Chapter 6
Simply, It Comes Down to This, 1972–1980

The fundamental change ushered in by the George Street bombings and Bulltofta skyjacking was that radical separatists appeared to accept that injury to or even the death of innocent victims was both unavoidable and defensible. Before September 1972, acts of anti-Yugoslav terrorism in the West had, without exception, been calculated to target only individuals and institutions with direct ties to Yugoslavia. In cases where acts of violence against such targets risked inflicting indiscriminate harm—such as the bombing of travel agencies—the attacks were carried out late at night or in the early morning hours, thus reducing the chances of unnecessarily shedding the blood of innocent bystanders.

Of course, the issue of who got to be deemed “innocent” is a relative one. The train station and—in particular—cinema bombings in Belgrade in 1968 made manifest that extremists in the Croatian liberation movement found violence against civilians to be as morally justifiable as that against state officials and institutions. The argument rationalizing this moral position—as examined in chapter 3—was that no Serb, as a member of socialist Yugoslavia’s allegedly hegemonic nationality, could by definition ever truly be considered “innocent,” regardless of their position in society. The victims at the 20. oktobar cinema, for instance, might not have been actively involved in the continued subjugation and denigration of the Croatian nation. But by virtue of their ethnic identity they both benefited from and were intrinsically complicit in the crimes of Yugoslavia’s “Serbo-communist” regime. The same logic would have been held by those responsible for the downing of JAT 367, assuming that Croatian separatists were indeed behind the crash.

But semi-émigré radical Croatian separatists had maintained a clear redline up to the summer of 1972 regarding the populations of their adopted host lands. This line was dramatically and irrevocably crossed in Australia with the brazen disregard for the welfare of Saturday morning shoppers on George Street and in Sweden with the midflight taking of nearly one hundred hostages. With an eye toward the tactics of more prominent and arguably more
successful terrorist organizations of the time, younger separatists came to believe that greater exposure for their cause outweighed both the greater risks and greater moral concessions involved when considering the possible victims of their acts of political violence. Terrorism that resulted in harm—or even worse—to Swedish travelers or Australian shoppers was, perhaps, regrettable. But a full generation of “moving about in a circle”\(^2\) had shown that such sensitivities had only held the cause back. If violence against the citizens of countries such as Sweden, Australia, or West Germany meant greater publicity and exposure for the plight of the national liberation struggle, then so be it. Since World War II, the emigrant Croatian liberation movement had declared the fight for national independence to be one without compromise. With the events of September 15/16, 1972, separatist extremists showed that this mantra was to be taken deadly seriously.

Importantly, the real significance of this shift in semi-émigré attitudes toward so-called innocent victims lay not in the strategic or moral implications of the move but rather in an issue that was simultaneously more mundane but also ultimately more formative. It would perhaps be a stretch to suggest that countries such as Australia, West Germany, and Sweden had tolerated the violence perpetrated both by Croats and the Yugoslav security services in the decade following the trade mission attack in Bonn, although in the case of Australia—as is explored later in this chapter—that is actually an apt description.\(^3\) But Western governments had long been willing to put the issue on the back burner so long as the violence remained firmly rooted within the Yugoslav community and rarely affected the country’s broader population. This indulgence, however, came to a swift end with the George Street bombings and Bulltofta hijacking. The redline the Croats held to before 1972 had been one the security services of the West tacitly accepted. When the former crossed that line, the latter had no choice but to act.

Consequently, while the decade following the George Street bombings and the hijacking of SAS 130 might be remembered for the most brazen and indeed infamous acts of terror committed by radical separatists in their struggle for national liberation during the Cold War, it was also the period when Western governments progressively curtailed the room to maneuver for Croatian extremists. Stated more succinctly, although Croatian terrorists would continue their campaign of political violence into the 1980s, the events of September 15/16, 1972, marked in a clear and direct way the beginning of the end of the Croatian separatist movement. Faced for the first time with a manifest threat to their own populations, Western governments moved both to tighten their laws concerning political violence and terror and to loosen restraints for dealing with those deemed to be a public threat. While Croatian separatists were not the only terrorists Western governments had to contend
with in the 1970s—the era, after all, is known for its proliferation of radical organizations and acts of terror—these Croats, in fact, provided the stimulus for many key examples of the period’s international movement to enact anti-terrorist legislation. In this way, the separatist movement became, to coin a phrase, a victim of its own success. For a decade, semi-émigré radicals had demanded greater attention to their cause. After September 1972, they had it. Unfortunately for them, rather than helping them to achieve national liberation, that attention led to the movement’s eventual obsolescence.

*Tightening the Screws*
The Swedish response to the Bulltofta skyjacking provides perhaps the starkest example of the importance of victims’ identity in shaping the responses of Western governments to radical Croatian terrorism. During the second half of the 1960s, Sweden experienced a precipitous upsurge in anti-Yugoslav political violence following the migration of many of West Germany’s most radical Croats to the country following the FRG’s measures against the separatist movement in the aftermath of the trade mission attack. Such incidents included a shooting at the Yugoslav ambassador’s residence in Stockholm in 1968, the assassination of the leader of a Serbian exile organization in Gothenburg in 1969, and a woman killed in a bomb blast in a Yugoslav club in Malmö in 1970. Even so, the Swedish security service the Säpo (Säkerhetspolisen) showed little interest in investigating terrorism within the Yugoslav emigrant community. In the half decade before the attacks on Yugoslavia’s consulate in Gothenburg and embassy in Stockholm in early 1971, just a single Säpo agent showed any interest in Croatian and Yugoslav political violence in Sweden, and his appeals for more resources to combat Croatian violence were mostly disregarded. The murder of Ambassador Rolović naturally precipitated something of a shift in this position both within the Säpo and the Swedish government more generally. But even then, discussions of counterterrorism were confined to parliamentary debates and governmental press releases.

The attitude of the Swedish government changed markedly with the hijacking of SAS 130. Less than a week after the conclusion of the Bulltofta skyjacking, the Swedish parliament appointed a special committee called the Commission for the Prevention of Political Terrorism, which was tasked with drafting the country’s first antiterrorist legislation. The commission’s recommendations were submitted for review just two months later, on December 8, in a report entitled *Action to Combat Certain Acts of Violence with an International Background*. In the words of a press communiqué issued by the Swedish government, the commission concluded that in light of the “several acts of violence of a political nature [that] have been committed by Croatian nationalists,” measures had to be taken to “reduce the risk of
Sweden becoming a refuge for members of terrorists organizations of various kinds.” These measures included the suspension of Sweden’s visa-exemption agreement with Yugoslavia, the establishment of a law to give the Swedish government the right to refuse entry into the country of any foreign national—including refugees and asylum seekers—the right of the government to examine and expel persons of foreign nationality presumed to belong to violent political organizations or groups, and greater security services latitude to control and supervise alien residents in the country, including house- and body searches, telephone wiretapping, and the interception and inspection of personal mail and other sealed documents.

By any measure, the vagueness of the categories employed in the new laws to justify state action against those either hoping to gain entry into Sweden or already residing in the country fell well short of the normal standards of penal law. Critics of the commission’s work declared the proposed laws to be “emergency legislation without a state of emergency existing,” with the government exploiting public outrage at the Bulltofta skyjacking to pursue security measures that otherwise would not have been possible in Sweden. The main issue raised by the proposed legislation, critics protested, was that one need not have committed a crime to be subject to punitive legal measures. The only criteria for the restriction of an individual’s civil liberties was for that individual to be “presumed to belong to or be active for an international terrorist organization.” How this presumption might be reached, however, was left solely to the Säpo, for whom the burden of proof was neither legally defined nor—for security reasons—reviewable or refutable by those charged. A Croat living in Sweden, for instance, did not need to be a member of an organization such as the HRB or Otpor to face investigation, search, arrest, or even expulsion from Sweden. It would be sufficient simply to openly express solidarity with the aims of the Croatian separatist movement to be considered a presumptive terrorist, even if agreement with the ultimate goal of national liberation did not mean agreement with the methods used in the pursuit of independence.

From today’s post-9/11 perspective, the commission’s recommended measures might appear—rightly or wrongly—neither particularly draconian nor egregious. In 1972, however, with both national and international laws regarding the growing spread of terrorism and political violence in their infancy, the proposed legislation was viewed by many as a direct assault on the basic democratic and legal values of Sweden. Importantly, the commission itself conceded that its recommendations were truly exceptional, stating that the laws being proposed were “of an extraordinary nature” and that they represented a “deviation from principles we otherwise usually follow in legislation.” To allay the concerns of those who feared that the new anti-terrorism law would serve as just the first step in a more systematic undermining of
civil liberties in Sweden, the commission proposed to make the legislation valid only for one-year terms, to expire automatically every twelve months unless renewed by the Riksdag, Sweden’s parliament. With this provision in place, the commission’s recommendations moved quickly through parliament. The final bill, dubbed simply the Terrorism Act, was put before the Riksdag in April 1973—just seven months after the Bulltofta skyjacking—where it passed with an overwhelming majority, 254 votes to 22, with 5 abstentions.  

As with most legal measures to combat political violence, the covert and secretive nature of the Säpo’s efforts to neutralize “presumptive” terrorists before they became actual terrorists makes it difficult to draw definitive conclusions about the effectiveness of the Terrorist Act. It is, however, clear that separatist activity by radical Croats in Sweden experienced a sharp decline from 1973 onward. The explanation might simply be that the most radical members of the movement had been on SAS 130. As dramatic and deadly as the eighteen-month-long period between the attack on the Yugoslav consulate in Gothenburg and the Bulltofta skyjacking had been, the circle of truly dedicated Croatian separatists prepared to engage in acts of violence in Sweden remained quite small. The few radicals who remained in the country after the escape to Spain by those on SAS 130 were left leaderless, disjointed, and perhaps even disaffected by the backlash in Sweden to the movement’s violent tactics.

There can, however, be little question that the Terrorist Act greatly restricted the ability of Croatian extremists living in Sweden to operate. The new measures implemented in 1973 were much further-reaching than those enacted in West Germany in the 1960s, which had been the impetus for the move to Scandinavia in the first place, leaving Swedish-based Croats with few options to organize and little space in which to maneuver. The Riksdag renewed the law in both 1974 and 1975, reflecting the government’s conviction that it was both necessary and effective. In 1976, the law was effectively divided in two. The part dealing with special investigative and coercive measures remained essentially an emergency power, requiring yearly renewal. The majority of the legislation, however, was incorporated—with added amendments—on a permanent basis into Sweden’s Aliens Act of 1954. 20 Ultimately, Sweden was determined to prevent the country from becoming a bastion of anti-Yugoslav Croatian violence. As a result, if semi-émigré radical separatists were going to build on their “successes” of the previous three years, they would have to do so from somewhere other than Sweden.

Perhaps the most obvious country to which semi-émigré separatists could have turned to consolidate their movement was Australia, which an early missive from the Supreme Headquarters of the HRB had declared to be “the citadel of Croatian national consciousness abroad.” 21 Australia had been first
a stronghold of wartime Ustaša émigrés and then later one of the true birthplaces of semi-émigré radical separatism. One reason for this is that arguably no other government was more accommodating to Croatian extremists over a longer period than that of Australia’s Liberal Party, which held power from 1949 until December 1972. A defining characteristic of the Liberal Party’s near quarter-century reign was a preoccupation with the threat posed to Australia by the forces of communism. From the earliest days of the Cold War through to the anti–Vietnam War protests of the 1960s and early 1970s, the Liberal Party was convinced that Moscow was using the Communist Party of Australia (CPA) to prepare the country for revolution. This fixation was shared by ASIO, which, despite ostensibly enjoying both bureaucratic independence and an apolitical mission, had become by the mid-1950s, to quote the political scientist Jenny Hocking, little more than “the political police of the Liberal-Country Party government.” As relates to Croatian immigrants, the fierce anticommunism of both the Australian government and security services translated into a rather indifferent—if not welcoming—position among those in power in Canberra to anti-Yugoslav elements in the country.

ASIO’s attitude toward the overtly violent and even fascist affinities of Croatian immigrants to Australia after World War II can be seen in an early engagement between the security organization and one of the country’s most influential émigré groups, the Australian Croatian Association (AHD; Australsko hrvatsko društvo). In 1953, an ASIO field officer submitted a report warning that those connected to the AHD were “intensely Nationalistic, bordering on fanaticism,” and that if left unchecked, the organization’s publication *Hrvat (The Croat)* “will become the official organ of Fascist propaganda in Australia.” Rather than finding this report troubling, ASIO’s director-general colonel Charles Spry dismissed his officer’s concerns, choosing to focus on what the association and like-minded Croats were against rather than what they were for. In a memorandum submitted to the secretary of the Department of Immigration, Spry wrote that while he did not dispute the field officer’s view that “the Australian Croatian Association was extremely pro-Ustachi and constantly in touch with the Croat terrorist Ante PAVELICH,” it mattered much more that “the Australian Croatian Association is anticommunist and anti-Tito . . . [and] therefore [ASIO has] no security objections” to either the Australian Croatian Association or the publication of *Hrvat.*

This laissez-faire attitude toward pro-independence, anti-Yugoslav Croatian immigrants by both Australia’s government and its security services not only remained unchanged following the Croatian separatist movement’s embrace of violence beginning in the early 1960s, but in many ways it became further entrenched. While the reasons for this are manifold, it was the government’s obsession with the communist threat that arguably proved most
formative. As explored in chapter 4, the Yugoslav government had made the infiltration of radical separatist groups one of its top priorities, employing agents provocateurs to subvert and weaken the movement by forcing host governments to deal with the growing violence of Croatian immigrants. Rather than viewing Udba activities on Australian soil as an infringement of sovereignty or otherwise a national security threat, ASIO saw them as an opportunity to observe up close how the security services of a state socialist country operated. While Yugoslavia was outside the orbit of the Soviet Union and not a member of the Warsaw Pact, the country remained nevertheless in the eyes of the Australian government and ASIO firmly in the communist camp. As such, as much as could be learned about how the Udba functioned would help in the larger struggle against the communist threat both in Australia and globally. As long as radical Croats posed no real security threat to Australia itself—as the thinking within the government and ASIO went—the benefits of allowing the separatist movement to operate more or less unimpeded in order to better monitor and scrutinize the Udba’s tactics outweighed the costs.

Even when it became clear that radical Croatian separatism did, in fact, represent a national security issue, the Liberal Party government took pains to downplay and relativize the nature of the threat. In a press release issued on July 20, 1972—one month to the day after eight naturalized Australian citizens together with eleven others launched the Operacija Feniks incursion into socialist Yugoslavia—the Commonwealth attorney general Ivor Greenwood stated publicly that the Australian government possessed no intelligence regarding organized extremist activity among Australian Croats. “Investigations by the Commonwealth Police,” Greenwood declared in direct contradiction to what both the Commonwealth Police and ASIO had, in fact, determined, “so far have not revealed any credible evidence that any Croatian revolutionary terrorist organisation exists in Australia.” He went on to assert:

That there have been bomb attacks and other incidents of violence is fact. Investigations of incidents are a State matter. The persons responsible for these attacks and incidents have, generally, not been able to be identified; this difficulty is not unique to Australia. In the absence of such identification there has been a tendency to attribute responsibility to extremist Croatian Nationalists. This tendency ignores the fact that Croatians and at least one Croatian building have been the subject of attacks.

The pattern of events, worldwide, discloses that there are extreme Croatian Nationalists who will resort to terror, violence, and murder. There is also evidence that Croatian Nationalists have also been murdered by those opposed to them.
More strikingly, even in the immediate aftermath of the George Street bombings two months later, Greenwood doubled down on his denial that radical Croatian terrorist organizations existed in Australia. In parliamentary debates just three days after the attack in Sydney, Greenwood not only repeated his claim that the Commonwealth Police had no substantial proof that Croatian terrorists were operating in Australia but implied that those who claimed otherwise were siding with the communists in Yugoslavia over law enforcement in Australia. As he stated, “Our investigation of those allegations [regarding Croatian terrorism] in Australia has proved that the allegations are without such a basis. Simply, it comes down to this: Does this Senate accept what is alleged by the President and the Prime Minister of Yugoslavia in preference to what our own Commonwealth Police have found and what I have stated?”

As happens, many within both the Senate and Australia’s general public did, in fact, accept the allegations of the Yugoslav regime over those of the attorney general. Before September 15, 1972, radical Croatian separatist political violence was both conceptually and spatially abstract for most Australians. On the one hand, the seemingly inscrutable history of ethnic relations in the Balkans discouraged broad engagement with the so-called Croatian Question. On the other hand, the violence of groups such as the HRB remained removed from the experience of most Australians, whether that violence took place on the far side of the globe or on the other side of town but safely cloistered within the “Yugoslav community.” The George Street bombings, however, were much more concrete, literally hitting hard at home. At best, attorney general Greenwood’s statements had the appearance of obliviousness on the part of the government. Worse was that many saw the attorney general’s position as obstructionist and willfully disingenuous. Either way, the repercussions for the ruling Liberal Party were the same. In federal elections held less than three months after the George Street bombings, the Australian electorate voted the Liberal Party out of power in favor of the Australian Labor Party (ALP), ending after twenty-three years what to date is still the longest continuous reign of one party in the country’s history.

The issue of Croatian separatist terrorism in Australia was, of course, just one of many contributing to the Liberal Party’s electoral defeat. But there is no doubt that growing discontent with the government’s blasé approach toward both Croatian extremism broadly and the George Street attacks specifically helped intensify already mounting dissatisfaction with the Liberal Party. Importantly, there is also no question that the incoming prime minister Gough Whitlam and—in particular—his attorney general Lionel Murphy viewed the relationship among the Liberal Party, ASIO, and Croatian radicalism as one of the new government’s most pressing concerns. During its many years in opposition, the ALP had come to see Australia’s security service establishment as
not just politically partisan but indeed conspiratorial. Driving this view were misgivings about ASIO’s long-standing obsession with both the anti–Vietnam War movement and those the security agency believed to represent the vanguard of communist and revolutionary subversion in the country—meaning students, intellectuals, artists, and members of the New Left. But ASIO’s manifest dereliction in dealing with the equally—if not indeed more—serious national security threat posed by radical Croatian separatists stood a close second, buttressing concerns within the ALP that ASIO was both politically tainted and operationally impaired.

Once in power, the ALP wasted little time in making moves to bring ASIO into check, and it was the Croatian issue that provided the desired pretext for the new government to act. A major preoccupation of the Commonwealth Police Force (CPF) in the early weeks of 1973 was assessing the security risk associated with the impending late-March arrival of Yugoslav prime minister Džemal Bijedić, who had scheduled a state visit to Australia as part of a larger tour of South Asia. In the course of their investigations, the CPF unearthed at least one definitive plot to assassinate the prime minister by anti-Yugoslav Australian Croats and evidence of several others. The police force also found that the likelihood of both organized and spontaneous violence by demonstrators protesting Bijedić’s visit to be extremely high. Even with diligent and careful planning, the CPF was forced to conclude, no guarantees could be made for Bijedić’s physical safety during his visit.

In addition to painting an alarming picture of the security threat posed by Croatian extremists within Australia, the CPF’s report was viewed by Attorney General Murphy as proof positive that the previous government had, in conjunction with ASIO, deliberately suppressed evidence of active and well-organized terrorists operating on Commonwealth soil. Murphy’s response was as dramatic as it was rapid. In the late night/early morning hours of March 15/16, 1973, the attorney general made a surprise visit to ASIO’s local offices in Canberra, demanding to see all available files held there related to radical Croats operating in Australia. Among the files Murphy found was one outlining a strategy of how ASIO should share information with the new government. According to the document, intelligence officers were to frame their information in such a way as to ensure that statements made by the current attorney general on the issue of Croatian radicals “should not be contrary or inconsistent to that of the previous government.”

Convinced that this document pointed to a conspiracy at the highest levels of ASIO, Murphy ordered the CPF to immediately seal off ASIO’s central headquarters in Melbourne. All safes, cabinets, and containers in the building were to be made secure, and staff was to be barred from their offices and work spaces. Murphy himself then took an early morning flight to
Melbourne—just hours after his visit to ASIO’s offices in Canberra—to meet the waiting CPF officers. Together, they then proceeded to search the building for further evidence of what the attorney general believed to be politically motivated obstructionism on the part of the security organization.

Ultimately, the “Murphy Raid”—as the visits came to be known—uncovered less than the attorney general had perhaps hoped. To be sure, what Murphy did find in Melbourne was damning. ASIO’s myopia when it came to the supposed communist menace to Australian security had led the agency to thoroughly neglect the threat posed by the radicalization of Croatian separatists in the country. Beyond failing to gather any meaningful intelligence on extremist Croatian organizations operating in Australia, ASIO possessed neither informants from nor agents within the movement. Still, the picture painted by the documents seized at ASIO headquarters was more one of indifference and incompetence than of political corruption and malevolence. The previous government had certainly been obstructionist regarding ASIO’s knowledge of radical Croatian terrorism. The reality, however, was that the obstruction had been more to cover up its own ignorance and ineptitude than a smoke screen for some more insidious plot within the Liberal Party and ASIO.

The repercussions of the raid—Murphy’s failure to find the evidence of a conspiracy that he had sought, notwithstanding—were deep and long-lasting. Operationally, ASIO took an immediate hit, as the raid was viewed as a gross violation of the organization’s autonomy and security. Agents, informants, and contacts working for ASIO became spooked, fearing that their covers were no longer secure. Similarly, the raid prompted widespread anxiety within the security agencies of friendly nations, most notably the United States, leading to a more cautious approach to the sharing of intelligence of all kinds with ASIO and the Australian government. Organizationally, meanwhile, a direct consequence of the raid was the establishment by the Whitlam government of the Royal Commission on Intelligence and Security, which was charged with undertaking a thorough and systematic inquiry into the history, structure, operations, and functions of Australia’s security services. In a real sense, the commission marked the end of ASIO as it had existed since the 1950s. While the commission report, which was presented to the government in 1977, actually recommended that some of ASIO’s powers be expanded, it also laid out a plan to substantially and fundamentally restructure the organization to make it both more modern and accountable.

Meanwhile, for the radical Croatian separatist movement in Australia the raid brought the era of general governmental indifference to their activities to an end. Having served as the impetus for Murphy’s assault on ASIO’s offices, the attorney general was deeply invested in bringing extremist Croats to heel. ASIO was ordered to cooperate and coordinate with the Commonwealth
Police Force in the monitoring and investigation of suspected terrorist organizations—something that remarkably had not occurred before 1973—making radical Croatian separatism for the first time not just a criminal but indeed a state security matter. To a far greater degree than before the raid, members of pro-independence nationalist groups were closely surveilled through both overt and covert means, resources went into research and translation, and known Croatian separatists were denied travel documents in an effort to upset international networks. As in West Germany earlier and Sweden at the same time, radical separatists experienced a rapid contraction of their room to maneuver in Australia.

That room shrank even further five years later, in 1978, with passage of the Foreign Incursions and Recruitment Crimes Act. The act made it illegal to engage in any hostile activity in or against a foreign state, the very raison d’être of pro-independence, anti-Yugoslav Croatian extremist groups. For more than twenty years—from the early 1950s until the George Street bombings—the Australian government had afforded radical Croatian separatists remarkable latitude to organize, operate, and act. Starting with the Murphy raid, it was clear that the Commonwealth government no longer would tolerate extremist politics within the Croatian community.

That the Murphy Raid in Australia and the passage of the Terrorist Act in Sweden had been effective can be seen in the precipitous drop in global incidents of Croatian separatist terrorism in the months that followed both. A 1979 report prepared by the Canadian Ministry of External Affairs concerning global anti-Yugoslav activities since 1962, for instance, lists not one single significant act of political violence between September 1972 and June 1976. Similarly, a report from the West German Ministry of the Interior from June 1976 records only two notable incidents involving radical Croatian separatists between 1972 and 1976, neither of which were, in fact, acts of terror. And in one of the most detailed catalogues of anti-Yugoslav emigrant activity compiled by any security service in the world—the East German Ministry for State Security (Stasi; Ministerium für Staatssicherheit)—the period from September 1972 to early 1975 is notable for its lack of entries. Of the total sixty-four pages in the Stasi report covering the years 1962 to 1984, 1973 and 1974 are given just one page each. Put simply, if the three-year period preceding the Bulltofta skyjacking and George Street bombings were characterized by a pronounced upsurge in the number of acts of political violence committed by semi-émigré radicals, the three years following the attacks showed an equally sharp decline in separatist terrorism.

Of course, it is important not to overstate the effectiveness of antiterrorist measures such as those implemented first in West Germany and later in Sweden and Australia. While the relatively limited number of those involved
in separatist terrorist acts made the movement particularly susceptible to governmental controls in individual countries, the transnational network of extremists stretching from Melbourne to Munich to Mississauga provided the movement with an intrinsic flexibility and resilience. To be sure, the governmental measures taken against radical Croatian nationalists in Sweden and Australia undermined the movement’s ability to operate and ultimately forced it into retreat. But retreat was not the same as defeat, a fact that radical Croatian separatists would lay bare with deadly effect in the second half of the 1970s.

Initial signs that a plunge in the number of terrorist acts by anti-Yugoslav Croatian radicals following the events of September 1972 represented only a lull rather than a cessation in political violence began to appear in late 1974. On October 29, two West German–based members of the HRB, Ivan Matičević and Mate Prpić, were “liquidated”—in the language of Yugoslav authorities—in a firefight in the Velebit mountains near the town of Gospić. According to official reports, Matičević and Prpić had been responsible for the murder of Đuro Uzelac, commander of a police station in the Croatian coastal town of Karlobag, in September 1972 and had made frequent incursions into Yugoslavia in the following two years to engage in subversive and seditious activities. When killed, they were armed with mortars, submachine guns, and other weapons.

Less than a week later, two militant Croats who had also been living in West Germany infiltrated socialist Yugoslavia armed with grenades and submachine guns, allegedly with the aim of assassinating prominent political figures, chief among them the former chairman of the SKH Vladimir Bakarić. Before they were able to carry out an attack, however, both men, together with eleven local accomplices, were arrested. Just over two weeks later—in an incident possibly related to the two abortive incursions—a parcel bomb exploded in Zagreb’s central post office on November 15, killing one postal worker and injuring two others. Shortly afterward, in a further incident pointing to potential plans for a larger raid on Yugoslav soil by radical separatists, a joint operation of authorities in West Germany and socialist Yugoslavia arrested five Croats in possession of arms, explosives, and antitank rockets that had been stolen from a United States Army munitions depot in West Germany. Meanwhile, on March 29, 1975, the Yugoslav vice consul in Lyon Mladen Đogović was seriously wounded after being shot in his basement garage. And on June 7, 1976—in an incident that would qualify as farcical had it not been tragic—a Croatian separatist named Jozo Damjanović mortally wounded in downtown Asunción the Uruguayan ambassador to Paraguay, Carlos Abdala, whom he had mistaken for the Yugoslav ambassador accredited to Paraguay, Momčilo Vučeković.
Initially, it seemed that Croatian extremists had revived West Germany as their primary base of operations. On Christmas Eve 1975, a bomb ripped through the Stuttgart offices of JAT, causing considerable damage but causing no injuries. Ten days later, on January 3, 1976, a second bomb attack took place in Stuttgart, this time at the home of the Yugoslav consul general, with a similar outcome. A third nonfatal bombing occurred on May 15, this time in Cologne at the entrance of the Yugoslav Information Center. And on June 28, the Yugoslav vice consul in Düsseldorf, Vladimir Topić, was critically wounded after being shot as he arrived at work. The gunman was Marko Krpan, a member of the Croatian National Resistance–Friends of the Drina (Hrvatski narodni odpor–Prijatelji Drine), a West German branch of Maks Luburić’s Otpor. Of particular note is that Krpan’s accomplice in the shooting, the student Pavle Perović, was known by West German officials as being an informant for—if not an actual agent of—the Udba.

Meanwhile, the most serious incident during the first half of 1976 was the assassination of the Yugoslav vice consul in Frankfurt, Edvin Zdovc, on February 7. He was shot several times by two assailants in front of his garage as he was leaving his house early on a Saturday morning. Zdovc died at the scene, and no suspects were ever arrested.

The government in Bonn, however, was both alert and sensitive to the danger posed by the resurgence of anti-Yugoslav violence on West German soil. The rise since the late 1960s and early 1970s of groups such as the RAF and the 2nd of June Movement (Bewegung 2. Juni) and events like the Black September attack during the Munich Olympics had not surprisingly greatly hardened governmental, security, and law enforcement attitudes toward any manifestation of political violence in the country. Consequently, authorities moved quickly to smother the fire of this new wave of radical semi-émigré Croatian terror before it was able to spread. In direct response to the attacks of the first half of 1976, two of the most active Croatian emigrant organizations in West Germany—the HNO and the Croatian Society Drina (Kroatischer Verein Drina e.V.)—were officially banned and their members required to register with the police every four weeks. Additionally, federal officials established a special unit within the state security division of the West German Federal Criminal Police Office (BKA) to deal exclusively with “Croatian extremism.”

These measures complemented and further strengthened those that the government in Bonn had put into place before 1976. In 1973, the BKA had entered into an informal agreement with their Yugoslav counterparts for a “greatly intensified exchange,” whereby Bonn would provide Belgrade with information about Croats operating in West Germany in exchange for information on the activities of the PLO—who often worked with left-wing groups in the FRG—which the Yugoslav government supported. Importantly, this
exchange included information not normally passed to the International Criminal Police Organization (INTERPOL) due to its political nature. More formally, Bonn and Belgrade concluded an extradition treaty in 1974 that broadened possible action against Croatian radicals operating in and out of West Germany. And following the revival of anti-Yugoslav violence in 1976, the West German Ministry of the Interior redoubled exchanges among domestic institutions, including the sharing of information on radical Croats among the country’s security agencies, the Foreign Ministry, the Ministry of Justice, and the police forces of West Germany’s individual federal states.\(^{58}\) Taken together, these myriad measures allowed the West German government to quell the new campaign of violence by semi-émigré nationalists operating in the country almost as quickly as it had started.

**The Final Act**

The actions taken by the governments of Sweden, Australia, and West Germany made it clear to those involved in the Croatian independence movement that if the struggle for independence was to continue, it would have to happen from somewhere that had so far been relatively unaffected by anti-Yugoslav political violence and therefore relatively unchecked by governmental control. That place was the United States. In the decade following the first postwar act of Croatian terrorism in Bonn in 1962, the United States was conspicuously spared the violence that had become somewhat commonplace in countries like West Germany, Australia, Sweden, and even Belgium and France. To be sure, anti-Titoist Croatian nationalists living in the United States were far from passive in the 1960s and the first half of the 1970s. But their activities remained by and large within the bounds of legal and political norms. Croats held protests, penned treatises and articles, wrote letters, and formed political organizations. But the radicalization that Europe and the Antipodes had experienced remained more or less in check.

As evidence, a list of the most grievous acts of “subversion” and “terrorism” perpetrated by Croatian separatists in the United States from January 1967 to September 1976 published by *Tanjug*, the official news agency of socialist Yugoslavia, includes only six entries before 1975. Of these, three involved the smashing of shop windows, one was a failed attempt to mine a Yugoslav vessel in the port of Charleston, South Carolina, and one was a demonstration that ended with protesters breaking the windows of the permanent Yugoslav Mission to the United Nations in New York.\(^{59}\) The sixth incident on the list, meanwhile, was an attack committed not by Croats but rather by anti-Titoist émigré Serbian nationalists.\(^{60}\) In what was by far the most serious and significant act of anti-Yugoslav violence in North America before 1976, Serbian terrorists simultaneously bombed six Yugoslav diplomatic missions
on January 29, 1967, including the embassies in Washington, DC, and Ottawa, and consulates in New York, Chicago, San Francisco, and Toronto. The explosions resulted in no loss of life and no serious injuries, but they did cause extensive damage, both to the buildings themselves and to US/Yugoslav and Canadian/Yugoslav relations.\(^{61}\)

Starting in 1975, however, the relative immunity to violence that the Croatian separatist movement in the United States seemed to possess showed signs of weakening. In May, three Croats were charged with assaulting the Yugoslav consul general in New York City, Milan Bulajić and his wife, at a party. Less than two weeks later, on May 14, two armed men attempted to storm the Yugoslav Mission to the United Nations, only to be thwarted by members of the mission’s security staff. Five weeks later, on June 23, the Yugoslav Mission to the United Nations was again targeted, when a time bomb exploded in front of the building. And just before New Year’s Day, on December 29, a plastic explosive detonated outside the home of the Yugoslav consul general in Chicago.\(^{62}\) In each of these instances, as had been the case throughout the 1960s and the first half of the 1970s, both the material and bodily damage caused by radical separatists was minimal. The tactics employed and the targets chosen, however, signaled a clear shift in the strategic thinking of US-based separatists. As Croatian nationalists in the United States declared in 1976, echoing language long used in Europe and Australia: “In countries where no opportunity for democratic change, peaceful lobbying, or publication [of] one’s views exist, another method must necessarily be utilized.”\(^{63}\)

If there was any doubt as to what that method was, it was emphatically removed on September 10, 1976. In what arguably remains the most infamous act of Cold War–era anti-Yugoslav Croatian separatist political violence, four men and one woman claiming to represent an organization called “Fighters for Free Croatia,” hijacked TWA flight 355 scheduled to fly from New York’s LaGuardia Airport to Chicago O’Hare. Declaring that they possessed five gelignite bombs, the hijackers—Zvonko Bušić, Frane Pešut, Slobodan Vlašić, Petar Matanić, and Bušić’s American wife, Julienne Bušić (née Eden Schultz)—ordered that the plane carrying eighty-seven passengers and seven crew be rerouted to London. They also directed the flight’s captain to inform authorities in New York to inspect a storage locker at the entrance to the 42nd Street subway station in Manhattan. In the locker, the captain was told, authorities would find a live bomb to prove that the explosives onboard were genuine. The locker also contained a letter with further demands. If the instructions in the letter were not followed, the hijackers threatened, a second timed explosive device planted somewhere in the city in a highly trafficked location would detonate.
The letter found in the locker contained only one demand: two manifestos written by the hijackers were to be published the next day in five major newspapers, the *New York Times*, the *Washington Post*, the *Chicago Tribune*, the *Los Angeles Times*, and the *International Herald Tribune*. The first text, entitled “Declaration of the Headquarters of the Croatian National Liberation Forces,” was a three-thousand-word treatise exploring broadly the global history of national self-determination and specifically the oppression, humiliation, and even genocide allegedly faced by the Croatian nation within socialist Yugoslavia. The second piece, entitled “Appeal to the American People,” was a slightly shorter tract that, on the one hand, compared the contemporary Croatian struggle for national liberation with the colonial American Revolutionary War against the British but also, on the other, accused the American government of abandoning its own founding principles through its continued support of “the colonialistic enslavement of the non-Serbian nations within Yugoslavia.”

The texts themselves aside, the nature of the demand itself marked a significant departure from the prevailing tactical thinking of most radical Croatian separatists. Stated simply, the hijackers of TWA 355 were interested less in the “propaganda of the deed” that had characterized anti-Yugoslav political violence since the early 1960s than in the spreading of actual propaganda. As explained in the “Appeal to the American People”: “We decided to undertake this particular action for many reasons. First, our goal was to present an accurate picture of the brutal oppression taking place in Yugoslavia. . . . Next, we decided on this method [hijacking a plane] to illustrate the idea that there indeed exists nobler values than the preservation of a bloody, totalitarianistic and imperialistic creation.” Unlike not just the Bulltofta skyjacking four years earlier but diverging from nearly every other act of Croatian political violence since 1962, the principal aim of the hijacking of TWA 355 was not to incite fellow Croats to revolutionary action in the struggle for national independence or—as had been the case with SAS 130—to liberate those who had been imprisoned for doing just that. Rather, the purpose behind the hijacking of TWA 355 was first and foremost to publicize as widely as possible the Croatian cause among the broader public in the West. The despotic nature of “Serbo-communist” rule in socialist Yugoslavia meant that the struggle for national liberation would by necessity have to be a violent one. But violence alone would not ensure the establishment of an independent Croatian state. The Croatian nation would also need to win the battle for public opinion. Having the truth told through the publication of the two manifestos would help further this aim, ensuring that, in the words of the hijackers, “when the eventual uprising against Serbian Imperialism begins, the American people will not, then, allow themselves to be further manipulated regarding the justifications of such an occurrence.”
The commandeering of TWA 355, however, ultimately did more harm than good for the cause of Croatian national liberation. Reflecting a lack of planning on the part of the hijackers, the operating aircraft of TWA 355 was a Boeing 727, a midsize plane designed for short flights. Neither the plane itself nor the crew were cleared for a transatlantic flight, meaning that the hijacked plane would both need to make several stops on the way to Europe and be accompanied by a plane with the proper navigational equipment. After first stopping in Montreal, the plane flew on to Gander, Newfoundland, where they were met by a Boeing 707 that would guide them over the Atlantic. In Gander, the aircraft was refueled, thirty-five passengers were released, and copies of the two manifestos were unloaded and given to authorities to be dropped by aircraft over Montreal, Chicago, and New York City. After stopping again in Reykjavik—where more copies of the manifestos were loaded onto the accompanying 707—the planes continued to London and Paris, over both of which leaflets were again dropped. Running low on fuel, the plane was ultimately forced to land in the French capital, where authorities—who took a hard-line approach to the hijacking—shot out the plane’s tires and issued an ultimatum that the hijackers either surrender or face execution. Following an eight-hour standoff—and some thirty hours after seizing the aircraft—the hijackers relented, surrendering to the French police.

Had TWA 335’s transatlantic adventure been the whole story, the five hijackers might have been able to declare their undertaking a success. Tragically, it was not. After the skyjackers surrendered, it was revealed that their bombs were fakes, constructed from an assortment of pots, wires, switches, black tape, and plastic putty. What was real, however, was the bomb left in the storage locker in midtown Manhattan. After securing the area around the locker, the New York City bomb squad removed the device and transferred it for inspection to a police facility in the Rodman’s Neck section of the Bronx. After several failed attempts to manually trigger the device, four members of the bomb squad—believing the device to have been deactivated—approached the sandpit where the explosive had been placed. Wearing only bulletproof vests and not the regulation protective gear, the men were left tragically exposed when the bomb unexpectedly detonated. One of the officers, Terence McTigue, was gravely wounded, with two others, Henry Dworkin and Fritz Behr, suffering less serious injuries. Absorbing the full force of the blast, however, was Brian J. Murray, who was killed instantly by the explosion.

Whatever sympathy the hijackers might have hoped to gain through their exposure of the Belgrade regime’s crimes against the Croatian nation was lost with the death of Officer Murray. The stark anticommunism of the separatists coupled with their youthful and perhaps even alluring idealism resonated with many in the United States, just as the skyjackers themselves had hoped.
in direct contrast to the hijackers’ assertion that their struggle resembled that of the American Founding Fathers, for most Americans the violent death of an innocent New York City police officer evoked nothing but revulsion. Although the hijackers had hoped to present themselves and the cause of Croatian independence as principled and high-minded, the plight of an unknown nation in a far-off country was an abstraction that could not compete with the more tangible reality that Officer Murray’s wife had been widowed and that his two small sons would grow up without their father. The hijacking of TWA 355 was intended to strike a massive blow for the Croatian separatist movement in the battle for public opinion. In the end, the undertaking proved to be a public relations disaster, with the death of Officer Murray overshadowing the entire episode to the detriment of any message the skyjackers had hoped to spread.  

Within the American Croatian community, reaction to the hijacking was generally one of muted support, mirroring the responses to comparable acts of radical semi-émigré political violence in West Germany and Australia. The actors involved in the hijacking were themselves widely defended while the act itself was treated with reproach. Air piracy was not the preferred mechanisms by which most emigrant Croats wanted to bring the suffering of their conationals at the hands of the “Serbo-communists” to the attention of the American public. The murder of a New York City police officer less so. But in the face of the oppression and even genocide taking place in the homeland, such actions were deemed not just understandable but justifiable. In the eyes of many Croatian emigrants in the United States, the skyjackers were viewed as freedom fighters, willing to sacrifice their own personal freedom in an effort to advance the cause of freedom for the whole of the Croatian nation. The hijacking may have ended in tragedy, but the principles and motives behind the undertaking—if nothing else—were deemed noble. Still, the moral ambiguities of the hijacking and its outcome were enough to give most American Croats pause, tempering any potential for widespread mobilization of the diaspora community.

The exception, of course, was among those members of the semi-émigré generation living in the United States for whom the national liberation movement was conceived in revolutionary terms. If the hijacking and killing of Officer Murray broadly elicited feelings of indignation among Americans generally and ethical disquietude among Croatian-Americans more specifically, it helped galvanize those extremist separatists for whom any questions about the means were secondary to the ends. Following the hijacking, Croatia was the subject for weeks of front-page headlines, backpage editorials, and television news spotlights. Granted, much of the news and commentary was negative, thanks both to the pervasive repulsion expressed in the media for terrorism generally and the death of Officer Murray specifically.
But at least Croatia was being talked about, whereas before the hijacking few Americans would have heard of the nation at all, much less have had any understanding of the existential peril it faced inside socialist Yugoslavia. For many of the more radical members of the separatist movement, this was a victory unto itself, even if the hijackers themselves had hoped their action would actually win the support of the general American public to their cause. The key now was to keep the topic of Croatia in the public eye and from there work slowly toward building sympathy for the struggle.

Insight regarding some of the moral ambiguities of the hijacking can potentially be found in a coda to the story. In July 2008, the acknowledged leader of the hijacking, Zvonko Bušić, was released from prison in the United States on parole after thirty-two years of incarceration. He returned to Croatia—which had achieved its independence in 1991—as a hero, greeted at the airport in Zagreb by hundreds of supporters and many of the country’s leading nationalist figures. He was also greeted by his wife, Julienne, who had been released from prison some nineteen years earlier and had spent most of the subsequent years living in Croatia. Just five years after returning, however, Bušić committed suicide by gunshot in his home on September 1, 2013. In a letter explaining the decision to take his own life, Bušić wrote that he “could no longer live in Plato’s cave,” and that “it was easier to dream of a free Croatia with all the trouble than to endure the Croatian reality.” Of course, how much the decision taken by Bušić was directly related to his later feelings regarding the hijacking is impossible to know, but unquestionably it weighed heavy.

The next major act of terror committed by radical émigré separatists in the United States came nine months after the hijacking of TWA 355. Early in the afternoon of June 14, 1977, Vladimir Dizdar, age twenty-three, Jozo Brekalo, thirty, and Marijan Buconjić, twenty-eight, forced their way into the Yugoslav Mission to the United Nations in midtown Manhattan with the aim of taking hostage the Yugoslav delegate to the United Nations, Jakša Petrić. As in the 1971 incidents in Sweden at the Yugoslav consulate in Gothenburg and embassy in Stockholm, the assailants had hoped to leverage their hostage to gain a platform—as federal prosecutors later charged—“for the purpose of publicizing a political cause.” In what can be ascribed to either poor planning or bad luck, Petrić was not at the mission at the time, recalling the raid in Gothenburg where the consul general had also been absent. However, the mission’s driver Radomir Medić was present and was shot in the abdomen by Dizdar as he tried to confront the three intruders, sustaining serious but nonfatal wounds.

The separatists then barricaded themselves in a third-floor room facing Fifth Avenue, one of New York City’s most prestigious thoroughfares. Falsely claiming to be holding a woman hostage, the Croats made only one demand,
that United Nations secretary general Kurt Waldheim be notified that the Yugoslav embassy had been occupied and that he be given a copy of a leaflet that condemned Tito’s Yugoslavia and called for the United Nations to take up measures to promote the establishment of “a free and independent Croatian State.” The assailants also dropped several dozen of the leaflets out the window, removed the Yugoslav flag from the side of the building, and attempted to hang American and Croatian flags from the mission’s windows. With no ambassador as a hostage, however, and having shot a public servant of Tito’s state on what was officially Yugoslav soil, the assailants had little recourse but to abandon their enterprise and quickly surrender to the police.

Just over a year later, a strikingly similar act of violence took place, but with the added drama of radical Croats playing a role in a sensitive international diplomatic incident. In May 1978, Yugoslav authorities in Zagreb arrested four members of the RAF. Each of the four—Brigitte Mohnhaupt, Peter-Jürgen Boock, Sieglinde Hofmann, and Rolf Clemens Wagner—had been involved in the kidnapping and murder of the German industrialist Hanns-Martin Schleyer in what remains one of the most notorious acts of terrorism in postwar German history. Pursuant to the extradition agreement signed in 1974 by the West German and Yugoslav governments, Bonn requested release of the four into West German custody. In response—in what the West German ambassador to Yugoslavia Jesco von Puttkamer described to his British counterpart as “blackmail”—Belgrade petitioned Bonn for the surrender of eight Yugoslav nationals residing in West Germany whom Yugoslavia declared to be terrorists. At the top of the list of eight—which included six Croats, one Serb, and one Kosovar Albanian—was Stipe Bilandžić. Following his three-year incarceration in a West German prison for his involvement in storming the Yugoslav Trade Mission in Bonn, Bilandžić served as leader of the West German branch of Maks Luburić’s Otpor. Among other acts, the Yugoslav regime charged Bilandžić with masterminding the second of the two failed incursions into Yugoslavia in the fall of 1974, the theft of arms from a US Army munitions depot in West Germany in the same year, and the June 28, 1976, shooting of Vice Consul Topić.

The beginnings of what the British Foreign Office came to call “the Yugoslav/FRG debacle” dated from early August, when West German courts blocked the extradition of seven of the eight individuals requested by Belgrade on the basis that the justification given for the petition was “extremely flimsy.” The one exception was Bilandžić, who made an immediate appeal to the West German Constitutional Court on the basis that the political system in socialist Yugoslavia precluded the possibility that—if extradited—he would receive a fair trial. Before the court could hear his case, however, the West German
federal government stepped in and announced that Bilandžić would not face extradition. The crimes for which Bilandžić was wanted by the Yugoslav government, Bonn declared, had taken place in the FRG and were already being investigated there. In addition, West German officials had evidence that Yugoslav security agents were involved in at least two plots to assassinate Bilandžić, reinforcing his contention that extradition would be tantamount to a death sentence. Outraged, the government in Belgrade responded to Bonn’s decision with what can fairly be described as provocative defiance. On November 17—without prior warning—Yugoslav officials informed the West German ambassador in Belgrade that the four Germans being held had sometime previously been released from custody and that they had left the country with the assistance of an unspecified “friendly” embassy, identified in a 1984 Stasi report as being Iraq.

While not publicly acknowledged, a significant factor contributing to the West German refusal to extradite Bilandžić was that—as the desk officer for Yugoslavia in the West German foreign ministry informed his British counterpart—“the Federal government had not wanted to provoke a wave of Croatian terrorist attacks in the FRG or against FRG government buildings abroad.” The West German government had, to a greater or lesser degree, been successful in controlling the activities of radical separatists following the brief flare-up of violence during the first half of 1976. But authorities recognized that the problem had only been contained and not solved. This was particularly true internationally, where Croatian extremists were viewed as a force still to be reckoned with, even if globally their overall activity had waned in the previous years. Bolstering such concerns were threats made against institutions of the West German state following the court decision to allow Bilandžić’s extradtion. Government officials received warnings, for example, that for every Croat handed over to Yugoslavia, two West German police officers would be murdered. And even one of Bilandžić’s lawyers openly declared that should his client be extradited, West Germany would experience a surge of violence compared to which “Baader-Meinhof terrorism will have seemed like a mosquito” bite.

Threats alone, however, were not all that stoked West German fears of a violent backlash against the state should Bilandžić or any of the seven others requested by Yugoslavia be extradited. On August 14, a group calling itself the Croatian Liberation Force planted two bombs in New York City, one at the Dag Hammarskjöld Library in the United Nations’ main headquarters and one in a locker at Grand Central Station. Both of the bombs—which New York City police officers were able to disarm—had notes attached demanding Bilandžić’s immediate release from West German custody. Three days later, two armed Croats—Božo Kelava, age thirty-six, and Mile Kodžoman,
thirty-two—stormed the West German consulate in Chicago, taking Vice Consul Werner Ickstadt and five other consular officers hostage. The Croats barricaded themselves and their captives in the consulate, with the radicals threatening to throw each of the hostages one by one from the building’s tenth-story window until Bilandžić was freed by West German authorities. Before harm came to any of the six hostages, the siege was brought to an end by Bilandžić himself, who called Kelava and Kodžoman from a prison in Cologne and convinced them over the telephone to release the hostages and surrender to police.94

Ultimately, the planting of bombs and the assault on the consulate were not decisive factors in West Germany’s final treatment of Bilandžić. The government in Bonn was more concerned with avoiding a Constitutional Court ruling on his case due to the probability that the outcome—regardless in whose favor—would create a troubling precedent. To prevent this, the government would have denied Yugoslavia’s extradition request in any case.95 Indeed, if anything—to quote a British Foreign Office assessment of West Germany’s handling of the extradition affair—the incidents in New York and Chicago actually complicated Bonn’s desire to keep Bilandžić in the country and out of Yugoslav custody due to the fact that the acts of violence “lost [the Croats] much public sympathy.”96 At the same time, the planting of bombs and the hostage situation in August 1978, together with the storming of the Yugoslav Mission to the United Nations the year before, yet again made clear to government officials on both sides of the Atlantic that even if semi-émigré radicals proved somewhat lacking in terms of planning, preparation, and implementation, they made up for it with a fervor and ardor that made them no less threatening. As much as one might question the effectiveness of the Croatian separatist movement, and despite measures already taken in Sweden, Australia, and West Germany, there could be no doubt that radical émigré Croats remained a serious problem in need of a solution.

When American authorities finally took resolute action to deal with the issue of Croatian radicalism, they notably took a different path than their counterparts in Europe and the Antipodes. Measures taken in Sweden, Australia, and West Germany for the most part all addressed directly the political dimension of semi-émigré violence in their countries. In the United States, the strategy taken for dealing with extremist Croats was to treat their actions as a criminal issue. Civil liberty concerns in the United States made efforts to monitor, infiltrate, and ultimately prosecute radical Croatian nationalists exceedingly difficult. As a federal judge explained before handing down the sentences of four Croats in a 1981 case: “The freedom to hold and to express political views, free of reprisal, extends to all inhabitants.”97 As such, the government had little recourse to stop politically motivated Croatian violence.
before it happened. What was not subject to such qualifications, however, were
the criminal activities surrounding the planning and financing of acts of ter-
ror and political violence. It was along this avenue that American authorities
sought to extinguish radical Croatian separatism in the country.

To wit, the primary focus of the Federal Bureau of Investigation’s (FBI)
scrutiny of extremist Croatian nationalists in the United States revolved not
around political violence and terrorism as such but rather on an international
extortion campaign targeting Croatian-Americans. Starting in early 1978,
members of the Croatian diaspora community began receiving letters claiming
to come from a group calling itself the Croatian Nationalist Army, demanding
payments of anywhere between US$5,000 and US$20,000. The letters were all
mailed to the United States from West Germany, with payment to be made to
a post office box in Asunción, Paraguay. The recipients of the letters—which
numbered at a minimum fifty—were warned that failure to comply would
result in reprisals carried out against them.

Fatefully, the extortionists were true to their word. On September 28,
1978, an immigrant named Anthony Cikoja—who had moved to the United
States eleven years earlier—was shot and killed on the front lawn of his
Greenburgh, New York, house after refusing to pay the demanded money.
One week later, on October 4, Daniel Nikolić survived a firebomb attack at
his custom cabinet-making business on the southeast side of Chicago when
he, too, balked at submitting to the extortionists. And in a virtual reproduc-
tion of Cikoja’s murder, Križan Brkić became the third victim in under two
months, when he was fatally shot outside his home in Glendale, California,
on November 22.98

The following year, the campaign against those refusing to acquiesce to
the extortion intensified, as several Croatian-Americans were victims of bomb
attacks. In February, Joseph Badurina, a journalist and politician from Queens,
New York, and Timothy Majić, a Catholic priest in Milwaukee, Wisconsin—
received identically constructed book-bombs through the mail. The device
sent to Majić severely injured a police detective when it detonated as he tried
to remove it from the parochial elementary school to which it had been sent.99
Less than two months later, on April 6, 1979, the Los Angeles–area homes
of Mario Forgiarini and Frank Striskovitch were rocked by separate pipe
bomb explosions after both men had refused to submit to the extortionists’
demands.100 And on May 23—in an incident that undoubtedly helped bring
the extortion bombing campaign to an end—Zvonko Šimac, age twenty-five,
and Mario Rudela, twenty-one, were killed in their pickup truck in San Pedro,
California, when a pipe bomb they were transporting to an unknown victim
prematurely exploded.101 Meanwhile, political violence by militant Croats
returned to New York City. On December 4, 1979, a bomb ripped through
a Yugoslav travel agency in the Astoria neighborhood of Queens, injuring three, while on March 17, 1980, the Fifth Avenue offices of Jugobanka were destroyed when a bomb left in a stairwell outside the bank tore through the thirtieth story of the midtown high-rise where the office was located.

According to federal officials, the mastermind of the extortion campaign, who also tended the post office box in Asunción, was Miro Barešić, the man who had also been responsible for the murder of Ambassador Rolović in Sweden in 1971 and one of the men liberated from prison as part of the hijacking of SAS 130. Barešić’s life trajectory following his escape from jail in Sweden reads like something out of a pulp spy novel. After fleeing to Spain, Barešić traveled with Franco’s permission to South America, settling in Paraguay with the help of that country’s deputy foreign minister, who provided him with passports and other travel documents under a false name. Barešić joined the Paraguayan military, reaching the rank of captain while working primarily as a karate instructor. Later, he became the personal driver and bodyguard of the Paraguayan ambassador to the United States under the name Tony Favik. Barešić’s sojourn in the United States would be short, however, as American officials uncovered his true identity following a traffic incident leading the government to deport Barešić back to Paraguay.

Although brief, Barešić’s time in America was long enough for him to make contact with American-based radical separatists with whom he hatched the extortion plan. For his role in the scheme, Barešić would later be extradited from Paraguay back to the United States at the request of American authorities. A New York court, however, ultimately acquitted Barešić and several other Croatian codefendants, reportedly due to witnesses refusing to testify at the trial because of threats made against them and their families. Barešić did not escape jail time, however, as American authorities deported him to Sweden to serve out the remainder of his sentence for the assassination of Ambassador Rolović. Barešić would be released from Swedish prison in 1987, after which he returned to Paraguay.

Following Croatia’s declaration of independence in June 1991, Barešić then returned to his homeland to help establish a paramilitary unit in support of Croatia’s secession from Yugoslavia. Barešić’s role in what has come to be known in Croatia as the Homeland War (Domovinski rat), however, proved short lived. Just three weeks after his return, he was killed in one of the earliest campaigns of the conflict. Perhaps fitting for his biography, the circumstances of his death have recently become the source of some controversy. Claims have surfaced suggesting that Barešić was killed not by soldiers fighting for the Serbian Autonomous Oblast (SAO; Srpska autonomna oblast) of Krajina, as originally reported, but rather by a member of his own unit. According to this theory, Barešić was killed to protect the identities of former Udba agents.
who had worked against Croatian dissidents and radicals abroad during the Cold War whom Barešić—a target of such operations—might be able to expose.\textsuperscript{109} If this were not controversy enough, on the fifteenth anniversary of Barešić’s death—July 31, 2016—a monument to Barešić was unveiled in the seaside village of Drage, leading to a heated diplomatic rows between Croatia and Serbia and Croatia and Sweden.\textsuperscript{110}

Of course, Barešić was not the only figure involved in the extortion plot. According to prosecutors, the campaign’s concomitant acts of murder and criminal violence—as well as its corresponding acts of political violence—had all been the work of leading members of the American branch of Otpor, which was registered as a legal entity in the United States. Rather than make the organization itself the focus of investigation, federal prosecutors chose instead to target high-ranking individuals within the group through provisions made into law by the Racketeer Influenced and Corrupt Organizations (RICO) Act of 1970. Originally designed to combat the criminal activities of the Italian-American Mafia, the RICO Act made leaders of criminal organizations legally accountable not just for crimes that they themselves committed but also for crimes that they ordered others to commit. Despite the undeniably radical proclivities of Otpor’s nearly three hundred members nationwide, federal officials determined that both the criminal and political violence of the group was being organized and orchestrated by just a small minority. If law enforcement officials could put Otpor’s key figures behind bars, they believed, the remainder of the organization—and indeed the remainder of the radical semi-émigré separatist movement in the United States—would be irrevocably crippled.

And they were right. Following a six-year-long investigation by the FBI, federal prosecutors secured convictions of eleven leading members of Otpor on charges of racketeering and conspiracy in two trials held in 1981 and 1982.\textsuperscript{111} The verdicts amounted to a death sentence for the organization. The jailing of the group’s leadership left Otpor directionless and broken. As Lee F. Laster, head of the FBI’s New York office, stated bluntly, the arrests were “a crushing blow” to the radical Croatian separatist movement.\textsuperscript{112} But it was not just Otpor that was left shattered by American federal prosecutors. Globally, the effects of the measures taken by law enforcement officials in the United States reverberated far and wide. Throughout the 1970s, countries like Sweden, Australia, and West Germany had been successful in stifling radical separatists operating within their borders, leaving America the last stronghold of the radical Croatian national liberation movement by the end of the decade. Due in no small part to the kind of splintering, disorganization, and dysfunction that had beleaguered the postwar national liberation movement from its very beginnings, Otpor in turn was the only organization in
America with both the resources and ideological dedication to continue the violent struggle for Croatian independence. As such, the fall of Otpor’s leadership meant not only the fall of Otpor itself but indeed the end of the radical semi-émigré generation’s use of terrorism and political violence in support of Croatian national liberation. After nearly two decades, the last flame of the revolutionary struggle had been all but extinguished.