This Time We Knew

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Isaac is neither the most important nor the guiltiest of the industrialized states with regard to the war in former Yugoslavia. Moreover, if any nation ever appeared to have a legitimate plea of extenuating circumstances, it would seem to be Israel. Beset by problems with its own peace process, shaken by unprecedented waves of terror unleashed in a seemingly mindless and fanatical response to its commitment to make far-reaching concessions—not excluding the creation of a Palestinian state, as its government ministers had increasingly hinted—and rent by internal division about how next to proceed, Israel would appear to be the last country to bear a burden of blame for a war in far-off Bosnia. And if that were not exculpatory enough, it is also a fact that Israel’s Foreign Ministry did offer Bosnia mutual recognition from 1993, while the Bosnian government—dependent on aid from Muslim countries, including Iran—reluctantly delayed acceptance of the Israeli offer. Nor will one fail to notice that the same Iran has been a spiritual and material supporter of the Palestinian groups claiming responsibility for terrorist attacks on Israeli civilians. In light of all this, even to discuss whatever shortcomings Israel’s Balkan policy might have, let alone to dwell on them at book chapter length, might appear captious at best, and at any rate of little interest to those whose chief concern is the people of Bosnia.
In fact, as I will attempt to demonstrate in what follows, Israel’s failings have been significant and for reasons at most only indirectly and partially related to any of the above. Moreover, these failings reveal a good deal about the nature of Serbian propaganda, its method of dissemination, and at least something about its receptivity in some circles in the West.

We may begin by noting that the debate in Israel about the war in Bosnia was in the first three years somewhat unusual. In most countries, discussion focused on what, if anything, should have been done by Western powers. Opinions ranged from advocacy of some form of military intervention and/or a lifting of the arms embargo on Bosnian government forces, to continuing the policy of nonintervention (if an embargo on victims of genocide can be called nonintervention). Among advocates of the latter were those, to be sure, who minimized Serbian guilt and attempted as much as possible to blur the distinction between main aggressor and main victim. The most notorious case was that of the former U.N. commander in Bosnia, retired Canadian Major General Lewis MacKenzie, who, it was revealed in June 1993, had received payments from the Serbian American lobby group SerbNet. MacKenzie was the best known and most outspoken opponent of Western military intervention, a view he often justified with the claim that all parties were to blame for the war. (Another case in point was Lawrence Eagleburger, who became a personal friend of President Milošević during his years as U.S. ambassador to Belgrade, and since maintained close business ties with Serbia.) And British cabinet ministers, in particular Malcolm Rifkind, invoked the claim from time to time when international pressure mounted to react to Serb aggression. Such cases notwithstanding, however, at least the essential facts about the conflict—despite its frequent mischaracterization as a purely “civil war”—were for the most part not in great dispute in most of the West, and the usual line of “noninterventionists” was that a “Balkan civil war” was nothing over which it was worth risking such and such nationality’s lives. In short, the debate is mainly over values, or policy, not facts.

In Israel by contrast, the debate departed from this norm in two crucial respects: on the question of who was the main aggressor, and relatedly, on the assumed relevance of World War II to the conflict. Among politicians as well as newspaper columnists, the notion that Serbs were the main aggressors was rarely accepted in the first three years of war. On the contrary, the opinions expressed by government officials and regular
columnists tended to range from the view that all sides were more or less equally to blame, to the not infrequently voiced position that the Croats, Muslims, and on some versions also the Slovenes were the real culprits, whether for having had the audacity to break up the federation, or simply by virtue of having been Croats, Muslims, and Slovenes. This latter view was expressed by well-known right- and left-wing commentators, as well as by prominent figures from the center of the political spectrum, most notably ex-mayor of Jerusalem Teddy Kollek.

The case merits interest for a number of reasons. Since the start of the war, Serbia has had a major stake in invoking World War II memories in an effort to cash in on the reputations of the respective ethnic groups and their putative war loyalties. Winning over the opinion of the group whose members were the Nazis’ quintessential victims—the Jews—has therefore been seen as a paramount propaganda objective, heightened all the more by the common belief in Serbian ruling circles that “the Jews [exert] a vast influence worldwide.” On the whole, diaspora Jews have overwhelmingly spurned Serbian overtures; as Alain Finkielkraut put it, “the Nazis in this story are trying to pass themselves off as Jews.” In Israel, by contrast, a highly motivated Serbian lobby, the perceived interests of state, and other related factors led to what might be called an “imagined affinity” with Serbia during the first three years of war.

I will return to an analysis of these factors at the end. I begin, however, with a few representative descriptions of the war by international observers, journalists, and human rights groups. These will then be contrasted with the debate in the Israeli press. This will be followed by discussion of some aspects of Israel’s political relations with the former Yugoslavia, including evidence of military support to Serbia, after which I will conclude with a few comments on Israel’s general demeanor in light of Serbian perpetrated genocide in Bosnia.

The War in Bosnia

José Maria Mendiluce, career official with the United Nations High Commissioner on Refugees (UNHCR), arrived in the east Bosnian town of Zvornik just as it was overrun by the notorious Serb irregular unit called the White Eagles. He recounts,

I saw kids put under the treads of tanks, placed under there by grown men, and then run over by other grown men... Everywhere people were
shooting. The fighters were moving through the town, systematically killing all the Muslims they could get their hands on.\textsuperscript{5}

Mendiluce further comments,

These people had a coherent strategy. The whole point was to inflict as much terror on the civilian population as possible, to destroy as much property as possible, and to target as much of the violence as possible against women and kids. After the irregulars had done their work, the established authorities—the J.N.A [the federal army of the former Yugoslavia which since the breakup has been in the service of Milošević of Serbia] or Karadžić’s forces, or the local police—would come in, ostensibly to restore order. But of course, that would mean that the ethnic cleansing of that particular place had been successful, and the White Eagles could move on.

This seems to have been the scenario in dozens if not hundreds of Bosnian towns and villages. The Amnesty International report of October 1992 entitled \textit{Bosnia-Herzegovina: Gross Abuses of Basic Human Rights} describes similar events in Bosanski Novi, Blagaj, Modrica, Doboj, and others. In Zaklopaca, near Vlasenica, according to the same Amnesty International report, eighty-three Muslims, including men, women, and children, were massacred by uniformed Serbs, as described by surviving eyewitnesses. As early as April 1 and 2, 1992, before the United States had recognized Bosnia (sometimes cited as a “cause” of the war), Serbian paramilitaries under the command of Zeljko Raznatović, the notorious “Arkan” who in 1993 scored a significant success in Serbia’s parliamentary elections, killed twenty-seven mainly Muslim civilians in Bijeljina, registering the first of what was to be a long campaign of such massacres. Amnesty’s news release of January 21, 1993, describes eyewitness reports from the town of Bosanski Petrovac of the “descent of the town from tension to terror,” as Serbian paramilitaries seized control of the town, shooting and abducting Muslims at will; the terror ended only with the final exodus of the few thousand surviving Muslim residents. Roy Gutman, co-winner of the 1993 Pulitzer Prize for his dispatches to \textit{Newsday} from the war zone, describes similar events in many other Bosnian cities.\textsuperscript{5} In villages such as Liplje, according to Melika Kreitmayer, chief gynecologist of a rape investigation at Tuzla Hospital Gynecological Institute, “practically every woman in the village was raped.”\textsuperscript{7} One can easily multiply these reports from dozens of other villages.\textsuperscript{8}

As former Pentagon analyst Norman Cigar has shown in the most
detailed analysis so far of Serbian ethnic cleansing, the operational procedure tended to follow a systematic pattern, despite variations, which relied on a "symbiotic relationship" between heavily armed Serbian forces and more lightly armed militias. The former would first take control of an area, thereby creating a "safe environment in which the more lightly armed Serbian militias and local Serbian activists were able to engage in ethnic cleansing. Often, Serbian militia units were attached directly to regular Army units for this specific purpose." As Cigar points out, this recalls the procedure implemented by the Nazis, according to which "heavily armed Wehrmacht combat forces [would secure] ... an area, thereby enabling lighter forces [made up of Einsatzgruppen and locally raised auxiliaries] to operate with relative impunity." The early stages of ethnic cleansing relied primarily on mass terror against the civilian population. Later, Serbian authorities found it more convenient to employ other methods: "The restriction on food and fuel supplies, in particular, became a key tool to pressure the civilian population, with the reduction of food supplies to near-starvation levels." This would typically proceed in tandem with the arrest and execution of the educated Muslim elite and community leaders. Thus "in the Kozarac area of northwest Bosnia-Herzegovina, prominent local Muslims were identified, separated, arrested, and earmarked for elimination according to prepared lists." Religious leaders were particularly targeted: "Thus in Bratunac the local Muslim cleric reportedly was tortured in front of the townfolk, who had been rounded up in the soccer stadium, was ordered to make the sign of the cross, had beer forced down his throat, and then was executed." Elsewhere children of Muslim clerics were impaled on spikes in front of their parents and townspeople.

It has now been clearly established that some detention camps could aptly be described as death camps. The Omarska camp was located in a large mining complex. As Gutman describes it,

According to former detainees, the killing went on almost everywhere: Inside the huge hangarlike building that houses earth-moving equipment, armed guards ordered excruciating tortures at gunpoint, sometimes forcing one prisoner to castrate another. The tarmac outside was an open-air prison where 500 to 1000 men had to lie on their bellies from dawn to dusk. Thousands more packed the offices, workshops and storage rooms. . . . All were on starvation diets.

The most feared locations were small outbuildings some distance from the main facilities: the "Red House," from which no prisoner returned
alive, and the “White House,” which contained a torture chamber where guards beat prisoners for days until they succumbed.  

Prisoners reported having to remove sometimes five or ten, sometimes as many as thirty or forty corpses daily in a small yellow pickup. The U.S. embassy in Zagreb investigated the massive atrocities at Omarska for a special UN war crimes panel. A top embassy official, speaking on condition of anonymity, remarked, “The Nazis had nothing on these guys. I’ve seen reports of individual acts of barbarity of a kind that hasn’t come up in State Department cable traffic in 20 years.”  

Atrocities ranged from decapitating prisoners with chain saws to forcing one prisoner to bite off the testicles of another. This latter atrocity resurfaces in other parts of Bosnia: David Rieff quotes a UNHCR official as willing to “stake his reputation” on the truthfulness of testimony taken from a Muslim in Bosanski Petrovac in western Bosnia, that he was forced by his Serb captors to bite off the penis of a fellow Muslim. In another incident at Omarska a prisoner died of massive blood loss after his testicles were tied by wire to a motorcycle that took off at high speed. Another was burned alive after being doused with gasoline. Prisoners were beaten to death daily, or had their heads smashed against radiators. “You’d see pieces of flesh or brain there the next day,” related one survivor.

Omarska was only one of several such camps run by Serbs in Bosnia. The Keraterm tile factory near Prijedor, where grisly accounts of mass slaughter exceed those of Omarska, and Tnopolje, Brčko, and Manjača were among the worst. At Brčko, nine-tenths of the inmates were eventually killed. After that, camp guards turned on the remaining townspeople who had not been captured. According to one of the few survivors of the town, prisoners were forced to drive the bodies to an animal feed plant, where they were apparently cremated for animal feed. During the cremations “the air in Brčko would stink so badly you couldn’t open the window,” reported a traffic engineer, one of the town’s few survivors. The Helsinki Watch report of August 1992 entitled War Crimes in Bosnia-Herzegovina cites a special UN memorandum as listing other Serb-run camps in Bihać, Cazin, Velika Kladuša, and Bosanska Dubica. The Manjača camp in particular continued to run for many months while all attempts at inspection by international representatives, including former Polish prime minister Tadeusz Mazowiecki, who visited the area on behalf of the United Nations, were denied. Elie Wiesel was finally invited to visit the camp by Serbian authorities attempting to counter horrifying
international reports. Somewhat later the prison was closed down in a highly publicized gesture by Serbian political leaders, including Radovan Karadžić, and the prisoners were said to have been handed over to the Red Cross. Wiesel himself, however, was soon writing in the *New York Times*,

But last month there came terrible news: not all the prisoners had been freed. Some 500 remained unaccounted for. Most disturbing to me was that many of those I had interviewed had been singled out for special punishment and transferred to an even worse camp, Batković.

The very men we came to help were hurt in the process, an action of deceit that poses a morally painful dilemma: how can humanitarian efforts be continued if the victims end up paying the price?  

“Atrocities on All Sides”

Before turning to the Israeli arena, it is necessary to take a short excursion through one of the most widely disseminated motifs of Serbian propaganda in Israel, namely, the claim that all sides in the conflict are guilty of atrocities. Taken in that form and with strict literalness, the claim is of course true, but also vacuous, since there has never been a war fought among civilian populations, especially when involving large numbers of irregular infantry, that did not witness abuses by all sides. This was the case in World War II—not necessarily regarded as an overall moral stalemate—and it is no doubt the case in the conflict in the former Yugoslavia. As mentioned at the start, there have been those throughout the West, notably retired Canadian General Lewis MacKenzie, and increasingly Secretary of Defense Malcolm Rifkind and Prime Minister John Major of Britain, who resorted to this argument in order to justify maintaining the arms embargo—and consequent critical deficit of heavy weaponry—on the Bosnian government. In Israel, however, constant repetition by politicians and the powerful Serbian lobby brought the argument early on to critical mass, such that it became an obligatory piece of conventional wisdom without an incantation of which one could not speak publicly about the war. The claim, in fact, like that about Muslims firing on their own people to gain world sympathy, originated in Serbian and Bosnian Serb official circles, and became their favorite fallback position each time international observers revealed incontrovertible proof of systematic Serbian atrocities. As Cigar has pointed out, “a Serbian public relations campaign sought to promote the idea that what was
happening was the unavoidable result of warfare or that all sides were equally guilty." In Israel, the Embassy of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, as it is officially known, made a concerted effort to propagate the "atrocities on all sides" argument; its chargé d'affaires, Mirko Stefanović, was indefatigable in defending the fallback line: "The tragedy and the sufferings of the Yugoslav peoples are impossible to explain if one tries to blame only one of them for all the events. There are no 'good' or 'bad' parties, no 'aggressors' or 'victims' in the ongoing war. All those involved are responsible for atrocities." The expression "there are no good or bad in the Yugoslav civil war" had already become a Hebrew cliché by the late summer of 1992. It was repeated to me by environment minister Yossi Sarid, Knesset Foreign and Defense Committee chairman Ori Orr, and Israel's new representative in Belgrade (as of May 1995) Tsvi Rav-Ner, and it has been a constant media refrain. The findings of scores of international observers, human rights organizations, independent reporters, the Bassiouni Commission, and even the State Department and the CIA, to the effect that there is no comparison between the systematic campaign of "ethnic cleansing," as Serbian officials themselves dubbed it, and the handful of sporadic abuses committed by isolated units, in or nominally under control of the Bosnian Army, have gone virtually unmentioned in the Israeli press. Already in late 1992, the U.S. State Department had compiled a list of war crimes, of which eighteen, or a mere 6.3 percent, were attributed to Muslim-dominated forces. By 1995 this percentage had, if anything, declined. A CIA report attributed "at least 90 percent" of atrocities to Serbian forces, in the words of one of the officials who leaked the report. No information was publicized about the remaining 10 percent or less, but it is almost certain that the majority were the responsibility of the Croatian HVO. The proportion committed by Bosnian government forces or those nominally under their control is thus infinitesimal by the historical standards of the paradigm case of a morally just war against aggression, the Allied cause in World War II. The CIA report was based on aerial photography and what one senior official called "an enormous amount of precise technical analysis." While acknowledging incidents of war crimes by other parties, the report stated that the Serbs "were the only party involved in a systematic attempt to eliminate all traces of other ethnic groups from their territory." Significantly, the report stated that "the systematic nature of the Serbian actions strongly suggests that Pale and perhaps Belgrade exercised a carefully veiled role in the purposeful destruction and dispersal of non-Serb popula-
tions.” It added that there was “specific evidence” that “Bosnian Serb leaders—including Radovan Karadžić—knew of the concentration camps through which many Muslims and Croats who had been evicted from their homes in 1992 were processed.” One of the officials commented, “To those who think the parties are equally guilty, this report is pretty devastating. The scale of what the Serbs did is so different. But more than that, it makes clear, with concrete evidence, that there was a conscious, coherent, and systematic Serbian policy to get rid of Muslims, through murders, torture, and imprisonment.” The leaked CIA report was classified “at an obscene level,” according to one official, apparently to prevent embarrassment to the Clinton administration’s policy of “nonintervention” and maintaining the embargo. In fact, it merely corroborated the by then massive evidence that, as Cigar put it, Serb-perpetrated ethnic cleansing “followed a premeditated strategy” according to “a pattern which suggests adherence to general top-down policy guidance and a degree of coordination across the republic and, apparently with unofficial and government circles in Belgrade.”

The Serbian attempt to divert attention from the implementation of their plan has included a host of stratagems, from outright denial to what Cigar calls “damage control.” This has ranged from blaming the victims in various ways, to accusations that Serbian civilians have been equally victimized by opposing forces. International organizations and observers have repeatedly attempted to investigate Serbian claims. The aforementioned Helsinki Watch report, for instance, refers to Serbian allegations of abuses, but then notes: “Although some of their concerns have proven correct, others have been wildly exaggerated and, in some cases, falsified.” For example, the report continues, after Serb forces were unable to take the village of Sijekovac, they alleged that Serb civilians there had been massacred. However, on the basis of interviews with approximately twenty Serb villagers who had fled the area, it emerged that “those Serbs who were killed in Sijekovac were armed combatants engaged in hostilities or were civilians who were killed by cross-fire.” The report concludes that “Helsinki Watch representatives could not find evidence to substantiate claims of excessive force.”

Similar cases crop up throughout the reports with regard to Serb allegations (which is not to say that there have been no abuses by the other parties to the conflict). By contrast, as David Rieff observed, “The most lurid tales the Bosnian Muslims had told about the process of ethnic cleansing—stories dismissed as exaggerations during the spring and sum-
mer of 1992—turned out to have understated the slaughter.”31 He relates the story of an Italian journalist shown a room in a recently conquered Muslim village. The local Serb commander himself stated that two hundred Muslims had been slaughtered there: “The wooden flooring, [the Serb commander] said, had been so saturated with blood that he ordered it ripped out and burned. ‘My men could not be expected to function properly,’ he said, ‘with that kind of stench in the air.’”32 That Serbian atrocities have been uniquely systematic and highly organized is again evident with regard to the mass rape of Muslim and other non-Serb women. A special report on mass rape in Newsweek stated that while a direct order from the top of Serbian leadership has as yet not been discovered,

there does seem to be a widespread pattern of on-the-ground commanders encouraging—or even ordering—their men to rape. The testimonies of so many victims and witnesses, and of some captured Serb perpetrators, have a consistency that cannot be accidental. “It’s hard to believe that all these Serbian men, no matter how animalistic you think human nature is, would suddenly get it in their heads to find a 7-year-old girl and rape her,” says the lead State Department researcher. Rape is an integral part of ethnic cleansing, of eradication of entire areas of their historic Muslim populations through brutal intimidation, expulsion and outright murder.33

Melika Kreitmayer, chief gynecologist at Tuzla of an investigation into mass rape by Serbian forces, reported cases of some young women who were abducted and taken to a house, but released without being raped after having been instructed to tell others they had been.34 The implication is that the men were under order to rape, and wished to protect themselves from punishment. Kreitmayer’s rape study group included Slovene and Serb doctors who concurred with the findings.35 The terror in Foča, including the notorious rape camp at the Partizan sports hall in the center of town, was apparently organized by three of Radovan Karadžić’s closest aides, Velibor Ostojić, Vojislav Maksimović, and Petar Cancar. Ostojić traveled frequently for consultations with Karadžić at the height of the terror. A minister in Karadžić’s government, he was once fired as a high school teacher for “sexually deviant behavior toward young female students.” He is said to have directly ordered the rape of Foča’s Muslim women. Some women were raped repeatedly, sometimes in front of all others at the stadium.36 On an earlier occasion (August 23, 1992) Gutman reported from Tuzla that
Serb forces in northern Bosnia systematically raped 40 young Muslim women of a town they captured early this summer, telling some of their victims they were under orders to do so, the young women say. Statements by victims of the assault, describing their ordeal in chilling detail, bear out reports that the Serb conquerors of Bosnia have raped Muslim women, not as a by-product of the war but as a principal tactic of the war.\textsuperscript{37}

The Israeli Response: The Media

When news of concentration camps and ethnic cleansing broke in reports around the world, Israeli newspapers duly carried the stories. Indeed, the more tabloid-style papers outdid each other with front-page tales of gore. Thus, under the by-line “N.Y. Times Publishes Horrifying Testimony from Yugoslavia,” Yediot Aharonot flashed this banner headline: “After She Was Raped, the Mother Requested to Breast-Feed Her Baby. The Rapist Cut Off the Baby’s Head and Handed It to her.”\textsuperscript{38} Somewhat less lurid is the headline over an article by veteran journalist Ron Ben Yishai: “The Women and Children Were Separated from the Men, and Then Shots Were Heard.”\textsuperscript{39} Around the same time, Ma’ariv carried one of Roy Gutman’s world-shattering dispatches under the headline “Witnesses from the Death Camps: ‘Ten Men Were Laid in a Row—Their Noses and Testicles Cut Off.’ ”\textsuperscript{40} And in the same paper a week later: “Even Journalists Are Fleeing Sarajevo, City of Terror.”\textsuperscript{41} The article by Emmanuel Rosin and Yossi Aloni, Ma’ariv correspondents in Sarajevo, describes the Serb-inflicted terror on the besieged city, while an accompanying article from Reuters recounts incidents of gang rape of Muslim women. In short, even someone whose reading was restricted to local Hebrew papers could not claim to lack access to the facts.

The Israeli departure from the international norm begins, however, with the daily columnists and commentators. Among many, especially those of Serbian origin, which includes several prominent journalists, there was a distinct sense of unease about the reports, and a compelling impulse to respond. Leading the way was Yosef “Tommy” Lapid, an editor and columnist of Ma’ariv, and a permanent fixture on the widely watched television show Popolitika. A right-winger with a reputation for not mincing his words, Lapid comes from Novi Sad in the Serbian province of Vojvodina. In a moment of candor he revealed his true credo: “We must support the Serbs no matter what they do. In my eyes they are my tribe.”\textsuperscript{42} This loyalty was still unshaken in June 1995, when he stated
on Popolitika, “We owe the Serbs our absolute support. The Jewish heart is with the Serbs.” As early as June 1, 1992, he set the tone for his future comments on the war with a piece in Ma’ariv entitled “A War of the Cameras.” The theme, reminiscent of some commentators’ complaints about media coverage of Israel’s 1982 invasion of Lebanon, is that the war is mainly media hype, not reality. He begins by complaining that media influence is responsible for bringing the Security Council to impose sanctions on Serbia, an imposition he apparently resents. He next explains that Sarajevo “is not Beirut”: it hasn’t been destroyed, but only damaged, mainly from fires (implying that Serbs are perhaps not directly responsible for the ensuing damage). “The cameras of CNN and SKY [News] naturally focus on the same damaged houses. It is the Yugoslavs’ misfortune that a camera happened to be present . . . when shells from a Serb mortar fell on a bread line in Sarajevo, killing seventeen.” He goes on to explain that the photos of this bloodbath led to the imposition of sanctions. By “Yugoslavs” he obviously means the Serbs who will suffer from the sanctions, apparently the chief victims of this “war of the cameras.” Nor does he deprive readers of a more general explanation of what he considers Western bias:

Western journalists arriving in Zagreb and Ljubljana at the beginning of hostilities sympathized with the Croats and Slovenes because they were more Western, more civilized, more liberal, and more Catholic than the Serbs. The Serbs failed completely in their efforts to explain their cause, which is no less just than that of the British in Northern Ireland, the Spanish in the Basque province, or the French in Corsica.

Whether Western journalists also found the Muslims “more Catholic than the Serbs” Lapid does not say. Or perhaps they sympathized with Muslims out of sheer anti-Serb inertia spawned by their initial falling in love with the Slovenes and Croats. As for Northern Ireland, the Basque province, and Corsica, I do not recall those regions having declared independence after their populations voted for it in referenda, but such trifles are not Lapid’s concern.

On August 9, 1992, when photographs of emaciated Muslim detainees and new tales of unspeakable horrors were again electrifying front pages, Lapid fired off another of his Let-The-Truth-Ring-Out columns, declaring,

As of this moment: In Bosnia and Herzegovina no extermination camps [machanot hashmada] and no proof of mass murder have been found, things which the Croats and Muslims have accused the Serbs. The Serbs
have offered to turn over all prisoner camps which they have set up to UN supervision. [For the facts, see first section above.] It seems that another chapter in the war has been completed, in which the Serbs are the victors at the military front while their rivals are the victors at the propaganda front.

It is perhaps not inappropriate to bear in mind that this comment was made in a cultural environment in which denial of a genocide of fifty years ago is considered a heinous crime.43 Lapid’s piece goes on to lambast Knesset member Yossi Sarid for planning a trip to Sarajevo, cites Germany’s and Austria’s leaders as “the real culprits” for having encouraged the breakup of Yugoslavia (a familiar line from Serbian official circles), and interestingly enough, praises foreign minister Shimon Peres in the last paragraph for “having acted wisely when he expressed regret at the suffering of the peoples of Yugoslavia and condemned acts of brutality—without citing names and without taking a position.”

Lapid’s representation of Peres’s stance is the only correct statement in the piece. In fact, he might just as well have praised Yossi Sarid, who had then also refused to “cite names or take a position” regarding war crimes in Bosnia, or the former Yugoslavia in general; at the time of his planned trip to Sarajevo, aborted when the United Nations could not guarantee his safety, he stressed that his reasons were purely humanitarian. (In a telephone conversation on January 15, 1994, Sarid reiterated to me that he sees “nothing to choose between the warring factions in ex-Yugoslavia.”)

Three weeks later, however, he did sharply criticize in the Knesset the “genocidal” (retsach am) shelling of Sarajevo on February 5, 1994, an attack that led to a temporary toughening of Western policy and an easing of the siege on Sarajevo.

Lapid may possibly be dismissed as a far-right crank unworthy of serious attention, despite his well-entrenched position in the media establishment. The evidence indicates, however, that his views have been not at all unrepresentative of the rest of the Israeli political spectrum, as he correctly implied through his praise of Peres. Even commentators on the left and far left adopted a similar stance, albeit with the necessary rhetorical changes.

A case in point is Raoul Teitelbaum, who writes in the daily Yedioth Aharonot under the pen name Yisrael Tomer and who became senior Knesset reporter of the paper in 1994. A Serbian immigrant to Israel and former member of Maki (the Israeli Communist Party) who still occasionally employs the Party rhetoric, Teitelbaum became one of the
leading spokespersons for the pro-Serbian lobby, appeared publicly on the serious television show *Moked* (which has often hosted prime ministers, cabinet ministers, and army generals), and a guest lecturer at public symposia on the war. In his appearances on *Moked* and at a Hebrew University symposium, he ran through the regular litany of official Serbian accusations, beginning with his quotation of Bosnian president Alija Izetbegović’s so-called Islamic Declaration—written in 1970 when he was a youthful anticommunist dissident—which called for a “united Islamic community from Morocco to Indonesia.” Whatever Izetbegović might have meant by that—and do not many Jews call for a united Jewish community from New York to Jerusalem?—Teitelbaum neglected to mention that his declaration was without standing in the present Bosnian government. In the symposium at the Hebrew University, June 7, 1993, Teitelbaum repeated the twenty-five-year-old quotation, and heaped scorn on the notion that Muslims could be a nationality, employing rhetoric reminiscent of orthodox Marxists’ traditional antagonism to the notion of Jewish nationality or peoplehood. He referred to the World War II SS division organized in Bosnia and Herzegovina with the help of the Palestinian Mufti, a staple of pro-Serbian propaganda both abroad and especially in Israel. He omitted to mention, as always in that context, that despite the mufti’s considerable efforts the division managed to enlist a mere fraction of 1 percent of the population, while many times that number of Muslims fought alongside Tito’s Partisans against the fascist occupiers; also unmentioned was the fact that Serb Chetniks were responsible for the deaths of thousands of Jews in areas in which they operated, while “in the Sandjuk and south Serbia, Chetniks slaughtered Muslims to try to create a homogenous Serbian population.” Estimates of Muslim victims of Chetnik terror run in the tens of thousands, to which must be added thousands of Partisan victims of all nationalities, slaughtered according to the doctrine of revenge as a “sacred duty.” Teitelbaum concluded his remarks with the bald assertion that the Muslims were holding their own militarily, when they had already been reduced to a mere 10 percent of Bosnian territory, most of it then under a yearlong siege.

The pro-Serbian lobby in which Teitelbaum is active is grouped around the Federation of Yugoslav Immigrants (Hitachдут Olei Yugoslavia). Reflecting the composition of the Israeli Yugoslav community itself, the organization is largely Serbian-dominated and has adopted an avowedly pro-Serbian stance from the start. When Israel decided in February 1993
to take in eighty-two Bosnian Muslim refugees (then in transit camps in Croatia) partly to offset the stream of international condemnation of the expulsion of some four hundred alleged Islamic activists from the Occupied Territories, a spate of letters appeared in Israeli newspapers opposing the gesture. Two were published together on February 2, 1993, in Ha'aretz. The first saw fit to delve deeply into the history of Bosnia's Muslims, pointing out that they are descendants of either Turks who conquered the area in 1463, or else Christians "who converted to Islam for reasons of convenience and have remained Muslim to this day." (Presumably, had these ancestors converted out of any genuine faith, the writer might not oppose so vehemently the granting of asylum to today's refugees.) If the presumption of transgenerational collective guilt was insufficiently clear, the next paragraph made the obligatory reference to the World War II Bosnian SS division, then asked dramatically, "Who can guarantee that the same 101 [sic] refugees are not children or grandchildren of those Bosnians who killed Jews 48 years ago?" The letter concludes, "The absorption of Vietnamese refugees [in the 1970s] was a humanitarian act. The absorption of Bosnian refugees is an act of propaganda, lacking any justification." The following letter made the same reference to the SS division, and concluded with the same supposed contrast with the Vietnamese refugees, indicating that the letters were perhaps part of an orchestrated campaign. It was signed by "Gershon Kaponi, National Chairman, Federation of Yugoslav Immigrants." That organization has been a hotbed of pro-Serbian sentiment; the handful of Sarajevo Jews who have arrived in Israel since the start of the war have told me they stay clear of it.

The Jewish community of Serbia was by World War II already highly assimilated, as Yosef Levinger points out in his introduction to The History of the Holocaust: Yugoslavia. Thus it is perhaps not so surprising that many of them have adopted the ultranationalist sentiments that have swept through Serbia in the last few years, taking in their wake even intellectuals of the dissident socialist Praxis publication, among others. Those of them inclined toward notions of collective national guilt may be further motivated to blame the entire Croat nation for crimes of the Ustashe regime, notwithstanding the fact that Harvard historian Aleksa Djilas (son of the famous Montenegrin dissident Milovan Djilas; neither is considered overly sympathetic to Croatia) was able to sum up the conclusions of "Yugoslav and other scholars" that the Ustashe "never had the support of the majority of the Croatian people." And Jovan Zamet-
ica—when still in his former avatar as independent scholar John Zamet-ica before becoming Bosnian Serb leader Karadžić's official spokesman—admitted that the Ustashe regime "was no more that a Nazi puppet state, and had little support among the Croats." And those living in Israel might tend to filter their perceptions of the war in Bosnia through yet another prism of prejudice, namely, their fear of and antipathy toward Muslims in general. Thus, by the time the light of events has passed through these interpreters, it has taken on the opposite colors of the spectrum.

What is astonishing is that these perceptions have been embraced almost wholesale by so many prominent Israeli commentators. These have included well-known figures of the left, like the "new historian" Yehoshua Porat, who runs through the familiar arguments about Muslims not being a real people (without mentioning the Bosnian independence referendum of February 29–March 1, 1992, passed with near-unanimous support from Muslims, Croats, mixed ethnics, and some Serbs, while the official Serb community boycotted it), the editorial board of Ha'aretz, left-wing columnist of Kol Ha'ir Haim Baram, and many others too numerous to cite. Indeed, it is simpler to list the handful of dissenters who have appeared sporadically on op-ed pages. One is Hebrew University philosophy professor Igor Primoratz, who appeared opposite Raoul Teitelbaum in the aforementioned television broadcast of Moked (alongside Army Radio's Itai Engel), and who published several op-ed pieces in Ha'aretz and the Jerusalem Post. Shlomo Avineri also published op-ed comments urging Israeli support for Bosnia, albeit in part "to prevent a [Bosnian] jihad against the West," duly given prominence in a bold takeout by Ha'aretz. (This argument has been invoked by Western friends of Bosnia on occasion, but the notion that such an eventuality could come to pass in Bosnia makes about as much sense as the possible recrudescence of Crusader activity in Western Europe. By any available standard, Bosnian Muslims are among the most secular peoples in Europe.) Itai Engel's direct reports from the war zone in 1992 for Army Radio were on a high professional level, and there have also been Gidon Levi's dispatches from Sarajevo to Ha'aretz in the fall of 1993, which compared what he witnessed to the Warsaw Ghetto. Until the end of 1993 that was about the sum total of Israeli printed commentary that was either unambiguously sympathetic to the victims of the Serb campaign or at least tried to depict their victimization as accurately as possible. From the electronic media one could add the Saturday night international news
television program *Viewing the World*, which has had consistently good segments. By the summer of 1995, the television news had become generally in line with foreign coverage, and Michal Yaniv and Nitsan Horowitz had written sympathetically in *Ha'aretz*.

Haim Baram is by his own frequent self-description a “genuine leftist.” He is perhaps Israel’s best representative of what Marcuse called a “lefter than thou” attitude, as he brings his weekly strictures against prominent figures of the moderate left, from Amos Oz to A. B. Yehoshua. Virtually alone among Israeli commentators in opposing the Gulf War, Baram denounced the self-righteousness of Israelis who gloated over the bombing of Baghdad while scorning Palestinians dancing on rooftops as Scud missiles fell on Ramat Gan. At the aforementioned 1993 Hebrew University symposium on Bosnia, Baram castigated the American media for portraying the Balkan conflict in a one-sided manner. His presumption seemed to be that if the American media say X, then X must be false, and furthermore its utterance a consequence of the darkest reactionary motives. In the present case, the media still sympathized with the Croatian fascists and harbored lingering Cold War antipathy to Serbian communism. His solution to the conflict? None other than the complete restoration of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia within its previous borders. Thus, a self-proclaimed “genuine leftist,” wielding a wholly different discourse, arrived at a result exceeding in pro-Serbian nationalism the fanatical ethnic cleansers Šešelj and Arkan, who were by then at least willing to concede the independence of Slovenia and perhaps part of Croatia. Baram told me a year later that he now regarded the reconstitution of Yugoslavia as “utopian” and accepted Avineri’s argument that while “no side is better than the other” the military forces were so unbalanced that it was necessary to help the weaker party, the Muslims. (For both Avineri and Baram there seems no difference in principle between the Bosnian aspiration to a democratic multiethnic state and the Greater Serbian campaign of ethnic cleansing via siege, terror, and murder.) After the fall of the first UN-declared “safe area,” Srebrenica (July 1995), in the wake of which the entire town was ethnically cleansed by means perfected in 1992, including rape of young girls, the apparent murder of thousands of men, and mass deportations, Baram wrote that the Serb attack was “provoked by a Muslim atrocity eight months earlier.” (It would be interesting to elicit Baram’s views on the German government’s claim in 1938 that the orchestrated anti-Jewish pogroms known as
Kristallnacht were “provoked” by the shooting of a German diplomat in Paris by a German Jewish refugee.) Baram also ridiculed a planned demonstration (which never materialized) in support of Bosnia by the “Young Guard” of the Labour Party and the Palestinian Authority.²⁵

And then there is the case of former Jerusalem mayor Teddy Kollek, who in an offhand remark to a Boston Globe reporter revealed much about the prejudices besetting Israeli society. In a discussion of why, in the then mayor’s view, Israel must retain sovereignty over all Jerusalem, he explained, “Deep down in Arab philosophy is the conquest by war and not a peaceful conquest.” Interviewer: “So that if you were to give them East Jerusalem, they’d still declare war? That’s your feeling?” Kollek: “I’m convinced of that. They don’t want East Jerusalem. Look, they still want Granada and Cordoba and half of Spain—it belongs to them. ‘The Dawlet el Islam, the land of Islam that we once ruled, we will rule again.’ You can observe that again about Bosnia. That is basic Islam. I make it difficult for myself [saying this] but I have to see that, too.”²⁶

Why Kollek thought he made things difficult for himself is not clear. The remark about Bosnia in particular, at least in the Israeli context, was certainly at the time not terribly out of synch. Indeed, it recalled a familiar dilemma: evil never presents itself naked on the stage of history; it always appears dressed up as itself the victim, the defender, the perhaps misunderstood struggler for survival (as observers of Serbian statements frequently point out). Thus the leaflets of the Black Hundreds never proclaimed: “We are pogromists, and have come to rape, pillage, and murder defenseless Jews.” Rather, they exhorted, “Mother Russia is in peril. The Jews are bringing it to its knees. Come save Mother Russia.” The message was between the lines, but nonetheless clear: Disregard the actual facts on the ground; a Jew is always a Jew and Mother Russia must be defended. Similarly, when the affable cultured (ex-)mayor says, “You can observe that again about Bosnia. That is basic Islam,” he doesn’t mean that you can observe it literally as much as he means, “Disregard the actual facts on the ground. A Muslim is always a Muslim.” One better than Arendt, it is the sheer civility of evil that is squarely beneath our gaze.

The Kollek interview was reprinted in the Jerusalem Post editor’s column.²⁷ Editor David Bar-Illan regarded Kollek’s views as deeply insightful; he similarly reprinted for its presumed merits Uri Eltsur’s Yediot Aharonot column which argued, “Maybe the terrible stories of ethnic
cleansing, genocide, and rape of tens of thousands of women are mainly war propaganda by Bosnian spokesmen, for whom the free press has volunteered to be their trumpet." 55 The column ends with a reminder that the Serbs were on our side in World War II, while "the Bosnians were on the side of the Nazis." Post editor Bar-Ilan's lone complaint was that Elitsur had omitted to mention the Bosnian government's hiring of a public relations firm in the US to spread this "war propaganda." 56

The Jerusalem Post actually distinguished itself throughout the war by running what could only be called straight Belgrade propaganda repeatedly in its op-ed pages, while disallowing responses. (However, its foreign news editor, Tom O'Dwyer, was permitted to condemn Serbian aggression in a number of unsigned editorials, and a few pieces by Igor Primoratz and others were also tolerated, albeit with commissioned responses. The op-ed balance was roughly six to one in favor of Serbia, a tilt probably unparalleled in Western newspapers outside Greece and Israel.) Typical articles included "The Coming of the Sword" by Alfred Sherman. 57 The title refers to the sword of Islam again threatening civilization, this time in Bosnia. As the author puts it, "There are good reasons for Jews in general and Israelis in particular to identify with the Serbs. We have several common enemies: German expansionism, Moslem fundamentalism; Catholic clerico-fascism; and the so-called 'international community' — a disguise for great-power egoism and manipulation." 58

Another characteristic sample was aptly titled "Don't Cry for Bosnian Moslems." 59 Its crankish author, Yohanan Ramati, has had at least eight pieces in the Post on Bosnia since the start of the war. This one compressed over a dozen familiar Serbian charges particularly popular in Israel: Islamic fundamentalism, German responsibility, the Bosnian Muslims "supported the Holocaust," and so on. (A response by the present author was not allowed by the editors. Ramati's article of April 17, 1995, reports matter-of-factly that the shell on the Sarajevo market of February 1994 was actually a bomb, "probably" planted by Muslims.) Similar contributions were made by retired Israeli diplomat Zvi Locker on May 5, 1992, "Hillel Flesch" (possibly a pseudonym) on January 2, 1994, and several letters by the rump-Yugoslav chargé d'affaires, on, for example, February 14, 1994. But no doubt the Israeli publication surpassing all others, even the Post, in its service to Karadžić and Milošević has been the formerly Histadrut-owned Davar, purchased in early 1995 by private interests, after which Ron Ben Yishai became editor. Two of its staff,
Pazit Ravina and Teddy Preuss, have traveled back and forth between Israel and Belgrade since the beginning of the war, bringing to Israeli readers the latest explanations and insights. (It would be interesting to confirm whether Belgrade has paid for the numerous trips of Ravina, Preuss, and Ramati.) Every horrible shelling of Sarajevo brought a column from one of the two revealing special evidence that it was really Muslims who were responsible, or that the real issue was still the Ustashe-run Jasenovac concentration camp in World War II. Thus on February 18, 1994, Ravina cited an unnamed “senior Israeli ballistics and explosives expert” who concluded, from his special vantage point in Israel, that the explosion in the Sarajevo marketplace couldn’t have come from a shell, but was probably caused by the type of device used by the Hezbollah in Lebanon and the Mujaheddin in Afghanistan. “There are at present several hundreds of Mujaheddin in Bosnia” (another staple of Israeli reportage), Ravina ominously reminds readers. Ravina is a regular pundit on Kol Yisrael’s daily international news radio program, her Belgrade connections and willingness to serve Serbian propaganda apparently never having been judged by the editors as detracting from her objectivity or “expertise.”

Preuss published some twenty rambling pieces in Davar, the Jerusalem Post, and even Ha’aretz, making claims so hysterical it is doubtful that they could have been published in most Western newspapers, again outside Israel and Greece. He exceeded even Serbian propagandists in his charges of “Nazism” against not only Tudjman but also Izetbegović. A local Israeli Bosnian support group was equally labeled “pro-Nazi” after it presented “An Evening for Bosnia” at the Jerusalem Cinematheque (April 6, 1994). A previous article (March 19, 1994), ostensibly a critique of the evening, was accompanied by a huge photo (indicating editorial collusion) of victims of Jasenovac. It seems unnecessary to add that while cranks like Preuss exist throughout the West, the free access to the media granted them in Israel—not to mention the near immunity from rebuttal—is an almost unique feature of the Israeli debate about the war; one must look to Greece and Russia for possible comparison.

A final example worth mentioning is the Israeli reaction to the February 1994 shelling of the old market in Sarajevo. While most of the world was calling for force finally to be used to break the siege of that unfortunate city, Israeli pundits knew better. A case in point was Israel Television’s David Witstom, whose earlier claim to notoriety derived from his long
interview with one of Panama strongman General Noriega’s last supporters, his Israeli military advisor Michael Harari. (The interview was widely perceived as a whitewash of Harari, who it was later discovered, was a relative of David Witston.) Now Witston took to the printed media in an effort likely to endear him anew to elite circles here.61 People think that it’s “one bang and we’re all done,” he ridiculed. What is needed, rather, is to “act wisely,” by which he meant—as the remainder of the article made clear—a continuation of the policy that had led thus far to 200,000 deaths.62

To sum up the public discussion in Israel: in contrast to that of the rest of the world, the basic facts about who is the main aggressor were in the first three years rarely acknowledged outside actual direct reports, especially those picked up from foreign news agencies. When debates were held, either in the media or the universities, organizers generally saw fit to “balance” the speakers so that at least half viewed the Serbian cause as unjustly maligned. This was quite at odds with the situation in most Western countries, where expression of sympathy for the Serbs was generally confined to the occasional op-ed piece or interview with a Serb official, some exceptions notwithstanding. And it has been even more at odds with the reaction of many diaspora Jews, especially in the US and France, who have taken the lead in urging their governments to use force to stop the slaughter. In Israel, it was sympathy with the Bosnian Muslims that was only occasionally voiced in a rare op-ed article. Frequently the content of debate almost immediately turned to World War II in an effort to establish which nation, in general, was the collectively guilty party. In this way Israel has resembled much more the killing fields of the former Yugoslavia than the West. As David Rieff observed,

Everywhere in former Yugoslavia, even on battlefields where the corpses are still fresh, it is almost easier to get a history lesson than to get a straight answer about what happened in this place where one is standing with one’s interlocutor. He or she is more likely to talk about the massacre of the Serbs by the Croat Fascists in the Second World War, or the dream of Greater Serbia, which dates back to the nineteenth century and beyond, even to the Battle of Kosovo of 1389, that holiest of days in Serb folk mythology.63

It seems difficult to deny that Israel shares with its cousin just north of the Mediterranean an obsession with history reminiscent of Amos Elon’s phrase about Jerusalem, “In the high noon of the ghosts, the human dimension is lost.”64
The Israeli Response: The Political Level

Until July 1995, all official government pronouncements had remarkably reflected the unwillingness of public commentators to attribute blame. Indeed, as Yerach Tal observed in *Ha'aretz* in 1992, it was the express policy of the government not to take sides in any of the conflicts in the former Yugoslavia. The first explicit condemnation of Serbian atrocities in the name of the government came only after the fall of Srebrenica (more than three years after the commencement of the Serbian onslaught in Bosnia), when Prime Minister Rabin, speaking by telephone on a live Jordanian television broadcast, was pressed by the moderator to state his position, whereupon he declared that he “condemned Serbian atrocities against Muslim civilians.”

Until that moment, that is, throughout the first three years of war, Israeli officials had insisted on maintaining official neutrality at best, and sometimes overt pro-Serbian sympathy. Nevertheless, during the height of Serbian atrocities in the summer of 1992, the legacy of the Holocaust obviously weighed on the consciences of politicians. Thus, as news of death camps, ethnic cleansing, mass atrocities, enforced ghettoes, and deportations made reaction unavoidable, officials began to utter peculiar statements in which they condemned the atrocities, but scrupulously refrained from naming the perpetrators, rather like a schoolteacher who scolds, “Whoever threw that piece of chalk while my back was turned had better stop.” In August 1992, Yerach Tal cited government “sources” as saying that they can’t take sides because “there is a lack of clarity about what is going on there, since according to information in [government] hands, no side is innocent of atrocities in Yugoslavia.” A hint about the nature of the “information in [government] hands” can perhaps be gleaned from a report in the *Jerusalem Post* two days earlier, on August 5, 1992. Peres had “expressed deep shock” at reports of concentration camps, saying, “Such actions anger us deeply, and I call on the peoples of Yugoslavia to stop” (emphasis added). The article stated that he then “called on the parties in Yugoslavia to resolve their differences through negotiations.” By transposing the remarks, *mutatis mutandis*, to, say, Eastern Europe in 1942, one can fully appreciate their political significance. But especially revealing is that the article went on to describe the interview with Budimir Kosutić, rump-Yugoslavia’s ambassador-designate in Israel, himself a possible candidate for war crimes. He is quoted as follows:
The concentration camps in Bosnia-Hercegovina were set up by the Creations [sic] and the Moslems, and they are the ones who approached the world media. In areas controlled by the Serbian people, there are no concentration camps. The Serbs have been the victims of the travesty in Yugoslavia, not the aggressor.

It is difficult not to wonder why Kosutic was granted an interview on Israeli radio’s *Eight in the Evening* program the night before, and whether this was not the “source” of the “information in [government] hands” leading to a “lack of clarity about what is going on,” since by the first week of August there was no parallel lack of clarity in corroborated reports from the Red Cross, *Newsday*, UNHCR, and Helsinki Watch. A week later, Peres was again quoted as saying it was impossible to take a position on the claims of the three warring entities, Serbs, Bosnians, and Croats. “But we can take a stand on tortures and concentration camps.”

Again, it is somewhat like saying in 1942, We cannot take a stand on the claims of the warring factions, Germans, Jews, and Poles, but we do condemn concentration camps.

Not all politicians were content with this noncommittal policy. According to the *Jerusalem Post*, several Knesset members charged the government was not doing enough to protest against the reported Serbian atrocities.

MK Rafi Elul and law committee chairman Dedi Zucker (Meretz) also accused the Knesset presidium and speaker Shevah Weiss of hindering their efforts to raise the issue in the plenum...

Elul said the reported Serbian atrocities were being conducted “according to the horrible practices of the Nazis during the Holocaust, and the world is silent. Israel must not be silent,” he declared.

Zucker criticized the government for not following the lead of most European countries and severing diplomatic ties with Yugoslavia.

“We must not only take pragmatic considerations into account; the moral consideration is also very powerful,” he said.

What some of those pragmatic considerations might have been can perhaps be pieced together from various clues appearing in scattered sources about possible Israeli-Serb arms deals. There is now no doubt that Israeli arms—and arms, not necessarily Israeli, but supplied by Israeli dealers—are being sold to Serbia; the only question is the extent, if any, of Israeli government involvement. Its spokespeople naturally deny such involvement, as it no doubt would even if it did exist. The duty incumbent upon morally responsible people, therefore, bearing in mind the signifi-
cance that such arms sales to Serbia would have, is to analyze as objectively and carefully as possible the available facts. They are the following:

In June 1993, in the *European*, Roger Faligot reported that, in the wake of an operation to take out hundreds of Jews from ex-Yugoslavia in November 1992, "Western intelligence agencies have told journalists that the Jewish refugees were allowed to leave only after a back door deal that involved supplying arms in breach of UN sanctions." The writer provides no further information about which intelligence agencies were involved, nor what their own sources were. However, other evidence, both Serbian and Israeli, indicates that at least until late 1991, high-level military relations were maintained, including, on one account, at least one major arms deal. Thus Dobrila Gajić-Glišić, former secretary of the Belgrade War Minister's office, writes in a recent book, "Certainly one of the biggest deals was closed by Jezdimir Vasiljević in October 1991 in Israel. At that time, for understandable reasons, the details of that deal with the Jews were not made public. It was a complicated and difficult deal. But it was made successfully." The same Jezdimir Vasiljević, prominent banker and old crony of Serbian president Milošević, arrived in Israel in February 1993. Though not Jewish, he announced his intention of staying in the country for a lengthy period, received considerable media attention, and was apparently still in the country by the end of the year. From the Israeli side, there was a statement in November 1992 by Ari Ben Menashe (former Mossad agent) on Belgrade radio B-92 that Serbia and the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia were acquiring arms from Russia and Israel (according to the Serbian wire service Tanjug, November 23, 1992, and picked up by several dailies throughout the former Yugoslavia). After describing some details of the arms deals, Ben Menashe replied to questions about Israel's interests in Yugoslavia. "Ben Menashe reminded listeners that in the eighties the Serbs in the federal government helped the Jews, and that brought the setting up of 'close personal relations between the people involved; thanks to those relations, the arms trade is functioning so well today.' "

Peculiar about the quotation from Ben Menashe is his reference to Serbs helping Jews in the eighties. Jews in Yugoslavia were at that time free to travel wherever they wanted (as were all Yugoslavs), so it is not clear to whom he is referring. Possibly he is simply conflating the commencement of military cooperation between the two sides, which may have occurred in the eighties, with the ideological pretext for such relations in Israeli circles, namely, that "Serbs are friends of the Jews,"
reverting back to World War II. Alternatively, he may be conflating the same initiation of relations with the alleged deal cited in the *European* of taking Jews out beginning November 1992 in exchange for arms.

In any case, we have so far three separate sources—Serbian, Israeli, and Western intelligence—claiming that there were arms deals between the two countries. Though scant by themselves (and Ben Menashe is not generally considered the most reliable source), these reports gain credence against the particular political background in which they occur. In mid-July 1994 Ori Orr, who heads the parliamentary committee overseeing Israeli arms sales abroad, led an official Israeli delegation to Belgrade and met with (in his own words) “all of the top leadership of Serbia with the exception of President Milošević, who was out of town” (telephone conversation with author, July 1994). This visit was a follow-up, according to Orr himself, of a meeting six months earlier between Israeli foreign minister Shimon Peres and his Yugoslav (Serbian) counterpart (the latter who, according to Reuters and AP, visited Israel in February 1995, at least the third ministerial-level meeting between the two countries within less than a year). The visit by Orr worried the American administration enough that, according to one Israeli report, Vice President Al Gore summoned the Israeli ambassador and officially “warned Israel not to establish any relations with the Serbian regime in Belgrade” (an official of Israel’s foreign office told me that the meeting with Gore was simply for purposes of gaining a “clarification” about the visit of the Israeli delegation). In a telephone conversation, Orr denied that Israel was selling arms to Serbia, but then proceeded to run through virtually all the usual elements of Serbian and IsraeliSerbian arguments in an effort to convince me that Israel had good reasons to be on the Serbian side. (Specifically, he mentioned World War II, Iranian and Hezbollah aid to Bosnia, and Croatian president Tudjman’s anti-semitism. An Israeli “Foreign Ministry spokesman” made a similar remark to the *Jerusalem Report*, adding, “You may draw the conclusion where our sympathies lie.”) And indeed, Orr addressed his Belgrade hosts accordingly:

> Because of history and World war II, the Israelis support the Serbs... We have not forgotten that we fought together. We have a good memory. We know what it is to live under sanctions and boycott. Every UN resolution against us was adopted by a two-thirds majority, often with Yugoslavia voting against us. But we should think of a better future. The first step was the recent meeting between minister Jovanovic and Peres in Bucharest. We here are the second.
Orr also stated, according to the same report, that “Israel should help the Serbs to improve their relations with the international public.” As an official responsible for approving or withholding permission for any arms sale abroad, Israel’s guardian of sanctions against Serbia—one may be forgiven for suspecting—was much like the proverbial fox in charge of the chicken coop. (Since the assassination of Prime Minister Rabin, Orr has pursued his pro-Serbian policy in his new portfolio of deputy minister of defense.)

It has also been confirmed on Israeli television that Bosnian Serb forces used Israeli-made munitions. Well-known television personality Yaron London interviewed an Israeli aid worker in Bosnia, who related that at the request of a UN official, he had identified the Hebrew writing on the casing of a shell recently fired into Sarajevo as indicating that it was a standard Israeli military issue, complete with serial number. He also reported having seen Israeli-made arms in Serbian hands, including Uzi rifles. It is of course true that Israeli munitions could have reached Bosnian Serbs in any number of ways. It is the totality of the evidence, however, that while not absolutely conclusive, is certainly ample cause for concern.

A possible further piece of earlier evidence is the report in Ha'aretz that an Israeli transport ship loaded with twenty military trucks and Kalashnikov rifles was detained off the coast of Sicily, and its captain arrested for illegal transport of weapons in Italian territorial waters.

But the most reliable report yet has been provided by the government-owned Israeli television itself. Veteran correspondent Hanan Azran reported on the evening news of August 2, 1995 (barely weeks after the joint Israeli-Jordanian airlift), that “private Israeli dealers,” in collaboration with French arms merchants, had closed a deal to provide Serbia with American-made LOW missiles. Private arms deals, in Israel as elsewhere, require government approval. Of course, the prevalence of arms entrepreneurs in Israel—some with dual citizenship—renders supervision difficult. On the other hand, it is also the case that Israeli governments have long used nominally private dealers to trade arms with unsavory or disgraced regimes, for example in Latin America, where plausible deniability of government involvement was desired. Whatever the case, it is entirely possible that the token but highly publicized planeload of Israeli-Jordanian humanitarian aid may end up treating victims of the same LOW missiles supplied by Israeli merchants to Serbia in defiance of international sanctions.
Israel and Serbia: A Cozy Relationship?

Environment Minister Yossi Sarid stated to me in 1994 that there were then no arms sales to Serbia, but declined to deny or confirm that there had been any in the past.\textsuperscript{82} But even assuming his statement is correct, the overall picture appears to be one of a cozy relationship that has developed between the military and diplomatic elites of Serbia and Israel since the late 1980s, and which has taken on its own dynamic, as Ben Menashe’s statement seems to testify.\textsuperscript{83} This relationship has ramified, and now manifests itself in the fact that Serbia’s legal advisor in the World Court is Israeli law professor Shabtai Rosenne,\textsuperscript{84} the presence in Israel of Milošević’s former crony and arms trade negotiator Jezdimir Vasiljević, the easy and frequent access to the Israeli media by pro-Serbian sentiment, including by officials of the rump-Yugoslav embassy (officially not recognized but still issuing visas and giving the impression of carrying on business as usual), the frequent top-level meetings between the respective foreign ministries, and especially the official policy of neutrality the Israeli government has generally pursued (with the exception of Rabin’s statement on Jordanian television).

In accounting for the discrepancy between Israeli and diaspora Jewish reactions to the war, it seems that six principal factors can be singled out. First, the influential Serbian-Jewish lobby, backed by the concerted efforts of Serbia itself (for reasons mentioned at the beginning), has operated in a political culture preoccupied with daunting local problems: the peace process and its persistent obstacles, continuing terrorism, regional insecurity, and so on. A highly motivated lobby backed by foreign resources and appealing to ostensible national interests was thus able to get an early “jump” on other potential commentators. This lead dissipated somewhat with the July 1995 brutal fall of two “safe areas,” with Jordanian friendly persuasion, and with the rise of some local pro-Bosnian activity.

Second, the competition with Iran for zones of influence seems to have been taken seriously by some government officials, including Ori Orr. Rather than compete with Iran by supplying Bosnia with sufficient arms to render Iran’s contribution dispensable, Israel seems to have opted for the easier solution of joining a Serbian-Greek-Russian regional alliance. (Recent Israeli military agreements with Greece have been reported on in the Israeli press, while trade with Russia of all sorts appears to be flourishing.)

A third factor is the legacy of World War II, reinforced by anti-
Semitic remarks by Croatia’s President Tudjman, and the all-too-ready exploitation of these by a Serbian lobby operating in an arena much more congenial to the expression of anti-Croatian and anti-Muslim sentiment than, say, the United States or France.

Fourth is a lingering suspicion of Islam, as Teddy Kollek’s remarks reveal. Even Foreign Ministry officials not taken in by charges of fundamentalism may be wary of having one more potential UN vote against Israel down the road, especially if a weakened Bosnian state remains dependent on Muslim countries.

Fifth, there is the interesting phenomenon of an instinctual feeling of solidarity with another pariah state, as evidenced by Ori Orr’s remark in Belgrade: “We know what it is to live with sanctions and boycott.” One often encounters an Israeli reaction along these lines: Well, we have been accused of these same things—ethnic cleansing, defying the international community, not respecting human rights. We know about the United Nations and the international media. All these have fed on each other and generated relations between respective national elites now exerting independent force.

In general, then, it seems that, far from having a double standard of morality applied to it, Israel has actually fallen somewhat short of the international standard on this issue. Whatever the extent, if any, of government involvement in the arms trade, the overall indulgence of Serbia—evidenced again in June 1995 by Israel’s rush to renew direct flights with Belgrade, and the refusal of government officials to condemn Serbia and its proxies publicly through the first three years of war—has remained an ongoing concern. This is especially true as Serbia attempts to use Israel to regain its standing in the international community.

Beyond paltry international standards there is much that Israel could have done, and could still do after the Dayton Accord, assuming that Rabbi Hillel’s dictum that where there are no humans one should strive to be a human has application also to those collectivities of humans known as states. Israel seems fated to have become a significant arms producer, and it is unlikely that the breaking out of peace in the Middle East will lead to large-scale Israeli conversion from military to civilian production in the near future. But this does not mean that its selection of clients cannot become more circumspect in a post-Cold and Arab-Israeli War era. The inclusion of moral considerations in foreign policy decisions may itself dovetail with new political interests, as Israel seeks to develop ties with Muslim and Third World nations emerging from the Cold War. Like
Israel in 1948, Bosnia is a UN-recognized fledgling state threatened with annihilation by more numerous and powerful enemies. Israel has the potential to play the role for Bosnia that Czechoslovakia filled for Israel in 1948, that is, to be a source of desperately needed arms. To be sure, while the embargo was maintained on Bosnian forces (leaving them with about 45 tanks against 400 for the Bosnian Serbs and 2,800 against the gamut of Serb forces), Israel did not risk violating it for the nebulous chance of befriending a beleaguered Muslim ministate, whether or not the same risk was already taken for the established ally Serbia. Nevertheless, with the embargo lifted, and if Israel and Bosnia were to establish diplomatic relations (which would be at some risk to the Bosnians, who have relied by default on military support largely from Muslim countries), the beginning of an important relationship could develop, which would in turn reinforce Israel’s ties to Turkey, Albania, and the Muslim former Soviet republics. The case of South Africa provides a precedent for Israel’s overnight reversal of policy following an American congressional decision; if the United States lives up to its commitment made at Dayton to arm the Bosnian government, a similar about-face should be possible.

Nor is the appeal of Serbia overwhelming. Unlike other pariah states supported by Israel in the past, Serbia’s claim on Israeli allegiance is less than unshakable. Latin American dictatorships, as well as Indonesia and UNITA forces in Angola, were viewed by some Americans as loyal allies in the Cold War. Arming them not only filled immediate requirements, but also ingratiated Israel to significant segments of the American defense community, itself hampered by congressional and domestic media scrutiny. Serbia, which has been described with some accuracy as the last bastion of communism in Europe, holds out little for Israeli long-term interests, since few among the Western elites would be enamored with Israel’s indulging of Serbian needs. There is every reason to believe that even if some settlement is reached with coercive help of NATO countries, Serbia will remain quite isolated. Its own economy will require years to recover, while its strongest ally, Russia, is itself floundering economically and in a quagmire politically. Moreover, as the full story of the Bosnian horrors becomes increasingly well known, it is likely that the perception of Serbia as pariah will persist among both Western and Muslim publics for years to come. For all these reasons it will be in Israel’s interest to distance itself as much and as soon as possible from its erstwhile client, and to establish a positive record with the emerging Bosnian state.
NOTES

This version has been updated to August 1995, except for minor revisions in 1996. Other versions were presented at the International Conference on Responses to Genocide and Holocausts, Hebrew University of Jerusalem, December 30, 1993, and the International Conference on Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bilkent University, Ankara, April 1995. Another version appeared in the Journal of Mediterranean Studies, summer 1996. I wish to thank Roy Gutman for his warm encouragement and advice, and Igor Primoratz for generous help.

1. Official pronouncements of some Western states with troops serving in UN forces in Bosnia—Britain, France, and Canada—have sometimes resembled Israeli statements of extreme caution and neutrality. Among nations without troops on the ground, Israeli official statements were matched in their coddling of Serbian sensitivity only by Greece, Russia, China, and perhaps some other former republics of the Soviet Union and former Soviet bloc states. It is also noteworthy that in the three Western countries mentioned above there has been sharp opposition to government policy not only by much of the respective media, but also by some leading politicians, sometimes of the governing party itself. In Britain, for instance, the policy set down by John Major and Douglas Hurd of maintaining the arms embargo on the Bosnian government and not using force against Serb forces was harshly criticized by former prime minister Margaret Thatcher and Social and Liberal Democrat leader Paddy Ashdown, as well as some stalwarts of the Labour Party left. There was little parallel in Israeli politics. As for the media, Israel was again distinct from all Western nations other than Greece, which continued to guard its traditional ties to Serbia. Despite some problems with Western media coverage, there was a general tendency at least to sympathize with the Bosnians, and often to criticize Western foreign policy makers. New York Times editorialists, to take a nontrivial example—from Safire on the right, to Gelb in the center and Anthony Lewis on the left (but excluding A. M. Rosenthal)—have excoriated both Bush and Clinton administrations on Bosnia. Le Monde and the Guardian have similarly lambasted their respective governments' inaction toward Serbian aggression. Again, there is no parallel in Israel, where analogous comment is a very rare exception.


3. The quotation is from the Krajina Serbian parliamentary session, as re-
ported in the now defunct Croatian opposition weekly *Danas*, March 10, 1992. For fuller quotation and surrounding circumstances, see note 67 below.

4. The allusion, of course, is to Benedict Anderson’s celebrated definition of nation as “an imagined political community.” *Imagined Communities* (London: Verso, 1983, 1991). Anderson gives the impression of wanting to protest too much against reductionist views—especially of a Marxist variety—that disparage nationalism as ideology or illusion. However “creative” imagination can be, an underlying assumption lingers that there is a “real” substratum of nationless individuals, over against which one “imagines” the mental construct of national identity. But one would have to imbibe a heavy dose of materialism—whether Marxist or liberal—to take nationless individuals as less “imaginary” than the thickly described and self-identifying people we know. But the point is well taken if it means merely that national belonging can be imagined in a variety of ways. It is this point that I would broaden to international relations against the traditional “realism” of that field, proffering Israel’s imagined affinity with Serbia—however “ideological” and distorted—as a case in point.

A good example of someone who slides easily from moderate to extreme readings of “imagination” is Michael Ignatieff. Without credit to Anderson, he discovers that “You can never know the strangers who make up a nation with you,” so “A nation, therefore, is an imagined community.” *Blood and Belonging* (New York: Vintage, 1994), 109). But he is soon taking to describing his Ottawa boyhood “illusions” and “phantoms” of “Frenchies” lying in ambush behind cemetery gravestones as having “shaped my imagined Canada” (112). With such loose usage, little wonder that Quebec, Croatian and even Bosnian (e.g., p. 188) varieties of the “new nationalism” get lumped together with the Serbian: all are guilty of “tearing apart” federal systems based on a “civic” principle according to which individuals and not ethnicity count.


6. For instance, Gutman, *Witness to Genocide*, notes atrocities in Kozluk (20–22), Kljuc (31), Sanica Gornja (31), Kozarac (37, 41), Bosanski Novi (38), Brezovo Polje (68), Novo Selo (78), Bratunac (78), Prijedor (38, 44, 109 ff.), Skender Vakuf (85, 86), Biscani, Zečovi, Carakovo, Sredeci (sites of mass slaughters, 86), Višegrad (21, 24), and others.

7. Ibid.


10. Ibid., 55.

11. Ibid., 58.
14. Ibid., 90.
15. Ibid., 93.
17. Ibid., 96.
18. Gutman, Witness to Genocide, 50.
20. Istvan Deak, for instance, went so far as to argue recently that the Allied policy of holding all Germans collectively responsible actually prevented an effective German resistance to the Nazis from coalescing. He further states that “the doctrine of collective guilt, although never officially promulgated, was made clear to all through the Allied policy of carpet bombing German cities and the murderous behavior of the advancing Red Army toward German civilians. Ultimately about two million German civilians were killed and twelve million were expelled from East Central Europe as well as from what used to be Germany east of the Oder-Neisse line. New York Review of Books, January 13, 1994.
23. My article in Ha’aretz, July 30, 1995, and Igor Primoratz’s review of Norman Cigar in Ha’aretz, June 1995, are about the only exceptions I know of.
27. Ibid., 90.
29. Ibid.
30. In some cases not only have Serbian claims subsequently been falsified, but it turned out that it was actually Serbian forces who massacred non-Serbian civilians at the time and place where the opposite had been alleged. Thus the Helsinki Watch report of January 21, 1992, addressed to President Milošević and Defense Minister Adžić, states,

Reports by the news agency Tanjug accused Croats of having committed war crimes against Serbs in the areas near the town of Grubisno Polje in Croatia. The allegations were investigated by members of the European Community (EC) monitoring commission who found that Serbian forces, not Croatian forces, were guilty of summary executions and destruction of civilian property in the area. The EC report concludes: “We established
evidence of crimes which were committed by the [Serbian forces] during the two- and three-month period that they controlled that particular zone. Our team did not find evidence of killings later, nor of the systematic destruction of Serbian property by the Croatian National Guard or Croats from the area.” The EC report also found that Czechs and Croats were killed in 16 villages visited by the mission, homes were destroyed and residents were terrorized. (pp. 4–5)

Cases of this kind arise in the reports uniquely with respect to Serbian allegations. It is also worth noting that the U.S. State Department, while acknowledging that all sides in the former Yugoslav republic had been guilty of atrocities, stated that “the atrocities of the Croats and Bosnian Muslims pale in comparison to the sheer scale and calculated cruelty of the killings and other abuses committed by Serbian and Bosnian Serbian forces against Bosnian Muslims. The policy of driving out innocent civilians of a different ethnic or religious group from their homes, so-called ethnic cleansing, was practiced by Serbian forces in Bosnia on a scale that dwarfs anything seen in Europe since Nazi times” (State Department, January 1993).

31. Rieff, op. cit., 94.
32. Ibid.
34. Gutman, Witness to Genocide, 69.
35. Ibid.
36. Ibid., 161.
37. Ibid., 68.
42. Quoted in the religious paper Yeted Hane’eman, August 14, 1992.
43. For instance, Franjo Tudjman’s minimizing of the number of Jews killed in the Holocaust and shifting of blame to them were understandably condemned by many Jews and Israelis, and have even been cited by Israel’s Foreign Ministry as grounds for not establishing relations with Croatia (known in Israel as “the Waldheim principle” in reference to the freezing of relations with Austria during Waldheim’s presidency). But it seems almost too obvious to mention that unlike the denial, however ignominious, of a past genocide, the denial of an ongoing genocide can have an actual effect on it, and on the readiness of politicians to urge intervention to stop it. Needless to say, comparison between the two denials does not presume identity between the genocides. Among differences, French historian Jacques Julliard cites two in his powerful book Ce fascisme qui vient (Paris: Seuil, 1994) worth repeating here: (1) in the Bosnian and Croatian case,
"barely are [atrocities] there committed when the reports of them can be found in all the best libraries" (102) (or, one might add, on CNN and other networks; indeed, the unprecedented simultaneous documentation of this ongoing genocide gives it claim to its own uniqueness); (2) "Germans, had they protested [the Holocaust], risked losing their lives. We risk losing an evening" (103).

44. For an extensive discussion of Serbian collaboration in the Holocaust, see the forthcoming book by Philip Cohen, as well as Philip Cohen, "Holocaust History Misappropriated," *Midstream* 38, no. 8 (November 1992).


46. See the subchapter of chapter 7, called "Chetnik Terror," of Jozo Tomas- sevich, *The Chetniks* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1975). For the doctrine of revenge as "sacred duty," see 261. With this history in mind, one can imagine how a Muslim must feel to hear the claim sometimes made, not only by Serbian nationalists (I heard it from the organizer of a conference on the Holocaust), that what is happening to the Bosnian Muslims is revenge for what they did to the Serbs in World War II. One might as well say that what Ukrainian collaborators did to Jews in World War II was revenge for what the Jews did to them in 1919. After Jews and Gypsies, Muslims had the greatest proportional losses in Yugoslavia during World War II, roughly 8.1 percent. See Noel Malcolm, *Bosnia: A Short History* (New York: New York University Press, 1994), 192.


50. The "new history," as it is referred to in Israel, questions many assumptions of earlier Zionist and Israeli historiography. In particular, the notion that Palestinian refugees fled in 1948 because Arab leaders had instructed them to do so has been decisively rejected by historians like Benny Morris. In general the works show a sensitivity to the plight of Palestinians, but other controversies have also been given new attention, such as the treatment of Oriental Jews in Israel, and Zionist policy during the Holocaust. The major contributors to this stream, in addition to Morris and Porat, have been the late Simha Flapan, Tom Segev, Avi Shlaim, and Ilan Pappe.


58. Ibid.

60. The Ha'aretz newspaper has come closest to meeting international standards. Though its editors have toed the familiar Israeli line, it has run foreign commentary sympathetic to Bosnia. A series on Sarajevo by foreign writers was carried weekly from December 1993 to February 1994 and other foreign articles of note, including one by Fouad Ajami in the New Republic, have also been reprinted. Its European correspondents Michal Yaniv and Nitsan Horowitz became increasingly sympathetic to the victims of Serb aggression, especially after the fall of Srebrenica and Žepa in July 1995. However, frequent contributors such as Yehuda Nadav and Teddy Preuss continue to stamp the unmistakable Israeli logo on the opinion section.


62. At the same time, the Israeli Foreign Ministry declared, “Israel hopes that the wave of violence plaguing the region of former Yugoslavia, which reached a peak with the terrible killing in the Sarajevo market, will quickly come to an end. Israel expresses its regret for the deaths of innocent civilians, and expresses the hope that the efforts to find a peaceful settlement of the conflict will soon bear fruit.” Quoted in Ha'aretz, February 7, 1995. The statement was criticized in a letter to the paper published February 15 (admittedly penned by this author) and signed by thirty academics.

63. Rieff, op. cit., 87.


66. Rabin's phone call to the station was a follow-up to Jordanian King Hussein's direct call to him a few days earlier. According to the initial report in Ha'aretz (July 18, 1995) based on Rabin's own account to the Knesset Defense and Foreign Relations Committee, Hussein proposed that the two leaders undertake a joint project of aid to Bosnian refugees and residents, but the prime minister rejected the offer on the grounds that “the wealthy European countries” should bear responsibility for Bosnia's victims. Nevertheless, perhaps on the advice of Foreign Ministry officials concerned to limit the damage, Rabin called the open line show a few days later, issuing his condemnation, pledging $3,000 of his own money to their telethon, and announcing a joint Israeli-Jordanian airlift of humanitarian aid.

67. Kosutić had been Serbian vice premier during the ethnic cleansing of the Krajina, and had been nominated for president of the self-declared Serbian state of Krajina. According to the protocols of the Krajina Serb parliament, reported in Danas (March 10, 1992), it was decided that “due to the vast Jewish influence worldwide,” a more important post awaited him: ambassador to Israel. Thus Milan Martić, himself eventually indicted for war crimes, became the Krajina chief. Nevertheless, the Serbian speaker presiding over the parliamentary session
concluded, "That does not mean that he [Kosutic] will not one day be President" of the Krajina Republic. Alas, as of this writing (August 1995), it appears Kosutić will have to miss this career opportunity.


69. Himself a Holocaust survivor, Weiss's own position marks an interesting evolution. As he became aware of the actual details of the Serbian campaign, he became increasingly critical both of Serbian aggression and of Western inaction in stopping it, and he issued a harsh condemnation of Bosnian Serb forces after the shelling of Sarajevo's old market in February 1994. A few weeks later he spoke openly about the change, in the Jerusalem Post, February 18, 1994: "At the beginning of the Yugoslavian crisis, the majority of Jews [sic] automatically had sentiments with the Serbs ... I remember that the Serbs had a unique place against Fascism and Nazism, but today, with such a cruel regime in Serbia, I've changed my feelings."

70. August 6, 1992.


72. When the right-wing Likud was in power; it was ousted by a left coalition in June 1992.

73. Iz kabineta ministra vojnog: Srpska vojska (Cacak: Marica and Tomo Spasojevic, 1992), 23.

74. Serbian strongman Milošević rose up through the ranks of Yugoslavia's central bank, Beobanka. His influence over this institution was a chief factor in his ability to plunder the Yugoslav federal reserves in 1991 and redirect them to his base in Serbia. Aside from the repressive measures against Albanians in Kosovo, this single act did more than any other to undermine confidence among the republics in Yugoslav prime minister Ante Marković's economic reform plan, and thus in the federation as a whole. As one commentator put it, "In fact, Milošević's theft had already wrecked the economic plan for 1991, by making off with no less than half the entire primary emission of money set aside for all six Yugoslav republics for that year. . . . Indeed, the Marković plan was already a failure by the time it was touted in the West as Yugoslavia's salvation." See Jonathan Eyal, Europe and Yugoslavia: A Lesson from a Failure (Royal United Services Institute for Defence Studies, 1993). Vasiljevic had a falling-out with his erstwhile colleague after being accused of embezzling state funds. His prolonged presence in Israel is nevertheless of interest, especially in light of Gajić-Glišić's claim regarding his role as arms negotiator with Israel.

75. Vecernji list (Zagreb), November 23, 1992.


83. An article in the Tel Aviv weekly Ha’ir (July 7, 1995) paints a picture of shadowy Israeli businessmen in Belgrade bragging behind a cover of anonymity of their connections with Mossad and other security agencies, and reiterating the standard justifications of Jewish-Serbian friendship.
84. See “Serbs, in World Court, Deny Guilt” by Stephen Kinzer, International Herald Tribune, Friday, August 27, 1993:

Lawyers for the remnants of Yugoslavia told the World Court on Thursday that their government had no territorial ambitions in Bosnia Herzegovina and was not supporting any militia forces fighting there. “Yugoslavia cannot be held responsible at all for the course events have taken on the territory of the former Yugoslav Republic of Bosnia Herzegovina, nor for an [sic] crimes including the crime of genocide,” said Miodrag Mitic, chief legal officer of the Yugoslav Foreign Ministry. “The Federal Republic of Yugoslavia has no paramilitary of any kind, either within or out of its territory.”

Asked about this during a break in the courtroom arguments, a senior legal adviser to the Muslim-led Bosnian government, Francis A. Boyle, replied: “It’s a total lie. You know it and I know it. . . .”

“The court is being invited to take political decisions to substitute itself for the will of other countries and organs,” said Shabtai Rosenne, an Israeli law professor who is a legal adviser to the Yugoslav government. “This is far beyond the competence of the court, which had in the past repeatedly refused to substitute its judgment for that of communities and states,” he said. “The court should not attempt to dictate to the republics of the former Yugoslavia, and perhaps to other states participating in the Geneva negotiations, how they should proceed and how they should negotiate,” Mr. Rosenne said. “It would exacerbate the conflict.”

85. Thus a cartoon in the Jerusalem Report (January 26, 1995): Frame 1: “The media has decided that the Serbs are the bad guys.” Frame 2: “Just like they decided the Israelis were the bad guys.” Frame 3: “Remember when reporters were supposed to report . . . and it was the job of the public to make the judgments?!” Frame 4 (second interlocutor, sarcastically): “No. . . . And just how old are you?!”

Of course, in terms of moral reasoning, implied arguments like Orr’s or the above are devoid of sense. Whether critics of Israel have been right, wrong, or alternately both, that has no bearing on the probity of claims against Serbia, nor is it clear how the media can report a genocide without making its perpetrator look bad. But beyond these obvious points, the underlying guilty conscience apparently revealed by this identification with a pariah has an added tragic
dimension. In the wildest dreams of neither Israel’s staunchest supporters nor harshest detractors has Israel committed anything like the crimes of Serbia and proxies in this war. Critics (or alternatively guilt-ridden Israelis) may seek to compare the flight/expulsion of Palestinians in 1948 with Serbian ethnic cleansing. But the 1948 war began with the attempt to expunge at birth the new UN-declared partition state of Israel, as Serbia has attempted with Bosnia. Thus both the evil attempted by the Arab states and the evil subsequently committed by Israel are incarnated in Serbia’s policy toward Bosnia. But there is also no comparison between the “ethnic cleansing” of Palestine and of Bosnia. In the former, there really were atrocities committed by both sides on a rather similar scale. Moreover, that scale doesn’t approach what Bosnian Serb forces did in a few days alone around Srebrenica. The largest massacre in 1948 was at Deir Yassin, where 242 Palestinians were killed. Three days later Arabs killed seventy-seven Jewish doctors and nurses en route to the Hadassah hospital at Mount Scopus. A handful of smaller massacres occurred on both sides, including a terrorist bomb in Jerusalem that claimed fifty-five mainly Jewish lives. Awkward as it is to point out, the victims on both sides are in the same ballpark—which is scarcely Little League size for even two days of serious Serbian cleansing. Israeli internalization of decades of demonization by the Soviet bloc and Arab states thus presents a fascinating case study for social psychology.

86. Aside from genuine security requirements, there are also the self-perpetuating dynamics of Israel’s military-industrial complex, analyzed in Shimshon Bichler, “The Economics of Israeli Military Production” (Ph.D. diss., Hebrew University).