of the root cause of the region’s violence, Hitler clearly wanted to keep the Ustašas in power. Wehrmacht documents also record forced conversions of Serbs to Roman Catholicism in the ISC by the Ustaša regime, thereby underscoring the religious aspect of the conflict.

A report by the German 718th Infantry Division (October 26, 1942) contains important information on the Chetniks in the ISC. Evidently, former army officers (Serbs) – most likely sent by Mihailović – had appeared in certain rebel Eastern Orthodox (Serb) volunteer formations, and as a consequence these formations were becoming more active. In the German view, Mihailović would assign an area in the ISC to certain military officers who joined him (if possible men who came from the targeted region), with the task of making contact with the local Serb rebel group. If the rebels accepted the personnel sent as their leaders, the group became part of Mihailović’s movement, and he could issue orders to it. Sometimes this transition did not happen smoothly, especially if the local rebel group in the ISC was unwilling to accept the commanding cadre from other region (i.e. Serbians and/or Montenegrin officers). The process also illustrates the initial apolitical nature of most rebel groups in the ISC; people fled towns and villages to escape Ustaša atrocities, and banded together to survive and fight. These apolitical rebels initially only wanted to survive, but the Chetniks and CPY engaged in a race to integrate as many as they could. In many cases, especially before the civil war between the Chetniks and the Partisans was transplanted from Serbia to the

223 AVII, NAV-T-315, r. 2271, s. 127-9.
224 AVII, NAV-T-315, r. 2271, s. 127-9.
ISC’s territory, the leaders and the majority of the men in some units did not always get along, and a fluidity between the Chetnik and Partisan poles persisted. Later, many units (and even more individuals) switched from one movement to another, and in a number of Partisan units, Chetnik putsches were successfully carried out.

The report notes that the activity of the rebel units now led by Mihailović’s officers was primarily directed against ‘the Ustaša state’; the main goal, however, was to win over all the rebel units for the ‘Great-Serb project’\(^\text{225}\). Put otherwise, the ultimate goal was integration, turning all rebel units into elements of the Chetnik movement under Mihailović.

The report devotes much detail to eastern Bosnia, where the Ustašas in the area east of Rogatica had provoked local Serbs, ‘the Eastern Orthodox population’, with recent murders. As a consequence, there were serious clashes between the Ustašas on one side and the rebels and communists on the other\(^\text{226}\). It is unclear from the wording if the rebels (most likely the Chetniks) and the communists (clearly the Partisans) cooperated against the Ustašas at this late date of October 1942, or if the struggle against the Ustašas occurred independently. Nevertheless, the course of events is quite telling with regards to the composition of the Chetnik and Partisan forces operating in the region. The Ustašas were almost certainly targeting the Serbs in the Rogatica region, and the fact that these murders sparked the conflict with both the Chetniks and the Partisans is a strong indication that the Partisans were mostly comprised of local Serbs (not only Chetniks). There is another interesting detail in the German report regarding Partisan-Ustaša cooperation: the ‘communist band’ led by Muja Hadžić\(^\text{227}\) was being chased by the Chetniks and requested Ustaša protection\(^\text{228}\). German sources confirmed that the Ustašas partially cooperated with the communist unit led by Muja Hadžić, and that they supplied Hadžić’s unit with weapons and ammunition to fight the Chetniks. Thus, the ISC used an approach similar to that taken by the Italians, only in reverse – helping the Partisans in order to undermine the Chetnik position. The report notes more

\(^{225}\) AVII, NAV-T-315, r. 2271, s. 127-9. It is unclear if the author is talking about Yugoslavia, or the Chetnik project of Greater Serbia; most likely he is equating the two.

\(^{226}\) AVII, NAV-T-315, r. 2271, s. 127-9.

\(^{227}\) The commander of the Muslim battalion of the Romanija Partisan Corps – an indication that Partisan units in some areas organised along national lines.

\(^{228}\) AVII, NAV-T-315, r. 2271, s. 127-9.
conflicts between the ‘Eastern Orthodox volunteers’, or ‘anticommunists’, and the Croat forces in the Ustiprača and Goražde regions of eastern Bosnia.\(^{229}\)

The ‘Minutes from the Conference of the Subordinated Commanders from the Territory of the ISC and Serbia held at the German Command of the Armed Forces Southeast’ (on October 31, 1942)\(^ {230}\) regarding the military and political situation in those regions features a significant analysis of the ethno-religious conflict and its influence on guerrilla activity.

At the conference, when discussing the measures the ISC could take against the Ustašas, Horstenau gave the opinion that improvements could hardly be expected as no one in the ISC government had enough courage to make a firm stand against the obstinacy of the militia. Horstenau also pointed out that the behaviour of the Italians was surprising. In their own zone of influence, they armed the Chetniks and supported them in their murder of the Croats. At the same time, in the German zone of influence, the Italians kept contact with Eugen Kvaternik whose Ustaša had the goal of exterminating the Serbs.\(^ {231}\) The Germans had full knowledge of Italian dealings both north and south of the German-Italian demarcation zone\(^ {232}\) and were aware of their hypocrisy. Dealing with both the Chetniks and Ustašas at the same time in different zones indicates that the Italians saw these groups as political tools, the ultimate goal being dependence on Italy for all parties concerned.

Horstenau estimated the strength of the Ustašas at twenty-seven battalions. The minutes record him as suggesting their subordination to the command of the regular Domobrani armed forces, because the circumstances in which the Ustašas were conducting independent operations were no longer sustainable.\(^ {233}\) General Ler added that during HQ talks, Hitler demonstrated his unwillingness to do away with Pavelić and the Ustaša regime, and that as a consequence, the generals had to make the best of the

\(^{229}\) AVII, NAV-T-315, r. 2271, s. 127-9.

\(^{230}\) AVII, NAV-T-312, r. 467, s. 8056659-62.

\(^{231}\) AVII, NAV-T-312, r. 467, s. 8056659-62.

\(^{232}\) The German leadership in Berlin had this information but did little with it because of the wider importance of the German-Italian axis.

\(^{233}\) AVII, NAV-T-312, r. 467, s. 8056659-62.
situation. Ler’s remark highlights the difference between the local Wehrmacht leadership in the region, represented by Horstenau, Bader and Ler, and the Berlin leadership led by Hitler. General Ler added that a new report about the situation would have to be submitted to Hitler if the troubles continued, but solving the ISC problem along the German-led government lines implemented in Poland was not under consideration at a senior level. General Bader also commented on Mihailović’s Chetniks, predicting they would be Italian enemies once again and would attack the Italians with the weapons supplied by the latter.

The ‘Report of the German 718th Infantry Division’ (October 6, 1942) about the military and political situation in Bosnia underlines the previous conclusions about the nature of the conflict in the region. Noting that Grand Župan (Veliki Župan) Dr. Vladimir Sabolić in the district of Brod was conducting religious persecutions, the report says that the local Eastern Orthodox population was being forced to covert to Roman Catholicism under threat of being sent to a concentration camp. The Ustašas were, above all others, responsible for creating disorder; reports had been received from all areas describing their brutality, cruelty and ugly violations of all legal norms ‘from this “statehood” organisation’. All German appeals to the Ustaša leadership had thus far met with no success, principally because the Ustaša leaders knew that local representatives of the Wehrmacht had no backing from Berlin which remained pro-Ustaša. The report adds that even the Croat Domobrani army leadership did not dare to criticise the Ustaša authorities.

Due to the rebellion of the Serbs, ‘the evacuation’ of sixteen villages from the Mount Vučjak region was continuing and the population had been taken to concentration camps, as an agreement with the Chetniks regarding the handover of the arms could not be reached. The author(s) of the report notes that rumours were circulating that the Germans were responsible for food and supply shortages. Further, the Germans had

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234 AVII, NAV-T-312, r. 467, s. 8056659-62.
235 AVII, NAV-T-315, r. 2271, s. 120-3.
236 AVII, NAV-T-315, r. 2271, s. 120-3.
237 AVII, NAV-T-315, r. 2271, s. 120-3.
238 AVII, NAV-T-315, r. 2271, s. 120-3.
created the ISC in the first place (this comment most likely came from non-Croats) and were not restraining the Ustaša. Indeed, they were supporting them.

As this report makes clear, German officers believed that the Italians were key to solving the Chetnik problem in the ISC, but the Italian unwillingness to cooperate made the eradication of the Chetniks impossible.

Another ‘Report by the Commander of the German 718th Infantry Division’ (October 12, 1942)239 devoted to the development of anti-Partisan operations in the Jajce region notes the possibility of an ISC-Partisan and Italian-Partisan connection. For the Partisans the ‘main suppliers of weapons were the Croat armed forces and the Ustašas’240, given that they frequently surrendered with little resistance or simply ran away when attacked, abandoning their weapons and equipment. The next culprits were the Italians; however, the author of the report could not say for sure how Italian weapons landed in Partisan hands. Weapons likely were taken from captured/disarmed Chetniks, who were supplied by the Italians, or from individual Italian soldiers who could be bribed to sell the equipment.

The report concludes that any operational forces comprising Croat units and/or Ustašas only would be out of the question in the future – the Jajce operation providing proof of this. As for the Croat armed forces:

There is no will to fight. Neither the officers nor the men truly believe in an independent Croatia. With regards to their own state, there is complete apathy and the soldiers are not ready to make any effort for it – let alone die for it.241

Thus, these soldiers represented ‘excellent material’ for communist propaganda.

Another ‘Report of the German 718th Infantry Division’ (November 13, 1942)242 to the commanding general and commander in Serbia is devoted in its entirety to the Chetnik presence in the ISC. The author reports no dealings with the Chetniks.

239 AVII, NAV-T-315, r. 2270, s. 585-93.
240 AVII, NAV-T-315, r. 2270, s. 585-93.
241 AVII, NAV-T-315, r. 2270, s. 585-93.
242 AVII, NAV-T-315, r. 2270, s. 811-2.
However, certain Chetnik commanders had been informed that any interruptions (particularly of the railway traffic) would be considered a hostile act against the German Wehrmacht and would result in reprisals. All Chetnik appeals for help – first and foremost for ammunition – were declined. At the same time, the ISC government and the Croat armed forces (most likely the Domobrani) reached agreements with various Chetnik groups, despite German protests\(^\text{243}\). With these agreements, the ISC secured temporary regional autonomy for the Chetniks, leaving them their weapons, and even supplying them with ammunition according to German sources.

Interestingly, the report notes that firms operating for the HQ collection of resources and materials\(^\text{244}\) – such as Hobag, Holzbahnwerke Zavidovic and Rivolta – made agreements with the local Chetniks to secure supplies of wood from Chetnik-controlled areas\(^\text{245}\). According to these agreements, the local Serb population provided labour, while the Chetniks secured the forest railway lines from Partisans and Muslim militia attacks, though it is unclear if the Muslim militia in question was organisationally/legally tied to the ISC, or if it was a local grassroots force.

The Chetnik purpose is explained as follows:

In the operating zone [of the 718\(^{\text{th}}\) Infantry Division] the Serbs comprise approximately forty to fifty percent of the local population. Because of the fierce persecution and atrocities at the hands of the Ustašas and the Muslim militia – both protected by the ISC government – Chetnik formations were created everywhere for defence purposes\(^\text{246}\).

Some Chetniks weapons came from the former Yugoslav army, others were purchased from the Italians, and still others were taken ‘from the [captured] Croats’\(^\text{247}\). The report adds that the backbone of the Chetnik movement consisted of strong, well-armed, well-organised and well-trained (by the Italians) large-scale formations operating in the Italian sphere of influence.

\(^{243}\) AVII, NAV-T-315, r. 2270, s. 811-2.
\(^{244}\) ‘Abnahmestab Freytag – des Oberkommando des Heeres’.
\(^{245}\) AVII, NAV-T-315, r. 2270, s. 811-2.
\(^{246}\) AVII, NAV-T-315, r. 2270, s. 811-2.
\(^{247}\) AVII, NAV-T-315, r. 2270, s. 811-2.
According to the author, the disarmament and destruction of Chetnik units was possible only if (i) the Italians employed exactly the same tactics as the Germans; otherwise, the Chetniks would simply find refuge in the Italian zone if faced with a German onslaught; (ii) the ISC government and its Domobrani armed forces acted in the same manner as the German forces; (iii) joint German-Italian military operations were carried out with strong forces and regardless of the German-Italian demarcation line; (iv) the supply of wood could be sacrificed for a few months; and (v) railway traffic could be restricted to the Brod-Doboj-Sarajevo and Doboj-Tuzla narrow gauge lines, as not enough troops could be found to secure secondary railway lines. To achieve the destruction of the Chetnik forces the author recommends: (i) the temporary suspension of the German-Italian demarcation line in the ISC to allow Axis forces full freedom of movement, and (ii) a joint German-Italian supreme command covering the entire territory of the ISC. If these were not feasible, German troop presence should be increased to at least three full divisions, which could then be freely used throughout the ISC. Finally, as a follow-up to anti-Chetnik military operations, the Ustašas and Muslim militia would have to be disarmed or removed from Bosnia, or ‘in a very short time, regardless of the German control, new Chetnik units would start growing once again’. This latter point indirectly confirms that the Germans understood the Chetnik phenomenon in the ISC to be a local Serb reaction to atrocities conducted against them.

A ‘Ten Day Report by the German 718th Infantry Division’ (November 15, 1942) deals mostly with the Chetniks in the ISC. Starting with the subsection ‘Eastern Orthodox Volunteers’, the author notes that Mihailović’s plan in the ISC, namely, integrating the various groups under his own command, was slowly becoming a reality. Here as elsewhere, a German source indicates that Serb rebels, the ‘Eastern Orthodox volunteers’, in the ISC had apolitical self-preservationist roots, and that their Chetnik/Partisan integration came later and was a conscious effort by Mihailović’s officers and Tito’s political commissars.

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248 AVII, NAV-T-315, r. 2270, s. 811-2.
249 AVII, NAV-T-315, r. 2270, s. 811-2.
250 AVII, NAV-T-315, r. 2270, s. 811-2.
251 AVII, NAV-T-315, r. 2271, s. 137-8.
Chetnik Captain Račić ‘was asked’, presumably by the Germans, to talk with representatives of the Croat armed forces; although the report does not specify which forces, most likely it was the Domoborani252. Račić, however, refused to take part once he learned that a German officer would participate in an advisory role. His refusal offers clear proof that certain Chetnik commanders avoided open contact with the Germans.

The report mentions that Chetniks in the Mount Devetak region were trying to avoid the German anti-insurgency operation by escaping to the Italian-controlled part of the ISC. As has been shown, for the Chetnik units operating close to the German-Italian demarcation line, escaping to the Italian zone under German pressure was typical, and the lack of Italian cooperation was an ongoing source of German frustration253.

Finally, the author discusses the Drina border region, on the Serbian side, where there were ‘legal’ Chetnik units loyal to Nedić’s government with headquarters in Užice; north of them were ‘illegal’ units led by Sergei, a Russian engineer. Both Chetnik groups were helping to transfer rebels from Serbia into Bosnia across the River Drina254.

**Pacified Serbia and the ISC in Continuous Turmoil**

As 1942 drew to a close, Wehrmacht documents attest the unrelenting persecution of the Serbs in the ISC. The German assessment was that any pacification of the area was futile until this persecution stopped. Local German commanders called for the end of the persecution and for a joint German-Italian command over the entire ISC (again, these calls proved fruitless). Faced with the political unwillingness of their superiors to resolve the persecution and ethno-religious conflict, the local Wehrmacht commanders emphasised the limited nature of German strategic goals in the region. A policy of non-interference allowed events to run their own course.

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252 AVII, NAV-T-315, r. 2271, s. 137-8.
253 AVII, NAV-T-315, r. 2271, s. 137-8.
254 AVII, NAV-T-315, r. 2271, s. 137-8.
The ‘Monthly Report by the Commander of the Armed Forces Southeast’ (November 29, 1942)\textsuperscript{255} to the supreme command of the Wehrmacht contains more direct analysis of the ethno-religious conflict in the ISC.

Commenting that general conditions of peace prevailed in Serbia (with the exception of periodic attacks and diversions on railways), the report states that conditions in the neighbouring ISC were not improving: ‘As long as the persecution of the Eastern Orthodox population by the Ustašas is not stopped, internal political conditions in the ISC will not improve’\textsuperscript{256}. The report, however, places part of the blame on the policies of the Italian occupation forces, presumably referring to their ongoing involvement with the Chetniks. With regards to the Italians, the report recommends the formation of a joint command covering the entire territory of the ISC, as

\ldots the police authority is completely at the hands of the Ustašas. Their mostly ad hoc terrorist acts were constantly being hidden [from the Germans?] These acts have as a consequence the constantly worsening economic situation and constant stream of reinforcements to various armed bands\textsuperscript{257}.

It also seeks the ‘fair treatment of the Eastern Orthodox part of Croatia’s population by the Croat government’\textsuperscript{258}.

At this point, Mihailović was residing in Montenegro because he felt safer there. However, the most important task was still the destruction of Mihailović’s movement by all possible means. This policy – a constant in German goal in occupied Serbia until late 1944 – reflected the ongoing German distrust of the Serbs. It also reflected the fact that Serbia was largely a Partisan-free zone at that time, unlike the neighbouring ISC.

In eastern Bosnia, meanwhile, ‘because of the violence against the civilians by the Ustašas near Rogatica, all segments of the population rose against them’\textsuperscript{259}. The

\textsuperscript{255} AVII, NAV-T-312, r. 468, s. 8057211-43.
\textsuperscript{256} AVII, NAV-T-312, r. 468, s. 8057211-43.
\textsuperscript{257} AVII, NAV-T-312, r. 468, s. 8057211-43.
\textsuperscript{258} Recommendations can be found at AVII, NAV-T-312, r. 468, s. 8057292-4. Interestingly, the author uses the term ‘Eastern Orthodox’ rather than ‘Serb’; perhaps this way, the recommendations could more easily be adopted.
\textsuperscript{259} AVII, NAV-T-312, r. 468, s. 8057211-43.
Germans stayed out of these local flare-ups, doing little more than simply recording events, and focussing on protecting the main railway lines:

The situation in the Mediterranean dictates unconditional protection of the main Zagreb-Beograd, Beograd-Niš-Skopje, Beograd-Sofia and Beograd-Kraljevo-Skopje railways. All other tasks are temporarily postponed for later.\(^{260}\)

Given that none of the main railways passed through Bosnia and Herzegovina, ethno-religious conflict could rage there unopposed as far as the Germans were concerned.

The Wehrmacht never had enough troops in the ISC to deal with the Partisans and the Chetniks militarily. In ‘The Struggle Against the Rebel Movement in the Area Southeast from June to August 1942’, written by the higher military archival advisor Ernst Wisshaupt\(^{261}\) at the request of the Commander of the Armed Forces Southeast. In it, Wisshaupt says that after the departure of German 2\(^{nd}\) Army (which had participated in the original invasion of Yugoslavia) only the necessary occupation forces of the 718\(^{th}\) Infantry Division remained. The initial German plan was to keep these weak occupational troops in Croatia, a friendly country, only until the new state solidified and built its own armed forces. However, these plans proved realistic. Unrest began spreading across the region on both sides of the River Drina, and it became apparent that this was not the work of local, individual bandit bands, but the beginning of a rebel movement ‘of the communist and Serb-nationalist units’\(^{262}\). Wisshaupt notes that the highly inaccessible terrain of the western Balkans was aiding the rebels.

Wisshaupt says in his report that in mid-December 1941, the rebel movement\(^{263}\) in the German occupation zone of the ISC covered the entire north Bosnia and Kordun region, and was showing tendencies of spreading into Slavonia and Srem. The Partisans ideals were a muddled mixture of communism and Panslavism, the latter being a useful tool for recruiting the Serbs into Partisan ranks. The ‘unconditional rejection of present-

\(^{260}\) AVII, NAV-T-312, r. 468, s. 8057211-43.

\(^{261}\) Copy of the original located in AVII, Na, Reg. No. 18/1, k. 70.

\(^{262}\) AVII, Na, Reg. No. 18/1, k. 70.

\(^{263}\) It is uncertain if the author considered this a term that simply lumped together the Chetniks and the Partisans; this is most likely the case because the civil war between the two guerrilla groups was starting.
day Croatia, meaning the ISC, was common to all rebels, Chetniks and Partisans alike. Besides the Croat communists, there were Muslims who joined the ‘Eastern Orthodox’ (i.e. Serb) rebels, who comprised the bulk of the rebel forces.

Croat reports indicated that Major Jezdimir Dangić, the Commander of the Chetnik forces in eastern Bosnia, was not accepting Mihailović’s supreme authority. These same reports said that rebels in the vicinity of Sarajevo had directed the following taunt at the Croat army officers with whom they had been negotiating:

We will not give up our weapons until the end of the war; because we were fighting against the fascists and the oppressors of Slavdom. We have nothing against the Croats and their armed forces – we were only the enemies of the Ustašas. Russia will win.

Although the author does not specify which rebel group was quoted in the Croat army report, these words could have been spoken by the Chetniks or the Partisans. The concluding remark about Russian victory could be a Chetnik reference to old, imperial and Eastern Orthodox Russia or a Partisan reference to Soviet Russia. The Partisans used their ties to Russia to attract local Serbs into their ranks, allowing them to see in Russia whatever they wanted to see.

The author says that other reports on Dangić in eastern Bosnia indicated that he did not wish to fight the German Wehrmacht. Rather, he was on a mission to protect the Eastern Orthodox in eastern Bosnia from the atrocities of the Ustašas and the communists. He adds that Serbia’s Minister of Internal Affairs, Milan Aćimović, was spreading propaganda that Germany would sooner or later re-establish an independent Serbia, which would consist of the pre-Yugoslav Serbia up to Skopje (i.e. to the border of modern day Republic of Macedonia), Banat, eastern Srem and eastern Bosnia up to the River Bosna.

264 AVII, Na, Reg. No. 18/1, k. 70.
265 AVII, Na, Reg. No. 18/1, k. 70.
266 It is highly likely that the Communists successfully used Panslavic sentiments among the local Serbs (i.e. the traditional ‘Mother Russia’ sentiment) as a recruitment tool, emphasizing their connection with Russia.
267 AVII, Na, Reg. No. 18/1, k. 70.
The author notes changes in the region after the Axis attack on the Soviet Union. The war on the Eastern Front required all available reserve forces; in the light of this development the Supreme Command of the Wehrmacht ordered the Commander of the Armed Forces Southeast on December 16, 1941, to release all German forces in Serbia and the ISC so that they could be moved to the east\(^{268}\). The first units scheduled to depart were the reinforcements (113\(^{th}\) and 324\(^{th}\) division), sent only a few weeks previously to deal with the uprising in Serbia. In place of those departing, German, Bulgarian, Hungarian, Romanian and, where necessary, Italian forces were to step in, entering Serbia and the ISC to establish peace and order. Of these four Axis countries, only the Bulgarians complied. The Italians reoccupied their Zones II and III fully, but did nothing else, although the Italian Supreme Command issued a statement about its readiness to replace the departing German units in the ISC beyond the German-Italian demarcation line with its own troops as soon as details were discussed with the ISC government\(^{269}\). For their part, the Hungarians and the Romanians refused to send their troops to Serbia and the ISC.

**Germans Prevent Italians from Occupying the Entire ISC**

The German recommendation in late 1941 was to transfer the entire territory of the ISC to the Italians, a move that could have potentially deflated the ethno-religious conflict and significantly improved the overall security situation. This was not meant to be, however, because in December 1941, Hitler simply changed his mind, thus preventing the Italians from moving further north.

However, German analysis of Italian policies indicated that their approach was feeding the uprising rather than suppressing it. In their view, if the 2\(^{nd}\) Italian Army were to become responsible for the entire territory of the ISC, the uprising would spread among the Croat population as well, though it remains unclear why the Germans thought this, and there is also an indirect acknowledgment that the rebels were local Serbs\(^{270}\). For this reason, the recommendation of the German General in Zagreb was to give up on the Italian occupation of the entire ISC, even extending German presence beyond the

\(^{268}\) AVII, Na, Reg. No. 18/1, k. 70.

\(^{269}\) AVII, Na, Reg. No. 18/1, k. 70.

\(^{270}\) AVII, Na, Reg. No. 18/1, k. 70.
existing German-Italian demarcation line. However, on December 20, 1941, the Commander of the Armed Forces Southeast made a recommendation to the Supreme Command that the Italian 2nd Army should occupy the entire ISC, with the exceptions of Sarajevo, Jajce and Prijedor. Ernst Wisshaupt, who wrote the report, recommended placing special emphasis on protecting the railways, considered vital to German strategic interests, especially the Zagreb-Belgrade railway, as well as the Brod-Sarajevo line. Those German troops remaining in the ISC were to be subordinated to the command of the Italian 2nd Army, except in Sarajevo, Jajce and Prijedor. Wisshaupt made this recommendation because the German presence in Serbia was considered of primary importance. He noted that the ISC leadership was stunned by this prospect, and Marshal Kvaternik offered an increase in the number of Croat troops fighting on the Eastern Front so that the German 718th Infantry Division could stay in the ISC.

However, these plans came to nothing. Wisshaupt says Hitler changed his mind about allowing the Italians to occupy the German sphere of interest in the ISC. Instead, the Commander of the Armed Forces Southeast was ordered to quash the uprisings in Serbia and the ISC with all available force. At this point in the war, Hitler could still afford to simply change his mind, and the Italians could do nothing but oblige. The plan to replace German troops in Serbia and the ISC led to the Italian reoccupation of their Zone III in the ISC, and the arrival of three Bulgarian divisions in Serbia.

One could argue that Hitler made a strategic regional blunder by not allowing the Italians to occupy the entire ISC. There was not only the question of additional German troops that could have been freed up for the Eastern Front or other uses. This was also a missed opportunity to achieve a more permanent pacification of the ISC territory which could have saved German troops and materiel in the long term. If the Italians had remained consistent in their policies in the ISC, that is if they had employed the same approach seen in their own zones of occupation (Zones II and III) up to December 1941 in the rest of the ISC, pacification of the troubled regions south of the River Sava could have been achieved. The Italians would have restrained, restricted or even dismantled most, if not the entire Ustaša militia in the ISC, and given that Ustaša atrocities were the

271 AVII, Na, Reg. No. 18/1, k. 70.
272 AVII, Na, Reg. No. 18/1, k. 70.
273 AVII, Na, Reg. No. 18/1, k. 70.
main cause of the Serb uprising, it is safe to assume that most rebels would simply have gone home if personal and property security were re-established. It is true that the Italian takeover of the ISC would not have solved ‘the Chetnik problem’ (the main German complaint), and it is very likely that the Italians would have continued militarily using those Chetniks legalised as MVAC troops against the Partisans to politically undermine the government in Zagreb. However, the end of Ustaša rampages would have arrested the uprooting process that fed both guerrilla groups. The end of atrocities would have most likely spelled the end of the Partisans because they would have lost their main recruitment base. The Italians could have let the Chetniks deal with the remaining Partisan forces. They could have then dealt with the Chetniks, given that their main reasons for existing, namely, the protection of the local Serb population from both the Ustašas and the communist threat, would have disappeared.

The German belief that the Croat population would join the Partisans, presumably because of the Italian anti-ISC and pro-Serb policies, has some merit, but it should be noted that the Croat presence in the Partisans was most noticeable in the areas the Italians annexed to Italy (Zone I, part of Dalmatia outside of the ISC). As long as the Italians respected the ISC to some extent, it is unlikely that the Croats would rise against them. Any Croat and/or Muslim rebellion would have occurred if the Italians had allowed the Chetniks to conduct atrocities against the non-Serb civilians, but the Italians likely would have prevented this for the same reasons that they would have prevented Ustaša rampages.

Wishaupt’s report contains a Memorandum on the situation in the southeast region, created by the operative division of the headquarters of the 12th Army for the Supreme Command of the Wehrmacht. Commenting on the ethno-religious conflict in the ISC, the memorandum states the following:

Unrestrained felonies of the Ustašas, the Croat volunteer force, were significantly adding to the disturbances in the country... The present situation in the ISC represents a serious endangerment of the entire northern Balkans, because Serb determination for resistance is getting constant support in the successes of the rebels against the Croats and Italians. The possibility of spreading the uprising into the old-Serbia
region and the renewed danger to vitally important lines of communication
in the Southeast are a continuing concern\(^\text{274}\).

Once again, German commanders on the ground, concerned about the strategic implications of these disturbances, complained about the ethno-religious conflict to their superiors and pointed to Ustaša atrocities as the principal force behind them.

German military reports from the end of 1942 provide further details of the continuing ethno-religious conflict in eastern Bosnia. The ‘Ten Day Report by the German 718\(^{\text{th}}\) Infantry Division’ (November 6, 1942)\(^\text{275}\) addressed the ethno-religious conflict in the ISC and the Chetnik issue. ‘A band’ of six hundred people had apparently crossed the River Drina from Serbia to occupy villages abandoned by the Volksdeutsche\(^\text{276}\), but large-scale clashes had not occurred at the time of writing. The description of the incident leaves many details unexplained, from any political association of the group crossing the river, to the identities of these people – most likely Serb refugees from the ISC residing in Serbia who saw an opportunity to acquire new homes.

The report contains a section on ‘The Rebels and Eastern Orthodox volunteers (the Chetniks)’\(^\text{277}\). The activities of the Chetniks are described as follows:

In the region of Rogatica the rebels have pushed the Ustašas into town and they are holding the high ground to the north and east. For now, their action is limited to preventing the Ustašas from entering the Serb villages. Since the Ustašas have made no attempt to do this thus far, no serious clashes have occurred. The rebels have received reinforcements from the right bank of the River Drina [from Serbia] so that an increase in hostilities is now likely, especially because a large [Chetnik] group to the north has proclaimed taking Rogatica as its goal\(^\text{278}\).

The remainder of the section includes the activities of Chetnik Radivoje Kosorović (sent by Dobroslav Jevđević, residing in the Italian occupation zone) who was attacking

\(^{274}\) AVII, Na, Reg. No. 18/1, k. 70.

\(^{275}\) AVII, NAV-T-315, r. 2271, s. 133-5.

\(^{276}\) One of the villages was Šembor (now Novo Selo) close to Bjeljina; the local Volksdeutsche were moved to Srem north of the River Sava.

\(^{277}\) AVII, NAV-T-315, r. 2271, s. 133-5.

\(^{278}\) AVII, NAV-T-315, r. 2271, s. 133-5.
Ustaša cars passing through the region, details of the activities of the Chetniks in the
Zenica region who were targeting railway traffic, and a discussion of the Ustaša murder
of a local Chetnik officer. This German report reveals the hostility between the Ustašas
and the Chetniks as two sides – Croat and Serb – in the ethno-religious war. The
Chetniks responded to Ustaša activities, while the Germans looked on.

**Problems of Hierarchy and Command in the Chetnik Ranks**

Chetnik units in the ISC continued to face discipline and hierarchy issues as
1942 drew to a close. Perhaps the root cause of the problem was the lack of ideological
indoctrination of the Chetniks, which placed them at a disadvantage when compared to
other ideologically infused groups with greater clarity of vision.

Wehrmacht documents explain the mechanics of the indirect Chetnik
collaboration with the Germans against the Partisans. While the Chetniks collaborated
closely with the Italians, their relationship with the Wehrmacht was far less direct. For the
Axis, different Chetnik groups were ‘reliable’ to co-operate with, depending on the area
and who was in command. Wehrmacht documents also illuminate the Slavic Muslim
strategy in Bosnia, demonstrating that they too acted as independent agents in the ISC.

The ‘Ten-Day report by the German 718th Infantry division’ (November 6, 1942)279
illustrates problems of cohesion and command with regards to the Chetniks. It says that
the Drina Battalion (commanded by Djura Bižić) separated from Kerović’s and joined
Dragoslav Račić’s forces. However, Kerović later managed to disarm the unit and kill its
leader Drago Gligić, the self-proclaimed Chetnik commander of the Semberija region.
This illustrates the organisational issues that the Chetniks faced on the ground; in many
areas, a Chetnik hierarchy existed only because of the goodwill of the local commanders
rather than any real assertion of authority by the Mihailović-led headquarters.

The report concludes with a section derived from captured communist
documents and the interrogation of Partisan captives. The author notes that political
courses were being held on a regular basis among the Partisans, each lasting a month;

279 AVII, NAV-T-315, r. 2271, s. 133-5.
these were mandatory for all young lower-level commanders\textsuperscript{280}. The utmost care was
given to political education, and political commissars were attached to the command of
each Partisan unit.

With these concluding remarks about the Partisans, the author records one of the
main differences between the Partisans and the Chetniks. Communist political
commissars in the Partisans played a crucial role in spreading ideological and political
propaganda among the soldiers. The Chetniks had no equivalent in their own units, with
implications for the mood and morale of the men. The effects of a widely shared
ideological vision which could provide soldiers with clarity of purpose on the morale for
fighting should not be underestimated. In their use of political commissars attached to
each unit, the Partisans were similar to Ljotić’s Serb Volunteer Detachments/Corps; like
the Partisan units, whose political commissars had the task of indoctrinating men with
revolutionary visions, the SVD/C units had German-trained commissars who
indoctrinated men with the vision of the New Order). The Partisans and SVD/C units
were well integrated, disciplined, and effective in combat; the hierarchical organisation of
each movement was respected, and it worked.

Given that hierarchy, effectiveness and discipline were systematic and ongoing
issues among the Chetnik ranks, it is likely that the absence of the Chetnik equivalent of
Partisan (or SVD/C) political commissars made a difference. It should be noted,
however, that the model would have been difficult to implement among the Chetniks,
because they – as essentially traditional Serb monarchists and nationalists – had no
political ideology to work with in the core sense of the word.

The ‘Report by the German Commander in the ISC to the Commander of the
Armed Forces Southeast’ (December 28, 1942)\textsuperscript{281} illustrates the dynamic of the indirect
Chetnik collaboration with the German forces against the Partisans. According to the
report, a German unit intervened against the Partisans in the area of Tuzla. German
soldiers were transported by trucks to Memići, where they attacked the Partisans. The
Partisan unit was destroyed, and the remnants of the Partisan group retreated towards
the south. The retreating Partisans were ambushed by the Majevica Chetnik Brigade

\textsuperscript{280} AVII, NAV-T-315, r. 2271, s. 133-5.
\textsuperscript{281} AVII, NAV-T-315, r. 2270, s. 1022-3.
near Caparda, and mostly were destroyed\textsuperscript{282}. As this report shows, the German-Chetnik collaboration against the Partisans really happened: there was an exchange of information between the Germans and the Chetniks, albeit no direct contact or side-by-side fighting. Thus, the Germans utilised the Chetniks far less than the Italians, and in a less direct way.

The report provides an extensive commentary on the condition of the Croat armed forces, pointing to the numerous problems of training and morale, and stating that Ustaša officers were less valuable than their Domobrani counterparts. The author accuses the Domobrani forces of trying to lure the German forces into acting against the remaining Serb civilian population with fabricated reports. In other words, the Domobrani were trying to involve the German forces in the ethno-religious conflict on the ground\textsuperscript{283}.

In a section devoted to the Chetniks, the report evaluates the Chetnik forces as ‘uneven’, with the Chetniks in the region northeast of Tuzla (the group led by Vojvoda Radivoje Kerović, commander of the Majevica Chetnik Brigade) described as unreliable and partially cooperating with the Partisans\textsuperscript{284}. Those to the south of Tuzla-Zvornik road were described as willing to cooperate with the German troops to eradicate the Partisans. The report adds details from German intelligence that Chetnik groups in the Tuzla region had refused any cooperation with Mihailović, and that they had set their own goal of protecting Serb settlements of the region from Partisan and Ustaša terror. If the German assessment of the situation was correct, this would be another indication of the Chetnik difficulties with integration and the imposition of an effective command and control chain, as well as an illustration of territoriality and self-preserving focus of the regional Chetnik groups.

The end of the report is devoted to the Muslims of the Tuzla region, described as unreliable and opportunistic, ‘making deals with both the Croats [Roman Catholics] and the Serbs in an effort to play one group against the other’\textsuperscript{285}. The Muslim militia of Major Hadži-Efendić was a Domobrani volunteer unit – a ‘Domdo’ unit – in this case comprised

\textsuperscript{282} AVII, NAV-T-315, r. 2270, s. 1022-3.
\textsuperscript{283} AVII, NAV-T-315, r. 2270, s. 1022-3.
\textsuperscript{284} AVII, NAV-T-315, r. 2270, s. 1022-3.
\textsuperscript{285} AVII, NAV-T-315, r. 2270, s. 1022-3.
of Muslims. According to the German assessment, the unit left the impression of being disciplined, but there was a real danger that in the event of a serious attack by the Partisans, the soldiers might surrender or defect to the communists\textsuperscript{286}. The local Serb population was afraid of the Muslim militia, because the unit frequently pillaged their villages. The author of the report recommends that the unit be disarmed.

**Bosnian Chetniks’ Radical Serb Views**

Despite their autonomist leanings towards the Mihailović-led headquarters, the Bosnian Chetniks were actually more exclusively pro-Serb and less pro-Yugoslav in other areas. This is not surprising because Bosnia, as well as the historical area of the Sandžak of Novi Pazar, saw the fiercest ethno-religious fighting.

A letter from the commanders of the Bosnian Chetnik troops to Mihailović (dated December 14, 1942)\textsuperscript{287} addresses some of the ongoing issues between the commanders and Mihailović’s Supreme Headquarters and discusses the position of Bosnia in the post-war state. Underlining the fact that the Bosnians Chetniks were fighting for the Fatherland and the King, the commanders say that, ‘we, the Bosnian Serbs, are tying our fate with the fate of Serbia, because Serbia is the home of our culture\textsuperscript{288}. In their view Bosnia was simply an integral part of the Serb lands,

that is, [a part of] the collection a regions that geographically, historically and statistically the Serbs have the right to call Serb lands, and based on that have the right to demand a new free and independent Serb state\textsuperscript{289}. Moreover,

if the developments...allow the creation of a state that is larger than the regions which the Serbs have the right to (in terms of history and population), we will not be opposed to it – under the condition that relationships between those who enter such a new state were precisely defined beforehand\textsuperscript{290}.

\textsuperscript{286} AVII, NAV-T-315, r. 2270, s. 1022-3.
\textsuperscript{287} AVII, Ca, k. 204, Reg. No. 25/7.
\textsuperscript{288} AVII, Ca, k. 204, Reg. No. 25/7.
\textsuperscript{289} AVII, Ca, k. 204, Reg. No. 25/7.
\textsuperscript{290} AVII, Ca, k. 204, Reg. No. 25/7.
For the Bosnian Chetniks the creation of a Serb state encompassing all Yugoslav Serbs and their regions was the primary goal. Yugoslavia, as a nameless ‘larger state’, was here left as an open possibility. But it is clear from the language of the document that the struggle of the Bosnian Chetniks was a Serb – not a Yugoslav – one. This conclusion is underlined at the end of the document, where the struggle of the Bosnian Chetniks is presented as ‘an expression of our strongest Serb desire to create our own Serb state, in which every citizen will have a right to work, to live and to be free’.291

One could argue that the Chetniks in the ISC, especially those from the German zone, were more exclusively Serb and less pro-Yugoslav than their Serbian and Montenegrin counterparts. This is not surprising, because the roots of the Chetnik movement in the ISC were reactive in the face of the Ustaša atrocities against Serbs, simply for being Serbs. Exposure and reaction to the Ustaša genocide clearly radicalised the ISC Chetniks, pushing them towards an exclusively Serb and away from a wider Yugoslav platform, as evidenced in their engagement in the ethno-religious war against the Croats and Muslims.

The Serbian and Montenegrin Chetniks had a pro-Yugoslav attitude, rooted in the tradition of resistance to foreign invaders. They were not directly exposed to Ustaša atrocities. Among the Chetnik political leadership, the ‘ISC Chetnik line’ was taken by Stevan Moljević, and the ‘Serbian/Montenegrin Chetnik line’ was taken by Dragiša Vasić. These two positions were not necessarily all that far apart, but they differed in their attitudes towards Yugoslavia and Yugoslavism and in their radicalism: Moljević was more radical, and over time he overshadowed Vasić in Mihailović’s circle.

The ‘Report by the Commanding General and Commander in Serbia to the Commander of the Armed Forces Southeast’ (January 20, 1943)292 contains observations on the ethno-religious conflict on the ground. General Bader, the author of the report, notes that the struggle between the Chetnik units commanded by Pavle Djurišić and the Muslims east of the River Lim (in the region of Sjenica town) could have endangered the southwestern border of Serbia; the fighting itself was taking place in Italian-controlled Montenegro. Bader reports that during the fighting, Montenegrin

291 AVII, Ca, k. 204, Reg. No. 25/7.
292 AVII, NAV-T-501, r. 248, s. 1190-3.
Chetniks destroyed thirty-three Muslim villages, killing four hundred men and one thousand women and children\textsuperscript{293}. He notes that the resistance of the Muslims was increasing, and they were expecting reinforcements from Albania\textsuperscript{294}. It is unclear from where and what kind of reinforcements the Muslim were about to receive, but this statement raises the possibility of Slavic Muslim-Albanian military cooperation against the Chetniks in the historical Sandžak of Novi Pazar region. Details of this cooperation – if that was, indeed, happening here – remain unknown. It is unclear who the Muslims fighting the Chetniks actually were – perhaps grassroots forces like the Chetniks, or Italian-organised units that had become entangled in the ethno-religious conflict against the Chetniks.

The Chetnik-Partisan war in the Independent State of Croatia, which followed the clash between the two resistance movements in Serbia, albeit with some delay, was another turning point for the Chetnik strategy in the region. The civil war with the Partisans diverted the Chetniks from their initial anti-Ustaša focus, and created a second front for them. In certain areas of central and western Bosnia, individual Chetnik commanders – indicatively without Mihailović's approval – found a solution in entering into collaboration agreements with the Independent State of Croatia on an anti-communist basis. Chetnik commanders who entered into these agreements justified them by arguing that legalization with the ISC protected their home regions from Ustaša rampages and provided necessary support to fight the Partisans, thus providing a mechanism for the Serbs and Chetniks to survive in western areas isolated from Serbia. Nevertheless, these agreements provided potent anti-Chetnik propaganda ammunition to both the Partisans and the ISC, and for that reason, Mihailović wanted them undone. The fact that he was not able to impose his policy indicates the Chetnik movement’s fragmentary regional nature; at times, only nominal unity existed between units in various parts of the ISC and Mihailović’s headquarters in Serbia.

\textsuperscript{293} AVII, NAV-T-501, r. 248, s. 1190-3.
\textsuperscript{294} AVII, NAV-T-501, r. 248, s. 1190-3.
Chapter 5.
The Chetniks and Ethno-religious Conflict in the German Zones of the ISC from 1943 to the End of the War

The Chetnik Waiting Game Continues

Although the Chetnik-Partisan civil war continued to intensify, wartime documents show late examples of Chetnik-Partisan cooperation in the ISC. These episodes have never been properly addressed. Another Chetnik policy that might seem contradictory, this time given the ethno-religious war, was the attempt to recruit Muslims and create separate Chetnik Muslim units.

The ‘Ten Day Report by the 718th Infantry Division’ (February 6, 1943)\(^1\) argues that the Chetniks were still in a ‘waiting phase’, largely because Draža Mihailović was still unable to put all Chetnik units under his direct control. In addition, the Chetnik anti-communist stance had become less pronounced at the time of writing; apparently, there had been recent local reports about joint Chetnik-Partisan operations by smaller units and local cooperation agreements between the two\(^2\). These initiatives seem to have come from the Chetnik side, because the Partisan leadership was described as emphatically rejecting any cooperation with the Chetniks and dismissive of Mihailović as a traitor.

The report adds that while there were no Muslims in the Chetnik ranks, German Intelligence had recently reported Chetnik propaganda being directed at attracting

\(^1\) AVII, NAV-T-315, r. 2271, s. 1324-7.
\(^2\) AVII, NAV-T-315, r. 2271, s. 1324-7.
Muslims into its units. According to the author, the first signs of success had been noted among the Muslim anti-communists south of the German-Italian demarcation line, although some signs of Chetnik success were evident in the German zone of the ISC as well. The Muslim Military-Chetnik Organisation had at least one operational unit in early January 1943, based in the village of Bjelemeić, with three hundred men under the command of Sergeant Jusuf Uzunović.

The report concludes with a small note on the Ustašas, stating that due to the German restraint of their powers, militia members were being careful around the Wehrmacht.

**Chetnik War with the Muslims in Eastern Bosnia in Early 1943**

Events in the ethno-religious war can be traced in the Chetnik wartime documents, including the following episode involving Muslims in eastern Bosnia. On January 3, 1943, Mihailović issued an order to the commanders of the Mileševo and Drina Chetnik Corps as well as the Durmitor Brigade (Chetnik troops from Serbia, Bosnia and Montenegro, respectively) to destroy the Muslim militia in the Čajniče district of eastern Bosnia. The order claimed the 'Ustaša-Muslim criminal gang' in the area was in fact an Italian-sponsored Muslim MVAC unit:

[They] entered the Čajniče district in December [1942] following the instructions by the occupiers, and commenced killing the innocent and unprotected civilian population in the local Serb villages, plundering along the way, raping Serb women and girls.

The purpose of the Chetnik retaliatory operation was to protect the region from any further terror by destroying the Muslim militia and establishing full Chetnik control.

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3 AVII, NAV-T-315, r. 2271, s. 1324-7.
4 For more information on the unit and its activities see: AVII, Ca, reg. No. 14/1 and 15/1, k. 162; reg. No. 27/1, k. 172.
5 AVII, NAV-T-315, r. 2271, s. 1324-7.
6 AVII, Ca, k. 2, Reg. No. 2/1-1.
7 There were also Muslim Chetniks in the region of Majevica, commanded by Huso Mitić; see: AVII, Ca, k. 210, Reg. No. 40/6.
8 AVII, Ca, k. 2, Reg. No. 2/1-1.
9 AVII, Ca, k. 2, Reg. No. 2/1-1.
The document shows that the ongoing civil war between the Chetniks and Partisans in Serbia had not yet been fully transplanted into the region:

[It would be great] if Radio London and Radio Moscow devoted a few words to the Chetniks and Partisans who are fighting in Bosnia-Herzegovina first and foremost for the Serbs (because the vast majority are Serbs), for Yugoslavism (the Serb mission of gathering South Slavs together) and for Slavism in general.\(^{10}\)

This proposal was presumably intended to be forwarded to the Yugoslav government in exile, which could potentially influence Radio London and Radio Moscow. It conveys the belated arrival of the civil war in Herzegovina, and that the Chetniks were fully aware that most Partisans were Serbs.\(^{11}\) Finally, it is an interesting insight into Chetnik Serb-centric understanding of Yugoslavism – ‘the Serb mission’ – a view that Mihailović shared with most in the Chetnik ranks.\(^{12}\)

**Pauses in the Chetnik-Partisan War in the ISC: Later Chetnik-Partisan Cooperation**

In certain localities in the ISC, Chetnik-Partisan cooperation continued despite the civil war. However, this cooperation was limited in scale, local in context and lacking the approval of the headquarters of either movement.

The ‘Ten Day Report by the 718th Infantry Division’ (January 26, 1943)\(^{13}\) contains an interesting example of Chetnik-Partisan cooperation. After capturing Prnjavor in northern Bosnia on January 16, 1943, the Partisans continued their march towards Derventa, where they joined forces with the Chetnik battalion Knez Arsen, commanded by Nikola Forkapa. The Chetnik-Partisan force caused mayhem, attacking the town of Derventa and endangering the Brod-Doboj railway.\(^{14}\) This common action between the Chetniks and the Partisans most likely happened at the initiative of the local commanders, and without the approval of either Mihailović or Tito. The fact that the local

\(^{10}\) AVII, Ca, k. 2, Reg. No. 2/1-1.

\(^{11}\) The goal of avoiding the Chetnik-Partisan war was sensible in light of the Chetnik policy of preserving Serbs from casualties.

\(^{12}\) AVII, Ca, k. 2, Reg. No. 2/1-1.

\(^{13}\) AVII, NAV-T-315, r. 2271, s. 1309-14.

\(^{14}\) AVII, NAV-T-315, r. 2271, s. 1309-14.
commanders could still cooperate regionally despite the civil war between the two guerrilla groups is clearly an indication of their tactical independence. It should be noted that this happened in Bosnia, where the civil war between the Chetniks and the Partisans emerged at a later date and with a somewhat slow start. How frequently these episodes occurred and how late into the war they continued is unclear, though it is most likely that the manpower of both units was comprised of Serbs. German sources sometimes mention episodes of Chetnik-Partisan cooperation after November 1941, but the Yugoslav historiography has remained mostly silent on this particular issue.

The Case of Grand Župan of Banja Luka

Anti-Serbism was the defining characteristic of the Ustaša movement, and the more tolerant elements within the ISC’s regime were forcefully removed, ensuring that any meaningful reforms were impossible and that the ethno-religious conflict continued. Local Wehrmacht commanders recommended reforms in the ISC, but without the removal of the Ustaša regime, something Hitler refused to sanction, little could change.

The German report also notes the assassination of the Grand Župan of Banja Luka, Dr. Dragan Hadrović. According to the report, Hadrović won the trust not only of the German military commanders, but also of ‘all three nationalities’. However, there was no place for tolerance in the ISC, and the Ustašas assassinated the Grand Župan: ‘our sources in the Ustaša circles tell us that he had to be removed’.

On the economic front, the report notes that Bosnia was full of high quality iron, bauxite, antimony and magnetite, resources that could significantly contribute to the German war effort if enough energy were invested in keeping the country peaceful.

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15 AVII, NAV-T-315, r. 2271, s. 1309-14. A Wehrmacht report sheds new light on the Chetnik-Partisan cooperation in the Brod-Derventa region. Apparently, led by Nikola Forkapa who had recently conducted joint operations with the Partisans, Croat armed forces were attempting to destroy the Chetniks. Thus, depending on the region of the ISC, Chetnik groups under different commanders were either fighting the Croat armed forces or negotiating, perhaps even actively cooperating, with them. This complex situation is indicative of the idiosyncrasies in each local context, and illustrative of the independence of action prized and held by local Chetnik commanders. It also raises the question of whether or not all these Chetnik units, even when taken together, truly represented a single movement.

16 AVII, NAV-T-315, r. 2271, s. 1309-14.

17 AVII, NAV-T-315, r. 2271, s. 1309-14.
In his concluding remarks, the author recommends immediate widespread political, administrative and economic reform in the ISC; the only way to achieve this would be if ‘the Wehrmacht took over the complete executive branch of the government, i.e. the entire state administration’. The report could not directly and openly recommend the removal of the Ustaša regime due to Hitler’s views on the issue, but this was a way of indirectly wording such a suggestion.

**German Reform of the ISC’s Police Force in Order to Halt the Violence**

German generals continued to try to improve the security situation in the ISC, but their hands were tied; because of this, the ethno-religious war dragged on until the end of the Second World War. By early 1943, Hitler’s pro-Ustaša course had resulted in a massive uprising in the ISC, forcing the Germans to invest extra manpower in the region at a time when it was arguably most needed elsewhere. A ‘Note from the Commander of the Rear Troops in the Command of the Armed Forces Southeast’ (March 4, 1943) explains the measures taken by the Wehrmacht, because ‘there is no police in the ISC, and the Ustašas represent a criminal gang’:

In order to strengthen the Croat state internally, and to pacify the recently cleared regions, it is necessary to establish administration from the ‘bottom up’. With this in mind, Reichsführer SS gave his approval to send to Croatia the German gendarmerie and police forces which must establish strongholds in the rear.

According to the report, the establishment of a police presence would lead to the creation of an executive authority and a complete German takeover in the zones in question. Soon these measures became a reality: the German occupational forces in the ISC were expanded on April 21, 1943 with the addition of the German gendarmerie and police authorities. Five police regions were created, subdivided into eighteen police

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18 AVII, NAV-T-315, r. 2271, s. 1309-14.
19 AVII, NAV-T-315, r. 2271, s. 1309-14.
20 AVII, NAV-T-77, r. 788, s. 5517500-1.
21 AVII, NAV-T-77, r. 788, s. 5517500-1.
districts together with one hundred and ten gendarmerie commands and four hundred and fifty gendarmerie stations. 

**Legal and Illegal Chetniks from the German Perspective**

The German analyses of the Chetniks operating in the Italian zone reveal the nature of the Chetnik-Italian relationship in the ISC, and provide insight into Chetnik strategic thinking. It is interesting to note that despite all the logistical help the Chetniks received from the Italians, the Germans felt the Partisans were superior to the Chetniks in combat.

The ‘Orders of the Commanding General and Commander in Serbia General Bader’ (April 25, 1943) to the German troops who were given the task of occupying the historical area of Sandžak of Novi Pazar to replace the Italians contains a discussion of Draža Mihailović and the Chetniks. The report says that Chetnik battalions, going under the name ‘national militia’ (most likely MVAC), had been legalised by the Italians. These men were supporters of Draža Mihailović; the Italians fed, armed and even paid them to fight the communists. In the writer’s view, these units were extremely untrustworthy:

> According to their own internal mood [they were] enemies of the ‘occupiers’, and they were only waiting for an opportune moment to start a struggle against their present commanders [the Italians] as well as against the Germans.

A number of illegal Chetnik battalions were not recognised by the Italians but were tolerated by them. The Germans were not interested in playing the same game, and they treated all Chetniks with the same level of hostility. Without exception, the Chetniks were dangerous, and their utilitarian value was deemed transitory at best.

In another section, ‘Combat Readiness’, the writer analyzes the Partisans, where ‘due to the strictest discipline, which is being overlooked by the political commissars, the
units were firmly in the hands of their leaders\(^{25}\). The communists, he says, were fighting to the last man, because they knew only too well that they would be shot if captured. As noted in the previous chapter, the political commissars attached to units, identified by the Germans as the main force behind Partisan discipline, set the Partisans apart from the Chetniks and mirrored the Ljotić-inspired SVC.

This document contains one of the most valuable assessments of the Chetniks from the German point of view in 1943. The ‘DM Chetniks’ (as they were called in the document, presumably to distinguish them from Pećanac-led Chetniks) were well fed and equipped – due to Italian deliveries, including weapons and ammunition\(^ {26}\). However, the Chetniks had no heavy weapons of any kind; here, the author uses an exclamation mark, likely to indicate his surprise. The Chetniks’ dress was partially civilian, partially ‘Serb’ (Yugoslav?) and partially Italian military uniforms, but always with a Serb military cap with the Serb eagle.

The author of the report says that Chetnik units proved inferior to the Partisans for the following reasons. First, the commanders, including Mihailović at the very top, constantly overestimated the combat value of their own troops and the quality of the lower commanding cadre; because of this, the Chetniks kept attempting military operations which were beyond their capabilities. Second, there was a lack of discipline, including cowardly behaviour among the lower commanding cadre. Third, ‘Chetnik units are mostly a self-protection force, resisting fighting outside of their home areas, and in numerous cases they desert in order to return to their home region’\(^ {27}\). Paradoxically, the Chetnik purpose and territoriality was both the movement’s strength and its weakness.

The writer comments on the Italian presence, noting that apart from the garrisoned towns, the Italian-occupied regions of former Yugoslavia were ‘Partisan and Chetnik country’.

\(^{25}\) AVII, NAV-T-501, r. 249, s. 334-8.\(^ {26}\) AVII, NAV-T-501, r. 249, s. 334-8.\(^ {27}\) AVII, NAV-T-501, r. 249, s. 334-8.
The Fluidity between Guerrillas and the Fragility of Chetnik Agreements

Interestingly, reports show that despite ever-heightening civil war tensions, switching people between the Partisans and Chetniks was still possible. The Chetniks were ready to incorporate any deserting Partisans into their ranks as long as they were Serbs. But as wartime documents also make clear, Chetnik agreements with the Axis or with the ISC were very fragile constructs that could quickly fall apart under pressure. In short, the Chetniks were both opportunistic and unpredictable.

The ‘Report of the German 717th infantry Division’ (March 14, 1943) contains an interesting analysis of the behaviour of the Partisans in Bosnia’s Rama-Gračanica area when it was under strong enemy pressure. The Partisans evidently contemplated splitting up; the Serbs among them would join the Chetniks in Herzegovina and further to the east in Montenegro. This German observation illustrates the continuing fluidity between the two guerrilla groups and runs counter to common historiographical wisdom. Even in March 1943, men could switch from one group to another, in this case, from the Partisans to the Chetniks. The fact that the Serb part of the Partisan force in jeopardy contemplated this move clearly shows the importance of national divisions in the Partisan ranks. It remains unclear if the Chetniks would have accepted them, but the men likely had a chance if they emphasised the Serb national theme.

An ‘Instruction by the Command of the Bosnian Chetnik Troops’ (April 14, 1943) to the commanders in the field reveals the fragility of the Chetnik-ISC anti-Partisan agreements in this part of the German zone. The document shows that the Ozren and Zenica Chetnik Regiments, both of which had previous agreements with the

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28 Nevertheless, by this time, the Partisans were the Chetniks’ principal enemy. The ‘Report by the Envoy of the Chetnik Supreme Command for Western Bosnia to the Commander of the Chetnik Regiment King Peter II’ (March 25, 1943) discusses communications received from Mihailović’s headquarters. In describing Chetnik actions against the Partisans, the author explains the Chetnik stance towards the Axis occupation forces: ‘it is our intent to use the occupiers – while protecting ourselves from them at the same time – to energetically pursue [the Partisans]’. See: AVII, Ca, k. 226, Reg. No. 9/10.

29 AVII, NAV-T-315, r. 2264, s. 435-9.

30 The German report did not explain what course of action was to be taken by the non-Serb part of this Partisan force.

31 AVII, Ca, k. 233, Reg. No. 49/10.
ISC, had been attacked by the Wehrmacht and ISC armed forces. Parts of the Manjača and Borja Regiments (the latter had an agreement with the ISC) had been attacked by the ISC armed forces, putting other troops, including the Trebava Regiment, in danger.

It seems that the German and ISC troops attacked the Chetniks because of an incident on April 14, in which the Chetniks attacked a German patrol travelling from Maglaj to Zavidovići\(^32\). The Chetniks killed three German soldiers and captured six; they eventually shot the captives, but one soldier survived, escaped and reported back to his superiors. This open hostility immediately provoked a reaction from the Wehrmacht and the ISC, demonstrating the precarious nature of the collaborationist (that is, ‘legalised’) Chetniks actually was. Local initiative was likely behind the incident, and it was not likely cleared by the upper level commanders; again, discipline and hierarchical issues dog the Chetnik ranks. The report names the Partisans as the Chetniks’ ‘biggest enemy’\(^33\). To return things to normal and to avoid antagonising the Chetniks, the author suggests a temporary ban on scouting out the enemy, as well as the Croat and Muslim population; evidently, the Chetniks kept a close watch on both German and ISC forces, and non-Serb civilians.

The ‘Monthly Report by the Operative Segment of the German 114th Division’ (May 31, 1943)\(^34\) provides further commentary on the political situation and the ethno-religious conflict in the ISC. The author of the report notes the development of a strong pro-British sentiment among the Domobrani (and even the Ustaša) officer corps. The main vehicle of pro-British propaganda was probably the Roman Catholic clergy, according to German sources.

According to the author, the ‘Eastern Orthodox’ (i.e. the Serbs) were very fearful of the ‘Roman Catholic Ustašas’ but not all priests Roman Catholic priests were pro-regime. The report quotes an unnamed Roman Catholic priest who most certainly did not like the Ustašas:

> Why are our (ISC) newspapers writing so much about the crime in the Kathyn forest? If the corpses of men, women and children murdered by

\(^{32}\) For a detailed description of the entire incident, see: AVII, Ca, k. 235, Reg. No. 2/1.

\(^{33}\) See: AVII, Ca, k. 235, Reg. No. 2/1.

\(^{34}\) NAV-T-315, r. 1294, s. 493-500.
Ustašas were gathered together, there would be more than ten thousand.\footnote{NAV-T-315, r. 1294, s. 493-500. The figure of ten thousand referred to the number of Polish officers executed by the Red Army in Kathyn forest, as reported in the ISC newspapers.}

The report adds that in the regions where the Chetniks operated, ‘only the name remains of the Croat administration’.\footnote{NAV-T-315, r. 1294, s. 493-500.} There were no reported instances of Chetnik-Partisan cooperation, but some individual Chetniks had Partisan connections. On the other hand, the Chetniks of the Drenović group (Bosnian Krajina Chetnik Corps, led by Uroš Drenović) behaved correctly towards the German Wehrmacht.

The report notes a group of one hundred and eighty three deserters from the Domobrani forces together with thirty-five ‘Illegal Chetniks’\footnote{NAV-T-315, r. 1294, s. 493-500.} in the region of Razboj. This band was looting. It is unclear if this was a mixed bandit group, given that the men came from both the Domobrani and the Chetnik forces.

According to the report, there was a Partisan attack on Jasenovac on May 12, 1943.\footnote{NAV-T-315, r. 1294, s. 493-500.} It is unclear, however, if this was an attack on the concentration camp or the town. The report adds that the Partisan group was forced out of the Banja Luka region with the support of the Bosnian Chetniks led by Radoslav Radić.

The ‘Monthly Report of the Commander of the German Troops in the ISC’ (July 18, 1943)\footnote{AVII, NAV-T-314, r. 554, s. 536-44.} to the Commander of the Armed Forces Southeast notes that the ‘renewed Ustaša course and persecutions of the clerical circles’ were exposing ever-increasing numbers to persecution and pushing them directly into the rebel ranks. As so many times before, a German report underlines the direct connection between the persecution and the rebellion’s intensity.
Continuing Atrocities and their Effects on Guerrilla Activity

As the Italian capitulation rapidly approached, atrocities continued to fuel guerrilla activity and the ethno-religious conflict showed no signs of abating. Wehrmacht documents show insight into Serb-Muslim-Croat relations, including the root causes of the conflict. Meanwhile, Chetnik documents suggest that the end of the ethno-religious conflict in the ISC could have ended the entire Chetnik movement there.

The ‘Monthly Report of the Commanding General and Commander in Serbia’ (July 19, 1943)\(^{40}\) comments on the effects on renewed terror in the ISC. The German Commander says that ‘the inhuman treatment of the Serb population by the ruling Ustaša organisation, which recently started persecution once again, is causing alarm in the most unfortunate moment’. The ‘unfortunate moment’ alludes to the imminent arrival of the Allies. Pacification operations in the ISC and Serbia could not be successful if ‘such occurrences’ were allowed. The writer may be going out on a limb here, as the upper echelons of the Reich’s hierarchy had permitted ‘such occurrences’, a fact which must have been known to him\(^{41}\).

Regional Relations in Northeastern Bosnia from the Chetnik Perspective

A report by Colonel Arsić to the Commander of the Romanija Chetnik Corps (July 25, 1943)\(^{42}\) provides details about relations between Serbs, Croats and Muslims in northeastern Bosnia. Arsić notes that in the Tuzla district, the Muslims were the most numerous, followed by the Roman Catholics (the Croats) and the Eastern Orthodox (the Serbs). The Brčko district had the largest number of Serbs, followed by Muslims and Croats. The Bjeljina district also had the largest number of Serbs, followed by the Muslims and Croats; the Zvornik district had a similar composition\(^ {43}\).

\(^{40}\) AVII, NAV-T-501, r. 252, s. 1278-87.
\(^{41}\) AVII, NAV-T-501, r. 252, s. 1278-87.
\(^{42}\) AVII, Ca, k. 178, Reg. No. 4/3.
\(^{43}\) AVII, Ca, k. 178, Reg. No. 4/3.
Colonel Arsić observes that there were one hundred and twenty Serb villages in the region that could yield approximately fifteen thousand soldiers\footnote{AVII, Ca, k. 178, Reg. No. 4/3.} to swell the Chetnik ranks. In his view, most Serbs were pro-Chetnik\footnote{AVII, Ca, k. 178, Reg. No. 4/3.}. However, most local Serb leaders had escaped to Serbia, ended up in camps or had been murdered; in his estimate, five thousand Serbs from the Bjeljina district alone were in the camps. Complicating the issue, the region had a number of forces operating in it: the Chetniks, the Partisans, the Ustašas and various village militias. Arsić claims there were two thousand Chetniks in the area in 1941-1942, but because of the Chetnik disunity and communist actions, this number was down to five hundred soldiers at the time of writing.

Arsić reports that the Muslims were well organised into village militia units, numbering about nine thousand people. These Muslim village militia units, the so-called Hadžiefendić Legion, were officially ‘Domdo units’, or Domobrani volunteer formations. The units were quite compact ‘because they were fearful of the Serb retribution’\footnote{AVII, Ca, k. 178, Reg. No. 4/3.}. They were also well organised because they were led by presumably Domobrani officers, both active and reserve. Nevertheless, there were tensions between the Muslim village militia and the ISC authorities because of the ‘separatist tendencies’\footnote{AVII, Ca, k. 178, Reg. No. 4/3.} of the militia leadership; presumably some leaders demanded special status for Bosnia and Herzegovina. Many members of the Muslim militia had previously been in the Ustaša formations, but switched to the local SS troops en masse once these were organised, particularly the Muslim SS Handžar Division. Others fled to the communists ‘hoping that this way they would evade the punishment they deserve’\footnote{AVII, Ca, k. 178, Reg. No. 4/3.}. Chetnik documents frequently accused Croats and Muslims of joining the Partisans as a ‘means of escape’ – to annul their Ustaša/Domobrani past, to escape Chetnik wrath and, by the last stages of the war, to find themselves on the winning side.

In his view, the Croats were the weakest in terms of organisation, possibly because most able-bodied men had already been drafted into the Domobrani or Ustaša
also, as most of the Croats in the regions were ‘Mačekovci’, the support among
the Croats for the CPP was strong until the end of the war.

Arsić explains that immediately after the capitulation of Yugoslavia in April 1941
the Muslims and Croats started ‘with the abuse and extermination of the [Serb] population. A large number of Serbs escaped to neighbouring Serbia, many were taken
away into camps, and many were killed’. There was no organised resistance by the
Serbs until August 1941, when the uprising erupted. The uprising had tremendous force
at the very beginning, with many ‘charging at the enemy with almost bare hands in order
to take their weapons’. The uprising worked because the pressure of the rebellion
forced the enemy to cease committing atrocities against civilians. The result of the initial
phase was a Chetnik force of two thousand well-armed and well-equipped men.

The end of open hostilities, however, meant serious trouble for the Chetniks. Discipline and the fighting spirit of the men had begun to dissipate, and many engaged
in criminal activities and looting. There was also a power struggle for positions of
authority. Arsić alludes to ‘the Bosnian separatists’ among the Chetniks, presumably
referring to the creation of a separate Chetnik command for Bosnia, a prospect viewed in
a dim light by Mihailović and his close circle. He criticises the Chetnik commanders in
central and western Bosnia who had cooperated with the ISC to protect themselves from
the communists.

Establishing a Single Chetnik Command in Bosnia
in 1943

During the summer of 1943, the Chetniks in the ISC made efforts to establish a
common command in Bosnia to strengthen the movement there. The ‘Minutes from the
Conference of the Commanders of Bosnian Chetnik Troops’ (July 8, 1943) deal almost
exclusively with organisational matters. At the conference, the commanders agreed that

49 AVII, Ca, k. 178, Reg. No. 4/3.
50 AVII, Ca, k. 178, Reg. No. 4/3.
51 AVII, Ca, k. 178, Reg. No. 4/3.
52 AVII, Ca, k. 178, Reg. No. 4/3.
53 AVII, Ca, k. 205, Reg. No. 13/1.
there should be a joint command for the entire region of Bosnia. From the minutes we
learn that the Bosnian Krajina Chetnik Corps was west of the River Vrbas. Directives
were issued to establish another Chetnik Corps between the River Vrbas and River
Bosna, and yet another between the River Bosna and River Drina. Thus, four Chetnik
Corps would cover the entire territory of Bosnia that was in the German zone, with the
major rivers defining their areas of responsibility.

**Zigfrid Kasche: The ISC’s Unceasing German Ally**

Zigfrid Kashe’s continued support of the ISC helped to sustain the Ustašas and
keep them on their course. Neither the atrocities nor the ethno-religious war were likely
to end any time soon. Zigfrid Kasche’s pro-ISC stance kept the Ustaša regime in power
with Hitler’s blessing. Consider, for example, a letter he wrote (August 2, 1943) to the
Reich’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs containing his recommendations for areas under
Italian control on the eastern side of the Adriatic in the event of Italian capitulation. He
suggested handing over Dalmatia to the ISC government. He recommended taking
steps to guarantee the national and cultural survival of the Muslims in the Sandžak
region; ‘In terms of [Sandžak Muslim] nationality, no declarations should be issued,
given that the Croats are claiming Croat nationality for the group, but such a claim in the
region would not be useful’. Kasche also recommended different standards of
treatment for the Partisans and the Chetniks. Regarding the former, the relationship was
to be decided on case-by-case basis, depending on the Partisan willingness to
recognise the Croat state. With the Chetniks, Kasche recommended caution because of
their ties with Mihailović, though it is not clear if he was discussing Italian-integrated
MVAC units, or ‘illegal’ Chetniks.

**The ISC and the End of the Italian Occupation**

With the Italian capitulation, the Italian zones in the ISC ceased to exist and the
Wehrmacht moved in. Finally the entire ISC was under a single command, potentially

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54 AVII, Ca, k. 205, Reg. No. 13/1.
55 AVII, NAV-T-501, r. 265, s. 001186-8.
56 AVII, NAV-T-501, r. 265, s. 001186-8.
opening the door to new solutions to the ongoing problems. Although the lack of popular support for the ISC regime was evident to the Germans, the wartime situation had grown far too complex to seek new regional solutions at such a late stage. As the news of Italian capitulation spread, both guerrilla movements in the ISC became openly hostile to the Italians, trying to capitalise on the situation and secure for themselves the best position possible. As it turned out, the Italian capitulation and German occupation of the entire ISC did little to improve the security situation; the Germans had no troops to spare, and the Partisan threat only grew bigger. Because of the Partisan threat, however, the Germans adopted a new course towards the Chetniks, one that mimicked certain aspects of the previous Italian policies.

‘Special Order No. 2 of the Supreme Command of the Wehrmacht’, together with Hitler’s directive No. 48, for adding former Yugoslav regions under Italian occupation to the German occupation zone following the capitulation of Italy was issued on August 3, 1943\textsuperscript{57}. The German takeover operation was codenamed ‘Akse’. One notable change was the territorial expansion of the ISC with parts of Yugoslav Dalmatia that had been handed over to Italy in 1941. Thus, by late summer 1943, the German presence in occupied Yugoslavia – as well as Albania and Greece – expanded precisely as the Red Army advance on the Eastern Front was picking up speed.

The ‘Quarterly Report of the Executive Headquarters of the Command of the 15\textsuperscript{th} Mountainous Army Corps to the Commander of the Armed Forces Southeast’ (October 1, 1943)\textsuperscript{58} provides an additional commentary on the military, political and economic situation in the ISC at that moment. The general assessment was that the entire region, with the exception of the towns, was to be considered ‘bandit territory’. The document notes that control of large areas had to be abandoned in order to secure the Adriatic coast following the capitulation of Italy (a situation that ‘the bands’ took full advantage of). As a consequence, there was a general change in the attitude of the local population, from previously friendly to unfriendly or even hostile behaviour. Indeed, as the report notes, the ‘inability of the German forces to provide necessary protection from

\textsuperscript{57} Published in \textit{Weisungen für die Kriegführung 1939-1945. Dokumente des Oberkommandos der Wehrmacht} (Walter Hubatsch, 1962, Bernard und Graefe Verlag, Frankfurt am Main), p. 223.

\textsuperscript{58} AVII, NAV-T-314, r. 1455, s. 110-117.
the bands to the general population defused initial enthusiasm for German presence.’ Further, the Germans were being blamed for the ‘mistakes made by the Croat government’ because the Germans created and supported the ISC. In the end, German interest in the region remained focused on the protection of the Brod-Sarajevo- Mostar-Coast and Sunja-Bihać-Coast railways.

The situation was increasingly problematic, as the ISC could no longer be pacified by military means alone:

The catastrophic political, administrative and economic situation in the country can only be corrected by energetic measures, first and foremost by a profound political reform. Because of its bad economic policy and the Ustaša course, the government has no support – neither among the Eastern Orthodox and Muslims, nor among the Croat population as well. The government has real influence only in certain larger towns. Governance and the authority of the state do not exist...there is no national consciousness that would lead to progress.

It is interesting to note that the author of the report mentions the Serbs and Slavic Muslims in religious terms, but not the Croats (as Roman Catholics); he separates Muslims and Croats as well.

The ‘Assessment of Feldmarchal Weichs, the Commander of the Southeast’ (November 1, 1943) discusses the guerrilla groups in occupied Yugoslavia after the German takeover from the Italians. Weichs notes that both rebel movements were now actively engaged in open hostilities against the German forces. Moreover, the fighting had shed its previous guerrilla war characteristics, and the well-armed enemy was now engaging in frontal assaults. The key element here was the support of the local population, which facilitated an uninterrupted supply of men and materiel. Weichs says that Mihailović was trying to speed up the process of creating ‘a Serb national army’ by mobilisation.

59 AVII, NAV-T-314, r. 1455, s. 110-117.
60 AVII, NAV-T-314, r. 1455, s. 110-117.
61 AVII, NAV-T-313, r. 189, s. 7449011-24.
62 AVII, NAV-T-313, r. 189, s. 7449011-24.
Feldmarchal Weichs divides the ISC territory into four distinct zones: (i) regions directly occupied by German troops; (ii) regions controlled by the ISC authorities; (iii) regions of Serb autonomy, and (iv) regions ruled by the communists led by Tito. The regions under direct German control, Weichs says, were important strategic points along the Adriatic coastline and along the major roads and railways. Their troops were under constant pressure, their supply routes and communications endangered all the time; in ‘remote areas’ of the ISC there were no German troops at all. As for the areas under ISC control:

Except in Zagreb, where Croat state administration withdrew to be under the protection of Pavelić’s personal guard, no Croat state authority exists anymore – not even in those parts of the country still controlled by the Croat troops. The population and the army, and recently even the Ustaša militia, were constantly yielding to rebel demands for food, clothes, weapons, information etc.

In the regions of ‘Serb autonomy’,

These were the groups of Serbs, which – following the Ustaša takeover – were barricaded in their home regions like a giant hedgehog. Self-protecting units of poor strength have been created, which do not allow access to either the Croat state authorities or the bands and they keep order in the interior. Towards Mihailović there is no consistent relationship. Towards the Germans, depending on the conditions of the moment, there is a flux between hostile restraint and readiness to help.

This was written in late 1943, indicating that Serb grassroots self-protection troops – apolitical in nature – still existed in the ISC at this late date.

Feldmarchal Weichs notes that these troops were also fighting ‘the bands’ trying to enter their home region, and that their relationship with Mihailović was ever-changing. This suggests that the competition between Mihailović and Tito to integrate these groups into either the Chetniks or the Partisans was both incomplete and ongoing by late 1943; perhaps in some regions it was incomplete at the end of the war.
The Serb self-protectionist paramilitaries in the ISC are described by Weichs in the same terms as the Muslim self-protection militia in the historical region of Sandžak, part of Italian-occupied Montenegro; only the main enemy was different, the Ustašas in the former, the Chetniks in the latter case. Thus, in any discussion of the common wisdom that two rebel movements operated in Yugoslavia, the apolitical self-protectionist Serb paramilitary forces and the Muslim militia – as a ‘grey zone’, or independent actors – should not be forgotten.

Feldmarchal Weichs concludes by saying the national forces were in decline and the communist movement was on the rise: ‘Thus, the most dangerous enemy is Tito’67.

**Continuing Conflict and Refugee Problems in the ISC**

As 1943 was drawing to a close, the Germans were losing energy on pointless border issues in the Adriatic north while conflict raged in the centre of the ISC. The ISC was also facing a growing Muslim refugee problem.

The ‘Report of Zigfrid Kasche, the German Representative in Zagreb, to the Reich’s Minister of Foreign Affairs’ (November 3, 1943)68 states that the border between the German operational zone on the Adriatic Coast (Adriatisches Künstenland) and the ISC had been set, and that Pavelić’s government was infuriated, arguing that all regions should be included in the ISC. On land, the new border would be the Italian-ISC 1941 border, while at sea it would follow the old administrative border between the Austrian provinces of Istria and Dalmatia from the Austro-Hungarian days. Kasche, who had open sympathies for the ISC and the Ustaša regime, noted the deep displeasure in the ISC regarding these developments in the former Italian-occupied regions69.

The ‘Report by the Authorised Reichsführer SS for Croatia to the Reichsführer SS and Chief of the German Police Heinrich Himmler’ (January 11, 1944)70 reveals some of the effects of the ethno-religious conflict in the region. Section IV of the report looks closely at the problem of supplying the refugees. There were approximately two

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67 AVII, NAV-T-313, r. 189, s. 7449011-24.
68 AVII, NAV-T-501, r. 265, s. 1143-6.
69 AVII, NAV-T-501, r. 265, s. 1143-6.
70 AVII, NAV-T-175, r. 21, s. 679-88.
hundred and thirty thousand internally displaced persons, two hundred and ten thousand of them from Bosnia-Herzegovina, due to the continued fighting in the ISC. More than eighty percent of the refugees were illiterate, which complicated registration matters, and their living conditions were unimaginably bad. Most of these refugees were Muslims, as the Serb refugees ended up in German-occupied Serbia or, to a lesser extent, Montenegro. The author of the report adds that in most cases these refugees were exposed to their enemies and could not trust their protectors, even in their places of refuge. Interestingly, given that many of the families in question had members in the SS Muslim volunteer units, the SS concern for the Muslim refugee problem, specifically demands to provide food and other supplies, was met with great suspicion by the ISC government because the regime saw this as an attempt to support the Muslim autonomist cause. However, the following statement reveals that the real motivation of the SS was political and propagandist rather than humanitarian:

Keeping in mind the Muslims of the 13th SS volunteer Bosnian-Herzegovinian mountainous division, as well as the world’s Muslim question, it should be reviewed if you, Reichsführer, hold the view that these refugees should receive special care.

Refugees were to be moved to refugee camps, divided according to religion and supplied with basic necessities. Once the Muslim regions were freed from the enemy, Muslim refugees were to be returned to their homes.

A ‘Note from the ABWER’s Department for Foreign Affairs of the Command of the Southeast’ (January 20, 1944) provides additional details on the situation in the ISC. Noting that the Eastern Orthodox had been the only participants in the uprising at the outset, the author of the report argues that their exclusion from the ISC’s military service was clearly a mistake. Interestingly enough, ‘despite this, even members of the Croat armed forces feel the struggle against the Partisans as a struggle against a brother’. The report documents that throughout 1943, Croat army troops and the

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71  AVII, NAV-T-175, r. 21, s. 679-88.
72  AVII, NAV-T-175, r. 21, s. 679-88.
73  AVII, NAV-T-175, r. 21, s. 679-88.
74  AVII, NAV-T-77, r. 882, s. 5630627-30.
75  AVII, NAV-T-77, r. 882, s. 5630627-30. Presumably, the author meant the Domobrani forces rather than the Ustaša militia.
majority of the Ustaša militia were ‘on the road’ to coming under the direct control of the German commanders\textsuperscript{76} for the following reasons:

Toleration of bloody, inhuman outbursts of the Ustaša policies has harmed, over the long term, the development of friendship towards Germany in Croatia. Also, the Germans are held responsible for the second evil – the very difficult economic and financial situation\textsuperscript{77}.

It is likely that the author was considering the non-Serb population in this statement; nevertheless, it is an indirect criticism of the pro-Ustaša course of the Reich’s leadership, radiating primarily from Hitler.

\textbf{The ISC and Ustaša Movement Bound Together}

As late as 1944, the Germans were still mentioning Maček and pointing out how Croat hopes were not answered by the Croat Peasant Party and its popular leader. Slavic Muslims were again identified as independent agents in the ISC, and the Germans were concerned that Croat-Muslim conflict might emerge as the situation grew more difficult. Meanwhile the Chetniks continued with their efforts to organise Muslim Chetnik units in the ISC. After the Italian capitulation, direct German-Chetnik agreements were concluded which became stumbling blocks in ISC-German relations and an endless source for complaints from the regime in Zagreb.

Interestingly, Vlatko Maček makes an appearance in a German intelligence report even at this late stage. The author of the ABWER report cited above notes that many in Croatia hoped that with the Italian capitulation, Maček would be willing to enter the government. This hope was dashed by Ustaša resistance and Maček’s unwillingness to cooperate\textsuperscript{78}. The Ustaša regime believed only in force, no matter what the price:

[The Ustaša regime] now regrets that it gave up its methods of terror in better times; for the German military leadership and for the position of the German soldier, the renewal of Ustaša terror will soon become unbearable\textsuperscript{79}.

\textsuperscript{76} AVII, NAV-T-77, r. 882, s. 5630627-30.
\textsuperscript{77} AVII, NAV-T-77, r. 882, s. 5630627-30.
\textsuperscript{78} AVII, NAV-T-77, r. 882, s. 5630627-30.
\textsuperscript{79} AVII, NAV-T-77, r. 882, s. 5630627-30.
Nor did the Ustaša leadership have any confidence in the Domobrani forces’ ability to sustain the regime and the state. They only believed in the Ustaša militia. Thus, the fate of the ISC and its regime was tied to the fate of the Ustašas.

A ‘Note from the Operative Division of the German-authorised General in Croatia’ (July 18, 1944) further analyses the political fate of the Ustaša movement and the Chetnik role in the ISC. The Ustaša movement was standing behind the Germans, more ‘by necessity than by its own desire’ because its leaders knew that no political road would lead them towards the Allies. The Germans had concluded this because they knew about failed Ustaša attempts to contact the western Allies, primarily in Switzerland. This political reality worked both ways; it strengthened the German determination to not seek alternatives for the ISC, and it allowed the Ustašas to stay in power with German backing until the Germans left the area. Even at this late stage, the Croatian Peasant Party (CPP) was still being mentioned in German reports from the ISC; the tone regarding the CPP’s willingness to cooperate with the Germans remained negative, although the CPP’s motivation in the summer of 1944 was the changing situation on the front.

The rest of the report contains more examples of the increasing Chetnik-Ustaša tensions throughout the ISC. It was evident at this point that both sides were losing the war. The fate of the Ustaša regime was tied to the fate of Nazi Germany, and by July 1944 all but the most fanatical Axis supporters could see how the war was going to end. Meanwhile, the Chetnik leadership was being overshadowed by the Partisan movement on the ground; the expected landings by the western Allies on the eastern shores of the Adriatic never materialised, and the Soviet advance towards Yugoslavia seemed

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80 AVII, NAV-T-311, r. 286, s. 79-84.
81 AVII, NAV-T-311, r. 286, s. 79-84.
82 AVII, NAV-T-311, r. 286, s. 79-84.
unstoppable. Faced with defeat in the international war as a whole, the Ustašas and the Chetniks engaged in ethno-religious war with renewed ferocity.\(^83\)

### The Unfailing German Support of the Ustašas

Given that the Germans created the ISC, brought the Ustaša regime into power and showed great unwillingness to remove this regime despite all the problems it had created, it was logical that the Germans would rely on the Ustašas during the last few months of the war. In the end, the Ustaša regime in Zagreb became the Reich’s last Balkan ally.

The ‘Report by the Command of the Group of Armies ‘F’’ (November 16, 1944)\(^84\) sent to the Commands of the Group of Armies ‘E’ and the 2\(^{nd}\) Armoured Army is mostly devoted to the military and political situation in the ISC. In the section titled ‘The External Enemy’, the author notes that the imminent danger of the advance of the Red Army from Serbia (it had already reached the ISC border) was not fully comprehended or even underestimated in Zagreb. The ISC leadership seemed to believe that the Soviet advance would be halted by the diplomatic pressure of the Anglo-Americans and the Roman Catholic Church, both of which desired to see ‘one national and Roman Catholic Croatia’.

The report almost seems remorseful: ‘It is pointless to seek out past mistakes...the only important thing now is to do what is the most useful. That is: wide support for the Ustašas’.\(^85\) They were, in effect, the last remaining local ally.

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\(^{83}\) The military diary of the Command of the Group of Armies ‘F’ from the period of July 1 to December 31, 1944, is a long document containing many details from occupied Yugoslavia. The August 7 entry is concerned with the Muslim question in the ISC: ‘In Croatia, in case of unrest, we must count on Ustaša actions against the Muslims’. With regards to Serbia, the diary notes that Mihailović offered the cooperation of Chetnik units with the Germans. Because of the problems ‘of giving to the hostages and internal Serbian divisions...there is for now only a request for weapons to be used in the common struggle’ (against the Partisans). See: AVII, NAV-T-311, r. 190, s. 763-1007 and r. 191, s. 191-278.

\(^{84}\) AVII, NAV-T-311, r. 194, s. 989-91.

\(^{85}\) AVII, NAV-T-311, r. 194, s. 989-91.
The ‘Report by the Chief Commissar in the Operative Zone Adriatic Coast to the Reichslauter Marin Borman’ (December 20, 1944)\textsuperscript{86} discusses the evacuation of Ustaša families from the ISC. The Wehrmacht wanted to create a defensive Sinj-Zagreb line, but this never materialised.

There is an amusing note on Pavelić’s personal conduct. Fully aware that he only controlled the city of Zagreb, Pavelić decided to send his wife to Germany as a sign of his unwavering loyalty. However, the author of the report is not impressed: ‘One should not forget that savage peoples always had a custom to leave their wives as hostages, only to abandon them afterwards’\textsuperscript{87}.

A related document is the report from December 7, 1944,\textsuperscript{88} it contains the German estimate that there were around sixty to eighty thousand Ustašas in the ISC at the time. With their families, the number was approximately two hundred thousand. This was the total number of people the Germans had to evacuate from the ISC as refugees in the face of the Soviet-Partisan advance.

**Chetnik Engagements in Bosnia in 1945**

The lengthy ‘Report by the Officer of the Intelligence Division of the Chetnik Supreme Command’s Headquarters, Reserve Second Lieutenant Dušan Spajić’ (January 10, 1945)\textsuperscript{89} to Mihailović provides an overview of the situation in eastern and western Bosnia.

Commenting on the Trebava Chetnik Corps led by Father Sava Božić, Spajić says that its commander ‘who considers communism to be the largest threat facing the Serb nation at this moment’\textsuperscript{90} had made every effort to win over local non-Serbs, particularly Muslims, to cooperate against the Partisans. Clearly, by this point the ethno-religious war was of secondary importance when compared with the Chetnik-Partisan

\textsuperscript{86} AVII, NAV-T-175, s. 25266586-7.
\textsuperscript{87} AVII, NAV-T-175, s. 25266586-7.
\textsuperscript{88} AVII, NAV-T-175, r. 21, s. 2526594.
\textsuperscript{89} AVII, Ca, k. 239, Reg. No. 1/10.
\textsuperscript{90} AVII, Ca, k. 239, Reg. No. 1/10.
war. Spajić comments that in certain settlements there was a joint Chetnik-Muslim control as well. Božić made an attempt to cooperate along similar lines with the Roman Catholics (the Croats). He even approached the Ustaša Militia, offering cooperation against the Partisans, but this was more of a challenge for both sides than Chetnik-Muslim cooperation:

This cooperation did not materialise partially because of the [Ustaša] stance, partly because of the hostility of the local Serbs towards the Ustašas... [Local Serbs] cannot and will not understand that the character of the Ustašas from 1941 to the present has changed to our benefit, and that many [Ustašas] are now in the militia only to avoid being sent outside of their home region, or in order to get supplies and benefits from the Croatian government91.

A somewhat similar incident occurred in the Chetnik attack on Tuzla. The goal of the Chetnik commanders was to wrestle the town from the Partisans, but the soldiers were not interested; they wanted to fight the Ustaša militia in the Posavina region to the north. Finally, the command of the local Chetnik Corps had to yield to its soldiers and allow them to march into Posavina.

Father Božić seems to have been a paragon of tolerance compared to his soldiers:

[Father Božić's] persuasion efforts...fall on deaf ears, especially with young soldiers. There is a serious danger that the soldiers will destroy what he has already achieved by their non-tactical behaviour towards the infidels,92 especially the Muslims. It is not uncommon that certain soldiers ambush Muslim merchants, and plunder them completely. There was not a single instance where the individuals who were responsible were brought to justice by their superiors, and all this creates a bad impression among the local Muslims93.

Spajić adds that bandit-style theft and murder went unpunished, citing the killing of a Muslim in Kožuh. As a consequence, the Muslims had stopped bringing food to sell at the local market. This had a significant impact on local food supplies, because only the

91  AVII, Ca, k. 239, Reg. No. 1/10.
92  This term was found only in this report; judging by the content, it signifies Roman Catholics and Muslims in contrast to the Eastern Orthodox. It seems that the author was directly describing local identity in terms of religious affiliation.
93  AVII, Ca, k. 239, Reg. No. 1/10.
Muslim merchants could traverse regions ‘controlled by the Croats and Germans’\(^{94}\) to reach markets in the Chetnik zones.

Local Muslims were also smuggling ammunition from the Croat/German controlled areas to the Chetnik controlled areas under the cover of going to the local market to sell food. Thus, their fear of making the trip endangered the Chetnik ammunition supply. It is evident that many localities had their own unique system during the wartime with regards to how food, weapons/ammunition and people circulated; upsetting the balance, especially if this entailed cutting off the established smuggling channels, would have serious repercussions.

Spajić adds to his list of discipline-related incidents by describing how local Chetniks from Kostajnica ambushed soldiers of the Muslim Legion, disarming them and looting their supplies. Instead of bringing the soldiers to justice, the local Chetnik commander paid monetary compensation to the Muslim Legion to defuse tensions. However, the approach showed ‘the Muslims that our command structure is weak and has no authority over its own soldiers’\(^{95}\).

Spajić also notes that the Muslims were ‘trying to eradicate the impressions they had left in 1941, when they were supporting the Croats’. To achieve this, they ‘are trying to show themselves as bigger Serbs than the Serbs themselves. With that in mind, they are provoking conflict with the Croats wherever they can’\(^{96}\). Chetnik soldiers, who were eager to support this trend, failed to realise that this behaviour did not support their cause. Spajić cites the following example. In Modriča in northern Bosnia, the Ustaša militia maintained the right to patrol during daylight hours. Members of the Ustaša militia tried to disarm some Muslims in town, only to be met with considerable resistance. The Chetniks became involved, killing four Ustašas. Tensions between the Bosnian Chetniks from the Majevica, Trebava and Ozren and the Posavina Ustašas quickly escalated. The Ustašas killed Serbs in the towns of Šamac, Crkvina and Miloševac; the Chetniks retaliated by slaughtering Croats in the pro-Ustaša village of Garevac\(^{97}\). This seems to

\(^{94}\) AVII, Ca, k. 239, Reg. No. 1/10.
\(^{95}\) AVII, Ca, k. 239, Reg. No. 1/10.
\(^{96}\) AVII, Ca, k. 239, Reg. No. 1/10.
\(^{97}\) AVII, Ca, k. 239, Reg. No. 1/10.
have been the end of the episode, but it clearly shows that ethno-religious tensions were running high, and that the situation was extremely flammable. The regional context is undeniable, and whether things escalated into an open conflict or continued as an uneasy armistice depended on the behaviour of each side.

With regards to the Chetniks operating in central Bosnia, Spajić notes that ‘their fighting spirit and military activity is directed only towards the Ustaša militia and the Croats in general (they were the only ones who still have something that can be stolen)’98. Although the fate of the Ustašas and the Chetniks was sealed, the ethno-religious war lasted to the bitter end.

**Conclusions on the German Zone of the ISC**

The Chetniks in the ISC were engaged in three simultaneous and intertwined conflicts: the war against the Axis, the ethno-religious war and the Chetnik-Partisan war. The first two conflicts are well covered by the existing historiography, but the latter has been largely ignored. The ethno-religious conflict can be labelled as a ‘war within a war’, because it had a life and dynamic of its own, with little overall impact on the Axis-Allies struggle.

Ustaša atrocities uprooted local Serbs in the ISC, creating manpower for both the Chetnik and Partisan guerrilla movements. The initial Serb uprising was apolitical, aimed at survival; the rebels were subsequently splintered into Chetniks and Partisans by the competing Yugoslav Army officers and Communist Party members who had risen to leadership positions and started indoctrinating men under their command. After a few months of common resistance by both movements, the rebels turned on each other, plunging themselves into civil war. The Chetnik-Partisan war fractured the common anti-Ustaša front, and gradually became the primary conflict as the ethno-religious war took a back seat.

The Germans had brought the Ustašas to power, and by so doing, created the conditions for atrocities against the local Serbs to occur. Without a major uprooting of the

98 AVII, Ca, k. 239, Reg. No. 1/10.
Serbs that accompanied Ustaša atrocities, guerrilla activity in the region would have been minimal. The Germans understood all of this, but because of Berlin’s unwillingness to change policy, they simply let events run their course, thereby giving rise to an insoluble guerrilla problem in the region.

In the Italian zones of the ISC, initially apolitical Serb rebels cooperated with the Italians who were ready to use them as a tool to weaken the ISC for their own purposes. After the civil war with the Partisans started, Chetniks in the Italian zones of the ISC continued to collaborate with the Italians increasingly for anti-communist reasons. As the civil war intensified and the Partisan threat grew more serious for everybody, Chetnik collaboration in the ISC intensified too, leading to agreements with the ISC in the German zone, and cooperation with the Germans especially after the Italian capitulation. Anti-communism provided Axis-Chetnik common ground and allowed for cooperation. It should be noted, however, that not all Chetniks collaborated in the ISC, and that there was always a split between the ‘legal’ (collaborating) and ‘illegal’ (non-collaborating) Chetniks. Mihailović was particularly opposed to Chetnik-ISC agreements reached by certain local Chetnik commanders in central and western Bosnia, but he had no means of preventing them.

The civil war with the Partisans transformed Chetnik strategies in the ISC, moving their focus away from the ethno-religious war and pushing them into deeper collaboration with the Axis. However, the ISC’s Chetniks remained essentially a regional Serb territorial paramilitary force and, as such, resembled the initial apolitical Serb rebels of 1941.

The Chetnik collaborations with the Axis was arguably one of the most controversial wartime and post-war issues. However, this collaboration was not incompatible either with the Chetnik-Partisan war (the common anti-communist ground was the basis of anti-Partisan cooperation) or with the ethno-religious conflict (which had its own dynamic and logic). It was incompatible only with the resistance war. Collaboration became an important strategy in the civil war with the Partisans and, to some degree, in the ethno-religious conflict as well.

It is evident from primary sources that Chetniks in the German zones of occupation in the ISC primarily acted as an anti-communist royalist Serb territorial
paramilitary force. Given that Ustaša atrocities and the Serb uprising came before the Chetnik-Partisan war, the Chetniks became a Serb territorial paramilitary force first; once the civil war with the Partisans started, they started acting as anti-communist royalist force as well. The Chetniks remained a resistance group too, but conflict with the Wehrmacht was not actively sought by them; the Ustaša/Muslim militias and the Partisans were the key enemies, with the latter taking over from the former as the war dragged on and Tito's strength grew. Despite Chetnik-Wehrmacht contacts and negotiations, formal agreements between the two sides were not possible given the overall German-Serb animosity. Some Chetnik-ISC agreements were created, but these did not involve Ustaša militia as Chetnik-Ustaša animosity over-rode all other considerations, and Mihailović was opposed to these arrangements. As will be shown in the next chapter, almost all these developments were echoed even more profoundly in the Italian zones of occupation in the ISC, and unlike the German-Serb relationship, the Italian-Serb relationship was not burdened with the memory of negative historical developments.
Chapter 6.

The Chetniks and Ethno-religious Conflict in the Italian Zones of the ISC

The Chetniks’ collaboration with the Italians in the Independent State of Croatia (ISC) was an integral part of their strategy in the ethno-religious conflict. Significantly, this development came first – Chetnik collaboration became an essential part of the Chetnik strategy against the Partisans only later, as the civil war with the Partisans came after the ethno-religious war was already well under way.

The Chetnik territorial goals in the ethno-religious war were to (i) establish a secure territorial link between Serbia and Montenegro via the historical area of Sandžak of Novi Pazar, where the main obstacles were the local Slavic Muslims and their militia; (ii) establish control of eastern Bosnia and eastern Herzegovina, the main obstacles again being the local Slavic Muslims and their militia, and (iii) establish control of western Bosnia and the surrounding Serb-populated areas along with secure territorial links from there to Serbia and Montenegro.

The Chetnik wartime strategy to achieve these goals in the ISC was to collaborate with the Italians and encourage their expansion at the expense of the ISC. In doing so, the Italians – and then the Chetniks themselves – could take as much of the ISC territory as possible, at least as far as the River Sava, if not the whole ISC, as the

1 Chetnik collaboration with the Germans in the ISC (and in Serbia itself), meanwhile, was restricted to the Chetnik war with the Partisans, based on the common anti-communist orientation of the Axis and the Chetniks. Chetnik-German wartime collaboration was far less extensive, flexible and formal than that between the Chetniks and Italians, as animosity was far greater.

2 Northern continental Dalmatia, Lika, Kordun, Banija, western Slavonia etc. Incidentally, the Chetniks’ World War II goals in what are today Bosnia-Herzegovina and Croatia were the same as the Serb territorial goals there during the 1991-1995 war. This is logical, because the territorial goals were based in both cases on (Serb and non-Serb) population distribution patterns on the ground rather than any historical or administrative boundaries.
main Chetnik goal was an Ustaša-free Bosnia and Herzegovina. Chetnik thinking dictated that if this were not possible through direct struggle, then it might be achieved via Italian expansion. At the same time, Chetnik collaboration with the Italians was part of the overall strategies of both parties to eradicate the ever-increasing Partisan threat, the anti-communist drive of both the Chetniks and Italians providing the common ground for cooperation³.

**Italian Perspectives and Involvement in the Ethno-religious Conflict**

Like the Germans, the Italians clearly identified the Ustaša militia and their acts as the main cause of the ethno-religious conflict in the ISC, seeing the Chetniks as the reactionary side. The Italians tried to deal with this issue by removing the Ustaša militia from areas under Italian control, something that the local German commanders north of the Vienna line⁴ never had the authority to do, and the Italians were largely successful in this approach.

Italian documents show the narrow popular base of the Ustaša regime among the Croats, who remained largely pro-Maček throughout the war⁵. However, the regime

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³ This aspect of Chetnik-Italian collaboration is sufficiently covered by existing historical works, and it will not be the main focus of this study.
⁴ The line separating German and Italian-controlled parts of the ISC was negotiated in Vienna in April 1941. It is interesting to note how the Italians saw the local population engaged in the ethno-religious conflict. The Italians in the ISC mostly used religious labels (Roman Catholic, Eastern Orthodox, Muslim) instead of national ones (Croat, Serb) to refer to the population and to describe the conflict. Unlike the ISC officials, however, no racial terminology was employed to explain religious labels. For the Italians, the local Slavic population was separated by their faith only. For the ISC officials, on the other hand, religious differences were equated with racial belonging as well.
⁵ ‘Italian report from Zagreb regarding political situation in the Independent State of Croatia’ (April 29, 1941) see: AVII, reg. No. 4/2, k. 869. Not surprisingly, among the first groups targeted by the Ustašas were the proponents of the Yugoslav ideal. In late April 1941 the Italians also noted that the Germans had still not abandoned Vladko Maček, because his supporters represented almost the entire Croat population.
quickly grew in numbers, including the Ustaša party and militia membership. The Italians also concluded early on that the Croats were pro-German and anti-Italian, particularly in the Adriatic zone where Croat and Italian interests directly collided.

Despite being Axis partners, tensions between the Italian and ISC armed forces ran high throughout the war. This had a strong effect on the ISC policy towards both Serbs and Jews. Tensions were especially high between the Italian Army and the Ustaša militia, sometimes leading to violent incidents and deaths.

To their surprise, the Italians found themselves embroiled in the midst of an ethno-religious war in the ISC between Croats/Muslims on one side and Serbs on the other. Ideologically speaking, Italian fascists were not well suited for a peacekeeping role in such a conflict, and they tried to turn the situation to their own advantage by developing a masterful ‘divide and conquer’ approach. They successfully performed this juggling act until the Italian capitulation in early September 1943, directing one group against another to prevent them from uniting against the external enemy.

6 ‘Italian report from Zagreb regarding political situation in the Independent State of Croatia’ (April 29, 1941), see: AVII, reg. No. 4/2, k. 869. The report states: ‘Serious and real Croats...consider Pavelić and his pitiful party a completely false construct, which is not an expression of Croat spirit, nor convictions, given that, out of four and a half million Croats, his party has twenty to thirty thousand followers at the most... Pavelić and his party do not mean a lot among the masses, among the intellectuals and without the presence of German soldiers. They...have no followers.’ See also: Weekly report of the Italian supreme command about political and economic situation in the Independent state of Croatia (June 26, 1941), see: AVII, reg. No. 1/6-f. 2, k. 332. The report says: ‘Various nationalistic passions are blinding a large number of Croats, and as a consequence of that the party is getting new followers each day. It seems that now it already has one hundred and fifty thousand members’.

7 ‘Weekly report of the Italian supreme command about the political and economic situation in the Independent state of Croatia’ (June, 26, 1941), see: AVII, reg. No. 1/6-f. 2, k. 332. The report says: ‘Croats as people are for now strongly leaning towards the Germans, who were received in Zagreb in a manner that was quite surprising to them; wherever the Germans go, they are showered with flowers and gifts. For us, the trend is in reverse: the hostility of the Croats towards Italy is growing from day to day...it is well known that Pavelić’s regime is only sustained via German bayonets ... The steering wheel of the country is energetically taken over by a party that is not only in an absolute minority, but is also unrecognised because of its tendencies...the racial question was energetically posed from the very beginning, anti-orthodox / anti-Serb and anti-Jewish in its character...the state encompassed an unpredictably high number of Eastern Orthodox (one million, eight hundred and fifty thousand), and it became evident that the government had to tone down its intentions...it was quickly forgotten that Croatia was created by the efforts and thanks to the Axis, rather than by [the Croats’] own efforts’.

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The Roman Catholic Church also played a role in the ISC – a widely researched and strongly contested issue. It was altogether different from the role played by either the Germans or Italians. Local Roman Catholic priests in the ISC supported the Axis-created satellite state and, to a certain extent, supported and even participated in some of its most questionable policies.

**Italian-Croat Hostilities and the Serb Uprising in the ISC**

Hostilities between members of various Croatian military organisations and the Italian military had become widespread by the summer of 1941. A number of such examples – including the analysis of the underlying causes of Italian-Croat tensions – can be found in reports of the Italian diplomatic mission in Zagreb.

One Italian report (July 19, 1941) describes a number of violent incidents between Italian soldiers and the Croat Ustaša (and Domobrani), including shootouts\(^8\). The report identifies the supposed Italian ‘easy treatment’ (from a Croat perspective) of Serbs and Jews as the primary reason for these tensions\(^9\). On a number of occasions the Italians intervened in mass executions to protect the local Serb population; this laid the basis of the Chetnik-Italian ‘live and let live’ wartime relationship. Ironically, the

\(^8\) AVII, reg. No. 10/1, k. 73.

\(^9\) AVII, reg. No. 10/1, k. 73. Of the Croats, the source says: ‘The accusation of the so-called Italian easy-handedness towards the Serbs and the Jews can be summarised in two different ways: in protecting these people from the persecution they are facing and in terms of making it easier for these elements to move people and possessions across the border...it is known that the [Croat] government, for internal political reasons, acts against the Serbs and the Jews in the utmost energetic way...that sometimes can be characterised as inhuman savagery. Women and children were murdered as retribution against the husbands and fathers, mothers were forced to witness the shooting of their children – and all that in front of our troops who cannot comprehend or justify such methods...Perhaps our behaviour is influenced by acquaintances made with Serbs and Jews who, either forced by the local authorities or voluntarily in order to protect themselves, invited into their homes the Italian officers who were posted in the interior. In these associations it is not out of the question – as Croats argue – that occasional affairs with local women took place, which only strengthen our protective instincts. However, what creates most dissatisfaction is not so much the protection for moral reasons, but – according to the Croats – making it possible for the enemies of Croatia to escape Croat territory with their money, jewellery, etc. It is claimed that Italian soldiers participated in these smuggling operations by driving individuals in official automobiles’.

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occupiers who had made the whole situation possible were now the only ones able to make the situation better.

A revealing Italian report (July 29, 1941)\(^{10}\) makes the following comments on the underlying reasons for the Serb uprising and the relationship between the rebels (whom the Italians called ‘Chetniks’) and the Italian forces on the ground:

One [Italian] captain from the Second Army left Knin this morning... and was stopped [on the road] by a group of one hundred armed men, who told him that they were not communists at all, but that they had had enough of the Ustaša persecution and slaughter, and stated that their movement was not aimed against the Italians and that the population of Lika would like to have a garrison of Italian troops. The leader of the uprising came to the captain and gave him a note, to be given to the commander of the Italian troops in Knin, with the following content: ‘The population of Lika is asking the Italian army to immediately occupy the entire zone because it cannot live under Croat oppression any longer. Signed: the Serb people and Chetniks’\(^{11}\).

Like the Wehrmacht documents, all Italian reports describe the Serb uprising in the ISC as anti-Ustaša – an ethno-religious conflict with no evidence of direct hostility towards the Italians.

The above report also delineates the mechanics of the Chetnik-Italian relationship in the countryside:

Today... the commander of Divulje airport was going down Gračac-Knin road across the territory controlled by the rebels. The rebels opened fire on him, but they stopped shooting as soon as they realised he was an Italian. The road was blocked at ten points, including one downed bridge... these obstacles were overcome with the help of these rebels\(^{12}\).

Another revealing Italian report on the nature of the conflict in the region comes from Dino Di Gianni the Colonel of the 23\(^{rd}\) Artillery Corps (August 9, 1941). Explaining that his genuine interest was in maintaining the Italian military presence in Serb-populated settlements at all times, Di Gianni states: ‘We are now facing a very odd

\(^{10}\) ‘Report of the Governor of Dalmatia’ (July 29, 1941). AVII, reg. No. 26/2-1, k. 540.


situation: our ‘enemies’ are now with us, while our ‘friends’ are not trusting us or are even hostile towards us.\(^{13}\)

Di Gianni writes of his conviction that the local Serbs could capture smaller towns whenever they wished to do so because they had the operational initiative, numerical superiority and greater warrior spirit; in addition, the local population belonged to the same nationality, and they could break off contact and melt away into inaccessible terrain whenever they wanted to. And last but by no means least, ‘they are full of righteous hate towards their Croat persecutors’.\(^{14}\) Di Gianni concludes with his personal opinion that the Serbs could attack Gospić with a high probability of success, but they had not yet done so because of the presence of the strong Italian garrison in the city (in this instance, the Italian presence was beneficial to the Croat civilian population). However, the prisons in Gospić, all of which housed hundreds of individuals, drew the armed Serbs like a magnet.\(^{15}\)

The surviving Italian documents contain records of contacts and discussions between the Chetnik leadership and Italian commanders. One such record is the ‘Report by the Intelligence Section of the Italian 2nd Army Command’ (September 23, 1942)\(^{16}\), regarding discussions between Chetnik leaders Ilija Trifunović-Birčanin and Dobroslav Jevđević with Italian General Mario Roatta. General Roatta says the Chetniks were willing to sign an agreement on a number of conditions, the first of which was Italian-Chetnik cooperation in “saving the Serb people” (who, allegedly, have already suffered one million casualties) and protection from further mass losses.\(^{17}\) This condition captures the Chetnik purpose in the ISC, and illustrates that all other goals, including the struggle against the Axis, were secondary. Taking into account that the Chetnik leaders considered the Partisans, the Ustašas and all affiliated forces to threaten their existence, it becomes much clearer why the Chetniks turned to the Italians. In the minds of the local Chetnik leaders, cooperation with an Axis occupation force, namely, the Italians, was the

\(^{13}\) AVII, reg. No. 2/5-3, k. 651.
\(^{14}\) AVII, reg. No. 2/5-3, k. 651.
\(^{15}\) AVII, reg. No. 2/5-3, k. 651.
\(^{16}\) AVII, NAV-I-T-821, r. 31, sn. 346.
\(^{17}\) AVII, NAV-I-T-821, r. 31, sn. 346.
lesser of two evils if the result ensured the survival of the Serb population, because liberating an exterminated population would, of course, be impossible.

This raises a hypothetical question: how successful were the Chetniks in their primary goal? In other words, how many Serb lives were saved in the ISC because of Chetnik cooperation with the Italians? While it is impossible to know for certain, there is no doubt that the Chetnik-Italian ‘live and let live’ arrangement prevented or at least slowed down Ustaša rampages against Serb civilians in certain areas, and had a similar effect on Italian actions. If the Chetniks had followed the Partisan course of open hostilities against all enemies, there would have been many more Serb casualties, not just in open warfare but in related atrocities against civilians, such as the Ustaša ethno-religious violence directed at civilians in rural areas under the pretext of rebel cleansing operations. However, over time, the Chetnik cooperation with the Italians heightened their civil war with the Partisans and led to significant casualties, given that both the Chetniks and the Partisans were largely comprised of Serbs. Thus, the civil war offset the goals of the Chetnik ‘Serb biological preservation’ policy, but did not necessarily neutralise it.

Chetnik Perspectives on the Italians in the ISC and Other Occupied Zones

A letter from Major Boško Todorović (from January 6, 1942)\textsuperscript{18}, Commander of the Chetniks units in eastern Bosnia and Herzegovina, to Belgrade journalist Milan Šantić who worked for the prewar \textit{Politika} newspaper, comments on the ‘problem’ of the Italian presence with respect to the ethno-religious war. Evidently, the Chetnik relationship with the Italians was not an altogether easy one. Major Todorović states that the Chetniks were not attacking the Italians in their actions against the Ustašas, and that Captain Vladislav Hamović, Commander of the 6\textsuperscript{th} Group of the Chetnik units in the region, officially notified the Italian command in Gacko in a letter about the Chetnik course of action. He complains that the Italian presence was obstructive to the Chetnik operations, as the Chetniks could not use the roads or telephone communications. Moreover, not

\textsuperscript{18} AVII, Ca, k. 231, Reg. No. 1/6.
attacking the Italians ‘gives propaganda ammunition to the Partisans, and if I do attack
the Italians they would help the Turks’\textsuperscript{19}. For this reason, Todorović asks higher Chetnik
commanders, including Radmilo Grgić and Dobroslav Jevđević, to negotiate the Italian
withdrawal from local towns, thereby allowing him a free hand. In his concluding
remarks, Todorović adds that Captain Vladislav Hamović had been assigned to act as a
Chetnik delegate to the Italians and seek the protection of the Serb population via
‘compromise with the occupiers’, likely by joining MVAC. Todorović states that he would
not do this personally, as he did not want to compromise his rank or give propaganda
material to the Partisans\textsuperscript{20}.

A ‘Report by the Command of the Operative Units of eastern Bosnia and
Herzegovina’ (January 26, 1942)\textsuperscript{21} written for Mihailović has a section devoted to
Chetnik political goals. The author of the report argues that the Chetnik MVAC should be
used to separate the Italians from ISC leadership, and to drive a wedge between the
Croats and Muslims. As MVAC, Chetnik troops would have freedom of movement in the
Italian-occupied territory, one of the preconditions for ‘solving the Serb question in the
region (taking over the civil government by the Serbs, evacuation, extermination, forceful
expulsion of the large part of Muslims and Roman Catholics)\textsuperscript{22}. Moreover, he points out
that free movement of Chetnik MVAC units would allow the ‘illegal’ Chetniks to move
freely as well, creating a corridor that could be used to shuffle Chetnik troops from
Serbia to Lika or via Sandžak to Montenegro.

Chetnik documents testify that local commanders saw the Italians as an asset. A
report by Ilija Trifunović-Birčanin to Mihailović from the first half of April 1942\textsuperscript{23} provides
an analysis on the state of Chetnik affairs from various parts of occupied Yugoslavia. In
the following, Birčanin summarises the position of the Serbs in the ISC with respect to
the Italians:

\textsuperscript{19} A nineteenth-century term used by the Chetniks to refer to the Slavic Muslims (present day
Bosniaks), see: AVII, Ca, k. 231, Reg. No. 1/6.
\textsuperscript{20} AVII, Ca, k. 231, Reg. No. 1/6.
\textsuperscript{21} AVII, Ca, k. 170, Reg. No. 16/4. The report was written by Major Boško Todorović.
\textsuperscript{22} AVII, Ca, k. 170, Reg. No. 16/4.
\textsuperscript{23} AVII, Ca, k. 157, Reg. No. 11/1. The document is ‘circa dated’ based on references to it from
other documents (such as Mihailović’s notebook located at AVII, Ca, K. 1, Reg. No. 17/3).
The general opinion among the people is that the struggle against [the Italians] should not commence, because in such a case the Ustašas would use the situation to continue their bloody work and exterminate all the Serbs in the ISC. The Chetniks, as far as I can see, share this view, which is, after all, logical. However, the communists (who wish to see Russia win even if all Serbs are exterminated in the process) use this view for propaganda purposes, accusing both the people and the Chetniks of collaboration with the Italians.

Once again, the theme of the Italians as the ‘unwanted protectors’ is evident. The different philosophies of the Chetniks (biological preservation of the Serbs during the war) and Partisans (ideology-driven struggle) are illustrated as well. Despite his rather gloomy prognostication, Trifunović-Birčanin concludes his report on a positive note, stating that the Serbs had lost their state a number of times but that this did not mean the end of the struggle: ‘the Serbs...proved to the world that they are capable of an independent state life by being Hajduks and Uskoks.

A report by Major Petar Baćović (July 16, 1942) to Mihailović discusses the military and political situation in Herzegovina. Major Baćović reports that all Chetnik troops in Herzegovina had been ‘legalised’, in other words, officially registered as MVAC troops, by the Italians; they were receiving food, weapons and ammunition from the Italians but not salaries. One could argue that the motivation of the local Chetniks to refuse regular wages from the Italians was more psychological than functional, given that they were already fully dependent on Italian supplies and support. Being on the Italian payroll would have been seen as the ultimate form of collaboration with the enemy, and as long as this element was absent, the Chetniks could maintain the self-deception that they were ‘using the Italians’ and were an independent force.

Baćović also states that Renzo Dalmazzo, Commander of the Italian troops, had invited Dobroslav Jevđević to Dubrovnik for important talks. In their discussion,
Dalmazzo apparently informed Jevđević that the town of Foča ‘belongs to Montenegro’\(^{29}\) (presumably within the zone assigned to the Montenegrin Chetniks). He told Jevđević that the Italian forces had full knowledge of Mihailović’s whereabouts and Baćović, in turn, alerted Mihailović. Jevđević also met with ISC government Ministers Andrija Artuković and Vladimir Košak; they informed him that two divisions of the Domobrani forces would occupy all of Herzegovina at the cost of direct confrontation with the Chetniks. Clearly, the Domobrani arrival had been cleared with the Italians. Baćović expressed the opinion that this was unacceptable, because the Domobrani arrival would strengthen the ISC locally and destroy the Chetniks in the region. Instead, Major Baćović advocated preparing for a struggle against the Croat armed forces by securing supplies, finances and so forth, mainly from the Italians.

Major Baćović mentions a Muslim village called Fazlagića Kula near Gacko, where a thousand armed Muslim men had fortified themselves. He recommends attacking this village ‘without anyone’s permission’ – meaning, of course, the Italians – in light of the ISC’s intent to bring Domobrani forces into Herzegovina\(^{30}\). He adds that Domobrani forces were garrisoned in the Herzegovinian towns of Kalinovik, Gacko, Bileća and Trebinje but ‘they are inactive and do not leave the towns at all’\(^{31}\).

A report by Dobroslav Jevđević to Major Petar Baćović\(^{32}\) from the second half of July 1942\(^{33}\) explains the military, political and economic situation in Herzegovina at the time. As will be demonstrated by Jevđević’s report below, the Chetnik leadership thought the Italians planned further territorial expansion in the Balkans, this time at the expense of the ISC. The Chetnik leaders believed that the border on the River Sava to the north was the ultimate Italian goal, something that fitted nicely with the Italian division of Slovenia (along the River Sava) and the Italian rhetoric about spreading their influence all the way to the lower Danube. To reach this goal, the Italians needed both the Serbs

\(^{29}\) AVII, Ca, k. 231, Reg. No. 12/7.
\(^{30}\) AVII, Ca, k. 231, Reg. No. 12/7.
\(^{31}\) AVII, Ca, k. 231, Reg. No. 12/7. The author comments that Herzegovina was now a Partisan-free zone; only Partisan ‘troikas’ (sabotage groups of three people) were eliminated from time to time.
\(^{32}\) Petar Baćović was Mihailović’s representative in Herzegovina. See: AVII, Ca, k. 159, Reg. No. 13/2.
\(^{33}\) AVII, Ca, k. 274, Reg. No. 12/2.
and potentially the Muslims in the ISC to act as tools against the Zagreb regime. The Chetniks were ready to cooperate with the Italians and support their expansionist appetites because to the Chetnik leadership the incorporation of Serb-populated areas into Italy was a far lesser evil than the ISC. Even if the Axis were to win the war – though Mihailović and his circle firmly believed they would not – the Italian annexation of ISC territory up to the River Sava would have secured the survival of the local Serb population. Thus, from the Chetnik perspective, collaboration with the Italians in the ISC had advantages on multiple levels even before the civil war with the Partisans.

Jevđević’s report contains a separate section on the Italians. This part of the document is one of the most detailed accounts of the Chetnik understanding of their relationship with the Italians and, as such, is invaluable in the context of the current study. Jevđević claims to have initiated the contact with the Italians in the name of the Chetnik organisations. At the time of the initial contact, he says, it was clear that the Italians were not satisfied with the borders of the ISC, and that they intended, ‘according to their political traditions’, to use the Serbs against the Croats ‘in the same manner in which they previously used Croats against the Serbs’.

Of great importance here is Jevđević’s recognition of the Italian motivation. He obviously understood the political conditions that had existed during the interwar period. In the following, Jevđević explains his willingness to be part of the Italian game:

In that moment there was a possibility to extract favours for the Serb people … The Italian plan is very simple. In the case of the Axis victory – something that a few people in Italy still believe in – [Italy] wants to favour the Serbs in northern Dalmatia and western Bosnia so that at the end of the war they could organise a referendum and vote for joining Italy proper. In other parts of Bosnia and Herzegovina, [Italy] wanted to unite

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34 If Jevđević is correct, this would place the initial contact between the Herzegovina Chetniks and the Italians sometime in December 1941; it is evident that the contact was initiated by the Chetnik side.
35 AVII, Ca, k. 274, Reg. No. 12/2. This remark refers to the interwar Italian support for the Ustaša émigrés (including hosting their Ustaša training camps in Italy), who had worked at undermining the Kingdom of Yugoslavia, provoking the Croat uprising and killing the Yugoslav King in Marseilles in 1934. Just as they had supported the Ustašas during the interwar period to undermine Yugoslavia, the Italians were now planning to use the Chetniks to undermine the ISC. The policy stayed the same, only the target changed.
36 It should be also noted that the Italians had a personal hold on Jevđević; his family was being held in Rome.
the Serbs and Muslims, so that this joint majority of eighty percent of the population could demand some kind of autonomous Bosnia and Herzegovina as an Italian protectorate. The Montenegrin federalists had another alternative – of incorporating Herzegovina [presumably the part east of the River Neretva] into a Greater Montenegro. In case of losing the war, the policy of favouring the Serbs would lessen the weight of [Italian] responsibility at the peace conference.\(^{37}\)

He then explains what this Italian policy meant for the Serbs:

> For us Serbs, collaboration with the Italians brought salvation from the Ustaša massacres, the ability to arm ourselves, acquiring food for the locals and the refugees as well as the creation of a semi-free zone in which the Serbs could build a political and military organisation without any obstacles.\(^{38}\)

If politics can be described as ‘the art of the possible’, Jevđević’s arguments for collaboration with the Italians were powerful given the alternatives. From a purely realpolitik aspect and excluding any moral questions the approach made sense. As an aside, it is interesting to note the use of the ‘semi-free’ label, as it was also used to describe Serbia and Nedić’s government in Belgrade. Unlike the Partisan world, the Chetnik world contained many shades of grey.

Jevđević explains the role of the communists (the Partisans):

> Despite the fact that the communist tide brought a lot of suffering to the Serb people, it also helped us in a way – it forced the Italians to give us far more weapons and all kinds of supplies than they originally had intended. Thus, our strength grew as well as our demands, and silently we took control of events.\(^{39}\)

According to Jevđević, the initial Italian support for the Chetniks was aimed at undermining the ISC, but with the rising Partisan threat, the value of the Chetniks increased. Jevđević seems to have believed that the tables had turned, and the Chetniks rather than the Italians were controlling the situation. This of course was wishful thinking. Nonetheless, the Partisan threat gave a lease on life for the Chetnik-Italian relationship. As Jevđević says:

\(^{37}\) AVII, Ca, k. 274, Reg. No. 12/2.
\(^{38}\) AVII, Ca, k. 274, Reg. No. 12/2.
\(^{39}\) AVII, Ca, k. 274, Reg. No. 12/2.
With regards to the national ideal, we are in a far better position than the Montenegrins, because Montenegro is an annexed region while we are negotiating with the Italians as equals on the territory of the third state [the ISC].

He adds that the Chetniks supported the Italians in their proposed occupation of Bosnia.

The biggest obstacle to Chetnik goals was German policy. Jevđević states that the Germans had prevented the Italian takeover of all of Bosnia (moving the Vienna Line north to the River Sava) and had forced the advancing Italian troops to pull back across the German-Italian demarcation line: ‘Finally, Croatia succeeded in outmanoeuvring Italy and forcing the Italians on July 10 [1942] to evacuate [Zones III and II] and hand over military and civilian authority to the Croats. Needless to say, it was the Germans who put pressure on the Italians to do so. This was a major reversal for the Chetniks, and not surprisingly, as Jevđević notes, it also angered the Italians. Jevđević says that the Italians ‘left [the Chetniks] two hundred and fifty thousand bullets just before their departure’.

While the next section of Jevđević’s report mostly concerns economic matters, many segments also pertain to Chetnik strategy and are therefore of interest in determining how the Chetniks viewed collaboration. Jevđević says the Chetniks had two parallel set of troops whom he called A and B, a smaller group that was known to the Italians and a larger one that the Italians were not aware of. One can assume that the ‘A’ set was the Chetnik troops with official status as the Italian Eastern Orthodox MVAC units, and the rest were ‘illegal Chetniks’. According to Jevđević, the Italians were feeding four thousand men, but did not supply eight additional battalions. The general population suffered food shortages and lived in conditions of extreme poverty, especially ‘the refugees from Vojvodina – volunteers and refugees’.

For Jevđević, the potential Italian departure from the area represented the biggest danger for the Chetniks. If this were to happen, the Chetniks would ‘lose their

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40 AVII, Ca, k. 274, Reg. No. 12/2.
41 AVII, Ca, k. 274, Reg. No. 12/2.
42 AVII, Ca, k. 274, Reg. No. 12/2. He adds that the Italians wanted to see open conflict between the Chetniks and the Croat Armed Forces in order to have good reason to stay put.
43 AVII, Ca, k. 274, Reg. No. 12/2. It is curious that Serb refugees from Vojvodina would end up in a part of the ISC, rather than Serbia.
bread, and end up fighting. But to prepare for this eventuality, Jevđević was considering requisitions from the wealthy peasants, even though when the Partisans did that they were bitterly criticised in Chetnik propaganda. Even more ironically, the Partisans had created a few collective farms while they were in the area, and these farms were now providing supplies to the Chetniks. Jevđević notes that the Italians were ready to sell food and other supplies to the Chetniks, but the Chetniks had no money to buy them. Jevđević had suggested that the Italians ask the German commanders in Serbia to sell supplies to the Italian Army, which the Italians could then sell to the Chetniks. If this failed, the only plan remaining was to establish complete control over the Foča, Goražde, Ustiprača and Višegrad sectors ‘in order to secure a food supply from Serbia and Sandžak directly’. Concluding the food supply matters, Jevđević says: ‘Croatia is offering food, but this option cannot be accepted, because this would amount to a moral capitulation.

A telegram sent to Jevđević on July 17, 1942, by someone with the code name ‘Čika Branko’ informed him that he should act ‘according to the local conditions’, doing what he could to keep the Italians in the area rather than allowing the Croat armed forces to replace them – the Italian presence was clearly preferred by the Chetniks. Furthermore, the author added that ‘with the Croat army [Domobrani] talks are allowed, but not with the Ustašas’. Energetic ‘puncturing’ of the Domobrani units was also to be undertaken.

An obligatory segment of the telegram is devoted to the Italians who were, for reasons unknown, preparing to increase the MVAC force by five thousand men, using

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44 AVII, Ca, k. 274, Reg. No. 12/2.
45 AVII, Ca, k. 274, Reg. No. 12/2.
46 AVII, Ca, k. 274, Reg. No. 12/2. Jevđević felt his position in Herzegovina was much better than the Chetnik groups in northern Bosnia in the German controlled zone who entered into collaboration agreements with the ISC; he believed such a scenario could be avoided.
47 AVII, Ca, k. 299, Reg. No. 3/1.
48 AVII, Ca, k. 299, Reg. No. 3/1.
49 AVII, Ca, k. 299, Reg. No. 3/1. This expression of ‘puncturing’ (Serbian ‘бушење’) was used by Mihailović to describe the process of infiltrating Domobrani units with Chetnik sympathisers, presumably so that they would switch sides once the projected general Chetnik uprising was on its way.
the ‘legalised’ Chetniks in eastern Herzegovina and Bosnia. The Italians were also preparing

the systematisation of [MVAC] troops along the lines adopted in Montenegro – giving a pay of ten liras to soldiers, troop commanders one thousand eight hundred and battalion commanders two and half thousand liras per month\(^{50}\).

This presented a dilemma for the author and his troops:

If we refuse this in Herzegovina, we might end up in an open conflict with the Italians; however if we accept, the opportunists and weak-minded ones might forget their obligations towards the Fatherland in their comfortable lives, and end up as a truly Italian militia\(^{51}\).

‘Recommendations by the Commander of the Armed Forces Southeast to the Supreme Command of the Wehrmacht’ (July 2, 1942)\(^{52}\) written by Peter Maher discusses securing German military and industrial interests in Bosnia and Herzegovina following the withdrawal of the Italian 2\(^{nd}\) army from their Zone III and parts of Zone II. The report demonstrates that the Germans knew about the Italian-Chetnik ties. Commenting on the new security situation, Maher argues that the territories between the new Italian positions and the German demarcation line should be secured by Croat forces only; to this point, the Italians had used Serb nationalistic bands – Chetniks – as well as their own forces\(^{53}\). Maher notes that with the arrival of the new Croat forces in the region, armed conflict between the Serb and Croat nationalists was inevitable, adding that the Croat forces were no match for Serb nationalistic and communist bands in terms of battle readiness. In short, the territories being evacuated by the Italians would undoubtedly become an area of conflict and disorder; the German-occupied part of ISC south of the River Sava could even be endangered\(^{54}\).

The ‘Book of Received Telegrams’ sent to Mihailović’s headquarters (July 19 to August 3, 1942) includes some interesting snippets of information. For example, the

\(^{50}\) AVII, Ca, k. 299, Reg. No. 3/1.
\(^{51}\) AVII, Ca, k. 299, Reg. No. 3/1.
\(^{52}\) AVII, NAV-T-312, r. 467 s. 8055822-3.
\(^{53}\) AVII, NAV-T-312, r. 467 s. 8055822-3.
\(^{54}\) AVII, NAV-T-312, r. 467 s. 8055822-3.
telegram dated August 3, 1942, from the code name ‘Ištvan’ reveals that the Italians had arrested Dobroslav Jevđević and Ilija Trifunović-Birčanin after their meeting with Mihailović in Zimonjića Kula\(^{55}\), though both were soon released. This shows that the Italians were concerned with local Chetnik links to Mihailović, whom they considered dangerous and hostile.

In Montenegro and Herzegovina, each movement of Chetnik troops had to be reported to the Italian command,\(^{56}\) except in cases of emergency, when the report could be submitted after the fact. These were likely the Chetnik troops registered as Italian MVAC.

The telegram goes on to say that the Italians had begun to have some reservations about the Chetniks. Not only were the Chetniks forbidden from having their own POW (or any other) camps, but the Italians had started to organise local Muslim and Roman Catholic MVAC units in various parts of Herzegovina, including Ljubuški and Konjic. This ‘new Italian political course’\(^{57}\) was unsettling to the Chetniks, although for the Italians, it was a logical step and an extension of their MVAC system: this way, all three religious communities could be in control of their own settlements as MVAC troops, keeping the Partisans out and minimising the Serb-Croat-Muslim conflict.

Italian General Mario Roatta had another discussion with Chetnik leaders Ilija Trifunović-Birčanin and Dobrosal Jevđević a month later, on September 26, 1942\(^{58}\). The minutes of the meeting refer to the subject of the talks as ‘Chetnik Militia’. Upon ‘legalising’ themselves with the Italians, the Chetnik units became Orthodox MVAC

\(^{55}\) A meeting between Mihailović and Ilija Birčanin was held on July 22, 1942, in Zimonjića Kula, Herzegovina. Among those present were Zaharije Ostojić, Captain Pavle Đurišić and various other Chetnik commanders from the area. The Italian Higher Command of the ‘Slovenia-Dalmatia’ Armed Forces produced a report about the meeting on August 7, 1942; according to this report, the Chetniks discussed the Italian behaviour towards the Eastern Orthodox in the region and concluded that cooperation with them should continue to proceed with the normalisation of everyday life, and to fight the communists. See: AVII, NAW-I-T-821, r. 403, sn. 55-57.

\(^{56}\) See: The ‘Order of the Chetnik Command for Montenegro and Herzegovina’ (August 25, 1942) written by Bajo Stanišić; AVII, Ca, k. 148, Reg. No. 36/1.

\(^{57}\) AVII, Ca, k. 148, Reg. No. 36/1.

\(^{58}\) AVII, NAV-I-T-821, r. 31, sn. 361-3.
formations. The Chetnik leaders gave assurances that they would not attack Italian units, as a sign ‘of gratitude to the Serb people from Italy’. Although indirect cooperation with Ustaša units (clearly against the Partisans) was not out of the question, the Chetnik units wanted no contact with them on the ground. The existing Chetnik units in the Italian zones, as well as those across the demarcation line in the German zone who wished to be under Italian influence were noted. The Chetnik leaders also asked for armaments to supply an additional six thousand men.

It should be noted that in their contact with the Italians, Chetnik commanders sometimes talked about the wider Chetnik movement. Roatta recorded an interesting remark made by Jevđević who stated that he commanded units in the Italian Zones II and III, as well as across the demarcation line in the German Zone. However, Jevđević kept mentioning ‘moral command’ over these units, which indicates that real commanding authority was rather loose. Roatta also noted that the mentality of the Chetnik units was orientated towards operating within the recruitment zone itself; in other words, Chetnik units were operating as a local territorial paramilitary force in a manner that was of very limited value outside their home region. If these units were to be utilised elsewhere, enough time had to be allowed for commanders to explain to their men that they had to move beyond their home regions. Roatta thus recommended the tactic as the ‘need to help other settlements populated by Serbs which are attacked by the communists’.

In the same report, General Roatta cites Jevđević’s summary of the Chetnik policy and the motivation for reaching an agreement with the Italians:

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59 This was a practice similar to the one in German-occupied Serbia, where a number of Chetnik units (first those under the control of Kosta Pećanac from August 1941, then under control of Mihailović from November 1941) ‘legalised’ themselves with Serbia’s quisling government to avoid destruction at the hands of the Germans. These legalised Chetniks, both in Serbia and in the Independent State of Croatia as well as Montenegro acquired a contradictory ‘double nature’, being a part of the occupation system and the resistance movement at the same time.

60 AVII, NAV-I-T-821, r. 31, sn. 361-3.
61 AVII, NAV-I-T-821, r. 31, sn. 361-3.
62 AVII, NAV-I-T-821, r. 31, sn. 361-3.
63 AVII, NAV-I-T-821, r. 31, sn. 361-3.
64 AVII, NAV-I-T-821, r. 31, sn. 361-3.
Cooperation with the Italians brought back to our [Serb] people the possibility to live in peace...cooperation with Italy is of crucial interest of the Serb people and the Serbs will never rise against the Italian army because such an act, besides being ungratefulness and a crime, would also be madness...only the friendship [with the Italians] is allowing the remnants of the Serb people [in the ISC] to survive.

The Legalisation Issue and Increased Italian-Chetnik Cooperation

This thesis argues that legalisation with the Italians was a key to local Chetnik strategy in both the ethno-religious conflict and the Chetnik-Partisan war. However, there were negative side effects of the strategy, and these were evident to the Chetnik leadership. The ‘Report by Major Zaharije Ostojić to the Chief of the Headquarters of the Chetnik Supreme Command’ (September 4, 1942) analyses many aspects of Chetnik policy, including the Axis ‘legalisation’. For Major Ostojić, legalisation was a double-edged sword, made possible only by the eruption of the ethno-religious and Chetnik-Partisan wars:

With legalisation, we saved the manpower and our weapons. That is the plus. However, there is also a very big minus too. By coming to the towns [i.e. by leaving the woods and mountains] the people have lost direct connection with you, and the fighting spirit of the people has gone down (the same is true for discipline).

The introduction of salaries led to increased gambling and partying, and led to an alarming trend whereby 'some men started speaking of Nedić as somebody on an equal footing with [Mihailović]'. This fear had been expressed in earlier Chetnik reports, and was also mentioned with regards to various legalised Chetniks in the ISC that had established a relationship with the Italians or the ISC directly. There was a serious

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65 AVII, NAV-I-T-821, r. 31, sn. 361-3. Reacting to Jevdjevic’s remarks in a footnote, Roatta says that although this sounded nice, he did not believe it. Jevdjevic was most likely sincere on a personal level, but Roatta doubted that his subordinates shared his convictions. Albeit indirectly, Roatta was questioning the strength of the Chetnik command structure.

66 AVII, Ca, k.1, Reg. No. 22/2.

67 AVII, Ca, k.1, Reg. No. 22/2.

68 Nedić’s government paid in this particular case; other legalised Chetnik formations in Montenegro and the ISC were paid by the Italians as MVAC.

69 AVII, Ca, k.1, Reg. No. 22/2.
concern among the Chetnik superiors that the legalised troops might become an actual Axis militia, and that the legalisation device might backfire and ‘undo’ some of the Chetniks who had engaged in this practice. Ostojić mentions that Nedić promoted certain Captains among the legalised troops to Majors, and these individuals argued that Mihailović would have to recognise their ranks as well.

The ‘Report by the Chetnik Representative at the Italian High Command of the Armed Forces Slovenia-Dalmatia Radmilo Grgić to Mihailović’ in late September 1942 explains the reasons for the Chetnik-Italian collaboration in the ISC. Although the stated reasons are echoed in other Chetnik wartime documents, this report stands out because it was written for Mihailović. Upset by recent news of the intentions of some Chetnik commanders in Herzegovina to attack the Italians, Grgić says this course of action ‘would represent in this moment the beginning of the final catastrophe of the Serb people in the ISC as well as the downfall of the entire Chetnik organisation in the region’ 71. He then explains the reasons for Chetnik collaboration with the Italians in the ISC:

The Serb people in the ISC, massacred, economically destroyed, without leadership, forced to hide en masse in the mountains and woods, bled so much that they reached the biological minimum without which the regeneration for tomorrow is impossible72.

According to Grgić, the Serbs were facing a multitude of enemies: ‘the Ustašas, the Muslims, the Germans, the Italians. At such a grave moment, another, new dangerous enemy showed up – the Partisans73. Fighting all these enemies at once was simply impossible, and would lead to ‘the assured and complete destruction of the entire Serb population in these regions’. Finally, ‘in the ranks of "the Chetniks" – really local villagers who were forced by Ustaša violence into the mountains by sheer necessity, and whose

70 AVII, Ca, k. 159, Reg. No. 51/2.
71 AVII, Ca, k. 159, Reg. No. 51/2.
72 AVII, Ca, k. 159, Reg. No. 51/2.
73 AVII, Ca, k. 159, Reg. No. 51/2.
groups had no connections with the old Chetnik organisation’ the will to fight had started
to deflate as soon as the Ustaša danger began to diminish. Many turned to plundering. 

As a result of the Chetnik-Italian collaboration, general conditions significantly
improved. Serbs were able to return to their settlements, even those who had fled as far
as Serbia. Collaboration with the Italians was now an irreversible fact:

The Ustašas and the Muslims were never so hateful towards the Serbs as
they are now, because we are now a constant reminder of the atrocities
they committed and of the retribution which they will not avoid. The
Italians took the Serbs under their own protection, which increased the
hatred of the Ustašas even further. [In certain areas] tens of thousands of
Serbs lived as hostages, surviving only because they had the protection
of the Italians. Only twenty-four hours without this protection was enough
for the Ustaša hatred to add those Serbs to the large number of those
already slaughtered.

Grgić points to the practical significance of the collaboration for the Chetnik
movement. Emerging from the chaotic uprising of the Serb population in the ISC, the
Chetniks were comprised of many independent, isolated and disjointed groups. The
collaboration with the Italians allowed the Chetniks to integrate these groups in the
Italian zones, to give them common command structures and supply lines and to
develop a common plan of action. Cooperation with the Italians was instrumental in
defeating the Partisans in many areas. Nevertheless, Grgić had no illusions about the
Italians and their overall role:

This historical fact will remain: that the Italian policy was a horrible crime
against the Serb people by establishing – together with the Germans –
Pavelić’s Croatia. However, the Italian Army stopped the slaughter of the
Serbs by the Ustašas, and afterwards gave the Serbs decisive assistance
to free themselves from the Partisans.

74 AVII, Ca, k. 159, Reg. No. 51/2. People in the woods and mountains were soon left without
any food or proper shelter, and various diseases started to spread. In Grgić’s view, the only
way to ‘save the people’ was collaboration with the Italians. The Italians talked with the
Chetniks in an official capacity ‘like one state to another...despite the fact that we the
Chetniks were in rags’, something that impressed the Chetniks.

75 AVII, Ca, k. 159, Reg. No. 51/2.

76 AVII, Ca, k. 159, Reg. No. 51/2.
Grgić summarises the positive results of one full year of collaboration with the Italians: (i) the Chetnik organisation was better armed than ever before; (ii) the Serb regions were unified and the Belgrade-Cetinje road was open; (iii) the Serb people in the Italian Zones were better off than elsewhere in the ISC; (iv) a connection had been made with allies; and (v) there was Italian political pressure in Zagreb aimed at further protecting the Serbs in the ISC.

In his assessment, opening hostilities with the Italians would: (i) lead to the downfall of the Chetnik organisation because their forces were no match for the Italian army and many would refuse to fight against the Italians; (ii) bring the Serbs into a third round of troubles, after they had survived the Ustaša and the Partisan episodes, forcing the people to again flee into the woods and mountains; (iv) condemn the remaining Serb population in the ISC to death by undoing the Italian protection, because the Ustašas and the Muslims are waiting like blood-thirsty wolves for the moment when they can finish with the remnants of the Serbs; (v) split the Serb leadership, because local Serb leaders would not accept responsibility for such a move; and (v) destroy all efforts to organise everything that was necessary for the renewal of national and state life. The Chetnik leadership agreed with Grgić, and the collaboration with the Italians continued until the Italian capitulation a year later.

The ‘Report by the Commander of the Armed Forces Southeast’ (October 13, 1942) talks about the Italian-Chetnik relationship in eastern Herzegovina, this time from the German perspective. The German point of view is important because it shows the German awareness of the collaboration – both its strengths and weaknesses. The Germans were not interested in mimicking this relationship in their own zones for...

77 The respective capitals of Serbia and Montenegro.
78 AVII, Ca, k. 159, Reg. No. 51/2.
79 Arguably Chetniks also used collaboration as a tool of retribution against Croats and Muslims in the ISC. An Italian report (October 18, 1942) notes that due to the Chetnik action in the Drežnica-Prozor area, between October 6-10, 1942, there were seven hundred killed ‘among the fighters and village population that was resisting’. The villages in question were Muslim and Croat. This is an example of a local episode in the ethno-religious war, of which the Italians (like their German counterparts) were fully aware. See: AVII, Ca, k. 231, Reg. No. 47/6 and 49/6.
80 AVII, NAV-T-312, r. 467, s. 8057157-8.
political reasons, but adopted some aspects of it in the former Italian zones following the Italian capitulation and German takeover of the entire ISC.

Arguing that affairs in eastern Herzegovina had become critical for the interests of the Croat state, the German commander explains that this situation had come about because of unclear policies among the Italians ‘and their Chetnik friends’ – the ten thousand men whom the Italians supplied and paid\(^81\). Apparently, Dr. Nikola Rusinović, the Croat Civil Commissar attached to the Italian command, had toured the region and concluded there had been a systematic expulsion and extermination of the entire Croat population east of the River Neretva. Moreover, this happened right under the noses of the Italians, who were tolerant of these developments. The Italians, General Roatta and his commander in Mostar, Ugo Santovito, did not deny their connections with Mihailović’s Chetniks, but they explained these connections to the Germans as an attempt to reach an arrangement with the Serbs for the time being. The report adds that the ISC leadership in Zagreb (Pavelić, Lorković) suspected these Italian actions were preparatory to adding eastern Herzegovina to Italian-controlled Montenegro. Accordingly, they invited Italian General Roatta to Zagreb to propose replacing the Chetniks with a few Croat battalions. The report adds that the Chetnik units in question were ‘Italian subsidiary units’\(^82\), thus indicating they were MVAC units rather than ‘Illegal’ Chetniks directly loyal to Mihailović.

In the ‘Instructions of the Italian High Command of the Armed Forces Slovenia-Dalmatia’ (October 31, 1942) General Roatta contemplates the creation of MVAC units in the Italian-occupied areas of the ISC along religious lines: ‘Roman Catholic, Muslim or mixed [Catholic/Muslim] anticommmunist voluntary formations...could represent a useful counterweight to the ‘Chetnik’ formations’\(^83\). It is clear that the Italians, in their *divide et impera* strategy, exploited local religious differences to the maximum.

The ‘Report by Dobroslav Jevđević to the Command of the Operative Units of Eastern Bosnia and Herzegovina’ (November 30, 1942)\(^84\) is devoted to the usage of the

\(^81\) AVII, NAV-T-312, r. 467, s. 8057157-8.
\(^82\) AVII, NAV-T-312, r. 467, s. 8057157-8.
\(^83\) AVII, reg. No. 17/2, k. 92.
\(^84\) AVII, Ca, k. 232, Reg. No. 26/14.
local MVAC troops in western Bosnia against the Partisans. Jevđević’s report also illustrates how the Chetnik-Partisan war and ethno-religious conflict overlapped for the Chetniks. Early in the report, Jevđević mentions the possibility of Ustaša conflict with the Italians – something that would be ‘a Godsend’ for the Chetniks – because of the local ISC-Italian tensions, but this was most likely wishful thinking on his part. However, the main topic of the report is the transport of local Chetniks from Herzegovina to the west. Jevđević says that the Italians approved a transfer of three thousand men to Knin by sea. In his view, the Chetniks, being transferred as MVAC, would have the ability to move artillery pieces and radios, thereby arming their counterparts in the west.

Another document from this period demonstrates Chetnik attempts to win over Slavic Muslims and separate them from the Croats, but presenting this in the context of the anti-communist struggle. A Memorandum to the Commander of the 2nd Italian Army from the political delegate of Mihailović’s headquarters, most likely Dobroslav Jevđević (the document is without date or signature but was probably written in November 1942) addresses the issue of cooperation and ways to enhance it. The first part of the memorandum is devoted to the food supply matters which were crucial for the Herzegovina region.

The second part is about security matters, more specifically, securing and pacifying unsafe districts. The author notes that in the Konjic district one Muslim battalion had been legalised, but the armed Serbs who expelled the Partisans from the area were not. It was therefore necessary to ‘calm the spirits’ between the Serbs and Muslims. The best way to achieve this was to have both sides armed, most likely because this would create a balance and act as a deterrent. Another recommendation was to legalise the Chetniks as MVACs in the Mostar district, so that the entire eastern area of Herzegovina east of the River Neretva would be integrated into the MVAC system.

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85 AVII, Ca, k. 232, Reg. No. 26/14. The author also expresses his hope that ‘the Croats would not try anything foolish’ because of the recent Chetnik violence in Bišina.
86 AVII, Ca, k. 231, Reg. No. 10/6.
87 Either a Chetnik-Muslim, or purely Muslim MVAC; it is unclear from the document.
88 The Konjic district was divided into Muslim and Serb settled-areas.
89 AVII, Ca, k. 231, Reg. No. 10/6.
The third part of the memorandum deals with the Chetnik-Italian relationship and is, in many ways, the most revealing of all. The author suggests that with the approval of the Commander of the 2nd Italian Army, the orders given to the 2nd Army should also be given to the Chetnik officers, who will, in turn, give them to the Chetnik troops. Along the same lines, the author argues that Chetnik officers ‘had the right to cultivate national ideals among the troops, because without them the struggle against Communism cannot be envisioned’90. The memorandum notes that the organisation of the troops was the direct responsibility of the Italian Corpus Command, but at the moment of writing, this was transferred to the Division level, so that each Division had local MVAC (Chetnik) troops attached to it.

Chetnik-Italian Tensions and Mistrust

There were inevitably tensions in the precarious Chetnik-Italian relationship. The author of the above-mentioned Memorandum to the Commander of the 2nd Italian Army from the political delegate of Mihailović’s headquarters (November 1942)91 goes through a number of grievances.

First, he notes that the Misina Division in Pribilovci had ordered local Chetnik troops to take off ‘the eagles with skulls’ and distribute the Italian MVAC insignia. A separate section regarding Chetnik equipment is also in the memorandum. The Italians had promised light-brown uniforms (kaki boje) to the Chetniks, but these had never arrived. However, the most important need at that moment was raincoats; the Chetnik troops would not accept the raincoats ‘in the Italian colour’92; they should be black if nothing else could be offered.

Moreover, the Chetnik troops were addressed ‘in the Croat lexicon’ (presumably the translators were Croats)93. The list of Chetnik grievances included the Italian-imposed ban on intra-Chetnik correspondence in the Cyrillic alphabet, even though the

90 AVII, Ca, k. 231, Reg. No. 10/6.
91 AVII, Ca, k. 231, Reg. No. 10/6.
92 Presumably meaning the same colour that the Italian army used.
93 AVII, Ca, k. 231, Reg. No. 10/6.
Italians had used the Cyrillic letters previously in their correspondence with the local Serbs for announcements etc. This could have been either because of the Croats or because it was more difficult for the Italians to follow this alphabet. The memorandum cites an incident in Sarajevo, where the Germans posted a public announcement in Cyrillic. The author of the memorandum says: ‘Cyrillic is both our national and religious script, and has nothing to do with separatism’94.

The memorandum discusses policing, as well. Apparently, the Croat gendarmerie was non-existent in the Herzegovina region, and ‘not a single gendarme would return if they ever dared to step outside of the towns’95. For this reason, the Chetniks asked for permission to organise their own gendarmerie stations.

Certain Chetnik officers were arrested and thrown into prison on Mamula Island of Boka Kotorska, and attempts to release these individuals failed. There were many incidents of Chetnik troops being disarmed for no obvious reason. The author complains that the Italians had arrested Chetnik Lieutenant Dr. Nino Svilokos, a Serb Roman Catholic from Dubrovnik, who had gone to his hometown to provoke a conflict there and make the Italians expel the local Ustaša militia96. Lieutenant Dr. Svilokos’ Dubrovnik mission was characterised by the author of the memorandum only as ‘anticommunist’ (he was described as an anti-communist par excellence), not any other conflict terms.

Clearly, although the Chetnik collaboration with the Italians was important, there was still resistance, if only on a psychological level97.

Chetniks justified their relationship with the Italians as part of their mission to save the local Serb population – from famine, from the Partisans, and from local non-Serb militias alike. A report by Dobroslav Jevđević and Major Petar Baćović to Mihailović

94 AVII, Ca, k. 231, Reg. No. 10/6.
95 AVII, Ca, k. 231, Reg. No. 10/6.
96 For more details on Svilokos’ mission see the telegram from Petar Baćović to Mihailović (September 18, 1942) at AVII, Ca, k. 280, Reg. No. 1/1.
97 AVII, Ca, k. 231, Reg. No. 10/6. The author devotes a section to the Serbs being held in the Italian prison on Mamula Island, asking for their release. The issue of transferring troops from Herzegovina to Knin to fight the Partisans is raised; two thousand troops were ready to be transferred by rail to Metković, by ship to Split and by rail again to Knin and western Bosnia.
(November 1942)\textsuperscript{98} discusses the problems of food supply, the organisation of propaganda against the Partisans and the Chetnik-Muslim and Chetnik-Italian relationships. Taking a now-familiar tone, Jevđević and Baćović present their actions in terms of saving the Serb people. The report contains details about food supplies received from the Italians, as well as an explanation that much of the food supplies had been spent on the ‘illegal units’. This provides a clue to the logistical importance of the ‘legal’ Chetniks for the actual survival of the illegal Chetniks; more specifically, it exposes the internal workings of the Chetnik structure. Some of the supplies had also been hidden away, to be used by the Chetniks once ‘[Mihailović] orders the general operations, depending on the world situation’. ‘Turning’ on the Italians at the right moment by utilising their own supplies had been an unrealised Chetnik plan until the Italian occupation and exit from the area\textsuperscript{99}.

The authors note that the Italian intervention forced ‘the Croats’ (ISC authorities) to provide legal Chetnik Serb families with the same food supplies that they distributed to other families in Herzegovina. They also comment that the Chetniks had resettled Serb refugees whose houses and properties had been burned down in Foča by putting them into abandoned Muslim houses.\textsuperscript{100}

The final section of the report concerns Chetnik-Italian relations. Here, Jevđević and Baćović note that the Italians had given up on the idea of placing Italian officers among the Chetnik (MVAC) troops in Zone III. A persistent lack of trust is expressed by the Chetnik commanders: ‘We have the ability to follow [the Italian] intentions at the source, thus making sure that they will not surprise us by jumping at us’. Exacerbating the situation, the Italians had arrested some Chetnik officers because of the destruction, atrocities against and expulsion of the Croats from the entire Stolac district – some ten to fifteen thousand people. We

\textsuperscript{98} AVII, Ca, Reg. No. 54/4, k. 170.
\textsuperscript{99} AVII, Ca, Reg. No. 54/4, k. 170.
\textsuperscript{100} This list could not be located in the archives. Such a document could proved that the Chetniks were doing ‘humanitarian’ work for the Serb refugees.
would like to point out that this action occurred despite our strict order not to engage in it\textsuperscript{101}.

A book of instructions (January 10-31, 1943)\textsuperscript{102} sent by Mihailović contains more insights into the Chetnik mindset and strategy. This valuable document shows Mihailović’s personal take on Chetnik related developments in the Italian-controlled areas of the ISC. The entry for January 31, 1943 illuminates the Chetnik perception of their enemies, most importantly that of the Italians. Regarding the option of disarming the Italians, referred to as ‘Aunties’\textsuperscript{103} in the document, Mihailović recommends patience:

[The Italians] could still serve us for a struggle against the communists, and they could easily serve us in the struggle against the Ustašas and the Germans as well. The Italians are jealously protecting the territories they captured in Pavelić’s Croatia, so we are going to easily use them against the Germans and against the Croats – especially given that the German progress on the Eastern Front is steadily growing worse, causing an ever-wider rift between them and the Italians\textsuperscript{104}.

Once again, the Chetnik leaders believed that they were using the Italians for their own goals (rather than the other way around).

It seems that Mihailović was well informed about events in the ISC, including the western-most Chetnik units (Dinara Chetnik Division). A report by Dobroslav Jevđević to Mihailović from the end of January 1943\textsuperscript{105} describes the military and political situation of the Dinara Chetnik Division and the local Chetnik-Italian cooperation. Upon close inspection, Jevđević concludes that this Division had only two thousand mobile soldiers; another other two thousand men were organised on the principle of local territorial paramilitary force and positioned in their local villages. However, Jevđević also notes that some six hundred men had recently deserted to the Partisans, taking Italian-supplied weapons along the way. With regards to the officer corps, Jevđević felt there

\textsuperscript{101} AVII, Ca, Reg. No. 54/4, k. 170. This was either an attempt by the authors to relinquish responsibility for the negative effects of this particular action, or an admission of their lack of control in certain areas under their command.

\textsuperscript{102} AVII, Ca, k. 299, Reg. No. 18/1.

\textsuperscript{103} A Chetnik wartime term for the Italians (“Temkufu” in Serbian); this negative assigning of feminine qualities illustrates the Chetnik perception of the Italians.

\textsuperscript{104} AVII, Ca, k. 299, Reg. No. 18/1.

\textsuperscript{105} AVII, Ca, k. 159, Reg. No. 47/2.
were enough men available quantitatively but not in terms of quality. One of the men of highest calibre was Major Stude ‘whose main fault was the fact that he was Croat’ – another indirect suggestion that the Chetniks perceived themselves as a Serb force, rather than a truly Yugoslav one\textsuperscript{106}.

Those Chetnik units that were legalised as Italian anti-communist militia never truly lost their Chetnik spirit. A letter to the Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Independent State of Croatia (January 13, 1943) from Italian General Mario Roatta discusses the organisation of the orthodox MVAC (Milizia Volontaria Anticomunista) in some detail\textsuperscript{107}. General Roatta notes that certain formations sometimes wore the uniforms of the former Yugoslav army and the Serb insignia – presumably the Chetnik insignia – and that some formations ‘allow themselves’ manifestations of a Serb nature, such as the singing of certain songs, particular command structures, and so forth\textsuperscript{108}. However, he also points out that the Yugoslav or Serb flag was not tolerated, at least not in front of the Italian soldiers and civil authorities\textsuperscript{109}. Roatta’s report briefly mentions ‘non-Orthodox’ MVAC units, presumably comprised of Catholics and/or Muslims (meaning that MVAC conscripts were organised and categorised according to religious affiliation). And he adds an interesting note on the Serb and Montenegrin officers in the anticommunist militia: ‘it is possible that some of them, categorised as Croats, are in fact Serbs or Montenegrins (Italian military authorities are not always able to assess this fact)\textsuperscript{110}. Finally, General Roatta concludes by saying it was true that some members of the Orthodox MVAC participated in manifestations against the Croat government, and that orders were given to prevent anti-Croat provocations by these formations\textsuperscript{111}.

One should not forget that the Chetniks had complex relations with Domobrani forces as well (ISC’s regular army forces) in these areas. The ‘Book of Received Reports by the Forward Headquarters [of Mihailović]’ (January 30 to March 6, 1943)\textsuperscript{112} gives insight into the dynamics between the Chetniks and Domobrani troops in the

\textsuperscript{106} AVII, Ca, k. 159, Reg. No. 47/2.
\textsuperscript{107} AVII, reg. No. 40/4, k. 313.
\textsuperscript{108} AVII, reg. No. 40/4, k. 313.
\textsuperscript{109} AVII, reg. No. 40/4, k. 313.
\textsuperscript{110} AVII, reg. No. 40/4, k. 313.
\textsuperscript{111} AVII, reg. No. 40/4, k. 313.
\textsuperscript{112} AVII, Ca, k. 280, Reg. No. 9/1.
Herzegovina region at the time. Jevđević’s entry for March 1 of that year shows how the Italians managed to utilise all of their enemy forces to fight the Partisans. It has already been stated that the Chetniks avoided any direct contact with the Germans, because the Wehrmacht forces attacked them in such instances. Jevđević talks about an itinerary given to his troops by the Italians, including specific routes that were to be taken while marching into the operational zone, to avoid any direct Chetnik-Ustaša contact and conflict. Such games of Chetnik-German and Chetnik-Ustaša avoidance illustrate how these forces could indirectly cooperate on the ground against their common Partisan enemy without coming into direct contact – and direct conflict – with each other.

Such scenarios orchestrated by the Italians had to be carefully planned and executed, and if things went wrong (such as Chetnik-German contact and conflict) the Italians had to do what was necessary to evacuate the Chetniks as MVAC units if they wished to use them later. This complex dynamic of indirect collaboration between the Chetniks on one side and the Germans and ISC forces on the other, and direct collaboration between the Chetniks and the Italians against the Partisans as the common enemy was fully in place by early 1943. This collaboration, however, was very different from the image of direct Chetnik-German and Chetnik-Ustaša collaboration found in the version of wartime history published in socialist Yugoslavia after the war.

The ‘Chetnik Problem’: Operations Weiss and Schwarz

The notes of Italian General Mario Robotti, prepared for his meeting with the members of the Italian supreme command in Rome regarding the military and political situation in the Independent State of Croatia (February 4, 1943), present the ‘Chetnik problem’ (term used by the Wehrmacht for the ISC as a whole) from an Italian perspective. General Roatta’s recommendations include the gradual disarming of the Chetniks in the future, although this was not yet possible.

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113 AVII, Ca, k. 280, Reg. No. 9/1.
114 AVII, reg. No. 1/1, k. 368.
115 AVII, reg. No. 1/1, k. 368.
The ‘Chetnik problem’ and the disparate Italian and Germans views of it came to the fore during the joint German/Italian/Croat operations labelled ‘Weiss and Schwarz’ (‘White and Black’), aimed at destroying the guerrilla resistance groups operating in the Independent State of Croatia. These operations were specifically aimed first at the destruction of the Partisans (Operation Weiss 1 and Weiss 2, Operation Schwarz), with follow-up action aimed at the destruction of the Chetniks (Operation Weiss 3, Schwarz). The Italians wanted to solicit Chetnik help in the first part of the operation (the destruction of the Partisans) before turning on them, but the Germans had different views. The Germans were much more hostile to the Chetniks, and never lost sight of the fact that the Chetniks would launch full hostilities in the event of an Anglo-American landing on the Yugoslav Adriatic coast. In the planning phase of Operation Weiss and Schwarz, the Italians pushed for Chetnik participation in anti-Partisan manoeuvres, while the German command and the Croat government categorically opposed this and sought Chetnik disarmament and disbanding, peacefully or by force.

After a number of German-Italian meetings to discuss the ‘Chetnik problem’, the Italians prevailed; The Chetniks would participate in the first anti-Partisan phase and then be disarmed and/or destroyed. Once this was settled, the German command made plans for Operation Weiss 3, an operation that would be directed against the Chetniks directly. However, due to unforeseen circumstances on the frontline and Italian opposition, Operation Weiss 3 was postponed. In contrast to the multi-segment Operation Weiss, the subsequent Operation Schwarz was aimed at ‘all groups which are in the operational theatre, and which do not belong to regular German, Italian or Croat forces’116. Within the context of Operation Schwarz, the German forces operating in the Italian zone (Montenegro – including Sandžak, as well as eastern Herzegovina) disarmed more than four thousand Chetniks, but then had to refocus on the Partisans.

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116 For more information of Operations Weiss (1-3) and Schwarz from the German perspective see the military diary of OKW at AVII, NAV-T-74, r. 780/5507046-457.
The Increasing Complexity of Italian-Chetnik Relations in the ISC

The Italians were not ready to give up using the Chetniks despite German frustrations, as illustrated in a book of reports received by Mihailović’s headquarters (February 7-25, 1943)\textsuperscript{117}. The entry for February 15 describes some interesting dynamics between the Chetniks, the Partisans and the Italians. Apparently, the Partisans were attacking only the Chetniks and avoiding the Italians, while the Italians were using the Chetniks to avoid having to do any fighting themselves. The entry for this day refers to Lim-Sandžak Chetniks travelling through Bosnia as illegal ‘wild Chetniks’ to avoid compromising themselves to Italians. There is also a reference to a three-hundred-strong Muslim Chetnik troop sent alongside the Herzegovinian Chetniks to fight the Partisans. This entry suggests that joint action between the Serb and Muslim Chetniks occurred on the ground, and if it is correct, it indicates that ethno-religious conflict was being partially amended in some areas.

The entry for February 25, 1943 contains an interesting glimpse into the Chetnik relationship with the Italians, Germans and the ISC forces\textsuperscript{118}. The Italians physically stopped the Chetnik advance towards Livno through Croat-populated western Herzegovina out of fear of Chetnik massacres of the Croat population and potential conflict with the Germans. German and ISC forces suggested that the Italians transfer

\textsuperscript{117} AVII, Ca, k. 289, Reg. No. 8/1 (Book XXXII).
\textsuperscript{118} AVII, Ca, k. 289, Reg. No. 8/1 (Book XXXII).
the Chetnik (officially MVAC) troops via ships, to avoid a Chetnik march through the Croat-populated part of Herzegovina\textsuperscript{119}.

Chetnik power in the Italian zones of occupation grew as a consequence of collaboration, and the behaviour of certain commanders bordered on dangerous overconfidence. An excellent illustration of this appears in a report by Commander Jevđević on the Dinara Chetnik Division (February 28, 1943)\textsuperscript{120} concerning an incident that occurred between Vojvoda Momčilo Đujić, Commander of the Dinara Chetnik Division and local political leader, and the local Italian troops. Đujić erected a large Serb flag on one of the local churches in the town of Knin, but the Italians pulled it down. Reacting to this, Đujić hoisted the flag and assigned a Chetnik guard to it with orders to shoot anyone who tried to dismantle it. The Italians brought in soldiers and armed vehicles and pulled the flag down once again. In response, Đujić proclaimed that the Chetniks and Italians were at war and evacuated Knin. Jevđević criticises such political outbursts by Đujić because such episodes harmed the fragile Chetnik-Italian equilibrium, especially when the Chetniks in the area were expecting the arrival or reinforcements from Montenegro.

At the end of the report, Jevđević comments on the joint German-Italian action against the Partisans in the region. Although he hoped that the occupational forces would simply destroy the Partisans without Chetnik participation, because this would

\textsuperscript{119} AVII, Ca, k. 289, Reg. No. 8/1 (Book XXXII). The Italian Supreme Command was aware that the arrival of the Chetniks from Montenegro (Lim-Sandžak Troops) into the ISC, albeit desired by the Italians to suppress the local Partisans, would worsen Italian-German and Italian-Croat relations. While the Italian military commanders wanted to utilise the Montenegrin Chetniks and MVAC troops in the ISC, the implementation of this plan was delayed on a number of occasions. Pavelić agreed that the Italians could use the Chetniks as MVAC units to fight the Partisans in the ISC, and eventually he consented to the use of the Montenegrin Chetniks in the ISC (in the direction of Prozor, Glamoč and further to the west) as long as these troops returned to Montenegro at the end of the operational phase. Based on the Pavelić-Roatta agreement (January 15th, 1943), the Italian Supreme Command gave the green light to the Montenegrin Chetnik troops (as MVAC) for their entry into the ISC. The Italians armed and equipped the Chetnik troops in anticipation of their departure, but further delays made Mihailović decide to send the Lim-Sandžak Montenegrin Chetnik troops into the area of western Bosnia as illegal (‘wild’) Chetniks; they were to advance via the Jablanica-Prozor-Livno-Glamoč-Bosanski Petrovac route. By the second half of February 1943, however, this transfer had not been executed due to the Partisan advance into Herzegovina (the River Neretva valley) which endangered Italian positions and local garrisons, including that in the town of Mostar. Given the circumstances, the Italians finally approved the Montenegrin Chetnik advance on February 20, 1943.

\textsuperscript{120} AVII, Ca, k. 152, Reg. No. 21/4.
spare the Chetniks from the burden of destroying Serb populated areas, the reality was quite different:

If the occupational forces are advancing without our troops, and the zone of military operations is mostly Serb-populated one, they will destroy all Serb villages and the entire Serb population with the excuse that that they are all Partisans; in order to prevent this, I sent a communiqué to the [Italian] army asking that the Chetnik troops participate in all anti-Partisan operations in the Serb-populated areas\(^{121}\).

Evidently the Chetniks were interested in protecting the local Serb population from destruction, although they had no such concern for the Serb Partisans unless there was a chance of incorporating these men into Chetnik ranks. Jevđević’s remark about total destruction in Serb areas under the auspices of the anti-Partisan struggle probably has to do with the cases in which the Ustaša militia participated in these actions.

The previous chapter established that German policies towards the Chetniks in their zones of occupation in the ISC were rigid and unimaginative. However, this was clearly their choice. It is vital to remember that contemporary German documents reveal a full awareness of what their Italian allies were doing and the extent of their relationship with the Chetniks in the zones of occupation. A lengthy report written by German General Glez von Horstenau in Zagreb discusses the military and political situation in the ISC (February 25, 1942)\(^{122}\). Horstenau’s report contains an overview of the Italian-controlled zones of the ISC, noting that hostility towards Italy could hardly have been greater, and that the Croat masses were gravitating towards feelings of ‘ally’ hatred\(^{123}\). For their part, he says, the Italians considered ‘Croats in the narrow sense’ – presumably meaning the Roman Catholics, thus excluding the Slavic Muslims – as their real enemies in the country, and they did everything possible to undermine them\(^{124}\).

Horstenau also comments that the Chetniks, in full military garb, walked freely in towns occupied by the Italians, while each Croat found with a weapon was ‘put up

\(^{121}\) AVII, Ca, k. 152, Reg. No. 21/4.
\(^{122}\) AVII, NAV-T-501, r. 268, s. 476-91.
\(^{123}\) AVII, NAV-T-501, r. 268, s. 476-91.
\(^{124}\) AVII, NAV-T-501, r. 268, s. 476-91.
against the wall. In Herzegovina, the Italians handed over a Croat military convoy to the Chetniks to do with as they pleased; in effect, Croat ‘independence’ was being trampled at every turn. Horstenau admits he was not familiar with the reasons that prevented the Italians from occupying ‘northern Croatia’ in December 1941. If the Italians had occupied Croatia south of the River Sava (or even the entire ISC) it is likely that some of the policies employed by the Italians in their Zones II and III would have been transplanted to the regions in the north. This would have included measures against the Ustaša militia: their removal from certain areas, restriction of movement or perhaps even abolition in the case of a complete Italian occupation of the ISC. It would have meant the removal of the main aggregate of the ethno-religious war on the ground. This, in turn, would have resulted in a great reduction of guerrilla activities, ultimately helping the German war effort.

Horstenau openly states that the Chetniks were getting their weapons and ammunition directly from the Italians in exchange for food. Finally, Horstenau argues: ‘Prior bad experiences with the insurgents are not preventing the Italians making attempts towards a ‘political solution’ in the spirit of their anti-Croat and pro-Serb policies’. The phrase ‘political situation’ most likely refers to the Italian negotiations with the Chetniks that resulted in the metamorphosis of the existing Chetnik units into MVAC forces. The Chetnik ‘legalisation’ as MVAC units was acceptable to both the Italians and the Chetniks: the Italians hopefully could control the Chetniks and use them to fight the Partisans and undermine the ISC, while the Chetniks were safe from the Italians, and were able to secure military supplies from them without compromising themselves in the eyes of the local Serb population. MVAC units were attached to the Italian occupation forces, and under the Italian command; this meant that the Chetniks had no legal obligations or standing with the ISC.

125 AVII, NAV-T-501, r. 268, s. 476-91.
126 AVII, NAV-T-501, r. 268, s. 476-91.
127 It is unclear whether this term refers to the area north of the River Sava.
128 AVII, NAV-T-501, r. 268, s. 476-91. This mutually beneficial agreement (of which the Germans were aware) reflected each party’s forte: the Italians had an abundant supply of arms and ammunition which the Chetniks lacked, while the Chetniks to some degree controlled food production in the countryside.
129 AVII, NAV-T-501, r. 268, s. 476-91.
Mihailović tried to simplify the complex situation Chetniks were facing in the area by combining ethno-religious conflict and civil war with the Partisans. A letter written by Mihailović to Major Zaharije Sokolović (March 28, 1943)\textsuperscript{130} discusses the Chetnik-Italian cooperation against the Partisans. Mihailović says forceful propaganda should be used on the Chetnik men to promote the ideas that the communists are connected with the Turks, that there are few Serbs among [the Partisans] and the rest are Turks and Ustašas. [The Partisan] connection with the Germans should also be exposed\textsuperscript{131}.

This interesting directive demonstrates the approach taken by the Chetnik leadership to their men: namely, to present the Partisans in national terms, as a non-Serb force, in contrast to the Chetniks, a Serb national force. This ‘fusion of enemies’ (ideological and ethnic fused into one) was a powerful device, because it simplified the multitude of enemies and made things easy to understand for the soldiers. This directive also shows that the Chetnik leadership was most likely aware of the Partisan-German ‘March negotiations’ that were happening at this time; the Partisans were attempting to establish a connection with the Germans to counterbalance the Chetnik-Italian relationship, and the Germans were interested in this for similar reasons.

The Beginning of the End: The Prospect of Italian Capitulation

The prospect of Italian capitulation grew ever more real, rendering collaboration with the Italians increasingly precarious. This is highlighted in a letter written to Mihailović by Dr. Mladen Žujović, Commander of western Bosnian, Lika-Dalmatia and Herzegovina Military-Chetnik Troops (August 6, 1943)\textsuperscript{132}. Besides the Chetnik committee in Split, Žujović notes that there remained only ‘the badly formed, poorly armed, undisciplined and lazy Dinara division’\textsuperscript{133}. Certain regions and the Adriatic Islands had no Chetnik presence at all. The Italians, who considered Split and its environs an integral

\begin{footnotes}
\item[130] AVII, Ca, k. 18, Reg. No. 4/6.
\item[131] AVII, Ca, k. 18, Reg. No. 4/6.
\item[132] AVII, Ca, k. 157, Reg. No. 12/3.
\item[133] AVII, Ca, k. 157, Reg. No. 12/3.
\end{footnotes}
part of Italy, had tolerated the existence of the Chetnik committee and allowed the officers to travel freely and to meet, but no conspiratorial work was possible. Dr. Žujovič adds: ‘The Italians tolerated the Serb and even Great Serb politics to be followed, which was discussing a Yugoslav and even anti-Croat town such as Split’134.

The last segment of the document concerns the problem of Italian capitulation. Žujović knows that Italian capitulation loomed, and asked Mihailović for instructions. He notes that he could either attack the Italians to gain supplies (in a race with the Partisans, who would inevitably do the same) or there could be an agreement with the Italians according to which they would surrender to the Chetniks – an easier option135. He adds that the Italians had repeated on numerous occasions that they would surrender only to the Allies, not to the Partisans, and that the local Italian and Yugoslav populations in the Italian-annexed towns were terrified, with many making attempts to gain visas in order to flee to Italy136. Dr. Žujović expresses his hope that in the event of an Italian capitulation, the Allies would order the Italian army to continue to maintain peace and order in the towns until Allied troops could arrive to replace them; this was the only way to avoid a Chetnik-Partisan war in Dalmatian towns.

With the imminent Italian capitulation, there was a sudden end to a long and complex relationship between the Chetniks and Italians. This situation represented both a challenge and an opportunity for the Chetniks. Italian capitulation ushered in the German takeover of the Italian zones of occupation, which could have meant an abrupt end to all privileges and support that the Italians had provided. With the arrival of the Germans, the position of the Chetniks in the former Italian zones of occupation could have been eroded to that already existing in the German zones to the north. More ominously, the German takeover could have meant renewed atrocities by the Ustašas against the Serbs in the southern areas.

On the other hand, the situation represented an opportunity for the Chetniks, in terms of their position with the Allies and with the Germans. If the Chetniks succeeded in their goal of having the Italians surrender to them instead of to Tito’s Partisans, this

134 AVII, Ca, k. 157, Reg. No. 12/3.
135 AVII, Ca, k. 157, Reg. No. 12/3.
136 AVII, Ca, k. 157, Reg. No. 12/3.
could have brought prestige to them among the Allies and the prize of ‘winning the race’ against the Partisans for Italian arms and supplies. Due to the common Partisan threat, the situation could have been used to revisit Chetnik-German negotiations to create new anti-communist collaboration efforts for the entire territory of the ISC.

The outcome presented a mixture of challenges and opportunities, but the real winners in the Italian surrender turned out to be the Partisans who won the race to capture Italian weapons and supplies. However, the Germans adopted and mimicked some of the Italian policies towards the Chetniks in the former Italian regions, undoubtedly in the face of the growing Partisan threat, and because they had already overstretched themselves. Although the Chetniks kept some of the arrangements previously enjoyed with the Italians, this, arguably, compromised them further in the Allied camp.

**Conclusions Regarding the Italian Zone of the ISC**

Contemporary wartime documents show that the Serb uprising in the ISC came as a direct reaction to Ustaša atrocities against them. More specifically, the Serb uprising occurred primarily within the context of regional ethno-religious conflict. It was not in opposition to the Italians and Germans as Axis occupiers, as the post-Second World War communist historiography has traditionally argued. The Chetniks in the ISC directly emerged out of the Serb uprising, and their collaboration with the Italians should be understood within this context. The initial actions of the Serb rebels were directed against the Ustaša militia and *not* against the Italian army, and this created manoeuvring room for both the Italians and Chetniks, paving the way to the complex wartime Chetnik-Italian relationship in the ISC.

For the Italians in the ISC, the Chetniks represented a tool that could be used to undermine the Ustaša regime when and if it was needed. At the same time, the Italians controlled the Chetniks with the ever-present threat of an Ustaša return to the areas from which they had been removed. The Italians used the Ustaša-provoked Serb uprising in the ISC to masterfully play local Croats against the local Serbs, and by keeping them on this collision course they made sure that they themselves never ended up in the line of fire, as both sides now needed them. Thus, the Italians used the ethno-religious conflict
in the *divide et impera* fashion much more skilfully and with far greater flexibility than their German counterparts in their zones of the ISC.

The ethno-religious conflict in the ISC never abated, but the eruption of the Chetnik-Partisan war added another dimension to the Chetnik-Italian relationship in the ISC. Chetniks and Italians shared common anti-communist ground, and the ever-growing Partisan threat allowed for wide-ranging Chetnik-Italian cooperation. In a somewhat similar fashion to the manner in which the Italians had initially played the Serbs against the Croats (or more precisely, Chetniks against the Ustaša regime), they now supported Chetniks in the civil war against the Partisans. The civil war allowed a formalisation of the Chetnik-Italian relationship by registering numerous Chetnik and volunteer anti-communist militia (MVAC) units as auxiliary formations of the Italian army, an arrangement that circumvented the ISC completely. This way, the Italians could fight a proxy war with the Partisans while preserving their own manpower. At the same time, they ensured that two guerrilla movements would not unite against them. From the Chetniks’ perspective, the MVAC arrangement ensured their survival and strengthened their position in the Serb-populated areas of the Italian controlled ISC. However, despite the numerous benefits that this arrangement brought to the Chetniks (access to Italian arms and supplies, preservation of Serb-populated areas from the Ustaša militia and so on), their relationship with the Italians had negative effects on the overall Chetnik standing within the Allied camp, especially when compared the Partisans.

When set against the overall situation faced by the Chetniks in the German-controlled zones of the ISC, their position in the Italian-occupied areas was strategically speaking much more favourable. Italian-Serb relations were more conductive to mutual cooperation, and they had more shared adversaries (Ustaša regime, the communists). This resulted in extensive Chetnik collaboration with the Italians and, as a consequence, the Chetnik transformation into an anti-communist royalist Serb territorial paramilitary force found its clearest expression in the Italian-controlled regions. Placing the resistance element deliberately ‘on hold’ through their collaboration with the Italians, the Chetniks blended ethno-religious conflict and civil war with the Partisans into one: they were protecting local Serbs by collaborating, used ‘official’ status to settle local scores with non-Serbs, and made attempts to create Muslim Chetnik units under the pretext of anti-communist struggle (really to separate Croats and Slavic Muslims), while presenting the Partisans as a non-Serb (led) force. It was a complex and challenging game, and as
the next chapter will show, these developments had a profound impact on the overall ideology of Mihailović’s movement.
Chapter 7.
The Ethno-religious Conflict and the Chetniks’ Post-war Vision

Introduction

The Chetnik movement which developed in occupied Yugoslavia, with the sole exception of Slovenia, was a traditional royalist, national and conservative Serb force and only nominally Yugoslav. Despite the official Yugoslav label and the participation of some non-Serbs, the Chetniks were essentially a Serb national force from the outset. The movement’s Yugoslav label and official standing with the Yugoslav government in exile was kept for propaganda purposes, for legal continuity, and for added insurance in the war’s aftermath. The real Chetnik focus was on Serb matters. In the ethno-religious conflict, the Chetniks looked to the Serb side, and before long, they started equating themselves with Serbdom.

This does not imply, however, that the Chetniks were anti-Yugoslav as such, or that they did not want to restore Yugoslavia – albeit on their own terms – after the war. Rather, this meant that Serb affairs, such as the creation of a Serb territorial unit, was the first priority for the Chetniks. The restoration of Yugoslavia was a secondary concern, and then only after the successful completion of all Serb-related business. For the Chetniks, the intention was to restore Yugoslavia at the end of the Second World

1 Such conservatism was immortalised in the epic poems of the period, which were (and still are in Serbia) a proud part of the school literature curriculum. Chetnik conservatism can be illustrated by their glorification of ‘Dinarci’ (Mountaineer) views that harkened back to the 19th century and earlier when resistance to foreign invaders was equated with mountainous and less accessible regions of the Balkans (such as Montenegro).

2 This remains true despite the Chetnik movement’s Slovene character in occupied Slovenia. However, the Slovene Chetnik issue is not the main focus of this study.

3 In the equation with Serbdom, certain Chetnik commanders saw fit to ‘exclude’ people from Serbdom, such as Momčilo Đujić’s decreed exclusion of the Serbs from the village of Kanjani near Dmiš from Serbdom and their proclamation as ‘Eastern Orthodox Croats'.
War along the lines of what they believed should have been done in 1918, thereby correcting a number of ‘historical mistakes’⁴.

It should be noted, however, that the Chetnik wartime program was also advantageous to the Slovenes⁵. The Chetnik leadership saw the Slovenes, in contrast to the Croats, as fellow victims of the war. Moreover, the Slovene lands in Yugoslavia, compact and homogenous as they were, never became a matter of internal dispute, and the Chetnik post-war vision not only promised a Slovene territorial unit within Yugoslavia but an expansion of the Yugoslav borders at the expense of the neighbours adjacent to the Slovene lands: Austria, Italy, and Hungary. For this reason, pro-Chetnik writers argued that the Chetnik movement should be seen as a bi-national Serb and Slovene movement. This is true to a certain extent⁶, or it would have been true had the Chetniks won the war; the Croats would have been at a great disadvantage in such a scenario, finding themselves pressed politically and territorially between Serbs and Slovenes.

While the Chetniks focused on Yugoslav Serbs and to a lesser extent on Slovenes, the Partisans attracted a number of Yugoslav groups with their political platform. They drew Slovenes with the promise of a national republic, but unlike the Chetniks, they offered a national republic to the Croats that was comparable to the prewar Banovina of Croatia. Moreover, they attracted autonomist-oriented Slavic Muslims with the promise of Bosnia and Herzegovina as a separate federal unit. Finally, the Partisan platform was popular with federalist-minded Montenegrins and Macedonian Slavs; for both, national identity could be secured in a separate federal unit.

For the Yugoslav Serbs, meanwhile, the Partisan political program offered far less than the Chetniks (most notably in the territorial sense). It is likely that most Serbs who joined the Partisan movement did so for reasons other than their political plan, or

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⁴ From the Chetnik point of view, the biggest mistake of 1918 was not delineating an enlarged Serbia before the overall Yugoslav unification. Other goals included territorial expansions denied in 1918, such as the city of Skadar and its environs.

⁵ In Slovenia, which had a miniscule Serb population, the Chetnik officers and troops were Slovenes.

⁶ Although the Chetniks in Slovenia were of Slovene descent, numerically speaking, the Chetnik forces there were not massive.
were simply unaware of the Chetnik or Partisan political programs. It comes as no surprise that some Chetnik troops in the ISC initially refused to fight against the Partisans simply because they were fellow Serbs; this fact overshadowed political concerns for many Chetnik soldiers in the region in the early stages of the Chetnik-Partisan war.

Despite their official Yugoslav orientation, the Chetniks ultimately failed to attract pro-Yugoslav Croats, largely because of their Serb nationalism and their intended revanchism at the end of the war. The Partisans much more successfully drew pro-Yugoslav Croats.

The Chetniks also harboured menacing plans to launch postwar retribution for the genocide conducted against Serbs in the ISC. Although the Chetniks emphasised in their wartime propaganda that only guilty individuals would be punished at the end of the war, the territorial aspects of their plans, such as Moljević’s ‘Homogenous Serbia’ (June 1941), envisioned a greatly reduced Croatia when compared to the 1939 Banovina of Croatia. The territorial reduction of Croatia could be understood as a collective

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7 The Partisans never reproduced maps or texts of Chetnik plans during or even after the war, unlike the Ustašas who used them in their propaganda as a scare tactic aimed at the ISC’s non-Serbs.

8 One of the key figures in the Chetnik wartime ideological landscape was Dr. Stevan Moljević. Born in 1883 in Rudo (eastern Bosnia), Moljević was a lawyer in Banja Luka during the interwar period. He was a member of Svetozar Pribićević’s Independent Democratic Party, a founding member of the French and British Club, and President of the Serb Cultural Club in Banja Luka. On April 10, 1941, the day the ISC was proclaimed in Zagreb, he escaped to Montenegro. He became a member of the Chetnik Central National Committee in August 1941, and remained a regular member until late January 1944. After he arrived in the Headquarters of the Supreme Command of the Yugoslav Army in the Homeland, that is, the Chetnik HQ, at the beginning of May 1942, he was incorporated in its civilian/political wing. This already included Dragiša Vasić (pre-war Vice-President of the Serb Cultural Club in Belgrade) and Dr. Mladen Žujović (member of the Republican Party). After the Chetnik HQ returned to Serbia from Montenegro in the summer of 1943, he took over the role of main political advisor to Mihailović from Dragiša Vasić. Together with Mihailović, he was one of the main organisers of the Chetnik ‘St. Sava Congress’ in the Serbian village of Ba, near Valjevo, at the end of January 1944. From late January to June 1944, he was one of the Vice-Presidents of the Chetnik Central National Committee, and from June 1944 to early May 1945, he was Secretary (the president) of the Executive Branch of the Central National Committee. He was the author of numerous Chetnik political documents and propaganda pamphlets. He surrendered to the Yugoslav Communist authorities on September 3, 1945. He was put on trial with Mihailović, and sentenced to twenty years in prison where he died; See: AVII, Ca, k. 3, reg. No. 27/1. AVII, Ca, k. 260, reg. No. 26-2/1 and 34-2/1.

9 In the Chetnik version, this territorial reduction went beyond what Croatia-Slavonia had encompassed of in 1918.
punishment even in the unlikely event of restrained Chetnik retribution against Croat civilians at the end of the war. This territorial reduction, threats of retribution, and plans for massive resettlements in the event of a Chetnik victory left little to attract pro-Yugoslav Croats\textsuperscript{10}.

While fighting their militia in the ethno-religious conflict, the Chetniks tried to recruit Slavic Muslims as separate Chetnik troops against the ISC, driving a wedge between these Muslims and Croats in the process. The Slavic Muslims were invited into Chetnik ranks as a way to ‘redeem themselves’ and to avoid any potential retribution after the war, and similar offers were made to the Croats. However, the Chetnik political program, unlike the Partisan one, really had nothing substantial to offer either Slavic Muslims or Croats. Indeed, the Slavic Muslims who cooperated with the Chetniks did so mainly to protect themselves from violence; they were simply opportunistic, going with the strongest group in localities where the Chetniks were the most prominent force.

The Chetniks tried, with varying degrees of success, to split the enemy camp as much as they could: they made attempts to separate Slavic Muslims and Croats, to differentiate the Domobrani and the Ustašas, and to widen the gulf between the Italians and the ISC. The Chetniks believed that the Axis would lose the war regardless of their actions and input; from this standpoint, it was easier to engage in collaboration, because in the grander scheme of things, this would not matter a great deal.

Despite the Chetnik failure to attract pro-Yugoslav Croats and Slavic Muslims, friends and foes alike equated the Chetniks with royal Yugoslavia during the war. Partisan wartime propaganda and ISC propaganda, as well as the historiography produced in socialist Yugoslavia after the war, presented the Chetniks as simple agents of the old regime. In short, they were the force behind the royal regime’s restoration.

\textsuperscript{10} It should be noted that the Chetnik Greater Serbia plans were known to the ISC leadership, and reproduced in their propaganda (in the daily newspapers) to scare Croats and Muslims. The maps eventually reached many others as well. The ISC newspapers wrote about the ‘Greater Serbia’ plan on January 23, 1943, and included an illustrative map. Mihailović was notified by a telegram about this, including the fact that the published map was almost identical to the one made by Stevan Moljević for his ‘Homogenous Serbia’ plan. It is unclear how Moljević’s plan found its way from the Chetnik HQ to Zagreb. See: AVII, Ca, k. 289, reg. No. 7/1.
This view is overly simplistic. The Chetniks indeed saw themselves as the Yugoslav government in exile, and were, in turn, recognised as representatives of this government. However, the Chetnik vision of a post-war royal Yugoslavia differed from the pre-war situation of which the Chetniks were vocally critical, pointing at the members of the Yugoslav government in exile and others who had fled the country as embodiments of those undesirable policies. For royalist Chetniks, the King alone embodied a sense of continuity, and they eagerly awaited his return from exile. However, the Chetniks had every intention of reconstituting royal Yugoslavia according to their own ideas after the war, following their envisaged complete takeover of the country. Thus, the Chetniks as royalists represented both continuity with the old regime and something new that stemmed from their immediate wartime experiences and the Serb’s pre-war frustration with the state of affairs in Yugoslavia.

This dichotomy is most evident when considering the Chetnik wartime vision of a post-war royal Yugoslavia that was, in fact, an adaptation of a prewar proposal made by the Serb Cultural Club¹¹. They envisioned a tripartistic (i.e. tri-partate) Yugoslavia comprised of Serb, Croat, and Slovene territorial units radicalised by wartime experiences. From the outset, the Chetnik program focused on the creation of the Serb territorial unit, which could exist as an independent country – without Yugoslavia if necessary.

The dichotomy between the old and the new extended to the Chetnik relationship with the Yugoslav military heritage. After Serbia’s heroic resistance in World War I, the complete meltdown of the Yugoslav royal army during the April War (1941) was an embarrassment to those officers who had avoided capture and became Chetnik wartime leaders. A guilty party was sought and found, and the ‘stab in the back’ theory was created to explain the April War catastrophe in meaningful terms. Despite this, the Chetnik leadership wanted to prove itself and neutralise the shame of the April War.

¹¹ Dragiša Cvetković’s ‘Serb Lands’ proposal from 1940 was similar, albeit with no acknowledgment from the Chetniks. Dragiša Cvetković was blamed for capitulating to the Croats in 1939 over the creation of Croatian Banovina, and got no credit for his intention to create a Serb (and Slovene) Banovina.
Thus, although the Chetniks were a continuation of the Yugoslav royal army\textsuperscript{12} and an instrument of the Yugoslav royal government in exile, they also acted independently.

To make things easier for their followers, Chetnik propaganda tried to reduce any complexities and ‘combine’ their enemies from both the resistance and from the ethno-religious and civil wars, portraying the Partisans, for example, as non-Serbs\textsuperscript{13}. As will be demonstrated, most Chetnik wartime propaganda was directed at a Serb civilian audience, with only sporadic proclamations designed for non-Serbs.

The Chetnik commanders also believed and reported to their superiors that the Domobrani in the ISC, as well as the Ustaša forces on occasion and members of the Muslim militia, were defecting to the Partisans to avoid the potential for retribution at the end of the war. This process was seen as extremely dangerous because this type of recruitment gave an increasingly anti-Serb character to the Partisan forces. Ironically, the Chetnik propaganda image that the Partisans were not Serbs reflected their deepest fear\textsuperscript{14}.

The Chetnik desire for revanchism went beyond ongoing wartime matters; the Chetnik leadership saw the Second World War as an opportunity to solve a number of pre-1918 questions, such as the status of Muslims, the ‘Skadar question’, etc. There was a feeling that at the end of World War I a number of mistakes had been made, most significantly the failure to create an enlarged Serb state \textit{first}, prior to wider South Slavic unification, thereby serving the additional purpose of criticising the old regime.

Arguably the most controversial aspect of Chetnik post-war plans was the intention to take punitive measures against all those who had targeted Serb civilians during the war. As an extension of this, ethno-religious engineering within Yugoslavia after the war became part of the Chetnik vision. This included the expulsion of non-Yugoslav national minorities and massive internal resettlement and separation of the

\textsuperscript{12} One of the Chetniks’ core wartime beliefs was that professionally trained military officers were necessary to lead a successful resistance guerrilla movement; as a result, they continually underestimated the Partisans because army officers were not leading them.

\textsuperscript{13} Partisans as non-Serb forces combined the civil and ethno-religious conflict.

\textsuperscript{14} As the end of the war approached, the only option of ‘escape’ for men in the ISC armed forces was to join the Partisans; this did not include the Chetniks, as the route was open only to Serbian and Montenegrin quisling forces.
Yugoslavs. The idea was to segment Yugoslavia internally into Slovenia, Croatia and Serbia, all three of which would be nationally compact and homogenous with no external or internal national minorities. This would have allowed territorially-defined ‘national possessions’ for Slovenes, Croats, and Serbs within Yugoslavia. Thus, in case of the country’s breakup, there would be no cause for war. The Chetniks never openly advocated collective punishment, and according to Chetnik wartime propaganda, only the guilty were to be punished after the war. That said, the reduced size of Croatia and massive resettlement programs were clearly going in the direction of collective retribution.

It should be noted that the episodes of the ethno-religious conflict in which Chetniks were involved were local affairs that had little to do with the bigger picture of the Second World War. As will be shown later, the Yugoslav government in exile did not want Chetnik participation in the ethno-religious conflict. The eruption of this war during enemy occupation brought with it the danger that the Allies would conclude that Yugoslavia was an unsustainable state that should not be re-established after the war.

Certain wartime episodes in which the Chetniks were involved were part of the ethno-religious conflict, as for example when the Chetniks cleared Slavic Muslims out of the Sandžak area to secure a direct connection between Serbia and Montenegro. Conflict with the Ustaša militia in the ISC was of a similar nature, although technically, the Chetnik leadership could interpret both conflicts as part of the ‘Allies versus Axis scenario’ for their Allied audience.

This said, the Allies, and particularly the British, largely ignored the ethno-religious conflict in occupied Yugoslavia in both their propaganda and policy-making, because they wanted to see the country restored at the end of the war. This, however, also meant ignoring the genocide against Serbs in the ISC; bringing this issue to the forefront would have undoubtedly necessitated an entire re-examination of the Yugoslav state concept.

If the Chetniks had been successful (assuming fair land distribution between the three Yugoslav territorial units), this would have allowed a Czechoslovak-style ‘Velvet Divorce’ between Slovenia, Croatia, and Serbia at some point in the future.
The Chetnik collaboration complicated matters significantly, not only politically but in terms of motivation and the readiness of Chetnik troops. By the summer of 1944, the Chetniks were in political limbo. The entry of the Red Army into Serbia at the beginning of October 1944 spelled doom for the whole Chetnik wartime strategy. Mihailović’s expectation that the western Allies (most likely the British, but preferably the Americans) would land on the Yugoslav side of the Adriatic never materialised. Ironically, the main Chetnik strategy – waiting for the Allies – in a way materialised for the opposing side, the Partisans, with the arrival of the Red Army. The Chetniks still considered themselves as belonging to the Allied camp, but the reality of their position became evident within days of their first contact with the Red Army. Undoubtedly with Stalin’s knowledge, the Red Army commanders began disarming the Chetnik units with which they came into contact in Serbia, even after some local Chetnik units provided assistance on the ground. Upon realising that contact with the Red Army resulted in disarmament and being handed over to Tito’s partisans, Serbian Chetnik units retreated from Šumadija towards the south; this meant abandoning Serbia – the main Chetnik base – to Tito, and pointed to the failure of the entire war effort.

**The Evolution of the Wartime Program**

The Chetnik wartime program was not officially defined and adopted until the St. Sava Congress, held in the village of Ba in occupied Serbia from January 26-28th,
1944\textsuperscript{16}. However, the program adopted during this Congress had an evolutionary history that can be traced back to at least 1937\textsuperscript{17}, and by some accounts to 1918.

In order to understand the evolution of the Chetnik wartime program, it is important to point out certain political trends that had existed in Yugoslavia in the late interwar period. For many of the Serb elite at the time, the preservation of the \textit{status quo} in the kingdom was both desirable and advantageous. Nevertheless, the ‘Croat question’\textsuperscript{18} had become too difficult to ignore by 1939, resulting in the Cvetković-Maček Agreement that created the Banovina of Croatia\textsuperscript{19}. The agreement abolished the unitary state model (as well as, \textit{without officially saying so}, the pursuit of a unitary Yugoslav national ideology) and set royal Yugoslavia onto a path of ethnic federalisation, a development cut short by the oncoming war.

\textsuperscript{16} Information about the St. Sava Congress comes from a number of different sources. The text of the Congress’ final resolution was widely distributed to the public by the Chetniks, and one of these leaflets is kept in the National Library of Serbia. See: ‘Yugoslav Democratic People’s Union: Decisions of St. Sava Congress in the free Serb mountains, 1944’, National Library of Serbia, II 135199. Surviving participants of the Congress who managed to escape the Partisans and reach the West at the end of the war also published their reminiscences, such as those found in the two-volume work \textit{Knjiga o Draži} (Windsor, Ontario, 1956). Between January and September 1944, various Chetnik publications produced additional materials in relation to the Congress, including complete speeches by participants and an analysis of the final resolution. Taken together, these sources paint a fairly complete picture of the Congress.

\textsuperscript{17} The Serb Cultural Club, a prewar organisation influential to Chetnik wartime leadership, was founded in January 1937. For further information on its founding, see: Dimić, Ljubodrag. \textit{Srpski kulturni klub izmedju kulture i politike}. in Književnost, No. 9-10 (1993), pp. 858-903. Both the Serb Cultural Club (before the war) and the Chetnik wartime leaders frequently advocated ‘a return to 1918’ in their quest for a new ethnic federal Yugoslavia; in this regard, their spiritual predecessors were Serb politicians who had advocated expanding and defining Serbia’s new borders before incorporating it into Yugoslavia; the most famous representative of this political thinking was Nikola Pašić.

\textsuperscript{18} The ‘Croat question’ in the political language of the day (which also found its way into the historiography) refers to the issue of Croat territorial autonomy in royal Yugoslavia or even independence from it. The Croat question became the main internal issue of Yugoslav politics from the country’s founding days. For an example of pre-Agreement discourse, see: Dr. Marković, Lazar. \textit{Yugoslav State and the Croat Question}. (Geca Kon: Beograd, 1925).

\textsuperscript{19} From October 1929 to August 1939, the Kingdom of Yugoslavia was divided into nine Banovinas and the City of Belgrade. Each Banovina derived its name from geographical features, in most cases, the largest river, and the borders of the Banovinas were designed in such a way as to eliminate former historical regions and ethno-religious allegiances. Although the Banovina of Croatia was an extension of the Banovina system with significantly increased powers, the new entity was envisioned as a form of Croat territorial autonomy in Yugoslavia.
Yugoslav Serb leaders were not entirely prepared for the changing political environment that came with the Cvetković-Maček Agreement and thus had to improvise. Through organisations such as the Serb Cultural Club, prominent Yugoslav Serbs came up with the concept of expanding the conclusions of the Cvetković-Maček Agreement by vocally demanding the creation of a Serb and by default a Slovene territorial unit as a counterweight to the Banovina of Croatia. As a Serb reaction to the 1939 Agreement, the concept of Yugoslav trialism, as a form of ethnic federalism, was taking shape, both within and beyond the Yugoslav royal court circles. Once the war engulfed the country in April 1941, many prominent members of the Serb Cultural Club became directly involved with the Chetnik movement, and the prewar ideas of the Club provided the basis for the Chetnik wartime program.

Between June 1941 and January 1944, a number of proposed Chetnik blueprints for postwar Yugoslavia can be identified in the surviving archival documents. They all point to the common goal of creating a Serb federal unit (sometimes, but not always, called ‘Serbia’) within Yugoslavia as a national possession and a guarantee of future security for Yugoslav Serbs. Moving in the same direction as the post-Agreement vision of the Serb Cultural Club and Prime Minister Dragiša Cvetković (although this link to Cvetković’s ideas was not acknowledged), the Chetnik wartime blueprints for a trialistic Yugoslavia were radicalised by contemporary wartime realities and conditions.

The St. Sava Congress in January 1944 was the largest and most important gathering of the Chetnik leadership during the war. At this meeting, the Chetniks shaped their blueprints into an official program. It was held two months after the CPY’s Second AVNOJ, where the Partisan leadership led by Josip Broz Tito had officially adopted its own blueprint for postwar Yugoslavia. The St. Sava Congress reaffirmed the trialistic model of ethnic federalism for Yugoslavia, as evidenced in Chetnik-related documents from June 1941 onwards, with a continued focus on establishing a large Serb territorial unit within the Yugoslav state as a pre-condition to any renewed South Slavic union.

From January 1944 to the end of the war, the official Chetnik war aims were openly presented to the Yugoslav public, and the Chetnik vision of a Yugoslav trialistic

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20 ‘Yugoslav trialism’ will be used to describe (the hypothetical) royal Yugoslavia, internally comprised of three ethnically-based autonomous units: Serb, Croat and Slovene.
ethnic federation became part of the propaganda struggle with the Partisans and their AVNOJ plan for ‘the ‘six republics, five nations’ model; both sought to win over the hearts and minds of Yugoslavs.

The following represents a more detailed analysis of these events, presented chronologically.

**The Point of No Return: the Cvetković-Maček Agreement**

The Cvetković-Maček Agreement\(^{21}\), primarily intended to resolve ‘the Croat question’ in Yugoslavia, was signed on August 26, 1939, only a few days before the outbreak of war in Europe\(^{22}\). The timing of the agreement was not coincidental; in fact, it was the inevitability of the approaching war that forced Prince Regent Paul to come to terms with the Croats, at the time represented by Dr. Vladko Maček, leader of the Croatian Peasant Party (CPP)\(^{23}\). In the face of growing external threats to the country, the Yugoslav Serb and Croat political elites decided to address the Croat question at what seemed to many to be a very advanced stage.

Prince Regent Paul had no love for federalism, but he realised that reaching a deal with the Croats could strengthen the country and provide a basis for long-desired internal unity\(^{24}\). In January 1937,\(^{25}\) he tried unsuccessfully to reach a resolution by organising a meeting between Prime Minister Milan Stojadinović and Vladko Maček. Stojadinović’s lack of progress on the Croat questions was one of the reasons why Prince Regent Paul replaced him with Dragiša Cvetković, one of Stojadinović’s former

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\(^{21}\) CMA for short.

\(^{22}\) After 1939, Serb and Slovene politicians added ‘the Serb question and the Slovene question’ to the political discourse as a reaction to perceived Croat gains.

\(^{23}\) Hereafter CPP for short.

\(^{24}\) For more details about the importance that Prince Regent Paul gave to internal unity in the face of external pressures see: Dr. Boban, Ljubo. *Sporazum Cvetković-Maček*. (Institut Društvenih Nauka: Beograd, 1965), pp. 84-85.

\(^{25}\) Coincidentally, the same month as the Serb Cultural Club was created.
ministers, in February 1939\textsuperscript{26}. As the new Prime Minister, Dragiša Cvetković was directly instructed by Prince Regent Paul to deal with the Croat issue. Alongside a group of experts from various fields, Cvetković and Maček started working on the new Agreement quickly, but despite the urgency, it took them a full six months to reach consensus\textsuperscript{27}.

The Agreement opened with a pro-Yugoslav statement, reaffirming the acceptance of the Yugoslav state in principle by both parties\textsuperscript{28}. The statement was followed by the specific points of the agreement, from the entry of Maček’s Croatian Peasant Party into the Yugoslav government to the creation of the Banovina of Croatia\textsuperscript{29} and the definition of its territorial extent. The Agreement ensured the political equality of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes in the Banovina of Croatia and all other parts of the country. The Banovina of Croatia would have its own assembly called the ‘Sabor’ and would be led by a governor, called the ‘Ban’\textsuperscript{30}. The Ban of the Banovina of Croatia would be a representative of the King, and he would be directly responsible to the King and the Sabor.

\textsuperscript{26} A detailed first-hand account of these events is available in Milan Stojadinović’s book of recollections \textit{Ni rat ni pakt: Jugoslavija izmedju dva rata}. (Rijeka: 1970). After the war Stojadinović continued to argue that he could have saved Yugoslavia from the disaster: ‘If I had remained in power, Yugoslavia would not have faced the tragic dilemma of choosing between the two evils, fighting the war or signing the [tripartite] pact with the Axis. Yugoslavia would have been spared both the war and the pact…Yugoslavia would have preserved its freedom and independence via neutrality, similar to how Sweden or Turkey did this…Because of the utter incompetence of Prince Regent Paul and Dragiša Cvetković Yugoslavia in the end suffered from both evils: from the humiliation of having to sign the pact, as well as the subsequent horrors of war’ (Ibid, pp. 661-662).

\textsuperscript{27} For Maček’s post-war recollection of these events see: Maček, Vladko. \textit{In the Struggle For Freedom}. (New York: 1957), pp. 177-195. For Dragiša Cvetković’s account see his article ‘The Meaning, Character, and Consequences of the Serbo-Croatian Agreement’ published in Glasnik SIDK Njegos, December 1962, pp. 8-27. Both Maček and Cvetković survived the war and managed to reach the West to publish their own accounts of the Agreement. This provides remarkable insight into the process of the Agreement’s conception. Dragiša Cvetković also wrote a book titled \textit{Rat ili Pakt: Unutarnja i Spoljna Politika Namašnjava} (1965), but the book was never published; the manuscript is located in Dragiša Cvetković Papers, 1928-1965, Hoover Institution Archives, Stanford, California.

\textsuperscript{28} ‘Yugoslavia is the Best Guarantee of the Independence and Progress of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes’. See: \textit{Politika}, No. 11220, August 27, 1939. Belgrade’s daily newspaper published the entire text of the Agreement and the accompanying map a day after the document was signed.

\textsuperscript{29} There is no standardised English name for this historical entity, although the ‘Banate of Croatia’ is sometimes used.

\textsuperscript{30} The choices of titles (Sabor, Ban) were deliberate linguistic throwbacks to the period of Croatian autonomy in Austria-Hungary.
The Agreement was envisioned to be only temporary in nature, until a new constitutional assembly approved a new Yugoslav constitution\(^{31}\). It was viewed as a political emergency measure, and it certainly created the impression of an incomplete project – something that proved to be its biggest flaw.

Both hardcore Croat separatists and Serb nationalists saw the Agreement in a negative light: Croat separatists argued that it yielded too little to Croatia, while Serb nationalists argued that it gave too much. There were also objections from Montenegrin federalists, from Slovenia calling for the transformation of Banovina Dravska into Banovina Slovenia, and from Muslims of Bosnia and Herzegovina who objected to the partition that violated the historical borders of the two provinces\(^{32}\). Pressures mounted from all sides, but in the short interval between the signing of the Agreement on August 26, 1939, and the Axis invasion of Yugoslavia on April 6, 1941, there was simply too little time for it to fully address Yugoslav internal problems. While it had clearly come too late, however, the Agreement gave clues to the future internal organisation of royal Yugoslavia.

As defined by its creators, the Agreement was to be only the first step in the reorganisation of the country. However, Cvetković and Maček had different visions as to what this future reorganisation of the rest of the country meant. For Maček, the Agreement was only a start to solving the Croat question in Yugoslavia, and he expected that further stages would increase both the autonomy of the Banovina of Croatia and its

\(^{31}\) Cvetković-Maček Agreement. Politika, No. 11220, August 27, 1939.

\(^{32}\) For a detailed discussion of the attitudes towards the Agreement of various Yugoslav political groups and parties not allied with Cvetković or Maček, see: Dr. Boban, Ljubo. Sporazum Cvetković-Maček. (Institut Društvenih Nauka: Beograd, 1965), pp. 218-280.
territorial extent\textsuperscript{33}. That said, in the aftermath of the Agreement, Prime Minister Cvetković started working with a group of legal experts on transforming the entire Yugoslav state territory east of the Banovina of Croatia into a Serb territorial unit to be called ‘Serb Lands’, with its capital in Skopje\textsuperscript{34}. Such an arrangement would imply that Banovina Dravška, the Yugoslav territory to the west of the Banovina of Croatia, would be transformed into the Banovina of Slovenia.

This was a logical move at the time. Officially, the Kingdom of Yugoslavia recognised only Serbs, Croats and Slovenes as individual tribes\textsuperscript{35} of the common Yugoslav nation. This trialistic ideological approach was now on its way towards embracing a territorial dimension, leading to the gradual internal federalisation of Yugoslavia as three distinct ethnic units.

Prime Minister Cvetković’s plan for the creation of a Serb territorial unit essentially meant that Maček’s aspirations for further territorial gains for the Banovina of

\textsuperscript{33} The reaction of the Serb Cultural Club to the possibility of additional Croat territorial claims following the Agreement was summed up by historian Dr. Vladimir Ćorović: ‘Even the closest advisors of Dr. Maček…pointed out on more than one occasion that securing the Banovina of Croatia was only a phase in the further national struggle of the Croats. To us [the Serbs] it is clear what that next phase can be. Thus, nobody can criticise us for wanting to create a common national platform in response’. \textit{Srpski Glas}, No. 2, 1939. Further territorial claims were to be located in Bosnia-Herzegovina, Vojvodina (Srem and Bačka), as well as Baranja and Boka Kotorška. Serbo-Croat territorial squabbling in Yugoslavia continued until the very day of the Axis invasion. Following the military coup of March 27, 1941, Maček was invited to join the new government. He remained out of the government for a week, trying to gain Subotica (in Bačka) for the Banovina of Croatia in return for his support. Apparently the royal regime agreed to this, and Maček arrived in Belgrade on April 4 to join the government; the actual transfer never occurred, because Yugoslavia was attacked two days later. For more information, see: Dučić, Jovan. \textit{Sporna pitanja Krajevine Jugoslavije}. (Beograd: 1990), p. 240. The episode was also reported in \textit{The New York Times}.

\textsuperscript{34} The complete blueprint can be found in: Dr. Boban, Ljubo. \textit{Sporazum Cvetković-Maček}. (Institut Društvenih Nauka: Beograd, 1965), pp. 412-418. It is in Dr. Vasa Ćubrilović’s private collection; Dr. Ćubrilović received it directly from Dragiša Cvetković on September 9, 1943. Dr Boban’s book was the first public exposure of Cvetković’s plan, although many Yugoslav politicians were aware of its existence during the 1939-1941 period. For a report on the Serb Lands project by Dragiša Cvetković, see: \textit{Hrvatski dnevnik}, No. 1558, January 28, 1940. To create the blueprint, the Prime Minister called on the same group of experts used to draw up the 1939 Agreement. The name of the Serb federal unit (‘Serb lands’), the choice of its capital (Skopje) and the proposed title of its head (‘Veliki Župan’; ‘Велики Жупан’) were all a throwback to Mediaeval times and traditions. See also: Dr. Ljušić, Radoš. \textit{Srbija 19. veka}. (Vojna knjiga: Beograd, 1998), pp. 287-288.

\textsuperscript{35} By choosing the term ‘tribe’, Yugoslav authorities acknowledged that Serbs, Croats and Slovenes existed as individual ethnic structures. At the same time they considered them sub-national groups, Yugoslavs being the only constituent national group in the country.
Croatia by the Yugoslav royal regime would be in vain. The same was true for smaller players in Yugoslav politics, such as the Yugoslav Muslim Organisation, which called for Bosnia and Herzegovina as the fourth federal unit, or Montenegrin federalists who wished to see Montenegro as a separate unit in its own right; autonomy for Macedonia, a pre-1918 territory of Serbia, was even less likely. The Croat question was now being replaced by the hitherto dormant ‘Serb question’, with political pressures for state transformation potentially much greater than the pressure from the Croats, who were only half as numerous as the Serbs.

Despite its incompleteness and the delays in implementation, the Cvetković-Maček Agreement marked the end of the unitary Yugoslav state and any unitary national ideology. With the Agreement’s approval, the Yugoslav royal regime abandoned its goal of creating a single Yugoslav nation by fusing together Serbs, Croats and Slovenes. Yugoslavia was now serving as a common state edifice for three separate national groups. Thus, the Cvetković-Maček Agreement transformed the Yugoslav state profoundly, and there would be no return to pre-1939 unitarism. This development had major implications during the war years and beyond.

Despite all its faults, the Agreement managed to lessen Serb tensions with the Croats, without entirely resolving them. However, it also unwittingly energised previously dormant but equally unresolved questions of the Serb and Slovene national position in Yugoslavia.

One of the side effects of King Aleksandar’s royal dictatorship imposed in January 1929 was the breakdown of Serbian political parties. By the time royal dictatorship had been lifted, Serbs were fragmented on the Yugoslav political scene and lacked a true representative that could speak in the name of the entire nation (unlike the Croats, who had the CPP to act in that role). The Serb Cultural Club (SCC) – the real ideological forefather of the wartime Chetnik movement, as will be shown later – was

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37 This can be attested by the Chetnik wartime ideology (with the Chetniks taken as the continuation of the ‘old regime’) that advocated its own version of trialism while continuing to bitterly criticise the Agreement and its brokers.

38 Abbreviated to SCC.
created in January 1937 to fill that representational void, and to provide the necessary leadership for Yugoslav Serbs\textsuperscript{39}.

The SCC was led by the Serb intellectual élite and envisioned as a national voice that was beyond party politics\textsuperscript{40}. The president of the Club was Slobodan Jovanović, a prominent Serb intellectual of the interwar and pre-Yugoslav era\textsuperscript{41}. The SCC brought together individuals from various positions on the Serb political scale, their common ground being dissatisfaction with both Yugoslav political developments and the internal situation. More specifically, many political factions that would have otherwise been unable to find consensus reacted negatively to the Cvetković-Maček Agreement. When the SCC started publishing \textit{Srpski Glas}\textsuperscript{42} in November 1939, this publication became the

\textsuperscript{39} The SCC held its first public forum on February 4, 1937. Slobodan Jovanović, an historian by profession and its first president, summarised the Club’s platform in the following words: ‘The Serb Cultural Club, according to its founders, should be a place of meeting and discussion for all those who are interested in the questions related to Serb national culture. National culture is taken in the widest possible sense, encompassing both material and spiritual culture’. Quoted in: Dimić, Ljubodrag. \textit{Srpski kulturni klub izmedju kulture i politike} published in \textit{Književnost} (1993), No. 9-10, p. 861. The SCC was comprised of prominent intellectuals from various branches of arts and sciences: historians Stanoje Stanojević, Vladimir Ćorović, Vasa Ćubrilović; ethnologists Tihomir Đorđević and Veselin Ćajkanović; literary critics Bogdan and Pavle Popović; sculptors Djordje Jovanović and Sreten Stojanović, university deans and professors (and future members of the Chetnik movement) Dr. Dragiša Vasić, Dr. Mladen Žujović, Dr. Nikola Stojanović, Dr. Slobodan Drašković, Dr. Vojislav Vujanac and others. For more details, see: Dr. Todorović, Dragoje. \textit{Dr. Stevan Moljević: rečju, perju, delom i životom za Ujedinjeno Srpstvo}. (Beograd, 2000), p. 88. Other Club Presidents were Dr. Nikola Stojanović (a lawyer) and Dragiša Vasić (a lawyer and writer).

\textsuperscript{40} Slobodan Jovanović pointed out: ‘State authorities are not capable of securing and protecting the Serb national interest in the Kingdom of Yugoslavia. Ever since the creation of the common Yugoslav state, the opinion that the Serb national question had been completely solved took hold among the majority of Yugoslav Serbs. Because of that, care for national development was neglected, the so-called “national demobilisation” took place, the idea of national unitarism (later, integral Yugoslavism) in the form of one nation with three names was uncritically accepted, Serb interests in the south and northwest of the country were overlooked, there was no effort to integrate the Serbs nationally, economically, culturally...Serb politicians acted as if they were not aware of the biological fatigue of the Serb national body and enormous suffering during the 1912-1918 wars; they also acted as if they were not aware that with the creation of the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes...the borders of different civilisations and religions have been crossed’ Quoted in: Dimić, Ljubodrag. \textit{Srpski kulturni klub izmedju kulture i politike}, published in \textit{Književnost} (1993), No. 9-10, pp. 658-9. In this way, the SCC disassociated itself in large part from the Yugoslav royal regime even before the 1939 Cvetković-Maček Agreement. The Chetniks adopted this trend during the war years.

\textsuperscript{41} Slobodan Jovanović was born in 1869 in Belgrade. He worked as a professor at the University of Belgrade. For additional biographical information, see: \textit{Stenographic Record and Documents from the Trial of Dragoljub Draža Mihailović} (Beograd, 1946), p. 10.

\textsuperscript{42} \textit{Srpski glas} in Serbian.
main avenue of communication between the organisation and the general public; a recurring motif was the negative reaction to the Cvetković-Maček Agreement. According to the SCC, it gravely endangered the interests of the Serbs in Yugoslavia. By emphasising that Prime Minister Dragiša Cvetković had no popular mandate to represent, let alone make decisions in the name of the Yugoslav Serbs, the SCC pronounced the Agreement non-binding and invalid for the Serb nation. It repeatedly argued that the Agreement should be rejected and nullified, but if reversing the situation was not possible, the SCC suggested that Serbs start their own struggle to secure their interests in Yugoslavia under these new conditions.

For the SCC, the Cvetković-Maček Agreement was seen negatively in almost every aspect, but it was the territorial extent of the Banovina of Croatia that was viewed as its worst feature. They called for exclusion from the newly created the Banovina of Croatia of those municipalities and villages outside of Savska and Primorska Banovina that had no Croat majority. The SCC also demanded territorial changes that went beyond those prescribed by the Agreement, arguing that territories with a Serb majority in Savska and Primorska Banovina should also be excluded from the Banovina of Croatia.

The SCC was certainly not the only organisation that criticised the Cvetković-Maček Agreement for its incompleteness. Creating the Banovina of Croatia without

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43 ‘The condition for success of the Serbo-Croatian agreement is that not only the Croats, but also the Serbs are genuinely represented’ Srpski Glas, No. 1, November 16, 1939; ‘What Mr. Dragiša Cvetković agreed with Mr. Maček is not binding for the Serb people’ Srpski glas, No. 12, February 1, 1940.

44 ‘The borders of the new Croatian Banovina created among the Serbs a real shock and large resentment’ Srpski Glas, No. 2, November 23, 1939.

45 The Banovina of Croatia included more than eight hundred thousand Serbs, and the Serb Cultural Club openly criticised the royal regime in Belgrade for abandoning ‘almost a million’ Serbs to reach a deal with the Croats. For an example of the SCC’s criticism of the Yugoslav royal regime’s ‘un-national’ behaviour, see: Srpski Glas, No. 12, 1940.

46 ‘We want an agreement, but according to certain principles – either ethnic, or historical, or economic and geographic – for the entire area where Serbs and Croats live. We will never leave districts with a Serb majority in Croatia [geographic], Dalmatia, Bosnia and Slavonia to the Banovina of Croatia... Serbs in those regions should have the right to decide for themselves whether or not they would like to join the Serb territorial unit or stay in the Banovina of Croatia’. See: Srpski Glas, No. 2, November 23, 1939 and No. 12, February 1, 1940.
giving further definition to the remaining parts of Yugoslavia was clearly unsustainable in the long term, though this was admittedly recognised by the Agreement itself.

Other tensions sprang from the Agreement. As an immediate consequence of the Agreement, Maček’s CPP acquired a dual position of power, holding power alone in the Banovina of Croatia and sharing it on the Yugoslav state level through a number of ministries, such as the Ministry of Finance and the Ministry of Trade and Industry\(^{47}\). The sudden influx of CPP personnel into positions of power, especially on the Yugoslav level, was threatening to the economic élite in Serbia, who had been supreme since 1918. The CPP made the situation worse by implementing widespread – even excessive – personnel changes, both in the Banovina of Croatia and in the Yugoslav ministries under its control. These personnel changes most often included replacing Serbs with Croats, especially in the Banovina of Croatia\(^{48}\), and they ignited national and economic passions.

Ultimately, the Serb Cultural Club argued that the Cvetković-Maček Agreement failed to solve the Croat question and defuse Serb-Croat tensions in the country, thereby discrediting it for completely missing its main target. Ironically, the activities promoted by the SCC contributed to the continuing tensions and stifled the potential positive effect of the Agreement. Yugoslavia was invaded by the Axis in early April 1941, thereby precluding the full implementation of the Agreement. Thus, it is impossible to determine the long-term effects of the Cvetković-Maček Agreement and determine its success or failure.

While initially rejecting the new state model that was emerging on the basis that it endangered both the Yugoslav state and Yugoslav national unity, the SCC soon started


\(^{48}\) Following the signing of the Agreement on August 26, 1939, a number of nationalistic excesses in the Banovina of Croatia raised Serbo-Croat tensions to new levels, threatening to overshadow any positive effects of the settlement. For example, on December 18, 1939, in Slavonski Brod, a crowd tore to pieces and burned Yugoslav flags. Led by the local chief of the Croat Peasant Party’s Civil Protection Corps (the party’s paramilitary organisation), the crowd proceeded to remove all ‘mixed’ public signs (written in both Latin and Cyrillic script) and throw them into the River Sava while singing nationalistic songs. For more examples, see: Kazimirović, Vasa. *Srbija i Jugoslavija 1914-1945.* (Prizma, Beograd: 1995), pp. 622-623.
openly demanding the creation of Serb and Slovene territorial units that would encompass all Yugoslav state territory outside of the Banovina of Croatia\textsuperscript{49}. Ironically, the policy of the SCC was, in this regard at least, almost identical to the ongoing efforts of the much-criticised Prime Minister Dragiša Cvetković to create a Serb and Slovene territorial unit in Yugoslavia.

The policies formulated and propagated by the SCC during the last phase of the interwar period in Yugoslavia (1939-1941) proved to be much more influential on the wartime Chetnik movement than any other political party or organisation of that era. The founder and leader of the SCC, Slobodan Jovanović, became a prominent member and, for a while, the Prime Minister of the Yugoslav royal government in exile in London during the war, and he also became a staunch supporter of Mihailović. However, the ideological connection between the SCC and the wartime Chetnik movement was much deeper, based more on a specific mode of thinking than the same personnel.

The 1939 ideological platform of the SCC was in essence an extorted and defensive position, created as a reaction to the abandonment of the \textit{status quo} in Yugoslavia that most Serbs wanted to preserve. Its political platform was an attempt to create a belated Serb national program within Yugoslavia, envisioned as a Serbian equivalent of the Croatian national platform promoted by Maček’s CPP. The coming of the war cut short the evolution of the SCC, but during its short existence, the organisation showed no interest in creating a pan-Serb political party that would pursue its agenda\textsuperscript{50}. The SCC was comprised of intellectuals and university professors, with few politicians; how successful the organisation would actually have been in the long run in

\textsuperscript{49} ‘Croatian Banovina is created with its own territory and wide political autonomy. It is now said that it is known what is Croatian, what belongs to the Croats. Isn’t it necessary in the spirit of the agreement to know what is Serbian, taking also into account that it is known what is Slovenian?’ Srpski Glas, No. 5, December, 14, 1939. Slobodan Jovanović also pointed out: ‘Since the Croat ethnic possession has been defined, Serb ethnic possession now has to be defined as well. It would be meaningless to argue that only Croats in this state have national consciousness, that only Croats have their history, while the Serbs have neither national consciousness nor history, representing instead an amorphous mass that can be manipulated in any way possible. Once the Croat question was opened, the Serb question was opened as well and Serbs have to defend what is theirs as a united front’. Quoted in Srpski Glas, No. 8, 1940.

pursuing its goals without being attached to a political party is impossible to say, but the challenges were evident.Nevertheless, the SCC found its spiritual successor and potential executive arm in the wartime Chetnik movement.

I should mention here that one of the shortfalls of the existing body of work on Chetnik program goals is the lack of recognition of the immediacy of core Chetnik ideas (i.e. stemming from the 1939-1941 period). A peculiar love-hate relationship between the Chetnik ideologists and the prewar Yugoslav realities imposed by the Cvetković-Maček Agreement has remained unexplored, possibly because the public distancing of the Chetniks from the 1939 agreement was considered by historians as genuine and sufficient.

During the war, the Chetnik movement based its program and ideological stance largely on the prewar platform of the SCC. However, the Chetnik movement also transformed the Club’s ideas in significant ways. The changes are perhaps not surprising: in contrast to the intellectually-inclined leadership of the SCC, military officers with little interest in political affairs and intellectual pursuits led the wartime Chetnik movement51.

A different kind of leadership, together with the harsh realities of war, especially the genocidal policies of the Independent State of Croatia towards the Serbs, produced an ideological platform that ended up being much more radical than anything propagated by the SCC during its short prewar existence, even though the core ideas promoted by the SCC were all still present: Yugoslavia and its monarchy were to be preserved, and the state edifice was to be internally transformed into a three-part federation along ethnic lines into Serb, Croat and Slovene territorial units.

The Chetniks’ views were certainly more radical than the ideas of the SCC. For example, they called for an enormous Serb and diminutive Croat territorial unit with the Slovene unit remaining the same size within the Yugoslav prewar boundaries. Additional plans, not found in SCC writings, for the expulsion and/or resettlement of various ethnic minorities, including even Yugoslavs, were created with the ultimate goal of achieving full ethnic homogeneity within internal Yugoslav national units. Thus, the Chetnik

movement called for an ultimate ‘internal ethnic divorce’ within Yugoslavia, while never officially abandoning Yugoslavia for reasons of international legitimacy and continuity.

Staying on Course:
Wartime Chetnik Ideas During 1941-1943

‘Homogenous Serbia’ by Stevan Moljević

The Chetnik leadership and individuals associated with the movement produced a number of blueprints during the course of the war, all revealing the movement’s great consistency with regards to its core ideas. Prominent among them was a project entitled ‘Homogenous Serbia’ that addressed the Chetnik vision of state and society in a resurrected post-war Yugoslavia (containing Greater Serbia), presented by Dr. Stevan

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52 ‘Homogenous Serbia’ was written in June 1941. The original document, which included a map of postwar Yugoslavia, can be found in the archives of the Yugoslav government in exile. It is reprinted in its entirety in the document section of Vesović, Milan and Nikolić, Kosta. Ujedinjene srpske zemlje: ravnogorski nacionalni program. (Vreme Knjige: Beograd, 1996), pp. 190-195.
Moljević on June 30, 1941. The name ‘Homogenous Serbia’ was never explained in the document, but the label most likely refers to a desire for the kind of ethno-religious homogeneity of Serbia that had existed before the Balkan wars (1878-1912). During this period, Serbia was a homogenous society in national and religious terms, with very few minorities. This homogeneity was achieved as the result of wars and population resettlement programs during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries.

Dr. Stevan Moljević wrote a memoir titled ‘My Road’ (Мој пут), which remains unpublished. In it, he elaborated on his wartime blueprints and provided further insight into his ideas and motivations. With regards to the genesis of the Homogenous Serbia project, he wrote: ‘When I arrived in Montenegro [from Bosnia-Herzegovina], I started thinking about the causes of our internal downfall… I came to the conclusion that Yugoslavia should be resurrected, but on a new federal basis, with three federal units: Serb, Croat and Slovene, each encompassing the entire area of ethnic settlement of its titular nation. The drawing of internal Yugoslav borders should be based upon the situation that existed on March 31, 1941, which could be projected based upon the 1931 population census and subsequent statistics—certain corrections will have to be made in the interest of traffic and communication—Serbs must have access to the Adriatic Sea, both in the south and in the north around Šibenik and Zadar… the population that remains behind after federal borders have been drawn, Serbs in the Croat federal unit and Croats in the Serb federal unit, must be exchanged, to avoid any repetition of 1941 events… Ethnically based federal units should have the widest possible autonomy within royal Yugoslavia’. Dr. Stevan Moljević, My Road, manuscript quoted in Dr. Todorović, Dragoje. Dr Moljević: rečju, perju, delom i životom za Ujedinjeno Srpsko. (Beograd, 2000), pp. 108-111; 121. Dr. Moljević drew a map of the future federal units at the same time, based on the 1931 population census. His main preoccupation was drawing a new line separating Yugoslav Serbs and Croats. Finally, he managed to publish his vision in the form of a booklet in Niksic (Montenegro) on June 30, 1941. One of these booklets eventually reached Mihailović’s Headquarters. While in Montenegro, Dr. Moljević learned from Mihailović’s Lieutenants Lazar Trkulja and Vidak Kovačević (who were passing through the region as couriers, heading towards Herzegovina) that Dragiša Vasić and Dr. Sreten Žujović, prominent members of the Serb Cultural Club, had already joined Mihailović’s headquarters. Most likely, this news inspired Dr. Moljević to do the same. By January 1944, he was the most important civilian member of the Chetnik movement, taking over the role of Mihailović’s main advisor and taking charge of Chetnik propaganda. He was also in charge of the Central National Committee (the civilian branch of the Chetnik movement), overshadowing both Dragiša Vasić who ended up in personal conflict with Mihailović and Mladen Žujović who managed to reach Italy. Ibid, p. 156.

The so-called ‘pre-Kumanovo’ Serbia, referring to the Kumanovo battle of 1912, during the First Balkan War.

Moljević clearly believed that homogeneity of state and society was a source of strength: ‘The sameness of views regarding the state … can only be achieved in a homogenous Serbia… Examples [of this homogeneity] are Serbia and Montenegro in former wars, and Greece in this one’. ‘Homogenous Serbia’, in Vesović, Milan and Nikolić, Kosta. Ujedinjene srpske zemlje: ravnogorski nacionalni program. (Vreme Knjige: Beograd, 1996), p. 190.
National and religious homogeneity was accompanied by a unitary and centralised system of government that remained in place until 1918\textsuperscript{56}.

The historical situation in Serbia was in sharp contrast to the experience of the Yugoslav state after 1918. This new state was a multinational entity not unlike Austria-Hungary, whose territory it had inherited. Not only was there a significant presence of ethnic minorities, but there were pressures to introduce (con)federalism and move away from the unitary state model. For both the Serbian political élite and Serbian nationalists, the Yugoslav experience represented a new set of difficult challenges that had not been resolved by 1941. For the Chetnik ideologists of the wartime period, as well as Serbian nationalists of the interwar period, the internal cohesion of pre-1912 Serbia, with its homogenous population and unitary government, must have seemed a ‘golden age’.

For Stevan Moljević, although he was not a native of Serbia\textsuperscript{57}, (re)constituting an expanded and homogenous Serbia within Yugoslavia was the most important wartime

\textsuperscript{56} The Serbian political élite that held supremacy after 1918 continued with the same centralised political model in the new Yugoslav state, but from the outset this proved highly problematic for all non-Serb Yugoslavs. Serbia’s (and Yugoslavia’s) unitary centralist model was based on France’s internal structure.
goal for the Chetnik movement. Mihailović and his close circle, comprised mostly of Serbians, were entirely sympathetic to this goal. To achieve independence and freedom, the cohesiveness of all Yugoslav Serbs, and internal peace in Yugoslavia, he strongly believed it was necessary to gather all Serbs into a strong Serb state within Yugoslavia.

Moreover, Moljević’s homogenous Serbia, as an entity within an enlarged Yugoslavia, was to cover a much larger territory than pre-1912 Serbia. This internal Serb state, which Moljević called ‘Greater Serbia’, encompassed all Yugoslav regions

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57 In early 1939, the Serb Cultural Club intensified its activities in western parts of Yugoslavia where the Serbs constituted a local majority. One of those regions was Bosanska Krajina (or, in more general terms, Vrbaska Banovina) in Western Bosnia. The main concern of the SCC was that these western regions might end up in Croatia in the upcoming reorganisation of the country. Dr. Stevan Moljević, as a prominent local representative of Bosanska Krajina (and Vrbaska Banovina) and someone familiar with local affairs in that region, gave a speech at an SCC meeting in Belgrade (January 30, 1939). His presentation, entitled ‘The role and importance of Vrbaska Banovina’ was received enthusiastically and published by the Club in two editions. Among other things, Moljević pointed out: ‘Serbs cannot allow…the solution of the Croat question [in Yugoslavia] to create a Serb question in turn. A Serb question would be definitely created if the Serbs of Bosanska Krajina, Banija, Kordun, Lika and one million two hundred thousand people – ended up subservient to Zagreb or Sarajevo’. Quoted in: Dr. Todorović, Dрагоје. Dr. Stevan Moljević: rečju, perju, delom i životom za Ujedinjeno Srpstvo. (Beograd, 2000), pp. 93-94; 102. As an outcome of Moljević’s presentation, the Serb Cultural Club decided to create a local branch in Vrbaska Banovina. The founding session was held in Banja Luka on December 24, 1939, and Moljević became the head of the local committee; see: Ibid, p. 98. For a detailed report of the founding session, the election of Moljević as head of the SCC local branch and speeches given on the occasion, see: Srpski Glas, December 28, 1939. It should be noted that the founding of the local branch came after the Cvetković-Maček Agreement was concluded, and Vrbaska Banovina mostly stayed out of Banovina Hrvatska. Moljević was a staunch critic of the Cvetković-Maček Agreement, and frequently called it ‘a second Munich’, referring to the 1938 events that eventually led to the dismemberment of Czechoslovakia, and accusing the Yugoslav royal regime of capitulation. Moljević integrated this hostile attitude towards the interwar royal regime into the Chetnik wartime outlook. Dr. Dragiša Vasić also used the Munich analogy to criticise the Yugoslav royal regime with regards to the Agreement.

58 Given that Mihailović and the core group of individuals around him (with the notable exception of Stevan Moljević) were Serbian and that the headquarters of the Chetnik movement was located in Serbia for most of the war, it is not surprising that Chetnik blueprints often talk about an expanded Serbia as the territorial instrument of Yugoslav Serb unification. While this scenario made sense to Serbian Chetniks, it had less appeal to non-Serbian Chetniks in Montenegro, Bosnia-Herzegovina and Croatia who were naturally more inclined to support unification of all Serb regions into a new territorial entity.

where ethnic Serbs lived, and was designed to achieve security and prevent atrocities like those occurring in the Independent State of Croatia. Pushing the notion of compactness and its accompanying security, Moljević envisioned ethnic resettlement and population exchanges, particularly between the Serbs and Croats (i.e. between their territorial units within Yugoslavia), and the expulsion of any ethnic minorities who were participating in the Axis occupation and partition of the Yugoslav state. Thus, the desired homogeneity had to be achieved not only by expelling certain ethnic minorities, but also by the resettlement of Yugoslav nationalities (Croats and Serbs) within the country. This new wartime feature, not found in any of the SCC writings, was undoubtedly a reaction to the ongoing atrocities against the Serbs in the Independent State of Croatia, including Moljević’s native region.

The result of the transformative process was to be a trialist Yugoslavia, consisting of Slovene, Croat and Serb parts: all three ethnically homogenous within their titular nation, much like Serbia before 1912. Serbia would comprise most of the Yugoslav state territory, with Croatia and Slovenia together comprising approximately twenty-five percent of the remainder. This formula was explained as an antidote to the ongoing wartime events, especially keeping in mind the fate of the Serbs in the Independent State of Croatia. The enormous size of the Serb unit was certainly

60 ‘Resettlement and exchange of populations, especially of Croats from Serb regions and Serbs from Croat regions, is the only way to delimitate the two and create better relations between them; doing this would remove the possibility of repeating the horrible atrocities which were already happening in the last war, but are especially occurring in this one. These atrocities are happening in all regions where Serbs and Croats live mixed, and where Croats and Muslims are carrying out a plan to exterminate the Serbs’. ‘Homogenous Serbia’, in Vesović, Milan and Nikolić, Kosta. Ujedinjene srpske zemlje: ravnogorski nacionalni program. (Vreme Knjige: Beograd, 1996), p. 190. Moljević acknowledged that an ethnic war was being waged by Croats/Muslims against the Serbs; he pointed out that a similar episode had occurred during World War I in the same region. Also evident in this passage is that Moljević was advocating the abandonment of Yugoslavism as an ideology, given that physical separation (segregation) of Serbs and Croats was not conducive to future integration. His plan was a reaction to the events of the ethnic war and an attempt to turn the Chetniks into participants on the Serb side.

61 ‘Strategically important lines and nexuses, essential for the security, livelihood and survival of [Homogenous] Serbia, even if some of them have no Serb majority today, have to be included in order to avoid any repetition of the atrocities committed against the Serbs by their neighbours whenever they get a chance.’ ‘Homogenous Serbia’, in Vesović, Milan and Nikolić, Kosta. Ujedinjene srpske zemlje: ravnogorski nacionalni program. (Vreme Knjige: Beograd, 1996), p. 190.
influenced by the realities of the war, a strong emphasis on former Serb sacrifices (the biggest being in World War I), and a desire for postwar revanchism.

Looking at recent history, Moljević argued that the basic mistake had been the failure to draw the borders of Serbia in 1918, something that could have easily been done at that point. Concluding that this must be corrected, Moljević defined the borders of post-war Greater Serbia. Only after establishing these borders would the Serbs enter negotiations with the Croats and Slovenes regarding Yugoslav matters. Yugoslavia itself would be an ethnic federation with three territorial units (Serb, Croat and Slovene), not a unitary state as before. Once these matters were resolved, Moljević allowed the possibility of including Bulgaria in Yugoslavia, thus creating a truly encompassing South Slavic state.

Proclaimed Yugoslavism notwithstanding, not to mention the obviously controversial issue of forceful expulsion and the mandatory resettlement of ethnic minorities and Yugoslavs, ‘Homogenous Serbia’ questioned the meaning of Yugoslavia. If Yugoslav nations were to end up internally segregated, what was the basis of union, and why should it not be replaced with homogenous ethnic units elevated to the level of independent nations?

Moljević provided no answers; he simply carried on as before. This is not especially surprising: after all, nominal Yugoslavism, for both propaganda purposes in the country/abroad and legalistic reasons, could have been useful to the Chetniks during the war; the fact that a trialistic model had little of substance to offer to Yugoslav non-Serbs, with the sole exception of the Slovenes, was not something Moljević bothered to contemplate. Clearly, he envisioned the Chetniks in complete control and dictating terms at the end of the war. Perhaps the only important reason why Moljević was not ready to promote an independent Serbia, Croatia and Slovenia instead of a federal Yugoslavia.

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62 ‘The essential mistake in our state building was not establishing the borders of Serbia in 1918. This mistake has to be corrected, now or never. Those borders have to be drawn today; they have to encompass the entire ethnic area where Serbs live, with access to the [Adriatic] coastline’. ‘Homogenous Serbia’, in Vesović, Milan and Nikolić, Kosta. Ujedinjene srpske zemlje: ravnogorski nacionalni program. (Vreme Knjige: Beograd, 1996), p. 190.

was his inherent hostility to the idea of Croatian independence, and his belief that giving up any 1918 borders was a historical setback and an acknowledgment of defeat.

Moljević's program for creating (Greater) Serbia in (Greater) Yugoslavia was very radical and, as such, quite unrealistic. Although his project did not abandon Yugoslavia per se, this was the answer to the Serb national question. It should be noted that this project was not officially accepted by the Chetnik movement. Indeed, at this time, Moljević had no direct contact with the Chetniks. Nevertheless, his project – loosely based on the pre-war ideas of the SCC – found its way to Mihailović and his close circle of associates within months and was built into the foundations of the St. Sava Congress' final resolution in January 1944.

Moljević's plan received very little historical attention after the war, creating the impression that the Chetnik movement devoted little energy to the national question until the St. Sava Congress. The truth is somewhat different: there was no official program before the St. Sava Congress, but its fundamental elements could be traced back to June 1941. The Chetnik strategy and goals were evident to all their adversaries, and included individual projects such as Moljević's, various instructions and other documents, newspaper articles and other leaflets.

All subsequent Chetnik and Chetnik-related documents on restructuring postwar Yugoslavia included the unification of all Serbs into a single territorial unit. During the first few months of its existence (May-November 1941), the Chetnik movement focused on the liberation of Yugoslavia; a firm political program had not yet materialised in any

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64 Both the Germans and the Ustašas reproduced Moljević's 'Homogenous Serbia' map (taken from the Chetnik newspapers that published it, such as Ravnogorac) for their own propaganda in the Independent State of Croatia. Axis propaganda was directed at non-Serbs to scare them with the Chetnik threat. Interestingly, the Partisans never reproduced the Chetnik blueprint map of Greater Serbia in their wartime propaganda; given that most Partisan fighters were Serbs (most joined the resistance group after being forced out of their homes in the Independent State of Croatia), the most likely explanation is that the Partisan leadership was concerned that such a tactic would backfire. For more information on the propaganda usage of Moljević's map by the Axis (and the lack of its use by the Partisans), as well as reproductions of wartime propaganda examples, see: Dr. Stanišić, Mihailo. Projekti Velika Srbija. (Službeni List SRJ: Beograd, 2000), pp. 254-256. Dr. Stanišić included Moljević's map in an article written for the Belgrade weekly periodical NIN in early 1976, and this marked the first post-war exposure of Chetnik blueprints to the Yugoslav general public. For Dr. Stanišić, as well as NIN's editor in chief Dragan Marković (a former partisan), this article almost amounted to academic and political suicide (Ibid, p. 254).
The Chetnik political program continued to develop in reaction to Ustaša anti-Serb policies and after October 31, 1941, to civil war with the communist Partisans.

The Belgrade Program

Moljević made no references to the Cvetković-Maćek Agreement in his ‘Homogenous Serbia’ blueprint. The unpopularity of the Cvetković-Maćek Agreement among Chetnik ideologists can be seen in another early blueprint associated with the Chetnik movement: the ‘Belgrade Program’, written in the early summer of 1941. It too avoided any associations with the Cvetković-Maćek Agreement, ignoring recent history completely. The historical focus and inspiration became Ilija Garašanin’s Načertanije from 1844, a document praised by the Program’s authors as the first Serb national program. A similar argument about the Načertanije was published just before the war in Srpski Glas in 1940. This article states that the 1844 document was Serbia’s first national program, stressing the role of the Serbian state. The emphasis on the Načertanije (the title could be translated as ‘the Blueprint’) illustrates another aspect of the ideological link between the pre-war SCC and the wartime Chetnik movement.

Dr. Dragoslav Stranjaković was one of the most prominent members of the SCC. It is likely that he was the author – or one of the authors – of the Belgrade Program. Producing a number of historical works, Dr. Stranjaković reintroduced the Načertanije into the Serb (and Yugoslav) political discourse in a number of historical writings in the 1930s.

Dr. Stranjaković was aware that the author of the Načertanije was not a Serb. Shockingly, the blueprint of Serbia’s national expansion was written by a Czech

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65 The Chetniks saw revolutionary internationalism of the CPY as anti-Serb at its core.
66 The ‘Belgrade Program’ was written by the political committee of the Chetnik movement in Belgrade; original documents can be found at AVII, 5/6-3, 133; AVII, 5/6-4, 133; AVII, 5/6-5, 133 and AVII, 5/6-6, 133.
68 Srpski glas, Issue No. 19 (March, 21, 1940).
69 See: Dr. Stranjaković, Dragoslav. Jugoslovenski nacionalni i drzavni program knezovine Srbije iz 1844 godine. (Sremski Karlovci, 1931) and Dr. Stranjaković, Dragoslav. Srbija od 1834 do 1918. (Geca Kon: Beograd, 1937).
immigrant, Franjo Zah\textsuperscript{70} together with Ilija Garašanin. The latter, a Serbian intellectual and government minister, was traditionally credited as the author but was, in fact, only an editor. Nevertheless, the Belgrade Program introduced the \textit{Načertanije} in 1941 as an autochthonous Serb program written by Serbs in favour of expanding Serbia and making it the most influential regional power in the Balkans. There are a number of reasons behind attempts to adopt \textit{Načertanije} in 1941. Clearly, the \textit{Načertanije} came from a different era, which made it an unlikely candidate for a national program under the circumstances (in 1844, the document focused on conditions of that time, namely, liberation from Ottoman rule). However, referring back to the nineteenth century was a form of escapism, a return to one’s roots and away from the gloom of the Yugoslav interwar era\textsuperscript{71}. Despite publishing Dr. Stranjaković’s articles about the \textit{Načertanije}, the Serb Cultural Club itself never considered the document as the basis of its national program. Thus, the 1941 resurrection of \textit{Načertanije} was clearly a propaganda move to avoid associations with the unpopular Cvetković-Maček Agreement. In the end, the abortive wartime efforts of Dr. Dragoslav Stranjaković (if he was indeed behind the Belgrade Program) to reintroduce the \textit{Načertanije} into the discourse met with little success, perhaps because of the underlying anti-Yugoslavism that was not seen as advantageous to the Chetnik leadership.

The next identifiable step in defining the Chetnik program came on December 20, 1941\textsuperscript{72} in Mihailović’s instructions to Major Djordje Lašić and Captain Pavle Djurišić with

\textsuperscript{70} See: Dr. Stranjaković, Dragoslav. \textit{Kako je postalo Garašaninovo Načertanije}. Spomenik SAN, XCI, 1939.

\textsuperscript{71} Perhaps the key attraction of the \textit{Načertanije} for the Belgrade committee lies in Ilija Garašanin’s changes to the original text by Franjo Zah. Garašanin was not enthusiastic about Zah’s final vision, which called for a wider South Slavic union once the unity of all Serbs had been achieved. Garašanin’s more conservative version focused on the unity of the Serbs alone. He rejected and removed from the text Zah’s suggestions that Serbia should enter into any state-building enterprise with Croatia. It seems that in the light of the wartime developments in the Independent State of Croatia, Chetnik ideologists in Belgrade started abandoning Yugoslavism and its disappointments in all but a purely nominal form, even though the movement officially represented the Yugoslav royal regime until the end of the war. Garašanin’s editing of Zah’s \textit{Načertanije} indicated the reactionary transformation that the Chetnik movement was going through in the early wartime period. See: Dr. Stanišić, Mihailo. \textit{Projekti Velika Srbija}. (Službeni List SRJ: Beograd, 2000), pp. 36-37.

\textsuperscript{72} The photocopy of the original is located at AVII, Ca, 10-1, k. 1.
respect to the goals of the Chetnik struggle. He touched on four major points: (i) the struggle for the freedom of the entire Yugoslav people under the rule of King Peter II, thereby reaffirming loyalty to royalist principles; (ii) creating ‘Greater Yugoslavia’ and within it ‘Greater Serbia’ which would encompass pre-Yugoslav Serbia, Montenegro, Bosnia-Herzegovina and Vojvodina – a more conservative vision than that projected by Moljević; (iii) the struggle to expand the Yugoslav state to include Slovene-populated areas of Italy and Germany (Austria), further territorial extensions at the expense of Bulgaria as well as northern Albania with Skadar, denied to Montenegro during the Balkan wars, and also to the Yugoslav state in 1918; (iv) the expulsion of ethnic minorities such as Germans, Albanians, Hungarians etc., and ‘anti-national elements’ (domestic enemies) from Yugoslav state territory.

Further insight into Chetnik national policy comes from a letter written by Stevan Moljević to Dragiša Vasić in late December 1941. The main issue is the demarcation of Serb and Croat areas in Yugoslavia. The letter contained a map (which could not be located in the archives, apparently not surviving the war) and proposed radical solutions, including forceful expulsions of Croats to Croatia and Muslims to Turkey or Albania from strategically important areas, and their replacement by Serb refugees.

With some differences, a similar concept was proposed by the Dinara Chetnik Division (located mostly in present-day Croatia) at the beginning of 1942. Like the other projects, this one prescribed the creation of Greater Serbia within Yugoslavia that would include the territories of pre-war Serbia, Montenegro, and Bosnia and Herzegovina, as well as Serb-settled areas of historic Croatia, Slavonia and Dalmatia.

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73 Some historians argue that Mihailović did not write this document, questioning the authenticity of his signature and the title; See: Dr. Stanišić, Mihailo. Projekti Velika Srbija. (Službeni List SRJ: Beograd, 2000), pp. 56-58. Nevertheless, there is no doubt that the document was conceived in Chetnik circles, most likely in Montenegro rather than in Serbia.

74 AVII, Ca, 10-1, k. 1. There are numerous similarities to Moljević's vision. However, it should be noted that this document made no claim to Serb-populated areas of Croatia, Slavonia and Dalmatia.

75 The letter was reproduced in its entirety in Zbornik NOP-a, XIV, I, pp. 93-97.

76 See: Petranović, Branko. Revolucija i kontrarevolucija u Jugoslaviji 1941-1945, II. (Beograd: 1983), pp. 93. This blueprint, which comes from the western fringes of the Chetnik movement, shows remarkable similarities to Moljević's original plan.
Although the Chetnik movement can be traced back to the immediate aftermath of the April War\textsuperscript{77}, it was not until May 21, 1942, that the major Chetnik ideologists met in person\textsuperscript{78}. On that day, Mihailović finally met with Stevan Moljević (with Dragiša Vasić present) on Mount Zlatar (southwest Serbia), and the leader of the Chetnik movement approved the postwar vision of its two main ideological architects. As the result of the Zlatar meeting, the Chetnik movement had what one might consider an unofficial program to follow. The vision agreed upon by Mihailović, Vasić and Moljević was a logical continuation of a number of documents produced by various parts of the Chetnik organisation and individuals either affiliated with the movement or desiring to be so, from June 1941 onwards. These early documents, often created independently and without the authors' knowledge of what others were doing, bore striking similarities in their conclusions, thus illustrating the similar mindset of their respective creators. The core features were approved by Mihailović at Zlatar in May 1942.

The basic wartime goal of the Chetnik movement both before and after the Zlatar meeting, as will be shown later was to re-establish Serbia as a Serb territorial entity within Yugoslavia\textsuperscript{79}. To this end, the unity, even the existence, of Yugoslavia was secondary. Clearly the Chetniks were concerned with Serb affairs despite their official role as the Yugoslav army.

The goal of re-establishing Serbia within Yugoslavia was not only seen as correcting the harmful unitary interwar Yugoslav national policy of the royal regime (which did not mean that the Chetniks had any genuine interest in federalism as a state model), but a reaction to the events in the Independent State of Croatia. Thus, an enlarged Serbia was not only seen as a return to the correct path, but a guarantee of the future safety of the Serbs within and, if needed, \textit{without} Yugoslavia.

At the end of 1942, another Chetnik gathering provided additional insight into postwar goals. At the Conference of Intellectual Youth, held in Šehovići (Montenegro)\textsuperscript{77} As discussed previously, the April War refers to the eleven-day war between the Axis and Yugoslavia, April 6 to April 17, 1941.

\textsuperscript{78} Dr. Stanišić, Mihailo. \textit{Projekti Velika Srbija}. (Službeni List SRJ: Beograd, 2000), pp. 73-77.

\textsuperscript{79} See Dr. Moljević’s letter to Mihailović (AVII, Ca, 4/2-1, k. 12) as well as Dragiša Vasić’s letter to Mihailović (AVII, Ca, 31/2, k. 12). Whether the Serb territorial unit within Yugoslavia would carry the name ‘Serbia’ was less important.
from November 30 to December 2 1942, attended, among others, by Major Zaharije Ostojić in the name of Mihailović, as well as Major Djordje Lašić, and Captain Pavle Djurišić. The notion of three-part ethnic federalism (Serb, Croat, Slovene) was reaffirmed, but a new element was added, namely, putting organisations of faith under firm state control, especially the Roman Catholic Church, whose Yugoslav branch was to be separated from the Vatican.

The quest for ethnic Serb security notwithstanding, the Chetniks called for a radical break with the past that would go well beyond the adaptation of three-part ethnic federalism for Yugoslavia. Achieving unity of the Serbs was of primary importance, and resurrecting Yugoslavia was the follow-up task. However, the resurrected postwar Yugoslavia was to be based on very different principles from those in the prewar period. The only thing that would remain the same was the supreme role of the Serbs and their ethnic state within Yugoslavia.

The Chetniks frequently criticised members of the interwar Yugoslav regime in their publications, labelling the regime both unpopular and against the people. According to Chetnik writers, these individuals could not carry out the task of reconstructing the country. The sins of the interwar élite included the failure to continue expanding Serbia within Yugoslavia in 1918 and the pursuit of an illusory ideological unitarism. The establishment of the Banovina of Croatia in 1939 was an offence even graver than the omissions of 1918.

The Chetnik criticism of the interwar élite is interesting, because as a wartime grassroots movement connected to and legally recognised by the royal Yugoslav government in exile, the Chetniks represented a direct continuation of the dismembered state and the only chance of the old elite’s return to power after the war. There are a number of possible explanations of the Chetniks’ public criticism of the interwar regime.

80 ‘Stenographic Record of the Conference held at Šehovići’ (November 30, 1942 to December 2, 1942), AVII, Ca, 7/3, k. 145. This is one of the rare instances where a full record of a Chetnik meeting of this kind survived the war.

81 In addition, there were publications aimed at the public that explained the basic outlines of the Chetnik program. In an article published on March 1, 1943, the Chetniks explained that their national aspiration was to ‘gather all Serb regions into one tightly-knit whole’. The Chetnik movement, as essentially a Serb organisation, was behaving as an ethnic group under attack. AVII, Ca, 7/3, k. 145.
Certainly, the Chetniks were voicing their displeasure with the policies of royal Yugoslavia (especially the Cvetković-Maček Agreement) that they believed were at the core of the rapid and total collapse in April 1941. Criticising the former policies and elites was also an indirect way of criticising those who had left the country, as opposed to the Chetniks, who stayed to fight on. There was a strategic positioning here, too, because the Partisan propaganda presented the Chetniks as embodying the past, proponents of the 'same old', while presenting themselves as future-oriented. Because the displeasure of the general public with the prewar period was widespread, the Chetniks had to work hard on neutralising this aspect of Partisan propaganda by dissociating themselves from the old regime.

The congress of the Chetnik Youth held in Ravna Gora from January 12-16, 1944, was the last important Chetnik gathering before the St. Sava Congress. The Youth Congress reaffirmed the Chetnik determination to re-establish Yugoslavia and reorganise it as a three-part ethnic federation of Slovenia, Croatia, and Serbia. The Congress also called for expanding Yugoslavia by incorporating the areas of neighbouring countries with Yugoslav populations. Once again, the Serbs were singled out as the national group that should lead in the Balkans.

Emphasising the atrocities committed against the Serbs, especially those by fellow Yugoslavs, the main focus of the Chetnik program became defining the position of the Serbs in postwar Yugoslavia. For the Chetniks, unification of the Serbs (within Yugoslavia) became the most important task, an achievement without which the nation could not survive. Realising that the Allies had no interest in supporting the formation of a Serb state as one of the successors of royal Yugoslavia, the Chetnik program called for a restoration of Yugoslavia with its internal divisions along ethnic lines in such a way that the Serb federal unit (comprising most of the state territory) encompassed all Serb populated regions. As far as the Chetniks were concerned, Yugoslavist ideology was dead.

82 The resolution of the Youth Congress was published in the Chetnik newspaper Srpska državna misao, No. 5 (March 20, 1943).
The ‘Program of the Chetnik Movement’ (September 1941) was conceived without Moljević’s input; it covered both the wartime period and plans for a post-war future, and represents the earliest known example of such a document. Conceived before the outbreak of civil war with the communists, the program was sent to the Yugoslav government in London. The program is divided into four sections: (i) directives for the duration of the war; (ii) directives for the transitional period; (iii) preparations for the return to normality; and (iv) questions of social and political internal organisation after the war.

For the duration of the war, the Program recommended a hostile stance towards the enemy and its domestic collaborators. However, the Chetniks were not to engage in open hostilities until further notice except in cases of self-defence such as the situation in the ISC. Self-defence was a logical directive, and the specific reference to the ISC is recognition of the ongoing attempts to destroy the Serb population there. The idea was to preserve the strength of the movement until the collapse of the Axis. It is possible that the dark aftermath of the 1917 Toplica uprising was on Mihailović’s mind as well.

More specifically, the Program recommended every effort to support — and, if possible, take command of — the struggle of the Serbs for self-preservation, such as in the ISC. Thus, from the outset, the Chetniks focused on the Serbs as the foundation of the movement. This is also evident in the subsequent point, which states that a civil war between Serbs should be avoided at all costs; this civil war comment was presumably about the communists, although it is possibly a reference to the Serb quisling formations. The Program proclaimed the Chetniks’ intention to spread their movement over the entire territory of occupied Yugoslavia; the government in exile should be considered legal while the war ran its course, and contact with it should be maintained. Interestingly, the recommendation limits the legality of the government only to the wartime period. This is not merely a technicality: as will be shown, the Chetniks had an uneasy relationship with the government élite who had escaped the country — or, more

83 AVII, Archive of the Yugoslav Government in Exile, k. 162, Reg. No. 34/1.
84 AVII, Archive of the Yugoslav Government in Exile, k. 162, Reg. No. 34/1.
85 AVII, Archive of the Yugoslav Government in Exile, k. 162, Reg. No. 34/1.
precisely, with what this élite represented and their responsibility, in the eyes of the Chetniks, for the Yugoslav April 1941 catastrophe.

The Program’s directives for the transitional period were somewhat more elaborate but equally ominous\(^\text{86}\): (i) to punish all those who were serving the enemy in a criminal way, and those who actively worked on exterminating the Serb population; (ii) to delimit Serb lands and ensure that only the Serb population stayed on them; (iii) that in doing so, special care should be given to the speedy and radical cleaning of the cities and their repopulation by Serbs; (iv) to create a plan for clearing or moving the rural population with the goal of creating a homogenous Serb territorial unit; (v) within the Serb territorial unit, to solve the especially difficult question of the Muslims – though no solution was recommended; and (vi) to decide in advance which and what kind of units should carry out these tasks.

The recommended points of the Program for the last stages of the war in September 1941 were not very different from Moljević’s ‘Homogenous Serbia Blueprint’ (June 1941). The Chetnik movement set as its goal the creation of a large Serb territorial unit that would be homogenous and minority-free, very much a throwback to the ‘golden age’ of the pre-1912 homogenously populated Serbia. While the territories that were to become part of the Serb territorial unit are not listed here, it is evident that the unit would comprise a large part of the prewar Kingdom of Yugoslavia. The creation of a homogenous Serb territorial unit was clearly the primary goal; there was no doubt about the Serb – rather than Yugoslav – orientation of the Chetnik movement.

However, the Chetnik movement was not ready to give up on Yugoslavia that easily. Part three of the Program, devoted to the period of return to a ‘normal state of affairs’, notes that, ‘the ideal is a strong and homogenous Serb state unit which would be capable of life in economic and political terms\(^\text{87}\). Once established, such a unit could enter ‘wider political combinations’, thus leaving the door open for the potential reestablishment of Yugoslavia. Even so, the Chetniks were Serbs first. This part of the Program constitutes only two points, the second one arguing that a team of experts

\(^{86}\) AVII, Archive of the Yugoslav Government in Exile, k. 162, Reg. No. 34/1.

\(^{87}\) AVII, Archive of the Yugoslav Government in Exile, k. 162, Reg. No. 34/1.
should be ready to present these goals to the peace conference that would inevitably come at the end of the war.

This Chetnik Program was, in many ways, a mixture of both recent and earlier history. The desire to have a Serb territorial unit could be seen as a reaction to the 1939 agreement, when only the Croats received their own national Banovina within royal Yugoslavia. It was also a return to 1918, echoing the position of certain Serb politicians, like Nikola Pašić, who had argued that Serbia’s expanded borders should first be established and only then should Yugoslavia include this expanded Serbia as one of its territorial units. Finally, the belief that ethno-religious homogeneity was crucial to political and economic stability and prosperity harkened back to the homogeneity of pre-1912 Serbia. All in all, it was a belated Serb national program in a Yugoslav era, an attempt to address issues which had not been addressed either at the end of the First World War or during the interwar period.

The last part of the Program looks forward to the post-war period and contains only one point: ‘The terms of any internal political and social system should not be discussed at present’\(^8\). This statement seems ironic, given that the reorganisation of Yugoslavia – or at least Yugoslavia’s territory – is clearly spelled out in the earlier part of the document. It seems that the question of the political and social system was ultimately about monarchy and capitalism; the current disinclination to press these issues stemmed from a wish to avoid civil war with the communists\(^9\).

**Other Lesser Known Documents**

The ‘Instruction by Mihailović to the Commander of the Chetnik Troops in Montenegro and the Commander of the Lim Chetnik units’ (December 20, 1941)\(^1\) chronologically represents the next step in Chetnik ideological evolution and provides further clarification of the organisation, goals and practices of the Chetnik units. The

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88 AVII, Archive of the Yugoslav Government in Exile, k. 162, Reg. No. 34/1.
89 The Chetnik-Partisan war had not yet erupted in September 1941, although tensions were clearly mounting in Serbia and elsewhere.
90 AVII, Ca, k.1, reg. No. 10/1. The instruction was most likely written by Montenegrin Commander Pavle Đurišić and portrayed as being authored by Mihailović to maximise its effect on the men.
document accepted the ‘stab in the back’ explanation of the Yugoslav capitulation in the April War by stating that the catastrophe came about due to ‘the treason of many dark elements’ (here left undefined). Nevertheless, as long as the Chetniks were around, the war would continue, with the main Chetnik responsibility being the need to address with their weapons the wrongs of the April War.

The document is divided into two main sections, the first of which very directly spells out the general goals of the Chetnik movement in the war. The first goal concerns liberating the nation under King Peter II, thereby reaffirming the continuation of the state and the commitment to the reestablishment of the royalist regime. The second point is clear in its expectations: ‘Creating a greater Yugoslavia and within it a greater Serbia, ethnically pure and in the borders of Serbia, Montenegro, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Srem, Banat and Bačka [Vojvodina].’ This goal of establishing a large Serb territorial unit within Yugoslavia is consistent with all earlier and later Chetnik plans; what is different here, however, is the slightly more conservative territorial extent of the projected Serb unit when compared to Moljević’s plans; the Serb-populated regions in Croatia west of the Bosnian border, for example, are not mentioned.

The third goal is the expansion of Yugoslavia by incorporating all Slovene-populated regions that were in Italy and Germany (Trieste, Gorica, Koroška and Istria; Croats are not mentioned), plus the additional territories at the expense of neighbouring Bulgaria, as well as northern Albania with Skadar. The fourth is ‘cleansing the state territory from all national minorities and a-national elements’ . No explanation is given, but one could presume that the national minorities were non-Slavic groups (such as Volksdeutsche, Albanians, Hungarians, Turks). ‘A-national elements’ are somewhat more difficult to decipher, but this could possibly refer to Muslims.

The fifth point concerns the creation of a common border between Serbia and Montenegro by clearing the Sandžak region of its Muslim population, and between Serbia and Slovenia by clearing Bosnia-Herzegovina of its Muslim and Croat

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91 AVII, Ca, k.1, reg. No. 10/1.
92 AVII, Ca, k.1, reg. No. 10/1.
93 AVII, Ca, k.1, reg. No. 10/1. This was an old Montenegrin goal; this strengthens the theory that the document was conceived by Djurišić rather than Mihailović.
94 AVII, Ca, k.1, reg. No. 10/1.
populations. Given that almost all Yugoslav Slavic Muslims lived in Bosnia-Herzegovina and the historical Sandžak of Novi Pazar region, it seems that the Muslims were to be expelled from Yugoslav territory altogether. The sixth point deals with retribution: ‘Punishing all Ustašas and Muslims who have been destroying our people in these tragic days’. The Chetniks and the Serbs are once again equated.

The seventh goal points to retribution, this time targeting those responsible for the April 1941 catastrophe. Beside the obvious target, namely, non-Serbs who deserted the army or turned their weapons against the army, retribution could be aimed at members of the old regime. The eighth point discusses the resettlement with Montenegrins of areas cleared of national minorities and ‘a-national elements’.

The second main section of the document is more local in its focus, looking specifically at the planned Chetnik action in Montenegro. The first directive mentions clearing the Muslim and ethnic Albanian populations from the Pešter region in southern Sandžak. Other troops were to cross Mount Čakor into the Metohija region to clear out the ethnic Albanian population. Two additional directives prescribe Chetnik action towards the Adriatic (Dubrovnik) and eastern Herzegovina, as well as towards Skadar. In addition, Montenegro was to be secured from any attacks by Albanian guerrillas coming from Albania. This section concludes with instructions on how to proceed against the enemy:

With the Albanians, Muslims and Ustašas, because of their role in the gruesome atrocities towards our people, leave them to the ‘people’s court’; with the Croats under Italian occupation [i.e. those outside of the ISC] proceed according to their behaviour in any given moment.

The focus in both sections is of great interest, as the goals of the struggle were specifically tied to the issue of territoriality and ‘ethnic ownership’. In other words, the presented goals are those of a force fighting an ethno-religious conflict rather than a

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95 The conversion of Muslims was not considered an option in any known Chetnik plan. As to the question of to where they were to be expelled, Turkey would have been the most likely location.
96 AVII, Ca, k.1, reg. No. 10/1. This point, once again Montenegrin-centred, supports the notion that the author was Džurišić rather than Mihailović.
97 AVII, Ca, k.1, reg. No. 10/1.
98 AVII, Ca, k.1, reg. No. 10/1.
resistance war against foreign occupation or even a civil war against communists. Both the general and Montenegrin-specific Chetnik goals revolve around resolving the *national* question. They reflect national frustrations both past and present that had arisen from problems with minorities, the failed integration with fellow Slav Muslims and Roman Catholics who spoke the same language, and certain long-term strategic goals, such as the acquisition of Skadar. When these are compared with the revolutionary goals of the Partisans, it becomes clear that the two resistance groups were very different political entities and that their divergent wartime strategies, including the relationship – or lack thereof – with the occupational forces and their domestic collaborators, were direct products of their ideological convictions.

Meanwhile, Stevan Moljević continued to refine his stance. A letter from Moljević to Dragiša Vasić during the second half of December 1941\(^99\) is devoted to the borders and post-war organisation of Greater Serbia. The letter opens by stating that ‘the national cause’ had been undermined by the events of 1941. Moljević accused Croat and Slovene members of the Yugoslav government in exile in London (as well as exiled political figures located in the US) of working only for Croatia/Slovenia rather than Yugoslavia, arguing that they were simply continuing ‘the old song’, in other words, the prewar state of affairs. Moljević says he is attaching a map of the proposed delineation of the Croat territory – certainly the largest and most difficult problem for Moljević – although it seems this map did not survive the war\(^{100}\). Moljević adds that there was an open question about how to achieve this delineation.

The border proposal section of the letter has two separate parts, one regarding the neighbouring state and one regarding internal matters. Concerning the claims against the neighbouring countries, Moljević states that these issues would be decided at the expected peace conference; logically, he expected a repetition of a Versailles-like event at the end of the war. To ensure this happened, he recommended seizing the desired territories militarily. However, he recognised that the forces to achieve this might not be available.

\(^99\) AVII, Ca, k. 12, Reg. No. 32/2. Circa dated by content.
\(^{100}\) I could not locate the map in the archives.
The section on internal matters\textsuperscript{101}, the first and most important matter being the establishment of the new border with the Croats, argues for another \textit{fait accompli} as soon as possible, including (i) capturing territories marked on the map, and (ii) clearing the territories before anyone realised what was happening. Moljević argues that strong units should capture certain towns earmarked as main traffic hubs: Osijek, Vinkovci, Slavonski Brod, Sunja, Karlovac, Knin, Šibenik, Mostar and Metković. Clearing the country of non-Serb elements would follow. Those found guilty of crimes should be punished on the spot, while the remainder were to be removed: Croats to Croatia, greatly reduced in its territorial extent, and Muslims to Turkey\textsuperscript{102}. Moljević adds his view that the Yugoslav government in London should resolve the Muslim question with the Turkish government, and the British government should help in this.

Unrealistic as these expectations were, Moljević most likely had in mind the 1923 Treaty of Lausanne, according to which Greece and Turkey exchanged their Muslim and Eastern Orthodox populations in a mandatory way: Muslims left Greece and were resettled in Turkey, while the Eastern Orthodox population left Turkey to resettle in Greece. Although Moljević never mentions this example, Yugoslav governing circles during the interwar watched the implementation of the Treaty of Lausanne period with great interest. Prime Minister Milan Stojadinović, who had worked on brokering the deal to resettle Yugoslavia’s ethnic Albanians in Turkey in the 1930’s, saw Turkey as a potential destination for Yugoslavia’s undesired Muslim minorities.

A letter from Dr. Stevan Moljević to Mihailović (April 23, 1942)\textsuperscript{103} was one of several such letters from that year devoted to the issue of a postwar homogenous Serbia. In this letter, Moljević reminds Mihailović that he had sent his vision of postwar settlement four months earlier. Many arguments from December 1941 are repeated here in an abbreviated form. Moljević underlines that the main goal had to be the creation of a homogenous Serbia\textsuperscript{104} as ‘the only goal, hope and belief of the Serb people’; he does

\textsuperscript{101} AVII, Ca, k. 12, Reg. No. 32/2.
\textsuperscript{102} Major Zaharije Ostojić added in handwriting in brackets ‘(or to Albania)’. One can presume that Moljević had in mind Slavic Muslims rather than ethnic Albanians.
\textsuperscript{103} AVII, Ca, k. 12, Reg. No. 4/2.
\textsuperscript{104} AVII, Ca, k. 12, Reg. No. 4/2. The author states that he is also resending his memoir entitled ‘Muslims and the Creation of the Serb State’, which Mihailović had not received on the previous occasion.
not mention Yugoslavia. He declares that Mihailović had an obligation not to disappoint his people in this regard.

What is new in Moljević’s letter is an attack aimed at the Yugoslav government in exile in London, specifically at its mouthpiece Radio London for conveying messages that were not in line with the stated goal of the Serb people. Moljević urged Mihailović to pass the following message to the Yugoslav government in exile:

This country is not the one you left, our people have opened their eyes...you have to follow the will of the people, and Mihailović will be the interpreter of that will and the defender of people’s wishes.

He adds that Mihailović must make the important decisions, and that the government in London should respond to those decisions; he also says that while the King should return, those who left with him might as well remain where they are.

Moljević’s open attack on the Yugoslav government in exile was a criticism of the Yugoslav pre-war policies and at the political elite that had pursued them, and an attempt to persuade Mihailović that he should be the main force behind the post-war policies and settlements rather than those returning from London. Needless to say, Mihailović represented an opportunity for the realisation of Moljević’s vision, not the exiled government, whose return, one might expect, would likely have ensured the continuation of pre-war policies. Thus, despite the obvious connections between the Chetniks and the Yugoslav government in London, one should not assume that they represented the same things or that they shared the same vision of a post-war Yugoslavia. One could argue that Moljević would have been happiest if the King, as the embodiment of the nation, had returned alone from London, thereby granting the Chetniks a free hand in shaping a post-war Yugoslavia as they saw fit.

Dragiša Vasić was at this point in time very much in agreement with Moljević (he later represented the less radical fraction). A letter from Dragiša Vasić (during the first half of May 1942) to Mihailović provides a commentary on the ‘Belgrade Program’ for postwar Yugoslavia. In the letter, Vasić attacks the conduct of the Yugoslav government

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105 AVII, Ca, k. 12, Reg. No. 4/2.
106 AVII, Ca, k. 12, Reg. No. 31/2. Dated by references in other documents.
in exile, specifically, the Croat and Slovene Ministers. Echoing Moljević, he charges that the Yugoslav government in exile, and most particularly its non-Serb part, was continuing its hated policies of the interwar period. For Vasić and Moljević, the Yugoslav government in London was clearly the embodiment of the troubled interwar period and its old policies that had been harmful for so many Serbs, while the Chetniks represented a fresh start and a force of change for the Yugoslav Serbs.

Vasić argues that the Serbs had a responsibility to secure the entire territory of occupied Yugoslavia at the moment of German collapse, plus everything ‘that we failed to secure at the end of the last war’. Like Moljević, Vasić believed in the fait accompli policy and argued that those territories seized at the end of the war would be secured at the peace conference. Vasić’s (and Moljević’s) conviction that the Germans would lose the war was unwavering; this is surprising, given Moljević’s letter was written in late 1941 and Vasić’s in early 1942, and that both men were isolated from intelligence information. Using semi-religious language to explain his belief that German defeat was inevitable, Vasić says:

Our common man has lost most of his moral grounding and has become very insecure. He has lost his main virtues that have guided him in past wars, which is the belief in the victory of goodness. It is not difficult to find people who claim that it is not possible to harm the Germans, people who believe in the victory of Evil. [Our man] is not ready to sacrifice himself even for the most sacred things, he has to be constantly reminded of even the most basic things – even that he is a Serb.

Nevertheless, the question of discipline was difficult, and the undisciplined masses could provoke a premature uprising, which he believed would be a grave mistake. The general uprising should, he says, coincide with the arrival of the Allies in the region. The point about the timing of the uprising represents a fundamental difference between Chetnik and Partisan thinking.

With regards to the army conducting the general uprising, Vasić expected that it should include some Croats and Slovenes, and not only Serbs. However, this was a cause of concern:

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107 AVII, Ca, k. 12, Reg. No. 31/2.
108 AVII, Ca, k. 12, Reg. No. 31/2.
We all remember how a handful of Croats participated in the break-up of the Thessalonica Front, and how the Croat politicians tried to cash in on this politically. This time around their participation could be numerically even more significant, and it is to be expected that they will make every effort to spoil our territorial and retribution plans.\(^{109}\)

Vasić was counting on the Yugoslav territory as a whole, but his vision was a purely Serb one.

Vasić says that creating ‘the homogenous Serb state that should encompass the entire ethnic region in which the Serbs live today...is not something that can be the subject of discussion at all. All Serbs agree on this.\(^{110}\) In other words, creating the Serb territorial unit at the end of the war was a given, the foundation of any post-war settlement. Although the territories should be cleared of all ‘foreign elements’,

this should not be a cause for concern. I remember well the period immediately after the end of the last war. The warring states were so engulfed in their own problems that none could pay any attention to what other states were doing within their own borders. In the first post-war year one could simply exterminate a good chunk of the state’s unwanted population and nobody would even turn his head. Thus, if we play it smartly, this question of clearing or resettling and exchanging populations should not be a difficult one.\(^{111}\)

The last part of the letter concerns the relationship with other Yugoslavs and Balkan nations. Yugoslavia should be a federation comprised of three federal units: Serb, Croat and Slovene. Incorporating Bulgaria as the fourth federal unit was a possibility. Joining with the Croats and Slovenes – ‘with whom we have never lived together before’ – in a centralised state ‘that they denied and, two decades later,
managed to destroy’ had been a mistake; a different approach should be taken in the future\textsuperscript{112}.

In contrast to the Chetniks, whose ‘Greater Serbia in Greater Yugoslavia’ attracted only the Serbs and to some extent the Slovenes, the Partisans’ political platform appealed to a number of groups. In addition to the Slovenes\textsuperscript{113}, the Partisans could attract: (i) the Muslims of Bosnia and Herzegovina, with the promise of this region as a separate unit and the long-term goal of Muslim autonomy in the region; (ii) Montenegrin federalists or ‘the Greens’, with the promise of Montenegro as a separate unit. The Chetnik platform was acceptable only to the Montenegrin ‘Whites’ who favoured a unified Serb state; (iii) non-extremist Croats, with the promise of Croatia as a separate unit, at least as big as the pre-war Banovina of Croatia of 1939, but arguably in a better position as the rest of the country would be divided among more groups, not only the Serbs and Slovenes; and finally, (iv) the Macedonians, with the promise of Macedonia as a separate unit.

The most intriguing question about the Partisan platform, however, was not why it was attractive – or at least acceptable – to the Muslims, Montenegrins, Macedonians, Slovenes and Croats. Rather, it was why so many Serbs joined.

A document of ‘Instructions to Dobroslav Jevđević’ from Mihailović (October 8, 1942) provides details on how the Croat people and youth could be won over to the

\textsuperscript{112} AVII, Ca, k. 12, Reg. No. 31/2. The book of telegrams received by Mihailović’s headquarters (June 29 to July 19, 1942) contains more insight into the Chetnik strategic thinking. Apparently, an exhaustive report had been prepared on the future of Serb territory in Yugoslavia. The report commented on the Albanian problem in general, settlements in Kosovo and Metohija, about the Macedonian problem, Bunjevci and Šokci in the Bačka region and so on. Unfortunately, it could not be located in the Yugoslav archives. Nevertheless, it seems that it existed and that there was comprehensive and detailed Chetnik-produced wartime literature about the post-war settlement (focusing on Serb territorial matters). These materials were most likely for the Chetnik internal use only (i.e. they were not reproduced in propaganda leaflets or Chetnik newspapers), and they were marked as ‘produced for [Dragiša] Vasić’. See: AVII, Ca, k. 275, Reg. No. 3/1.

\textsuperscript{113} The autonomous existence and territorial extent of Slovenia in the Chetnik and Partisan platforms was essentially the same, any differences between capitalism and communism notwithstanding.
Chetnik cause\textsuperscript{114}. In the last segment of these instructions Mihailović makes the following exhortation:

Now, when the work to create one completely homogenous Serb unit is more serious than ever in our history, it is the duty of all Ravnogorci [members of the Ravna Gora movement] to make the effort to stop once and for all localism and individual ambitions\textsuperscript{115}.

This patriotic call for unity seems designed to restrain, if not overcome, Chetnik fragmentation along local and regional lines by evoking a greater national cause, playing on the patriotic consciousness of all involved in the movement. As an aside, the difficulties of imposing the will of Mihailović’s headquarters upon various Chetnik troops, especially those in Bosnia, should be borne in mind. In addition to the practical implications, this statement shows Mihailović’s optimism in extremely bleak circumstances; he believed that the war would inevitably end with the Axis defeat, that the Serbs (i.e. the Chetniks) would be on the winning side and in the immediate aftermath they would be able to do what they had been supposed to do in 1918, namely, create a Serb territorial unit \textit{first} and then rebuild Yugoslavia.

A ‘Report by Vojvoda Ilija Trifunović-Birčanin to General Mihailović’ (October 20, 1942)\textsuperscript{116}, though largely devoted to the pressing issues affecting the Chetnik organisation, asks some significant questions:

Are we fighting for Yugoslavia or for Serbia? If we are fighting for Yugoslavia, how will she be organised internally? Is the Cvetković-Maček Agreement to be a foundation of the future internal reorganisation, as all Croats are arguing?\textsuperscript{117}

Regarding the first question, one should keep in mind that Yugoslavia had existed for only about two decades at that point, while Serbia had been a historical reality for much longer. In light of this, abandoning Yugoslavia and reverting to Serbia was not difficult to imagine. The second question is really about a continuation of pre-war politics; the Chetnik leaders counted on the restoration of the royal regime in Yugoslavia at the end

\textsuperscript{114} AVII, Ca, k. 12, Reg. No. 45/2.  
\textsuperscript{115} AVII, Ca, k. 12, Reg. No. 45/2.  
\textsuperscript{116} AVII, Ca, k. 159, Reg. No. 49/2.  
\textsuperscript{117} AVII, Ca, k. 159, Reg. No. 49/2.
of the war. If the Second World War had not come to Yugoslavia, the Cvetković-Maček Agreement would have been the basis for the country’s transformation. How the events of the war would change things was anybody’s guess.118

Chetniks in Montenegro also had input on the movement’s overall ideological matters. The ‘Conclusions of the Conference of the Chetnik Youth of Montenegro, Bay of Kotor and Sandžak’ (December 2, 1942)119 documents the Chetnik vision for post-war Yugoslavia from that part of occupied Yugoslavia. The conclusions constitute seventeen points; only the most important ones will be dealt with here.

The first point was that the future restored and transformed state would be a hereditary and constitutional monarchy – the Kingdom of Yugoslavia – ruled by King Peter II Karađorđević. However, the Chetnik Organisation, rather than the Yugoslav government in exile, would directly cooperate with the Crown as the only state authority in the country after the war. Here, both the desire to break with the past – the pre-war Yugoslav policies embodied by the Yugoslav government in London – and maintain the continuity embodied by the Crown becomes evident. This intention is yet another indication that the Chetniks could not be seen as mere ‘restorers of the old regime’, as the Partisan wartime and post-war socialist Yugoslav propaganda painted them, but rather as royalists with significant changes in mind. They were, in this sense, ‘transformative conservatives’.120

The second point concerns Yugoslav borders and the desire to expand the state borders so that they would include all the territories denied to the country in 1918-1919.121

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118 One could argue that if Maček had accepted the leadership, the ISC would have been territorially the same (this was Hitler’s decision, not the Ustašas’ doing) but there would not have been a genocide; the ISC would have been an ‘overgrown’ Banovina of Croatia, certainly discriminatory against the Serbs (a full role reversal in power relationships) but for most Serbs, this would have been a return to a mini-version of Austro-Hungarian times. Most importantly, without the genocide there would not have been an uprising in the ISC; certainly nothing of great magnitude, at least.

119 AVII, Ca, k. 15, Reg. No. 10/4.

120 AVII, Ca, k. 15, Reg. No. 10/4.

121 AVII, Ca, k. 15, Reg. No. 10/4.
The third point deals with the nature of Yugoslavia itself\textsuperscript{122}. The new state was to be a monarchy and within it Serbs, Croats and Slovenes would ‘live in their own regions with wide autonomies’, implying an intent to internally segregate the three groups physically. In addition, a direct connection should exist between the three regions ‘in order to support the idea of a Yugoslav community fully’, indicative of an attempt to establish direct connection between the Serb and Slovene units, splitting Croatia in the process, as the document never states that each unit should have territorial continuity.

The fourth point is very short, but arguably the most ominous: ‘On the territory of the future state only the Serbs, Croats and Slovenes shall live. National minorities cannot exist’. This is a direct indication of the intention to expel non-Slavic minorities such as ethnic Germans and ethnic Albanians from the Yugoslav state territory. One should keep in mind that this point is not about Bosniaks, Macedonians and Montenegrins, unless the Bosniaks were seen as Turks, a foreign element; but this was not stated in the document\textsuperscript{123}.

The seventh point concerns religious matters\textsuperscript{124}:

The Church is state run. The Eastern Orthodox Church is national and St. Sava’s\textsuperscript{125}. The Roman Catholic Church has to administer separately from the Vatican, and be Yugoslav in spirit along the ideals of Štrosmajer. Religious instruction is mandatory in all primary and secondary schools.

The desire to control religious institutions by essentially making them a department of state comes from the conviction that their influence was paramount in the ethno-religious conflict(s) raging across occupied Yugoslavia. It is interesting that only two religious institutions, the Eastern Orthodox and Roman Catholic Churches, are mentioned; there is no word about Islam.

The next section of some significance is the thirteenth point, which asserts that state employees had to be ‘nationally and morally suitable’; among other things, they could not be communist-inclined. In addition, they would need to come from Chetnik

\textsuperscript{122} AVII, Ca, k. 15, Reg. No. 10/4.
\textsuperscript{123} AVII, Ca, k. 15, Reg. No. 10/4.
\textsuperscript{124} AVII, Ca, k. 15, Reg. No. 10/4.
\textsuperscript{125} Светосавска in Serbian.
ranks. This highlights the Chetnik organisation as the cornerstone of the state, here taken as something beyond a military formation, similar to what had existed in the pre-war era. This point concludes by stating that women could work in state administration ‘only when there is a shortage of men, and in suitable professions’, an illustration of the conservatism and traditional patriarchal spirit prevailing among the Chetnik ranks.\(^\text{126}\)

The St. Sava Congress (January 1944) and Beyond

In January 1944, in the village of Ba in Serbia, the Chetnik leaders held their last major gathering of the war, the St. Sava Congress\(^\text{127}\). National policy was the most important point of the Chetnik wartime program, and the St. Sava Congress officially reaffirmed this. The Resolution that came out of the Congress reaffirmed the contours of the 1941 ‘Homogenous Serbia’ plan, albeit in less explicit detail so as to avoid drawing attention to the more controversial parts, such as the territorial relationships within postwar Yugoslavia. At their core, both documents contain a version of Yugoslav ethnic trialist federalism that was to build upon the hated Cvetković-Maček Agreement from 1939.

\(^{126}\) AVII, Ca, k. 15, Reg. No. 10/4.

\(^{127}\) The timing of the congress indicates that it was likely organised as a response to Tito’s Second AVNOJ (November 1943) which provided a blueprint for the Yugoslav postwar state on the basis of a six-part federation.
By 1944, Chetnik trialism was openly presented as a form of Yugoslav federalism. Federalism started appearing as a term in Chetnik propaganda from 1944 onwards, clearly as a reaction to the Second AVNOJ plan by the Partisans, adopted in Jajce (Bosnia) in late November 1943, which called for a federal Yugoslavia comprising six republics. The Conclusions of the Second AVNOJ quickly found their way to the Chetnik leadership, prompting them to react with a congress of their own. The St. Sava Congress was envisioned as the Chetnik equivalent to AVNOJ; representatives of the Chetniks from all over occupied Yugoslavia were invited, as well as prominent Yugoslav pro-Chetnik politicians and representatives of the Allies (members of the American military mission to the Chetniks). Although the timing of the St. Sava Congress could be explained as a reaction to the Partisan assembly at Jajce, the Chetniks certainly

128 Slobodan Jovanović, as Prime Minister of the Yugoslav royal government located in London, informed Mihailović as early as December 1942 that postwar Yugoslavia would be reorganised along federal lines, not only because the Croats wanted it, but also because the Serbs would benefit from their own federal unit. However, not all members of the Yugoslav government in exile wanted to see the resurrection of Yugoslavia: Konstantin Fotić, Yugoslav ambassador in Washington, believed that resurrecting Yugoslavia would not be beneficial for the Serbs, and the alternative solution of an expanded Serbia should be pursued. The Serb American pro-Chetnik organisation Narodna Odbrana (National Defence) went as far as adopting an anti-Yugoslav resolution during a Chicago session in 1943. See: Vesović, Milan and Nikolić, Kosta. Ujedinjene srpske zemlje: ravnogorski nacionalni program. (Vreme Knjige: Beograd, 1996), p. 68. In the spring of 1943, the Yugoslav government in exile (led by Slobodan Jovanović) adopted a proclamation promising wide internal reforms in the postwar period, including a trialist federal model (Serb, Croat, Slovene units) of state organisation. For more information, see: Petranović, Branko. Revolucija i kontrarevolucija u Jugoslaviji 1941-1945, II. (Beograd: 1983), pp. 103-107. It should be pointed out that Mihailović, as a Minister in the Yugoslav royal government, had to follow its recommendations. In this regard, holding the government position was a double-edged sword, providing legitimacy on the one hand, but restricting his freedom of action on the other. It remains unclear what Mihailović really thought about resurrecting Yugoslavia after the war.

129 According to various Chetnik wartime publications, more than three hundred delegates attended the Congress from almost all regions of occupied Yugoslavia (only the delegates from northern Dalmatia were not able to reach the meeting place due to heavy snowfall). However, according to Chetnik postwar sources, such as Miloje R. Nikolić's essay ‘Remembering the St. Sava Congress’ (published in Knjiga o Draži II, Windsor, Ontario: 1956, p. 22), two hundred and seventy-four delegates attended. The congress was presented as Yugoslav in nature, but almost all delegates were Serbs. The non-Serbs were Mustafa Mulalić (Bosnian), Vladimir Predavec (Croat), Zvonimir Begić (Croat), Djura Vlôvić (Croat), Niko Bartulović (Croat), Anton Krejci (Slovene) and Franjo Parte (Croat). George Musulin, a member of the American military mission to Mihailović, was also present. Although the village of Ba, where the Congress took place, is only three kilometres from the Belgrade-Gornji Milanovac railway, the village was geographically well-situated, with only a single possible access route. The Congress was protected by two thousand Chetnik soldiers, led by Captain Zvonimir Vučković. For a first-hand account of security matters see: Vučković, Zvonimir. Protecting the Congress. (published in Knjiga o Draži II, Windsor, Ontario: 1956, pp. 6-7).
needed a clear political platform that could compete with the Partisan program. At the congress itself, a less radical and more pro-Yugoslav faction of the movement won the day, although the program adopted was not a great departure from the familiar blueprints of summer 1941.

Chetnik ideologists reacted harshly to the Partisan model of a Yugoslav federation of six republics: Slovenia, Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Serbia, Montenegro and Macedonia. According to the Chetniks, such an arrangement meant that Serbia was reverting to its pre-1912 state, before the Balkan wars\textsuperscript{130}. Instead of the Serbs achieving their own national unit in Yugoslavia as the Chetniks wanted, the Partisan plan would give the Slovenes and Croats their own territorial units while at the same time dividing the Serbs among four separate provinces\textsuperscript{131}. Thus, the Partisan

\textsuperscript{130} 'Almost a million Serbs would remain in undivided Croatia (with Dalmatia), while more than 1.2 million Serbs in Bosnia would remain under a Croat and Muslim majority ...Montenegro and Macedonia are being separated from Serbia...Many Serbs are angry at Dr. Maček because of the agreement according to which only a chunk of Bosnia, mostly Roman Catholic...was won for the Banovina of Croatia...however Tito will not allow the Serbs to have even a foot of Bosnia'. 'Tito and Us' article, serialised in \textit{Vojvodina}, No. 1-3, May 1 to July 1, 1944.

\textsuperscript{131} 'The partisan movement in Yugoslavia...had up until now numerous chances to openly, clearly and loudly declare itself against the Serb unification...While for the Croatian people they demand a unitary, unified Croatia with Dalmatia all the way to the Bay of Kotor, for the Serbian people, who suffered horrific atrocities, they demand four separate provinces: Serbia, Macedonia, Bosnia and Herzegovina and Montenegro. In the new communist-partisan Yugoslavia, besides a unified Croatia there should be division of the Serb people...but that is not all. According to the communist-partisan leadership the Serb people only live in Serbia.' \textit{Ujedinjeno Srpstvo}. No. 2, May 20, 1944.
program for post-war Yugoslavia was – in the eyes of the Chetnik leadership – anti-Serb to the core\textsuperscript{132}.

The resolution that came out of this congress took a more diplomatic tone than previous Chetnik resolutions, including a statement assuring non-Serbs that there would be no en masse retribution for those who were innocent\textsuperscript{133}. No clauses directly prescribed expulsions and resettlements, but the basic formula of trialism based on Serb, Croat and Slovene ethnic units within Yugoslavia was reaffirmed\textsuperscript{134}. The resolution talked about three-part Yugoslav federalism, but there was no direct discussion of internal borders except to state that each of the three Yugoslav nations should have its

\textsuperscript{132} Dr. Živko Topalović, a journalist from Belgrade and the leader of the Socialist Party of Yugoslavia before the war, was invited by Mihailović to join the Congress to give it a wider political basis. As a socialist, Dr. Topalović successfully toned down the rhetoric of the upcoming Congress, causing conflict with Dr. Moljević which almost led to his departure. Dr. Topalović suggested that Bosnia-Herzegovina should become the fourth territorial unit in post-war Yugoslavia, besides the three ethnically-based units that were by now a staple of all Chetnik blueprints. For Dr. Moljević, a native of Bosnia, such a suggestion was deeply insulting because it represented the antithesis of his own ideas. Mihailović had to intervene and Dr. Topalović withdrew his proposal for the fourth territorial unit before the opening of the Congress. Dr. Živko Topalović was sent to Italy in May 1944 to present the Chetnik point of view and the official postwar blueprint to the western Allies. His mission was not successful, but by being in Italy, he avoided the final drama of the Chetnik movement and managed to survive the war. He wrote a memoir titled The Struggle for Yugoslavia’s Future (London, 1967), providing a detailed account of his involvement with the Chetnik movement. For the episode with Dr. Moljević mentioned above see: pp. 158-164. During his speech at the Congress, Dr. Topalović openly attacked the Communist Party of Yugoslavia and its federal model of six republics. For the full transcript of his speech see: Kongres jugoslovenskih narodnih predstavnika, Vojvodina, No. 1, May 1, 1944.

\textsuperscript{133} For an example of the Chetnik rebuttal of accusations that they were planning a post-war military dictatorship and revenge on a massive scale see the article entitled ‘Narodni Skup’, Ravna Gora, No. 2, February 15, 1944. The final resolution of the Congress underlined that there would be no collective retribution after the war. Dragiša Vasić, in his opening speech at the Congress, said ominously: ‘Regarding the question about what will happen with those who are guilty, the Serb nation will have to answer that directly...nobody has the right to forgive in its name. Only those whose dearest family members are now under ground can forgive’. Quoted in Narodni Kongres: stenografske beleške, Nova Jugoslavija, No. 1, March 1, 1944. This publication supplemented the resolution of the Congress by publishing a detailed stenographic record of the entire proceedings.

\textsuperscript{134} The most important speech at the Congress was given by Dr. Stevan Moljević. The content of his speech was quite similar to his ‘Homogenous Serbia’ blueprint from June 1941, showing remarkable consistency in his views. The final draft of the resolution, which contained all the core ideas of Dr. Moljević’s speech, was prepared by Dr. Živko Topalović and Dragiša Vasić. See: Vučković, Zvonimir. Duh Baškov kongresa. Knjiga o Draži II. (Windsor, Ontario, 1956: p.27). During the Congress, Moljević finally eclipsed Dragiša Vasić as Mihailović’s most important advisor; Vasić’s importance was diminishing throughout 1943, partly because of personal issues with Mihailović. See: Vesović, Milan and Nikolić, Kosta. Ujedinjene srpske zemlje: ravnogorski nacionalni program. (Vreme Knjige: Beograd, 1996), pp. 60-61.
unit on ‘all its ethnic territory’. Given that Serb and Croat settlements were not contiguous in many parts of the former Yugoslavia, the conclusion can be drawn that the resettlement program for solving these internal problems was still envisioned even though this was not explicitly stated.

The Chetnik movement produced a number of publications, most of them in the format of leaflets or newspapers, during the war. These publications became the main venue for disseminating Chetnik propaganda and ideas. It is difficult ascertain how many people outside the Chetnik movement became aware of Chetnik postwar goals through these publications, but it is evident that both Axis circles and the Partisan leadership learned of them through this medium. Following the St. Sava Congress in January 1944, Chetnik postwar projections became more frequent and direct in the movement’s publications, and from 1944 on, they provide clear guidelines for the postwar restoration of Yugoslavia and its internal division along the trialist federal model.

In these later Chetnik publications, the refutation of Tito’s plan for a Yugoslav federation consisting of six republics became a recurring theme. Tito’s Partisan movement was regularly portrayed as an essentially non-Serb movement, the goal of...
which was to break up Yugoslav Serbs both in territorial and in national terms. This worst-case scenario was contrasted with the Chetnik trialist model.

To validate its own postwar model, Chetnik publications attacked Yugoslav interwar unitarism. The Chetniks distanced themselves from the interwar policies and engaged Tito’s movement in a race for hearts and minds (mostly of Yugoslav Serbs):

From the tradition of creating a homogenous Serbia from the homogenous Serb nation sprang the fallacy of an entire generation…that Yugoslavia has to be built as a unitary state based on one homogenous Yugoslav nation. That rudimentary postulate was wrong. A state built on such a flawed foundation would soon be overwhelmed with crises. It is true that Serbs, Croats and Slovenes are excellent ethnographic and historical material for building one Yugoslav nation of the future. However it is also a fact – stronger than all plans for the future – that Serbs, Croats and Slovenes are in political and moral terms three separate units… This fact must find its expression in the political organisation of the state, if that state wants to exist and live in internal peace. This is possible only if the state acquires a federal shape.

The Chetniks used their newspapers to disseminate officially adopted programs and views for the rest of the war. For example, the Chetnik publication Pomoravlje provided an extended blueprint for the territorial organisation of postwar Yugoslavia in three

138 ‘Those same [partisan] leaders in their blueprint for the future Yugoslavia divided the state into seven [sic] federal units: Slovenia, Croatia, Bosnia, Herzegovina, Montenegro, Serbia and Macedonia. Isn’t their plan clear? The Serb nation should be divided into Serbians, Bosnians, Herzegovinians and Macedonians. What strength would our nation have if it were divided into four segments, and what strength would it have if it were united into a single whole?’ Glas Rudnika, No. 3 (July, 10, 1944). This article is interesting because it illustrates the Chetnik awareness of Tito’s AVNOJ plan, but the information presented is not entirely correct: the partisan blueprint (eventually realised in 1945) was to internally divide federal Yugoslavia into six republics (Slovenia, Croatia, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Montenegro, Serbia and Macedonia), and to recognise five Yugoslav nations (Slovenes, Croats, Montenegrins, Serbs and Macedonians); the sixth Yugoslav nation – Muslims – was added only in 1967.

139 Dr. Živko Topalović at the St. Sava Congress. Quoted in Pomoravlje, No. 5, May 15, 1944. Topalović’s address to the Congress illustrates that the event was organised at least in part as a reaction to the CPY’s rival AVNOJ gathering in November 1943. Topalović argued that there was ‘Nothing more reactionary today in the age of democracy when states are based upon the territorial extent of living nations than to break up those wholes into small parts, create small statelets…It would be simple political unfairness for the Serbs to ask for the breaking up of a Croat national whole and vice versa. When the communists want to break up the Serb national whole, that is only an expression of their political blindness, their struggle with history, with normal development…We want a federalised Yugoslavia based upon Yugoslav ethnic units: Serbs, Croats and Slovenes, with separate self-governments’. Ibid.
separate articles, each devoted to one of the three federal units\textsuperscript{140}. The first article in this series, the Serb federal unit, is the longest and most elaborate. It, together with its sequels, provides a long-winded overview of the history of the Serbs from the early Middle Ages to modern times, including an explanation of their pattern of settlement in the Balkans. The article states that the ‘Serb ethnic unit...should include all regions where the Serbs live’\textsuperscript{141}; the list of territories to be included in the Serb unit is not given directly, but it can be deduced from the list of regions mentioned in the article’s historical overview. Besides the territories of pre-1918 Serbia and Montenegro, these included Vojvodina (Srem, Bačka and Banat), Bosnia-Herzegovina and the Serb-settled areas of Dalmatia, Lika and Slavonia (in modern day Croatia).

The article about the Croat territorial unit, published second in the series, provides what amounts to an overview of Croatian history from the early Middle Ages to the 1918 Yugoslav unification. Besides the basic acknowledgment that this unit should exist, there is no further discussion\textsuperscript{142}. This careful silence may indicate that the Chetnik leadership was proposing a much smaller entity than the prewar Banovina of Croatia, though it held back from explicitly advertising this. The proposed constitution of the Croat ethnic unit can be inferred by looking at what remained outside the Serb and Slovene\textsuperscript{143} units.

The final article in the series deals with the Slovene ethnic unit in postwar Yugoslavia\textsuperscript{144}. There is a brief historical overview, but because the Slovenes had no extensive history of independent mediaeval statehood, the focus quickly shifts to the current and former extent of Slovene ethnic settlement, including its diminishment over time, especially due to ‘Germanisation’. The Slovenes are portrayed in a positive light as an ethnic group fully loyal to the ‘King and fatherland’; the focus on Slovene-settled

\textsuperscript{140} See: \textit{Pomoravlje}, No. 5 (May 15\textsuperscript{th}, 1944), No. 6 (June 1, 1944) and No. 7 (June 15, 1944).
\textsuperscript{141} ‘The Serb Ethnic Unit in Tomorrow’s Federal Kingdom of Yugoslavia’ in \textit{Pomoravlje}, No. 5 (May 15, 1944).
\textsuperscript{142} ‘The Croat Ethnic Unit in Tomorrow’s Federal Kingdom of Yugoslavia’ \textit{Pomoravlje}, No. 6 (June 1, 1944).
\textsuperscript{143} Undoubtedly Dravska Banovina, with any potential postwar territorial extensions beyond the Yugoslav western and northern borders adjacent to it.
\textsuperscript{144} ‘The Slovene Ethnic Unit in Tomorrow’s Federal Kingdom of Yugoslavia’ \textit{Pomoravlje}, No. 7 (June 15, 1944).
lands that were beyond prewar Yugoslav boundaries seems to indicate the postwar extensions of the Slovene ethnic unit within federal Yugoslavia.

Throughout 1944, Chetnik publications continued to promote the concept of three-part ethnic federalism as a new foundation of postwar royal Yugoslavia. The Yugoslav federation was to be based on ‘ethnic division’, that is, each federal unit was to be based on ‘ethnic borders’ according to the situation that had existed before the Axis invasion\(^{145}\). Each ethnic unit was to be free of any national minorities that had forfeited their right to live in Yugoslavia through their (anti-Serb) wartime behaviour\(^{146}\). And each ethnic unit was to enjoy a wide range of self-government.

Chetnik writers presented their vision of federal Yugoslavia as fundamentally fair to all three Yugoslav nations:

> We do not accept federalism as a way of breaking up the Serbs and concentrating Croats. We understand federalism as a form of trialism...we have to clearly define the Serb living space [in Yugoslavia], what is Croat and what is Slovene...all Serb lands have to be one whole...the same is true for Croats and Slovenes\(^{147}\).

This is another stab at the rival Partisan plan for a six-part federation, which the Chetniks saw as concentrating the Croats into one unit (Croatia) and breaking up the Serbs into five other units (in all federal republics except Slovenia).

### Common Misconceptions about the St. Sava Congress

Two common misconceptions about the St. Sava Congress are frequently found in the existing historiography. One is that the Congress occurred too late to be relevant; the other states that the goals of the Chetnik movement remained largely undefined.

\(^{145}\) ‘Future Yugoslavia’ in *Pomoravlje*, No. 2 (April 1, 1944). Using the pre-war ethnic situation as the basis of future Yugoslav federalism acted to neutralise the effects of Ustaša anti-Serb policies in the Independent State of Croatia. For more on the three-part ethnic federalism model, see: ‘Federal Democratic Yugoslavia and United Serbdom’ in *For The Fatherland*, No. 1 (June 1, 1944).

\(^{146}\) ‘Future Yugoslavia’ in *Pomoravlje*, No. 2 (April 1, 1944). Although the minorities in question remained unnamed, this most likely referred to ethnic Germans and ethnic minorities from neighbouring countries who had participated in the Axis invasion, occupation and partition of Yugoslavia (certainly Hungarians and Albanians, possibly Bulgarians and Italians).

\(^{147}\) ‘All for Serbdom’, No. 11, August 1944.
Correcting the second misconception is the easier of the two. At the time, the St. Sava Congress was as centrally defining to the Chetnik movement as the second AVNOJ, held two months earlier, had been to the rival Partisan movement. A closer examination of the final resolution of the St. Sava Congress and the final resolution of the second AVNOJ reveals that the level of detail and clarity is fairly similar for both blueprints of Yugoslavia’s future. Beside the obvious differences (capitalist vs. communist systems), the Partisan federal model of six republics (Slovenia, Croatia, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Montenegro, Serbia, Macedonia) for five nations (Slovenes, Croats, Montenegrins, Serbs and Macedonians) found its equivalent in the Chetnik federal model of three territorial units (Slovene, Croat, Serb) for three nations (Slovenes, Croats, Serbs). While the Partisan blueprint represented a radical departure from prewar Yugoslav policies, the Chetnik blueprint offered a logical continuation and conclusion of the transformation that had begun with the Cvetković-Maček Agreement in 1939. In both cases, there was the promise of a break with the past and a move towards a federal Yugoslavia. Unlike the AVNOJ blueprint – which materialised once the Partisans seized power – for many decades, the resolution of the St. Sava Congress remained in obscurity as far as the Yugoslav public was concerned. The lack of discussion about the conclusions of the St. Sava Congress evokes the Partisan wartime tactic of not reproducing Chetnik material (goals, maps etc.) in their own propaganda (unlike the Ustašas, who used Chetnik material to scare Croats and Muslims in the Independent State of Croatia). In short, a lack of familiarity with the final resolution of the St. Sava Congress lies behind the misconceptions.

An evaluation of whether the St. Sava Congress came too late is somewhat more challenging. The Congress was held only two months after the Partisans held their second AVNOJ, and there was no significant time lag between the two rival movements’ adaptations of their respective programs. It is certainly true that the Chetniks defined their goals after the Allies had already switched their support to the rival Partisan

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Some individuals affiliated with the Chetnik movement who managed to survive the war later argued that the St. Sava Congress came too late, and that many things would have been different internationally had the Chetniks held this congress in 1942 or early 1943 at the latest. For an example of such a view, see: Pribicevic, Adam. *Ideology of Draža’s Movement. Knjiga o Draži, II.* (Windsor, Ontario: 1956), pp. 34-35. While holding the congress earlier might have been beneficial for the Chetnik movement internally, there were other, arguably more important, factors that had a far greater impact on the outcome of the war.
movement. However, this is offset by the fact that switching support to the Partisans was already in place before Tito’s movement had defined its own goals in late November 1943. Taking this into account, it is doubtful that having such a congress earlier would have significantly changed the outcome of the war.

**Conclusions about the Chetnik Wartime Program**

On the ideological front, the wartime Chetnik movement was, in many ways, a microcosm of the Yugoslav Serb politics of the later interwar period. Exhausted by the enormous sacrifice of the First World War, and satisfied that ninety-eight percent of all Serbs lived in a common state\(^{149}\), the Yugoslav Serb élite now focused on preserving what had been achieved in 1918. From that point on, Yugoslav Serbs were on the defensive, lacking an identifiable national program beyond maintaining the status quo in Yugoslavia. For their part, Yugoslav non-Serbs continuously challenged this status quo, particularly the Croats who started a political offensive aimed at internal transformation as soon as the new kingdom was created. Finding themselves in an unfamiliar role – or rather, in a role that was a complete reversal from that of the previous century – Yugoslav Serbs were unable to articulate a coherent response to these new challenges.

The pursuit of a unitary Yugoslav state based on a single Yugoslav nationality lasted from 1918-1939, when the weight of the ‘Croat question’ finally forced the Yugoslav royal regime to abandon unitarism and explore new directions. This moment was pivotal in Yugoslav politics, and a defining formative point in the ideology of the wartime Chetniks. In 1939, Yugoslav Serbs lacked anything resembling a national program, but the overwhelmingly negative reaction to the creation of the Banovina of Croatia (especially its territorial extent) prompted the Serbian élite into action. More specifically, the Serb Cultural Club formulated a Serb national response to the new situation in Yugoslavia. Its goal after the Cvetković-Maček Agreement was to establish a Serb territorial unit within Yugoslavia, both as a counterweight to the Banovina of Croatia and as a symbolic return to 1918, thereby correcting the mistake of not marking Serb territorial possessions in the new state. After the Axis invasion, the Chetniks, as a

\(^{149}\) A figure given by Jovan Cvijić in his critical work *Balkansko Poluostrvo* (Beograd, 1921).
resistance movement led by military officers, took over the platform of the SCC and integrated it into their own program.

Despite the clearly negative attitude of the Chetniks towards the Cvetković-Maček Agreement and their attempts to distance themselves from or simply ignore it, a closer examination reveals the Agreement was the real predecessor of the Chetnik postwar vision. Yugoslav trialism, most likely the next step of the Yugoslav state’s transformation stemming from the agreement, became the basis of the Chetnik wartime blueprint for postwar Yugoslavia. Three federal units, acting as national homelands for the Serbs, Croats and Slovenes, would have a substantial degree of autonomy. The Chetnik ideas on post-war Yugoslavia, with regards to both its external borders and its internal organisation, can be summarised by the Chetnik slogan ‘Greater Serbia within Greater Yugoslavia’.

The real focus of the Chetniks, however, was securing a Serb territorial unit within Yugoslavia. The Chetnik goal of creating Greater Serbia within a restored Yugoslavia demonstrates that Yugoslavism as an ideology had been abandoned.

What separated the Chetnik plans to transform Yugoslavia from the demands made by the prewar SCC was the territorial extent of the Serb unit as well as the Chetnik plans for Yugoslav minorities and the Yugoslavs themselves. Stunned by the genocide of the ethnic Serbs in the Independent State of Croatia, and motivated by the desire for revenge, Chetnik ideologists envisioned a large Serbia that would include most of post-war Yugoslavia alongside a significantly reduced Croatia (when compared to the pre-war Croatian Banovina). The size reserved for Slovenia was essentially the same as that of

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150 The unity of our three-name people will be on a federal basis. All Serbs will be gathered together on their ethnic territory, which will become a Serb unit with the widest possible autonomy by political, military, economic, social, cultural and every other means. Along the same lines, Croatian and Slovenian units will be formed...within their own ethnic domain. Serbs, Croats and Slovenes will lead their state and national affairs completely autonomously, without one people interfering in the life of another. *Pomoravlje*, No. 1, March 15, 1944.

151 The Slogan was printed on the header of the Chetnik newspaper *Ravnogorac*, together with ‘Freedom or Death’ and ‘For King, Faith and Fatherland’.

152 'We committed a large sin against the natural order of things when we gave primacy to the unity of South Slavs over the unity of Serbdom'. *Ravnogorac*, No. 14, March 1944. One could argue, however, that Yugoslavism had been on shaky ideological ground since the 1939 Agreement.
the pre-war Dravska Banovina, not counting the desired expansions beyond the old Yugoslav borders.

The brutal realities of the war were reflected in the Chetnik plan to expel all national minorities beyond Yugoslav state soil. The most telling part was, in fact, the plan to segregate Serbs and Croats and confine them to their own national units within Yugoslavia, and to expel Slavic Muslims to Turkey or Albania, a task that would require large-scale permanent and mandatory transfers of Croats and Serbs within Yugoslavia. The desire to have an ethnically homogenous Serb unit, on whose territory all Yugoslav Serbs would live and enjoy maximal autonomy from Yugoslavia was a nostalgic throwback to the stability offered by the ethnically homogenous pre-1912 Serbia. It also reflected the desire to seek guarantees that the wartime atrocities would never be repeated and that no Serbs would ever be left behind in the event of a Yugoslav dissolution.

During the last phase of the war there were two further developments on the ideological front. The first, which came at the end of 1944, was the concept of separating the Chetnik forces along ethnic lines by creating a Serb, Croat and Slovene Army under the umbrella of the ‘Yugoslav Army in the Homeland’ (as the Chetniks were officially known). In this way, the official blueprint for an ethno-federal trialistic Yugoslavia was being supplemented and reinforced by separating the armed forces. In the first days of 1945, the Chetnik Headquarters started to use the term ‘the Serb military of the Yugoslav Army in the Homeland’; along similar lines, there was also to be ‘the Croat military of the Yugoslav Army in the Homeland’ and ‘the Slovene military of the Yugoslav Army in the Homeland’. Local Chetnik headquarters adopted the new nomenclature and kept it until the end of the war.

This belated separation of the Chetnik forces along ethnic lines (Serb, Croat, Slovene), echoing their territorial plan for post-war Yugoslavia, marked the final point in the Chetnik wartime transformation from a Yugoslav to a Serb force. It should be noted that the projected Croat and Slovene military, notwithstanding a few Croats and small units of Slovenes in the Chetnik movement, was at this point purely theoretical. Effectively, all existing Chetnik units became the Serb military, with the entire Chetnik movement openly adopting a Serb course. It should also be noted that with this decision, Mihailović’s pre-war concept of creating three ethnically-based sub-militaries within the
Yugoslav Army was (in theory) finally implemented; before the war, when Mihailović had promoted this as a more effective defence plan for Yugoslavia, he had been disciplined.

The Chetnik leadership held one more conference before the end of the war. At a meeting from March 27 to April 11, 1945, the movement’s Central National Committee produced its political testament. This document introduced a number of innovations to the Chetnik ideological platform, and was the last of its kind. Entitled simply ‘The Yugoslav National Program’, this document is divided into two parts: the first is devoted to Yugoslavia and general matters, and the second (called ‘The Serb National Program’) concerns Yugoslav Serb matters.

Now-familiar conclusions in the first part include the goal of re-establishing Yugoslavia, expanding its borders according to the demands of the Yugoslav delegation put forward at the Paris Peace Conference in 1919, and reorganising the country along ethnic federal lines (Serb, Croat and Slovene units) with the emphasis on separating Serbs and Croats and demarcating their lands. All reorganisations of the Yugoslav territorial space conducted without genuine Serb representation – from the 1939 Cvetković-Maček Agreement to that day – were proclaimed null and void.

New elements in the first part of the document include a positive tone towards the 1917 Soviet revolution, a belated attempt at rapprochement and a realistic understanding that state sovereignty would be quite different in the post-war period. The document expresses Serb readiness to accept Yugoslavia’s post-war status as a satellite of one of the Great Powers (perhaps even the USSR). Another novelty is the suggestion that the Yugoslav army should be ethnically and territorially based, with conscripted individuals serving in their own ethno-federal units, although the unity of the Yugoslav army was to be preserved with a joint command at the federal level. The main goal was once again geared towards separating Serbs and Croats, this time in the armed forces. This proposal was an official adaptation of the late-1944 ‘ethnic militaries within the Yugoslav army’ model pursued by Mihailović before the war, the validity of which was proven to the Chetnik leaders by the behaviour of non-Serbs in the Yugoslav Royal Army during the short April War of 1941.

The second part, devoted to the Serbs in particular, centres on national unity. Here, the desire for national unity of the Yugoslav Serbs is described as something
natural, a state of affairs that all European nations had already achieved, echoing
sentiments seen in previous Chetnik blueprints. What is new, however, is the recognition
that diverse territories inhabited by Yugoslav Serbs had created, over time, a number of
different psychological types and mentalities. Because of this, the Serb unit within
Yugoslavia was not to be a centralised but a regional state, with significant local
autonomies. The Serb unit was to be subdivided into a few larger regions, but this
should be done only after the Serbo-Croat border had been defined.
These innovations indicate that the liberal faction within the Chetnik leadership
won over the right-wing faction in the closing months of the war. However, this evolution
came too late: the final defeat was only weeks away. Most of the authors of the program
were caught and brought to trial in the following months by the Yugoslav communist
regime. Not surprisingly, the Chetnik leadership was tried for ‘counter-revolutionary
activities’ (civil war with the Partisans), collaboration with the Axis forces and atrocities
against non-Serbs (such as those against Slavic Muslims). The Chetnik blueprints, or
any reference to their goal of uniting all Yugoslav Serbs into a single territorial unit were
deftly ignored during the trials and in all subsequent records.
In the process of shaping Chetnik wartime ideology, Yugoslav prewar national
and religious tensions, wartime genocide/atrocities and subsequent ethno-religious
conflict proved to be of critical importance. In areas where ethno-religious conflict was
raging, Chetniks were transformed into (or were formed from an outset as) a Serb
territorial paramilitary force. This development on the ground was reflected on the
ideological front, in the primacy of Serb national matters and the emphasis on Serb
national unification in the Yugoslav region. The civil war with the communist Partisans
also had an impact on Chetnik ideology, toning down exclusive Serb rhetoric in an
attempt to attract Yugoslav non-Serbs. Nevertheless, the civil war with the Partisans was
essentially a win or lose situation, and its ideological impact was significantly less
weighty than the national/religious matters and affairs. The next segment of the thesis
will make conclusions about Chetnik wartime strategy and ideology and provide a final
assessment of the movement.

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Analysis and Conclusion

Mihailović’s Chetnik Movement from the New Historical Perspective

As I have argued in the preceding pages, there were not two but three parallel conflicts in occupied Yugoslavia during the Second World War, a timeframe measured from the Axis attack on Yugoslavia, April 6, 1941, to V-Day in Europe, May 9, 1945. First, a resistance struggle against the Axis, second, a communist-royalist civil war and third, a regional ethno-religious conflict made possible by the wartime circumstances. The Chetniks – officially the Yugoslav Army in the Fatherland – were unique among wartime guerrilla groups in that they fought in all three: as the extension of the Yugoslav army in the resistance struggle, in the civil war as royalists, and in the ethno-religious conflict as a Serb territorial paramilitary force in areas with a mixed population. The ethno-religious conflict, a distinctive ‘war within a war’, had a profound transformative influence on the Chetnik wartime strategy and ideology and a lasting impact on the region’s future. The civil war with the Partisans also had a great impact on the Chetnik wartime strategy, but not so much on its ideology, except that it made the Chetniks less radical in their rhetoric and, on the surface at least, more Yugoslav-oriented to compete with the Partisans. Once combined, these elements paint a picture of Mihailović’s wartime Chetnik resistance movement as an anti-communist, royalist, Serb territorial paramilitary force in areas with a heterogeneous population, and an anti-communist royalist guerrilla force in the areas of old (pre-1912) Serbia and Montenegro.

Problems and Challenges

Perhaps the main challenge in completing this work was psychological: growing up in socialist Yugoslavia meant learning about the Partisan myth in school, and with it the notion of Mihailović as a national traitor and his guerrilla movement as a collaborationist pro-Fascist force. The official state history stated that Mihailović and his Chetniks started as a royalist resistance movement, but then betrayed the resistance
effort, turned against the Partisans and joined the Axis. Moreover, the Chetniks as extreme Serb nationalists were responsible for wartime atrocities against the Yugoslav non-Serbs (Slavic Muslims in particular) and, as such, were the closest thing to Serb wartime equivalent of the Croat Ustaša movement. This was the image of the Second World War that two post-war generations grew up with, myself included.

This ‘official’ history of the Chetnik movement was a powerful obstacle to overcome, even though there were many immediately noticeable problems with it before I began a detailed examination of the archives. My curiosity and my desire to establish a more balanced historical truth were major driving forces behind the thesis; I felt no need to reach a predetermined outcome. As it turned out, the Chetnik and other wartime documents revealed a different view from the events familiar to every Serbian schoolchild, resulting in some revisionist conclusions.

The most significant changes in perspective – and a major challenge to the official history taught for decades in Yugoslav classrooms – arising from this thesis include a new understanding of the Chetnik position in the Chetnik-Partisan war, and a new context for the Chetnik wartime collaboration with the Axis. Mihailović and his men were staunch anti-communists, and from October 31, 1941, on they relentlessly pursued the civil war with Tito’s communist Partisans in all parts of occupied Yugoslavia. This in itself does not make them national traitors, nor for that matter pro-fascist – despite the fact that the Partisans were a fellow resistance group on the Allied side. Rather, the Chetniks waged war against the Partisans from a traditional Serb nationalist and monarchist standpoint, and not from a pro-Axis platform. They viewed the communist-prescribed solutions to the national question in Yugoslavia, including their fragmented federal model of territorial organisation, as a catastrophe for the Yugoslav Serbs, and saw communist revolutionary goals as a direct threat to Serb national institutions such as the monarchy and the Serbian Orthodox Church. For Mihailović’s Chetniks, the Partisans were an anti-Serb force (even though the majority of Partisans were ethnic Serbs), a Serb national enemy, not just anti-royalist competitors for power.

This leads me to the psychologically more difficult issue of collaboration. After the Chetnik-Partisan war erupted, the Chetniks collaborated with their Axis enemies against the Partisans, the Chetnik-Italian collaboration in the Italian zones of the ISC being the most elaborate example. The collaborationist charge was used in socialist Yugoslavia to
place the Chetniks firmly in the Axis coalition and to deny their standing as a resistance group. Admittedly, Chetnik anti-Partisan collaboration with the Axis on the basis of anti-communism developed from an earlier cooperation with the Italians in the ISC within the context of the ethno-religious conflict. However, Chetnik documents clearly show that the only common ground between the Chetniks and the Axis was their anti-communism. In fact, the Chetnik leadership always believed that the Axis would lose the war; moreover, they found Nazi and fascist ideology alien and strange, and had no interest in securing their spot in the New Order. While the ‘Chetniks as Axis’ thesis is not justifiable from an ideological viewpoint, as the resistance was never abandoned, the fact remains that focusing on fighting the Partisans (with or without Axis help) over time gradually diminished the Chetnik capacity to fight a foreign enemy. This does not make the Chetniks part of the Axis, but their ever-increasing focus on the Partisans certainly contributed to the Allied decision to switch logistical and political support from the Chetniks to the Partisans, thus leading to the Chetnik movement’s demise.

A particular problem is the incomplete nature of the archival sources. Although the archives are now open to researchers, many lacunae remain. For one thing, the Chetniks lost the war, and in the final months and weeks of the conflict, many commanders hid their records so well that they have never been found. For another, the opening of the Yugoslav archives in 1991 showed that wartime document collections published in the Zbornik series were selective and focused on incriminating the Chetniks by printing every record on collaboration while suppressing all reports on their resistance struggle after October 31, 1941. Nonetheless, the remaining records, such as the books of reports to the headquarters from various commanders on the ground provide fascinating evidence of Chetnik resistance actions against the Wehrmacht and other Axis forces during the 1942-1944 period. That said, the fact that any records concerning Mihailović’s execution and final resting place are nowhere to be found indicates that much has been either destroyed in the post-war period or remains hidden from ordinary archival researchers.

The Chetniks on Three Parallel Fronts: Strategic and Ideological Difficulties

The original Chetnik intent was to simply be a guerrilla resistance group, organising in the shadows in preparation for a general uprising when the Allies reached
the region. This was their initial purpose: their engagement in the other two conflicts was purely reactive, being neither planned nor desired. What the Chetniks had envisioned as their wartime role and how their actual engagement turned out were two very different things indeed.

The Chetnik wartime position was difficult, challenging and full of contradictions. They were, first and foremost, a resistance group. However, both the ethno-religious conflict and the civil war with the Partisans pushed them into collaboration with their enemies in certain areas. The civil war with the Partisans, another resistance group, in the midst of Axis occupation was the cause of ever-increasing displeasure among the Allies, particularly the British. This discontent increased when collaboration became part of the Chetnik civil war strategy. For the Allies, the bottom line revolved around who was contributing to the Axis body count; they had little interest in the Chetnik-Partisan war or the ethno-religious conflict. In the end, the Allies abandoned the Chetniks and switched their political and logistical support to the Partisans whose resistance was more active.

The Chetniks were nominally the armed forces of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia and were officially recognised as such by the Yugoslav government in exile and the Allies until the summer of 1944. However, in areas of occupied Yugoslavia with a mixed population, at the geographical fringes of Serbia and Montenegro and particularly in the Independent State of Croatia, the Chetniks essentially became a Serb territorial paramilitary force, protecting villages in the ethno-religious conflict against the Ustašas, Muslim, and Albanian militias, and engaging in retaliatory attacks against nearby non-Serb settlements. Being nominally the Yugoslav Army and factually a Serb territorial paramilitary force caused friction between the projected image/official role and the reality on the ground: discrepancies were rife between the Yugoslav government in exile and the Chetnik leadership in occupied Yugoslavia, as well as between the Chetniks and non-Serb pro-Yugoslavs. It should also be noted that as the war dragged on, the conflict with the Partisans gradually took ascendancy over both the resistance struggle and the ethno-religious conflict, consuming the Chetnik movement’s energy and deflecting its attention. Moreover, most of the Partisan forces, especially in the first half of the war, consisted of Serbs. Thus, the Chetnik-Partisan war ended up significantly increasing the number of Serb casualties, in direct contravention of the Chetniks’ ultimate goal of Serb population preservation.
The Chetniks’ strategic and ideological response was complex and not always successful. They collaborated with Yugoslavia’s Axis occupiers and their domestic quisling regimes within the context of the ethno-religious conflict (their first contacts were with the Italians in the ISC) and then on a more widespread scale within the context of the civil war with the Partisans. These developments had to be justified to the local Serb population, the Allies and the Yugoslav government in exile. The Chetniks argued that such collaborations allowed Serb-populated areas to be protected from attacks by the Ustaša militia; they granted access to weapons, ammunition, logistics and food for the duration of the occupation and partially shielded the Chetniks from the Axis attacks. The Chetnik commanders also argued that any collaboration was only a formality and fundamentally superficial in nature, implying that they were using the enemy purely for Chetnik benefit and would turn their weapons against the Axis once the war’s endgame started in the region. In theory, no matter how formal or deep the collaboration ran, the Chetniks remained in the Allied camp; the collaboration was anti-Ustaša (with the Italians) and anti-communist (all Axis forces).

Perhaps not surprisingly, the Chetniks’ partial collaboration with the Axis, a much-studied topic in postwar socialist Yugoslavia, represents one of the most controversial issues in the movement’s history. There was a two-fold motivation for the collaboration: one lay within the context of the ethno-religious conflict and the other within the context of the civil war with the Partisans.

When collaboration occurred within the context of the ethno-religious conflict – the most important example being the Chetnik-Italian cooperation in the Italian zones of the ISC – its main motivation was the protection of Serb populated areas from the Ustaša militia and other like-minded forces. The Chetniks and the Italians shared common ground within this context: both wanted to undermine the Ustaša regime, albeit for very different reasons. In the Italian zones of control within the ISC, and circumventing the ISC completely, numerous Chetnik troops were legalised by the Italians as MVAC (voluntary anti-communist militia) Italian Army auxiliaries. In the German zones of the ISC, some Chetnik troops became formally recognised as VAM units (voluntary anti-communist militia), Eastern Orthodox auxiliaries within the Domobrani, the ISC’s regular army. These VAM units provided potent propaganda
material for the enemies of the Chetniks, the Ustašas\(^1\) and Partisans alike, and while Mihailović despised these units, he could not force the local commanders to abandon them\(^2\). The Chetniks in the ISC tried to create formalised agreements with the Wehrmacht forces a number of times, but despite the willingness of local commanders, such agreements never truly materialised largely because of Berlin's objections. In any case, Chetnik MVAC/VAM legalisations, no matter how fragile, helped achieve one of principal goals of the movement in the ISC: the biological preservation of some of the local Serb population. As long as the agreements held, Serbs living in the areas covered were spared Ustaša atrocities. This gain was offset, however, by Chetnik-Partisan fighting; given that troops from both movements were comprised mostly of Serbs, most casualties were Serbs\(^3\).

When collaboration occurred within the context of the civil war with the Partisans – and this type of collaboration was much more widespread than the collaboration outlined above – it was based on the common anti-communist stance of Chetniks and the Axis, their only common ground.

Overall, Chetnik collaboration with the Axis was never simply anti-Allies and pro-Axis. It was certainly presented as such in socialist Yugoslavia, as the Chetniks collaborated with Axis enemies against a rival resistance movement, but this view is overly simplistic. Documentary wartime evidence, both Chetnik and Axis, shows no Chetnik ideological sympathy for fascism/Nazism; nor did they believe in the likelihood of the permanence of Hitler’s New Order in Europe. The Chetniks considered themselves members of the Allied camp and were considered as such by the Axis. In Chetnik-Axis collaborations, both sides argued that they were using the other for their own goals, and neither trusted the other. Despite partial collaboration with the Axis during the war, the Chetniks firmly believed in an ultimate Allied victory and ideologically belonged to the

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\(^{1}\) There was no direct Chetnik collaboration with the Ustaša militia, and they signed no formal contract.

\(^{2}\) To strengthen the collaboration side of their argument against Mihailović, Tito’s regime placed Commander Radić, whose Chetnik troops signed a collaborationist agreement with the ISC and became VAM despite Mihailović’s objections, on the same bench as Mihailović during his 1946 trial. VAM agreements were used to implicate the entire Chetnik movement as collaborationist and present Mihailović as a traitor.

\(^{3}\) The Chetnik core with Mihailović remained 'illegal' until the end of the war.
pro-Western camp. Although the Chetniks were abandoned by the Allies in favour of the Partisans, these views prevailed until the end of the war.

With hindsight, the Chetnik collaboration strategy was a failure. It made the Chetniks less active against the Axis than the rival Partisans and, as a result, the Allies sided with the Partisans, allowing Tito to come to power and abolish the monarchy in late 1945.

Collaboration was a strategic challenge because the Chetniks, as the domestic arm of the Yugoslav government in exile, were reduced to a Serb base (except in Slovenia, which was free of ethno-religious conflict). Moreover, acting as a Serb territorial paramilitary force in areas such as the ISC was simply not compatible with incorporating Croats and Slavic Muslims into the Chetnik ranks. Yet the Chetniks attempted to do exactly that, partly to separate the Croats and Slavic Muslims and partly to compete with the Partisans. Indeed, many Chetnik strategic and ideological adjustments were reactionary, aimed at competing with Partisan actions and policies. The Chetniks had some temporary success with the Slavic Muslims, and a few Muslim units were created, but they made little headway with the pro-Yugoslav Croats. For all intents and purposes, in areas with a mixed population, Mihailović’s Chetniks were a Serb force despite the official ‘Yugoslav’ nomenclature. Unlike the Chetniks, the Partisans successfully incorporated non-Serbs into both their leadership and their rank and file, especially in the later stages of the war, and they had demonstrably more to offer Yugoslav non-Serbs (with the sole exception of the Slovenes) than the Chetniks did. One issue for future research is why the Partisans, whose political platform offered the Yugoslav Serbs significantly less than the Chetniks still managed to attract so many Yugoslav Serbs, especially in the western parts of the ISC. Perhaps by offering the opportunity to engage in more active resistance, they appealed to those who had lost everything.

Consider Chetnik behaviour towards the Red Army which entered Serbia from the east in late 1944. Despite fighting the communist Partisans for three years, the Chetniks simply retreated after unsuccessful attempts at establishing friendly contact. The fact that the Red Army was part of the Allied camp was more important here than the fact they were a communist force.

The monarchy was abolished by the Yugoslav federal communist assembly on November 29, 1945.
The Chetniks’ Ideological Dilemma: The Restoration of Yugoslavia or the Establishment of the ‘United Serb Lands’

For the Chetniks, the ideological challenge of participation in the ethno-religious conflict was profound. In the light of widespread persecution of the Serbs in occupied Yugoslavia, particularly in the ISC, the Chetnik leaders faced a dilemma over the ultimate aim of the struggle: was the goal to restore Yugoslavia or was it to replace Yugoslavia with a smaller successor state which would unify all Yugoslav Serbs?

As a direct continuation of the royal Yugoslav army, the post-war restoration of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia was certainly a Chetnik obligation. They were fighting for the return of the King and his exiled government in which Mihailović held a ministerial seat. However, there had been widespread dissatisfaction with the state of affairs in interwar Yugoslavia and shock at the wartime collapse and subsequent events. Many Chetnik leaders thought that the very creation of Yugoslavia had been a mistake; a common statehood with the Croats was toxic, pointless and in need of change, they argued. While all Chetnik leaders held Serb unification as their primary goal, they disagreed as to how this could be achieved – by keeping Yugoslavia and creating within it a large Serb territorial unit or by abandoning Yugoslavia and establishing an independent Serb state. Territorially, the options were essentially the same on the Serb level; the disagreement concerned whether to maintain Yugoslavia in a broader framework.

Serb territorial unification within Yugoslavia was favoured by more traditional and conservative Chetnik leaders from Serbia and Montenegro, while the more radical solution of Serb territorial unification without restoring Yugoslavia was favoured by those originating from Bosnia and Herzegovina where local Serbs faced the prospect of annihilation. The pro-Yugoslav fraction eventually won, as evident in the official proclamation of the Chetnik movement’s goals in January 1944, namely, to compete with the Partisans and to offer an alternative Yugoslav platform. However, it is important to remember that for all Chetniks, the territorial unification of Yugoslav Serbs remained the central ideological goal.
**Axis Responsibility for the Ethno-religious Conflict**

The Axis occupation forces, through their choice of occupation arrangements, created a situation that resulted in widespread atrocities and ethno-religious conflict in occupied Yugoslavia. The initial wave of Ustaša violence caused a Serb uprising in the ISC, and the creation of the critical mass for the emergence of guerrilla resistance. However, the Germans, Italians and Ustašas responded to these events quite differently.

For the Ustaša regime, the Serb uprising demonstrated that eradicating two million Serbs (thirty percent of the state’s population) was going to be a much harder task than initially thought. The rebellion had a dampening effect on the Ustaša violence and forced the regime to seek alternative solutions, including such improvisations as the creation of the Croat Orthodox Church and legalisation of some Chetnik detachments.

The Germans, for their part, decided to stay on the sidelines as long as the conflict between the ISC and its Serb population did not put the Wehrmacht in the line of fire. Local Wehrmacht commanders were shocked by the events in the ISC, especially the gruesome details of Ustaša atrocities, and led local initiatives to reduce the violence, but these were doomed to fail because the Reich’s leadership in Berlin was not willing to change direction, even though their own plans had been hastily improvised in April 1941. The bottom line was that occupied Yugoslavia represented a side theatre of war for Germany.

Because local Wehrmacht commanders were unable to change the situation, they redefined the Reich’s strategic goals and limited them to the protection of key transportation routes, along with a few sites of economic value. As long as the local violence did not endanger these, it went unchecked. The entire German response was rigid and unimaginative and in the long term proved to be counterproductive: more violence meant more people being up-rooted, a development that only increased the size of both the Chetnik and the Partisan guerrilla movements.

The Italian response to the Serb anti-Ustaša uprising was very different from that of the Germans to the north. Unlike the troubled Serb-German relationship, there was no previous baggage of historical hostility between Serbs and Italians; on the contrary, following the occupation, tensions grew between the Croats and Italians over the fate of Dalmatia. Leaders of the Serb rebels approached the Italians for help, and the Italians
responded. Although Italian shock at the Ustaša atrocities was even more profound than the Germans, the Italians were not driven by humanitarian concerns; rather, they looked to political opportunism. Be that as it may, their actions resulted in the removal of the Ustaša militia from Serb-populated areas, thereby creating a bond with the rebel leadership. This relationship was inherited by the local Chetniks once the Serb rebels diversified into Chetniks and Partisans and was deepened by the common Chetnik-Italian anti-communist struggle.

**The Chetniks: Continuing the Old, with Something New**

Traditionally, Mihailović’s Chetniks have been represented as an extension of the old Yugoslav royal regime. This view is not necessarily wrong, but it is certainly incomplete. The Chetniks were fighting in the name of the King in exile and presented themselves as the direct continuation of the Yugoslav royal army. In this way, they were indeed a continuation of the old regime. However, on the ideological front, the Chetnik spiritual predecessor was the prewar Serb Cultural Club (SCC) that had opposed the regime’s internal policies, particularly the creation of the Banovina of Croatia via the 1939 Cvetković-Maček Agreement. What the SCC demanded before and especially after the 1939 agreement was the territorial consolidation of Serb lands in Yugoslavia – also a wartime goal of the Chetniks. Like the SCC, the Chetniks criticised the immediate post-World War I situation in Yugoslavia and expressed deep dissatisfaction with how Yugoslav unification had come about in 1918.

Thus, despite their official standing, the Chetniks stood in opposition to the old Yugoslav royal regime embodied by the Yugoslav government in exile. Instead, the Chetniks represented a force of change. A Chetnik victory in the Second World War might have meant the return of a royal Yugoslavia, but it would have been a very different county, becoming a trialistic federation of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes (the only national groups recognised in the country), most of whom would live in their respective territorial units. Returning to the interwar situation was never a feasible option.

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6 Prime Minister Cvetković planned to do the same in 1940 as a logical evolution of the Cvetković-Maček Agreement, transforming the areas west of the Banovina of Croatia into Slovenian Banovina and the areas east into Serb Lands, to create a trilateral national federation.
The Chetniks in the Second World War: A Final Assessment

Needless to say, the Chetniks lost the civil war with the Partisans, and royal Yugoslavia was not restored in 1945. With the Partisans on the winning side, Tito set up a communist regime; this disappeared in a renewed round of nationalistic euphoria less than fifty years later, leading to the violent break-up of Yugoslavia in 1991. The Allied switch of political and logistic support from the Chetniks to the Partisans in mid-1943 set the stage for this chain of events.

The Chetnik strategy in the resistance struggle was based on Serb nationalism. Faced with the genocide of the Serbs in the ISC and atrocities and mass expulsions in other parts of occupied Yugoslavia, Chetnik leaders focused on the survival of the Serbs and incorporated this single-minded focus into their strategy. Simply stated, they avoided unnecessary casualties where possible. The Partisan leaders had no such concerns. As ordered by Moscow, they engaged in active resistance to relieve pressure on the USSR regardless of the inevitable Axis reprisals against the local population. These two radically different philosophies meant that the initial joint Chetnik-Partisan resistance could not last long. More importantly, the Allies looked at the larger picture, namely, which resistance movement did more to fight the Axis. Thus, they eventually sided with the Partisans and abandoned the Chetniks. While the Chetnik policy of waiting in the shadows until the Allies arrived in Yugoslavia was logical, especially when viewed from the Serb national situation of the time, it contributed to communist victory in Yugoslavia and, as such, was a failure.

Mihailović’s attack on the communist Partisans in Serbia in late October 1941 marked the beginning of the civil war between the two guerrilla groups. This was not the struggle Mihailović had sought, but he felt that his hand was forced. With the Partisan uprising in Serbia in the summer of 1941, he decided that he had to act quickly to prevent the Partisans from attracting more resistance-minded individuals and taking over the leadership. His attack in the late fall of 1941 was intended to prevent further Partisan actions in Serbia, especially given the brutal German reprisals (a hundred hostages shot for each dead soldier, fifty shot for each wounded soldier).

The fact that civil war erupted between the two resistance movements and that the Chetniks were aided by the Axis played in the Partisans’ favour in the Allied camp.
The Allies had no patience for the Chetnik-Partisan war and tried to reunify the combatants in a joint focus on the Axis. Once this proved impossible, the Allies made a choice and sided with the Partisans. The initial reason for the civil war was to prevent the Partisans from causing further German reprisals in Serbia. In this limited sense, it served its purpose: the Partisans were ejected from Serbia in the late fall of 1941 and did not return in significant numbers until three years later. However, looked at another way, it was a failure. More specifically, the civil war led to many Serb casualties, given that most of the soldiers on both sides were Serbs. Overall, the Chetnik engagement in the civil war was disastrous.

The Chetnik participation in the ethno-religious conflict as Serb national agents in the form of Serb national paramilitary force in ethnically-mixed regions was a fight Mihailović had not anticipated but ended up joining. Participation in the ethno-religious conflict on the Serb side reduced the Chetniks to a Serb base, a development that had an important effect on Allied perceptions. The Allies intended to restore Yugoslavia after the war, but if the Chetniks were a Serb movement, the Allies questioned whether they were the best force for restoration, despite their official standing. In this regard, the Partisans were more attractive because of their ability to incorporate non-Serbs. While the Allies had no interest in the ethno-religious conflict itself, they were concerned about Chetnik anti-Muslim retaliations because of the wider political implications. All in all, the Chetnik participation in the ethno-religious conflict created problems for Chetnik-Allied relations.

Closing Remarks on the Chetnik Wartime Transformation

This thesis has shown that Mihailović’s Chetnik movement transformed itself from an extension of the Yugoslav Royal Army to a Serb nationalist guerrilla force during the course of the Second World War. The main causes of this transformation were the events that occurred in the Axis-created Independent State of Croatia, specifically, the Ustaša genocide against the Serb population and the Serb uprising that followed in response.
The uprising of the Serbs in the Independent State of Croatia was apolitical, with self-preservation in the face of the Ustaša onslaught as the main goal. The uprising was spontaneous, erupting in a disconnected fashion in various regions of the puppet state and lacking any central authority. The initial clash between the Serbs and the Ustaša militia occurred on May 6, 1941, while Mihailović was still on his way to Ravna Gora and the Communist Party of Yugoslavia was inactive. Mihailović's involvement with the Serb uprising in the ISC began in August 1941, when he started sending officers from Ravna Gora to the region to take command and integrate insurgents into his Chetnik movement.

The integration of Serb insurgents in the ISC into Mihailović's Chetnik movement was a challenging process, and it was achieved with a variable degree of success. Mihailović's officers were sometimes rejected by the locals; they also had to compete with communist party members who were sent to the region with the task of turning Serb insurgents into Partisan detachments. Many Chetnik units in the ISC, especially those further away from Serbia, only nominally accepted Mihailović as their supreme commander and often pursued independent regional policies that Mihailović simply had to accept despite his disapproval.

Nevertheless, the spread of the Chetnik movement into the Independent State of Croatia had a profound impact on the resistance organisation as a whole. By taking over the Serb insurgents there, the Chetniks also absorbed their cause and agenda. This meant becoming a Serb side in the ethno-religious conflict in the ISC, which placed Serbs on one side and Croats together with Slavic Muslims on the other. Unlike the Chetniks in ethno-religiously homogenous Serbia who closely resembled Mihailović's original vision of a guerrilla resistance movement against the foreign enemy, the Chetniks in the ISC became a Serb territorial paramilitary defence force – their main focus being the protection of Serb settlements from their non-Serb neighbours. Not only was their purpose different, but their ideological outlook was also exclusively Serb, leaving little room for Yugoslavism.

Overall, this process led to changes in the Chetnik movement's strategy, such as cooperation with the Italians on an anti-Ustaša basis within the context of protecting Serb civilians in the ISC, a development that opened the door to much broader collaboration with the Italians against the communist Partisans. The Chetniks' ideology
changed as well, coming to focus on Serb matters first and foremost, with the primary goal being territorial unification for the Yugoslav Serbs. The result was the transformation of the Chetnik royalist movement from the initial Yugoslav to a narrower Serb nationalist platform, despite a theoretical adherence to the Yugoslav state ideal.

**Future Research**

Although this work represents an essential beginning to an important area of study, many questions remain unanswered. For example, the ethno-religious conflict in occupied Yugoslavia during the Second World War was echoed in the 1991-1995 wars in Croatia and Bosnia-Herzegovina. The Croat use of the Ustaša insignia and imagery, and the Serb use of the Chetnik insignia and imagery visually attest this. The conflicts have strikingly similar dynamics, including similar territorial goals. Was this conflict inevitable, given events of the Second World War? Are the events of the 1990s a second round in the same conflict? Looking farther back, and equally important, there was a guerrilla-style conflict in Bosnia-Herzegovina (especially in eastern Bosnia) between the Muslim paramilitaries and Serb guerrillas during the First World War. Did this influence the events of the 1940s? Or was it merely an earlier round in the same ethno-religious conflict? Simply stated, to end the cycle, we need to clearly understand the causes of the conflict.
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