**Letter Hamdija Custovic to the Editor: Foreign Policy should reject Dobbs’ views on the war in Bosnia and Herzegovina**

Michael Dobbs is at it again, appeasing the Serbs who have apparently been critical of his coverage of the Ratko Mladic trial and the Srebrenica Genocide, and falling into the increasingly dangerous trap being set by a coalition of Serb nationalists and islamophobic activists worldwide (see Julia Gorin and Srdja Trifkovic) to revise history and “spread the blame” for the aggression and genocide in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Mr. Dobbs’s latest blog entry “[In Defense of the Serbs”](http://dobbs.foreignpolicy.com/posts/2012/08/22/in_defense_of_the_serbs) on the Foreign Policy website is shockingly irresponsible. In this blog article, Mr. Dobbs sympathizes with the Serb arguments that they were trying to “protect large Serb minorities” and that the western governments were hypocritical for allowing the breakup of Yugoslavia.

Anyone who survived the violent breakup of Yugoslavia and the Serbian aggression on its neighbors knows that the breakup of Yugoslavia was primarily caused by the rise in Serbian ultra-nationalism and their desire to create a greater Serbian state, a plan that dates back to the 1840s (see [Nacertanije of Ilija Garasanin](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Na%C4%8Dertanije)) We cannot forget that it was Slobodan Milosevic who rose to power following his infamous 1989 speech at Kosovo claiming that Serbs were being oppressed in Yugoslavia, and that he will defend them at all cost.  This was an ominous existential threat to the other republics of the former Yugoslavia which at the time still functioned as a union of six republics, with equal rights.

Let us briefly remember that Adolf Hitler and the Nazi establishment used fear tactics and nationalist appeal to raise support domestically in order to consolidate all Germans into a single state.  It was through the same arguments of existential threats to German minorities and the injustice against Germany that Hitler used to invade the neighboring countries and commit grave atrocities.  Likewise, Milosevic and his minority supporters in Croatia and Bosnia used fear tactics and propaganda to garner support.  Serb nationalists seized on this widespread nationalist support to take over the majority of the Yugoslav National Army (JNA), heavily arm their populations, and launch a systemic plan of attack for carving out Serb “republics” in Croatia and Bosnia at the expense of Bosniaks, Croats, and other nationalities. The war of aggression finally prompted a NATO intervention in the fall of 1995 in Bosnia and again four years later in Kosovo, that ultimately resulted in temporary defeat of the Serbian army and the ousting of Slobodan Milosevic from power in 2001. I use the words “temporary defeat” because the last few years have once again seen the escalation of the same nationalist rhetoric that caused the war. Once more, Serb nationalists are claiming that Serbs are in danger because they’re being “unfairly” blamed for the Balkan wars of the 1990s.  This time it may be even more dangerous because of the use of internet to spread lies and propaganda to support their agenda. The election of Tomislav Nikolic to the presidency of Serbia is a clear signal to Serbia’s neighbors and the international community that the Serbian fascist ideology is alive and well, waiting on the right conditions to once again launch their evil and terrifying agenda.

The article suggests hypocrisy of the western nations in their policy towards Serb secessionists saying that he was “struck by a contradiction in western policy to the former Yugoslavia. Europe, supported by the U.S., recognized the independence of the breakaway republics” while “Serbs did not have the right to secede from Croatia or Bosnia”.  Mr. Dobbs is somehow missing the point that Bosnia and Croatia both have historically recognized territories that go back a thousand years, and were ratified by the socialist establishment that formed the socialist Yugoslavia after World War II.  It was only after the breakup of Yugoslavia and the aggressive policies of the Milosevic led Serbia that led Slovenia, Croatia, and Bosnia to secede. In the case of the Republic of Bosnia and Herzegovina, this secession was done through completely peaceful and democratic means of a referendum which resulted in more than 66% of the population voting for independence, with constitutional guarantees of equal rights for all citizens, regardless of their ethnic or religious background.

On the other hand, the self proclaimed, fabricated, and historically inexistent “Republika Srpska” and “Serb Krajina republics” in Bosnia and Croatia were carved out through an organized campaign of military aggression, ethnic cleansing, and genocide which completely wiped out all non-Serb populations in their territories.  How can Mr. Dobbs, then, argue that the international community should have somehow recognized these types of acts as legitimate will of the Serb minority?  One can only conclude that he is either completely unaware of the principles of international law or willingly using skewed logic.

According to the [CIA report from 1995](http://www.bosniak.org/letter-to-the-editor-foreign-policy-magazine-should-reject-dobbs%E2%80%99-views-on-the-war-in-bosnia/%28http%3A/www.nytimes.com/1995/03/09/world/cia-report-on-bosnia-blames-serbs-for-90-of-the-war-crimes.html?pagewanted=all&src=pm%29), more than 90% of all ethnic cleansing in Bosnia and Herzegovina was committed by Serbs: “The C.I.A. report, based on aerial photography and what one senior official called “an enormous amount of precise technical analysis,” also concludes that while war crimes were by no means committed exclusively by Serbs, they were the only party involved in a systematic attempt to eliminate all traces of other ethnic groups from their territory.” This assessment was further confirmed by the International Criminal Tribunal at The Hague which was set up to facilitate the investigation and prosecution of war crimes in the territories of the former Yugoslavia.  Mr. Dobbs appears to give support to the Serb nationalist arguments that ethnic cleansing and genocide are somehow justified due to “legitimate concerns” of the Serb nationalists for minority rights.   He is also somehow implying that, Bosnia with a majority Bosniak population was inherently going to encroach on Serb civil rights without offering a single shred of evidence to support these claims. The constitution of the Republic of Bosnia and Herzegovina guaranteed equal rights to all its citizens regardless of ethnicity, religious, or political convictions. As such, it was recognized by the entire international community and the United Nations.

Those of us with firsthand experience of the wrath of Serbian nationalism cannot accept the vicious organized attacks on historical truth and justice that are being perpetrated only 17 years after the end of the war in Bosnia.  Most of us are old enough to remember the fascist propaganda that was openly spread by Serb nationalist prior to their genocidal aggression are disturbed by the latest attempts to downplay the seriousness of their role and crimes. Among these propaganda tactics were constant calls for revenge for the Battle of Kosovo in 1389 and the Ottoman occupation, the glorification of Draza Mihailovic, fascist collaborator who was executed for war crimes by Marshal Tito’s partisans following the end of WWII, and the regular accusations against Bosniaks of wanting to form an “Islamic state” in which the Serbs are going to be persecuted.  These are eerily the same fear tactics being perpetrated today by the aforementioned coalition, as part of a global islamophobic campaign.

The well respected Foreign Policy magazine should provide clarity and perspective in these difficult times, not promote irresponsible and outrageous writing of Mr. Dobbs on his website which serves to insult the victims of war and genocide.  It sets a terrible precedent whereby genocide denial, justification of military aggression, ethnic cleansing, and revisionist history become the norm.  Foreign Policy magazine should immediately remove this article from their website and apologize to the victims of ethnic cleansing and genocide everywhere.

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**About the Author**

Hamdija Custovic is a former refugee of the Bosnian war, and a victim of ethnic cleansing and genocide. He currently serves as the Vice President of the Congress of North American Bosniaks and lives in the United States.