When Two Worlds Collide:
The Allied Downgrading Of General Dragoljub “Draža” Mihailović and
Their Subsequent Full Support for Josip Broz “Tito”

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by

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Prelude

Oftentimes, studies of the repercussions from the manner in which the First World War ended center on the policies that befell the German Empire. An overlooked aspect of the conflict was the circumstances surrounding of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia, formally known as the Kingdom of the Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes until 1929, which coalesced around the Kingdom of Serbia in 1918 when the Great War ended.

Serbia’s King Peter I Karađorđević¹ had come to power in June 1903 upon the assassination of King Alexander Obrenović and his queen, Draga.² Peter I reigned during and after the events precipitated by Archduke Franz Ferdinand’s assassination. Prince Aleksandar, his second son, served as regent during his declining health from 1918, when the Serbs oversaw the union of the South Slavs with the formation of the Kingdom of the Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes,³ and came to full power in 1921 upon his father’s natural death. Divisive national issues contributed to an unstable domestic policy that caused Aleksandar to suspend the kingdom’s constitution in 1929. He directed the creation of a dictatorship, which resulted in oppression of his political opponents, particularly non-Serbs within the kingdom. The king had suspended the constitution in order to quell the

¹ Pronounced, “Kara-george-avich.”
political instability within Yugoslavia.³ That same year also saw the name of the country change from the Kingdom of the Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes to the Kingdom of Yugoslavia.⁴

In particular, the Croat minority did not take kindly to the rule of the Serb-dominated kingdom. Religious divisions contributed heavily to the animosity between the two groups; Serbs are Eastern Orthodox while the Croats are staunchly Roman Catholic, as are the Slovenes. These tensions culminated in the assassination of Aleksandar on October 9, 1934, shortly after he landed by boat in Marseille, France for a state visit to advance discussions on forging a Franco-Yugoslav alliance. The Ustaša,⁵ a Croatian separatist group that would subsequently come to be in league with the Axis forces against the Serbs during the Second World War, was eventually found to be responsible for the tragedy. An assassin, Vlado Chernozemski, had been sent from the Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organization (IMRO), a terrorist group that was then active against the Kingdom of Yugoslavia.⁶ This act displayed the discontent that unwilling subjects of the Yugoslav crown harbored for the monarchy. Since Peter II, Aleksandar’s son, was but nine years old and thus not of age at the time of the

³ Ibid., 624.
⁴ Ibid., 619.
⁵ “Ustaša,” Serbo-Croatian for “insurgent,” according to Stevan K. Pavlowitch in Hitler’s New Disorder: The Second World War in Yugoslavia (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008), 2. It is transliterated as “Ustasha,” “Ustashe” and “Ustahi” in other sources. Stavrianos also notes on page 629 in Balkans that spellings include “‘Ustasha’ for the singular and ‘Ustashi’ for the plural.”
⁶ Stavrianos, Balkans, 653.
assassination in 1934, a regent, Prince Paul, Alexander’s cousin, was given power until Peter II became old enough to rule.⁷

The Second World War commenced with the German blitzkrieg invasion of Poland on September 1, 1939. During the escalation of World War II, the German war machine pressed west into the Benelux states and France, extending its tentacles, and nations fell as if they were dominoes to the seemingly overwhelming might of the enemy. As the Panzer divisions brought about death and destruction, resistance in occupied territories was initially scant. By early 1941, Yugoslavia was encircled by Axis forces: Hungary and Germany to the north, Bulgaria and Romania to the east, and Italy, which had invaded Greece, to the west and south.

Finding itself in a quandary, the Yugoslav administration had no choice but to submit to an ultimatum and join the Tripartite Pact by the deadline of March 25, 1941.⁸ German Chancellor Adolf Hitler commented at the signing of the Pact that “the Yugoslavs acted as if they were at a funeral.”⁹ Upon hearing news of the pact, however, the Yugoslavs protested, declaring it illegitimate. Yugoslav military officers executed a non-violent coup on the night of March 26 and declared that Prince Peter was old enough to become king. Furious upon learning of the defiance of the Yugoslavs, Hitler ordered the Luftwaffe to begin an air campaign and to assault Yugoslavia “with merciless

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⁷ Ibid., 629.

⁸ Pavlowitch, Disorder, 12.

brutality,” although the new Yugoslav government had agreed to keep with the tenets of the March 25 pact.

And so on April 6, 1941, Operation PUNISHMENT commenced, as Hitler had claimed “atrocities against the German minority, [and so the German military] attacked at dawn with no ultimatum or declaration of war.” Consequently, the Yugoslav army, having been routed in short time because of ill-preparedness, became largely ineffective and its ranks were greatly reduced or captured by the Germans; in any case, the Yugoslavs would have been little match against the seasoned Wehrmacht. The invasions of Yugoslavia and also Greece stalled Hitler’s preparations for the invasion of the Soviet Union, codenamed Operation BARABROSSA, Hitler’s next objective after subjugating much of Western Europe.

Yugoslavia was dismantled as a result of the invasion. A German-controlled puppet regime was established in Croatia under the auspices of the Ustaša, while Germany’s Axis cohorts Italy and Bulgaria were granted occupation zones. One account notes that after the dismemberment of Yugoslavia by the Axis forces, “Serbia was even more closely controlled than Croatia. It was subject to the authority of the local German commander and its frontiers were reduced to those that had prevailed before the Balkan Wars [of 1912 and 1913].”

10 Quoted in Pavlowitch, Disorder, 16.
11 Stavrianos, Balkans, 757.
12 Pavlowitch, Disorder, 17.
13 Stavrianos, Balkans, 771.
Although there were several organizations that would resist the German occupation, two factions moved to the forefront. The opposing sides were the monarchist, largely-Serbian Nationalists, called the Chetniks,\(^\text{14}\) led by Dragoljub “Draža” Mihailović, and the communist Partisans led by Josip Broz, then known simply as Tito. The two groups sought to rid themselves of the Germans—and each other.\(^\text{15}\)

The Chetniks and the Partisans emerged out of a situation not favorable to all subjects of the Serbian crown: a Serbian monarch of the house of Karadordević had controlled the country since before the Great War. To varying extents, the monarchs were oppressive and not favorable toward Communism, as was the case in many European countries in the interwar period. When resistance to the Axis assailants became necessary, the Nationalists sought the restoration of King Peter, who had fled to England, while the Partisans sought to usurp power in Yugoslavia as part of the worldwide Communist movement.

L.S. Stavrianos, in his seminal work *The Balkans since 1453*, lays out a description of the problematic circumstances abounding in Yugoslavia. Concerning the plight of Mihailović, he writes that:

> Under the stress of the national emergency, Chetnik bands were organized in traditional fashion by local leaders in various parts of the country. The most disciplined were those under the direct supervision

\(^{14}\) Stavrianos writes that Chetnik was “a Serbian term with revered historical associations. A Chetnik was literally a member of a Cheta or military detachment that had fought against the Turks in the nineteenth century” (*Balkans*, 773). The Chetniks were nationalist in the sense that they were loyal to the monarchy of Yugoslavia.

\(^{15}\) Stavrianos, *Balkans*, 778.
of Mihailovich in Serbia proper. Other bands in Montenegro, Bosnia, Herzegovina, and Dalmatia operated virtually independently and had little in common with one another apart from a general ideological affinity. This loose organization and the lack of discipline were important factors in Mihailovich’s failure to build up an efficient army.\(^{16}\)

The circumstances were further compounded by the conditions that will be discussed in the following chapters. In brief, however, the issue of support from the Western Allies proved to be a point of contention due to the justifiably questioned effectiveness of Mihailović and his subordinates.

Stavrianos’s depiction of the mayhem that ensued is also rather apt. He tells us that after Germany had invaded the Soviet Union, the Serbs decided to rise up against the Axis occupiers.\(^ {17}\) Furthermore, he writes that “Tito now sought to apply the official Comintern \(^ {18}\) policy of a People’s Front of all patriotic forces against the German invaders.” For one reason or another, the two groups initially decided to try and combat the common enemy that was the Axis: “Between September and November, 1941, [Tito] held several conversations with Mihailovich and reached vague agreements for common action.”\(^ {19}\) The stage was set for political unrest between the two Yugoslav factions, because “instead of cooperating, the Chetnik and Communist Partisan bands were soon at

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\(^{16}\) Ibid., 773.

\(^{17}\) Ibid., 773-74.

\(^{18}\) Communist International, the body that directed the actions of Communists throughout the world.

\(^{19}\) Tito’s name was made public and he was given the title of marshal on November 29, 1943 (Stavrianos, *Balkans*, 784); for reasons that will aid in his identification in this text, he will commonly be referred to as “Tito,” “the Partisan leader,” or something to that effect.
each other’s throats. Their tragic feud was to be a major factor determining the course of events in Yugoslavia until the triumph of the Partisans and the establishment of the Communist Tito regime at the end of the war.”20

To the anti-Communist credit of General Mihailović, the Chetnik leader and Serbian general “hated the Communist-dominated Partisans because he feared, with justification, that their aim was to establish a communist Yugoslavia and to abolish the [Karadorđević] dynasty” of King Peter II.21 As with other European monarchs during World War II, King Peter II oversaw a government-in-exile in London following the Axis takeover. Mihailović’s disdain for this extreme leftist ideology would be the fuel by which the civil conflict between him and the Partisan leader would burn.

Although the subjugated country would be in a state of disarray, American President Franklin Roosevelt and British Prime Minister Winston Churchill still sought to take advantage of the resistance in Yugoslavia and opted to lend support. The British arrived with a combined British-Yugoslav mission to the Chetniks in late September 1941.22 The Americans arrived to aid the Chetniks much later, in August 1943.23 Initially, the Allies backed both sides against the Axis occupiers, but as the war dragged on, for a variety of reasons that will be discussed, the Allies eventually withdrew support for Mihailović and backed only Tito. While during and after the war several Allied

20 Stavrianos, Balkans, 774.

21 Ibid., 779.

22 Pavlowitch, Disorder, 64.

notables regretted this decision, there is ample evidence showing that this decision was, in the opinion of many scholars that will be investigated, misguided and based on incomplete information. This thesis will discuss the background of the situation in Yugoslavia and the facts surrounding the Allied decision to downgrade and eventually eliminate support for Mihailović, which, paved the way for Communist rule in Yugoslavia after the war ended.

Roosevelt and Churchill, with all of the wisdom and foresight bestowed upon them, could not have foreseen the mess that would result from the Allies’ change in support from Mihailović and his loyal, monarchy-backing Chetniks in favor of the left-leaning Tito and his Moscow-influenced and directed Communist ideals. The peace that emerged because of the end of the Second World War ushered in another age of contention both for those who lived in the Balkans and for those who would offer to try and dissect the causes and effects of the conflict; the question of the diplomatic action in Yugoslavia is merely one facet concerning the actions of the war that would take decades to analyze further.

The scope of this thesis is two-fold in nature. There is a small gap in the current literature, to be discussed directly and more thoroughly in Chapter 1, concerning the decisions of Roosevelt with all the reports and intelligence that he had available to him. This thesis will primarily give an overview of this information and will, secondly, try to assess the reasons why the president did not press the British prime minister in favor of King Peter II’s interests, which would have involved dissuading Churchill from dismissing support for General Mihailović. As the case will be made, for Roosevelt to
have followed through with this policy would have benefitted King Peter II, Yugoslavia, the Western Allies, and the postwar political situation.

The organization for this thesis is rather straightforward. Chapter 1 is comprised of more than simply a review of the existing literature. It provides an explanation of the conditions in Yugoslavia by discussing the way in which the tale of Tito and Mihailović has been played out in various publications, be they in favor of or against the future Communist strongman or the deposed Serbian general.

Chapter 2 examines the situation in Yugoslavia from the British point of view. Discussed therein is an overview of the information that Churchill had at his disposal before the irreversible decision to dismiss General Mihailović was made. Also considered are some of the reasons why, it can be argued, the prime minister was quite obstinate in his reasoning and why he would not listen to the advice of his most trusted War Cabinet.

Next, Chapter 3 undertakes a task rather similar to the preceding chapter, but the overview instead centers on the American position. President Roosevelt and the American forces were obviously stakeholders in Yugoslavia as well as the whole of Europe. The American and British participants in Yugoslavia offered differing views, as we will see, to their ultimate commanders, which had (or should have had) influential effects on the policy decisions that were made.

Finally, Chapter 4 evaluates all the varied information scrutinized in the other three chapters. A brief overview of the policies and the important events that led to the dismissal of General Mihailović and the extension of full support for Marshal Tito will be
provided. The chapter will conclude with an examination of the policies that were implemented as a result of the reports available to the president and the prime minister and will discuss the ramifications of these policies. Moreover, possible alternatives that the Western Allied leaders could have undertaken in order to provide a more favorable outcome not only for the players involved directly in the conflict in Yugoslavia but also for postwar Europe will be considered.

The Conclusion will then consider some parting thoughts on the general and the Chetniks. Some matters considered will be the fate of postwar Yugoslavia and how the Serbian general spent his last days after the Allies had won.

To one unfamiliar with the intricacies of Balkan politics, and Yugoslavia in particular, the following pages might perhaps seem to be filled with intrigue and mystery—such is the nature of the region. As one not-so-easily-shaken observer commented during the opening pages of his turn-of-the-twentieth-century travelogue:

“Why ‘savage’ Europe?” asked a friend who recently witnessed my departure from Charring Cross for the Near East.

“Because,” I replied, “the term accurately describes the wild and lawless countries between the Adriatic and the Black Seas.” […]

The remoter districts [of the Balkans] are, as of yore, hotbeds of outlawry and brigandage, where you must travel with a revolver in each pocket and your life in your hand. […] Moreover, do not the now palatial capitals of Servia 24 and Bulgaria occasionally startle the outer world with political crimes of mediæval barbarity? […] Wherefore the term “savage” is not wholly inapplicable to that portion of Europe which we are about to traverse, to say nothing of our final destination—the eastern shore of the Black Sea. 25

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24 Late 19th and early 20th century sources commonly used this spelling for Serbia.

Chapter 1

A Brief Overview of the Existing Literature and an Explanation of Balkan Aspirations

Overview

From the close of World War II until the present day, there do not appear to be clear answers to several questions surrounding the change in Allied policy from supporting both General Draža Mihailović and Josip Broz “Tito” to supporting only the latter. Time and again, various commentators, academic and otherwise, have striven to deliver a definitive answer to one or several of the questions that essentially remain unaddressed. However, the findings that they have produced have been less-than-comprehensive in their scope and nature. As mentioned in the Introduction, a major concern of this thesis is to investigate the lack of apparent incentive on the part of President Franklin Roosevelt to change the mind of British Prime Minister Winston Churchill in regard to Western Allied support for the Yugoslav resistance movements during World War II.

It seems that most writers fall into one of two camps, much in the same manner that the actual protagonists did during the Second World War in Yugoslavia: the pro-Tito camp and the pro-Mihailović camp. Nevertheless, several texts certainly do lend
themselves to help solve the seemingly apparent controversies that have helped keep the Balkans enshrouded in mystery for far too long. There are works that focus solely on the conflict in Yugoslavia and the struggles that were occurring between the Chetniks and the Partisans, while some works mention the Allied position in Yugoslavia but in passing, though there are several astute observations that can be gathered from them.

Quite interestingly, it seems that the primary sources from Allied servicemen are divided along the same line that the Chetniks and Partisans were. The works that support the Chetniks and their struggle against the Axis forces and the Partisans have been given to us from American servicemen, either intelligence-gatherers who were supposed to be with the Chetniks or airmen who had been shot down from the skies over Yugoslavia and, in turn, rescued by the Chetniks. On the opposite end of the spectrum, we have works that support the effectiveness of the Partisans. As such, these works are mostly British in nature, unsurprisingly, as they have come from British personnel who were sent on missions to the Partisans and thus reported on the work against the Germans that the Partisans were assumed to be undertaking. This situation is not unpredictable, for how can we expect assessments based on one-sided knowledge to offer support for the contrary faction. Surprisingly, the number of works from British servicemen deployed to the Chetniks is minimal. In a perfect world, we would be fortunate to have the account of a witness who had visited both the Chetniks and the Partisans, but this is of course not the case. Thus, we must ascertain what we can from the available sources.

Just as there were differences in ideology between the Chetniks and the Partisans, so is there a stark difference in assessment between the historical analysts of the Second
World War in Yugoslavia. These differing opinions have emerged with varying levels of support for both the Chetnik and Partisan leaders inquiring about their actions.

**In Support of Tito and the Communist Partisans**

Let us first examine a sampling of the body of work that concerns itself with Tito and his Partisans. In this camp, as with the Chetnik side, the sources can be divided further into first-hand accounts of the war in Yugoslavia and commentaries on Tito.

Milovan Djilas was a Partisan who worked closely with Tito throughout the war years. He has produced many works in his native Serbo-Croatian for the consumption of researchers. To the benefit of historians and researchers, several books have been translated into English. The culmination of his work is embodied in *Conversations with Stalin*, *Memoir of a Revolutionary*, *Wartime*, and *Tito: The Story from the Inside*. It is safe to say that even though Djilas had a falling out with Tito after the war, he was “on the inside,” as per his own proclamation. These works would more or less portray Tito in a positive light while the light cast on Mihailović would paint him as less-than-ideal.

There are also primary works available from the British. F.W.D. Deakin offers his account of the Battle of Sutjeska in *The Embattled Mountain*, an incident he was

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involved in with Tito. This meticulous text renders a fair amount of information on the Partisan organization and its struggle against the German occupiers. Deakin had been sent to Tito as part of a mission from the SOE, or Special Operations Executive, the British intelligence-gathering service during World War II.

A series of texts by British Army Brigadier Fitzroy Maclean is perhaps more thorough than this battle account. Maclean, as will be discussed in detail in Chapter 2, was also a British intelligence agent with the SOE who had been sent on a mission to Tito and the Partisans in order to assess their effectiveness in their struggle against the Axis forces. To his credit, Maclean was a rather prolific writer and produced volumes on an array of topics. Even so, our concern is with the British presence in Yugoslavia and the brigadier’s acquaintance with Tito, so we must take Eastern Approaches and Disputed Barricade: The Life and Times of Josip Broz-Tito, Marshal of Jugoslavia into consideration. Eastern Approaches is a sort of personal diary that documents Brigadier MacLean’s travels as an agent of the British intelligence community, describing his trip through parts of Asia and finally back to Yugoslavia. This adventure caused him to meet up with Tito in Yugoslavia, thereby establishing what appears to be a stable relationship.

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7 Fitzroy Maclean, Disputed Barricade (Oxford, Great Britain: Alden Press, 1957). Disputed Barricade is the title for the work published in the United Kingdom. Elsewhere, including the United States, this text was called The Heretic. This moniker had the same subtitle; however, Marshal of Jugoslavia was not included in the North American version. As an aside, Yugoslavia is spelled with a “J” in many British English as opposed to American English sources, as is displayed here.
There is little doubt that this friendship was the catalyst needed for Maclean to produce such a lengthy work. Needless to say, the brigadier appears to have become enamored with the marshal. His works laud the man to some extent, all the while considering the actions of General Mihailović and the Chetniks in an unfavorable light. There is still vital information to be gleaned from his account, however, particularly when conversations with Tito as well as British personalities are examined.

Franklin Lindsey offers the Allied serviceman’s perspective in *Beacons in the Night: With the OSS and Tito’s Partisans in Wartime Yugoslavia*. This account offers a view somewhat similar in nature to what has been discussed in detail by Brigadier Maclean. The OSS, or Office of Strategic Services, was the American intelligence-gathering network during the Second World War. Yet this work, as the title implies, yields insights on the information that Roosevelt should have received during his decision-making on the fate of Yugoslavia. This work is the completion of research requested by former President Herbert Hoover to document what he considered to be the first successful Communist revolution after that of 1917 as well as the first break from the Soviet Union.

Phyllis Auty has been somewhat prolific in terms of production on Tito. First, we have a somewhat-dated biography of Tito from Pelican’s Political Leaders of the

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9 Ibid., ix-x.
Twentieth Century series entitled simply *Tito: A Biography*.\(^{10}\) Essentially, this text comes across as non-combative and instead renders a matter-of-fact delivery of Tito’s life and times up until the book was published, 1974.\(^{11}\) Because of this approach, references to General Mihailović come across as basic facts and do not make negative references to the Chetnik general. Auty had been a BBC correspondent for several years during World War II and, by its end, found herself in the employ of the British government.\(^{12}\)

**In Support of General Mihailović and the Nationalist Chetniks**

We have seen that there are some significant primary and secondary sources on the Partisan struggle. These works have been penned by both Allied servicemen and Partisans themselves. Unfortunately, primary source texts supportive of General Mihailović and the Chetniks have proven to be fewer in number. Nevertheless, the publications produced in this subdivision of works on World War II-era Yugoslavia concentrate on the vindication of the Serbian general, if this is an appropriate term to be used. The questioning of this term will be clear by the end of this subsection.

In the Chetnik category, we have works that seem all the more unfriendly in content. Perhaps it is because these writers have become so dismayed at the manner in which support for General Mihailović was eliminated by the Western Allies that they have taken upon themselves a personal crusade of sorts. Their collective works, while

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\(^{10}\) Phyllis Auty, *Tito: A Biography* (Suffolk, Great Britain: Richard Clay Ltd, 1974).

\(^{11}\) Marshal Tito lived until May 4, 1980. He died in Ljubljana, Yugoslavia.

not produced in direct conjunction with one another, still complement each other in a fashion lacking in the literature that considers the Partisans. This might be so because Tito and the Partisans, having secured Allied support, went on to plague the Germans and establish their government afterwards in Yugoslavia. It can be decided, then, that these works seek to defend the Serbian general, for they feel that history has not been kind to him. Thus, the view of many of these works, to be discussed directly, is vindicating in nature.

Breaking down the types of Chetnik reviews further, there are accounts available from both primary and secondary sources. The primary sources, naturally, consist of accounts and retrospections of Allied airmen and intelligence agents from their time in Yugoslavia with General Mihailović and the Chetniks. These are invaluable to historical researchers, even if they are pro-Chetnik and one-sided: they offer the eye-witness versions that expose the reasons why there is so much angst against General Mihailović’s detractors, thus shedding light on what these authors feel was an injustice to the Chetnik leader while he was still alive, an uneasy memory that has also surrounded him in death.

These works concerning the Chetniks take issue centrally with the way in which Allied policy was handled during the war and have made several strong cases in favor of Mihailović and his leadership of the Chetniks, all the while recognizing the deficiencies in support of them. They include David Martin’s *Patriot or Traitor: The Case of General Mihailovich: Proceedings and Report of the Commission of Inquiry of the*
Committee for a Fair Trial for Draja Mihailovich,\textsuperscript{13} The Web of Disinformation: Churchill’s Yugoslav Blunder,\textsuperscript{14} and Ally Betrayed: The Uncensored Story of Tito and Mihailovich.\textsuperscript{15} Richard Lamb’s Churchill as War Leader: Right or Wrong?\textsuperscript{16} is another example of these types of works, although the discussion on Yugoslavia is but a fragment of the information that Lamb discusses. In summary, Martin writes in The Web of Disinformation that “Of all the changes in Allied policy that occurred during World War II, there is nothing even remotely comparable to the dramatic switch that took place just before the end of 1943 in British policy toward Yugoslavia. This book attempts to explain how and why this change came about.”\textsuperscript{17} Moreover, Lamb notes that “After Tehran Churchill decided that Tito’s Communists would render more useful help than Mihailovic, and against Foreign Office advice he decided to back the former and disown the latter. This decision he soon regretted,” adding that Churchill “involved himself personally […] without sufficient or proper understanding of [the Yugoslav resistance’s] complexities.”\textsuperscript{18} Fortunately, Martin and Lamb have scrutinized many primary sources


\textsuperscript{14} David Martin, The Web of Disinformation: Churchill’s Yugoslav Blunder (San Diego: Harcourt, Brace, Jovanovich Publishers, 1990),


\textsuperscript{17} Martin, Web, xvii.

\textsuperscript{18} Lamb, War Leader, 250.
to arrive at their conclusions. These sources include correspondence from presidents and the prime minister, interviews with and documents from Yugoslav nationals, and published reports and verbal accounts from Allied servicemen, both regular service and clandestine.

As can be gathered from the title, *The Rape of Serbia: The British Role in Tito’s Grab for Power 1943-1944*, by former SOE agent Michael Lees, strongly seeks to implicate Churchill and some of his subordinates in the SOE in the British change of policy toward the Chetniks. After penning a memoir about his time as an agent and subsequently reading other accounts of what happened within SOE, Lees researched many SOE documents from the declassified public records in the United Kingdom. His work has resulted in what he says “really happened to cause the U-turn in British wartime policy in regard to Yugoslavia” and that he “also wanted to know why we British liaison officers dropped [by air] to Mihailović were treated as fall guys and untrustworthy pariahs.”

There is also a personal account called *Mihailovich and I* by retired United States Air Force Major Richard Felman. Then a lieutenant, Felman had been shot down over Yugoslavia and, with eight out of his nine other crew members, was rescued by the Chetniks. Undoubtedly, it was because of the noble actions of the Chetniks in rescuing him and many hundreds of other Allied airmen that Felman felt compelled to produce this

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20 Ibid., ix.

short work on his experience with General Mihailović. This seems especially true as the short text argues a strong case summarizing his decades-long task where he “has been lobbying for the rehabilitation of Mihailovich.”

While primary sources are most always welcomed by researchers, their content also has to be scrutinized because of the information that they contain. Major Felman felt strongly enough about Mihailović to write a short text about the work that the Serbian general had accomplished for the cause of the Western Allies. This book includes a variety of primary sources as well as first-hand accounts from Felman and his fellow downed American airmen coupled with a sprinkling of Chetnik sources. However, its lack of scholarship in terms of formal research and organization have either caused the book to go unnoticed by historians because of its limited production run or, perhaps even worse, discredited because of its lack of formal scholarship when it is discovered.

Much to his credit, Gregory A. Freeman’s *The Forgotten 500: The Untold Story of the Men who Risked All for the Greatest Rescue Mission of World War II* has picked up where Richard Felman’s *Mihailovich and I* left off. A good deal more scholarly as a secondary source and thus more refined than Felman’s contribution, *The Forgotten 500* thoroughly examines one of General Mihailović’s contributions to the Allied war effort by discussing how the Chetniks rescued over 500 Allied airmen shot down over Yugoslavia. Freeman, in the same style as Felman, uses first-hand accounts of the

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22 Ibid., 10.

downed airmen to construct his work. Departing from Felman, however, Freeman proceeds by using the style of writing that is more standard for historical inquiries.

No-Man’s Land

A third category can be established for works on the Yugoslav front of the Second World War. In this sort of “No Man’s Land,” we find works that investigate the question of the Chetniks and the Partisans from a non-partisan position, to use the term in a solely neutral manner. This is perhaps the most difficult of paths to venture down. Despite this fact, several notable works by competent authors find themselves cast into this category. They include an edited volume by the aforementioned Phyllis Auty, a biographer of Tito, and Richard Clogg entitled *British Policy toward Wartime Resistance in Yugoslavia & Greece.*

To the benefit of these editors, their contribution arose from a decades-later postwar conference in the United Kingdom that included presentations from several British servicemen, clandestine and regular.

*British Policy toward Wartime Resistance in Yugoslavia & Greece* offers readers a mixed bag. Between its pages the conference presentations sought to re-examine British policies during the war. Chapters are offered by several luminaries from the World War II British intelligence community, who had been on the ground in Yugoslavia during the war, and the British Foreign Office, who offer accounts of what Churchill’s line of thinking was concerning Yugoslavia. The presentations of papers, as well as the

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discussion that followed, which is luckily transcribed in the volume, are of invaluable importance to researchers, given that they are primary sources.

Another work of note on Allied involvement in Yugoslavia comes from Jozo Tomasevich. In his exhaustive volume entitled *War and Revolution in Yugoslavia, 1941-1945: Occupation and Collaboration*,\(^\text{25}\) nary a hint of an inflammatory tone can be found. Incidentally, the collaboration that he refers to involves other actors in Yugoslavia, such as the Ustaha, not the Chetniks, who, as the introduction noted, were accused by their various detractors as having been in league with the Axis occupants.

There are also works whose scope is not confined to the internal relations of Yugoslavia during the war. Instead, these volumes address the broader scope of the war or concentrate on one or two central figures of the Second World War. Primary source compilations include Warren F. Kimball’s edited collection *Churchill and Roosevelt, the Complete Correspondence*,\(^\text{26}\) which appears in three volumes, and *Roosevelt and Churchill: Their Secret Wartime Correspondence*,\(^\text{27}\) which has been edited by Francis L. Loewenheim, Harold D. Langley, and Manfred Jonas. These volumes offer scholars the chance to assess policies as they were constructed by the players at the time. Although a secondary source that draws on select primary sources, the aforementioned Stavrianos

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volume has also provided valuable information on the region. A perusal of *The Balkans since 1453*\(^{28}\) reveals a thorough understanding of the intricacies of this area, especially in regard to a general overview of the local history.

Another indispensable work is Winston Churchill’s *The Second World War* series in six volumes. Although only the last two volumes, *Closing the Ring*\(^{29}\) and *Triumph and Tragedy*,\(^{30}\) have been considered here, the insight and soon-after-the-war commentary rendered by the prime minister have granted scholars an inside look at many relevant events that dictated the Allied course of action during the Second World War.

Of indispensable use is the United States Government’s publication, the *Foreign Relations of the United States* series.\(^{31}\) Letters to and from Roosevelt and Churchill as well as a good number of American, British, Russian, and Serbian statesmen and rulers are found within the pages of these many volumes. The documents have provided valuable firsthand accounts of the inner workings of the collective Allied war effort during the Second World War.

**Balkan Aspirations**


As with most any political venture, there are players who seek to establish themselves at the forefront of the movement. The issue of political dominance in Yugoslavia is thus no different. The tapestry that has been woven in this country is consistent with the nature of the region, for we see that all manner of intrigue and cloak-and-dagger tactics are employed. Unfortunately, it appears that more dagger than cloak is used on the peninsula.

To understand the reason for the political upheaval and its subsequent ramifications, one must have a deeper knowledge of the background and turn of events that led up to the changing of the guard. Warren F. Kimball, in his analysis of Churchill and Roosevelt’s correspondence, offers succinct commentary on what this situation entailed. He writes that “The guerilla forces of General Draža Mihailović represented Serbian aspirations and supported the restoration of the monarchy. The Partisans led by Tito […] opposed Serbian domination and were avowedly communist, although they asserted their willingness to let the Yugoslav people decide on the form of their postwar government.”32 This is the issue of contention that arose between the two leaders in Yugoslavia and will be discussed herein with great detail.

Kimball has splendidly stated the reasons for the division and opposition of forces in the dismembered Balkan state. Even though King Peter II had been forced to flee the country and eventually ended up in Great Britain with the Yugoslav government-in-exile, he had virtually no experience as a ruler and was not up to addressing the pressing issues

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that his government faced. After it was declared that Yugoslavia would not partake in the Axis plan for Europe, he had to make decisions for Yugoslavia from abroad. King Peter II promoted Colonel Mihailović to brigadier general on November 15, 1941, who then became the commander of the Yugoslav Army of the Homeland on December 7, 1941.33

Mihailović, because he had remained in Yugoslavia, took on this leadership position for King Peter.34 Born in Belgrade on April 27, 1893, he was a career soldier who had fought for Serbia in both the Balkan Wars of 1912 and 1913 and the First World War. In the Kingdom of Yugoslavia antebellum period, Mihailović held many general staff positions in several Yugoslav cities. Mihailović found favor early on in the Second World War from Winston Churchill for his initial resistance to the Axis.35 The Serbian general proceeded to go on the offensive in a protracted, guerilla-style war against the Axis forces, and the Germans in particular, whom he quickly wanted to expel from Yugoslavia. One historian notes that “The British wanted to believe that Mihailović stood a better chance of re-establishing [Yugoslav] unity [in the dismembered nation] than the communist-led partisans” 36 but that he “had no political agenda beyond maintaining […] the persistence of the Yugoslav state, and opposing the mood of

33 Pavlowitch, Disorder, 64; David L. Martin, The Web of Disinformation: Churchill’s Yugoslav Blunder (San Diego: Harcourt, Brace, and Jovanovich Publishers, 1990), 34.


36 Pavlowitch, Disorder, 89.
defeatism.” 37 *Time Magazine* even featured him on the cover of the May 25, 1942 issue; the article lauded the general’s daring resistance to the Axis occupiers. The article closed, “Today Draja Mihailovich seems legendary, but he is a legend with big basis in fact: the fact that he has kept five to ten Nazi divisions at a time fighting to conquer the country which they destroyed twelve long months ago.” 38 Mihailović would remain minister of war until King Peter II changed his internal policy at the behest of Churchill. Another historian notes, “On September 12, 1944, the king, in an act that tormented him until his last days, succumbed to Churchill’s pressures and called upon ‘all Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes to unite and join the National Liberation Army under the leadership of Marshal Tito.’” 39

Interestingly, and as an aside, the term “Chetnik” was used to refer to Yugoslav units that were established to put up resistance to attackers before Yugoslavia entered the Second World War. 40 Historically, as mentioned briefly in the Introduction, Chetniks were Serbs who had stood against the Turks at various times during the 1800s when the Ottoman Empire still clutched at straws and was declining in many sections of the Balkans. Nevertheless, Phyllis Auty offered some insight when she wrote that “Četniks,

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37 Ibid., 54.


40 Pavlowitch, *Disorder*, 52.
[came] from the Serbian word četa meaning military company. ‘The name Četnik came from the people, not from me,’ said Mihailović later.”

In the converse to General Mihailović, Marshal Tito had a different formative period and interest for himself and for the Kingdom of Yugoslavia during and after the war. Auty lays the marshal’s story and goals out accurately. Born to Roman Catholic parents, a Croatian father and a Slovene mother, in the Austro-Hungarian Empire (the city in which he was born, Kumrovec, would later change hands over the years through conflict), he fought in the Great War against the Russians but was captured on the Carpathian frontier. During his time as a prisoner of war, he became familiar with the ideals of Communism and even fought for the Bolsheviks in their civil war against the White Russians, who opposed their communist tendencies. While Auty notes that knowledge of Tito’s interwar whereabouts and activities remains clouded, she does note that he returned to Yugoslavia as General Secretary of the Yugoslav Communist Party under the direction of the Soviets in March 1939. Tito was the leader of the Communist Party of Yugoslavia and took action against the Germans at the orders of the Comintern after the Germans invaded the Soviet Union in June 1941. Aided by the Partisans, who had evidently taken their name from the nineteenth century Russian term, Tito would seek to establish communism as the form of state government after the

41 Auty, Tito, 215.
42 Ibid., 161.
43 Pavlowitch, Disorder, 66.
Germans had been defeated, thus solidifying his grasp on the former Kingdom of Yugoslavia.  

The issue at hand is that Marshal Tito ardently opposed any Allied support to General Mihailović. Instead, he wanted to keep Mihailović at bay, thus forcing domestic support to wane for the monarchy and Allied support to subside for the Chetniks; Churchill noted after the war that “The tragic figure of Mihailovic had become the major obstacle” between Tito and the Yugoslav government-in-exile. Additionally, Tito had no intention of permitting the Yugoslav people to determine what their destiny would be, although this is the story that he fed to Churchill. When asked by Churchill about implementing a postwar Communist system upon the Serbian peasants similar to that of the Russian collectivization, Tito replied, “We do not intend to impose any such system. I have often stated this publicly.” The prime minister then used this unfulfilled pledge from the marshal to rally support for the Partisan leader from the Americans, who went along with a certain amount of reserve because Churchill made it clear that if each nation were to support a different faction of guerillas in Yugoslavia, the United Kingdom and the United States would be held in low esteem in the eyes of the Soviet Union.

There is also the issue of the greater Allied plan for the whole of Europe. Churchill and Roosevelt did not share the same vision for the European theater of World

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46 Quoted in ibid., 282.

War II. Although this will be discussed in detail in Chapter 4, a brief overview here is necessary. Churchill had the foresight to acknowledge that the Soviets, after having fought back the Germans and their followers, would seek to push as far as they could into Central and Southeast Europe. Thus, it was the prime minister’s notion to check this advance, if at all possible. Nevertheless, Churchill had other aspirations in mind when it came to the Balkans. Roosevelt and Churchill did not see eye-to-eye on this and other policy issues concerning both Yugoslavia and the general area, as will be discussed. For that matter, Soviet Premier Joseph Stalin did not agree with all of Churchill and Roosevelt’s policies.

**Filling in the Gap**

Even with the existing works, both scholarly and popular, significant gaps remain. On one hand, we see that there are those who sympathize with Churchill and his policy-making, going so far as to discuss the statesman in a nonchalant manner for the outcome in the Balkans and telling us that what he accomplished in Yugoslavia (and elsewhere, for that matter) was the best that the Allies could have hoped for when discussing postwar Europe with Joseph Stalin. Such is the case with Warren F. Kimball. On the other hand, we see that Churchill’s naysayers vehemently chastise the man for selling out, in the simplest of terms, Mihailović and his Chetniks, who were debatably, at least initially as will be seen, important contributors to the anti-Axis war effort in Yugoslavia, as Felman, Lamb, and Martin contend. This is the common position held after the
Chetniks, according to a variety of Allied servicemen, had done a rather formidable job of opposing the occupying Axis forces.

It is because of situations such as these that history has expressed mixed feelings concerning Churchill. He has been highly praised in other circles for his staunch stance against the Nazis before the war and for his stout opposition to Axis aggression during the conflict. This view of “the Last Lion” is certainly justifiable in the eyes of many. Nevertheless, the blame for failing to push the Western Allies onto territory that instead went to the Soviet Red Army and, subsequently, to communism in Eastern Europe as the war drew to a close has forced him to be questioned as a leader in time of war and for his term-limited role in the postwar reconstruction of Europe.

Because of the rift separating the Chetniks and the Partisans over conditions in Yugoslavia during World War II, a closer inspection of the material is warranted. The necessary information will be gathered from the works described in the overview of the existing literature in order to arrive at a conclusion that fits the scope of this thesis.

**Conclusion**

As with almost any issue pertaining to the Balkans, opposing camps on Allied policy in Yugoslavia have been established. Naturally, one side insists that the Partisans were the pre-eminent force fighting against the various Axis occupiers while the other side holds that the Chetniks were the appropriate force to be supported. And while authors from both of these factions have made significant contributions to the literature that we have access to, it seems that neither explores the reasons why, when taken
collectively, Churchill made a decision based on a fair amount of information that Roosevelt was well aware of, and why the president did not try to sway the thoughts and opinions of the prime minister with more vigor to continue to support the Chetniks. Thus, primary documents such as the *Foreign Relations of the United States* series and the aforementioned collections of correspondence will aid in properly understanding the circumstances.
Chapter 2

Churchill’s Yugoslav Policy and British Military Involvement

Background

Because the British had entered the war against the Axis forces before the United States, they had an organized network of both conventional forces and intelligence officers in place by the time that the Americans would enter such places as Yugoslavia. This chapter explores the involvement of certain British personnel, British policy toward both the Chetniks and the Partisans, and Prime Minister Winston Churchill’s positions toward both groups.

Quite unbeknownst to Churchill and the other Allied leaders, the ranks of the SOE had been infiltrated by communist operatives. One in particular, James Klugmann, would play a large part in the change in policy toward Draža Mihailović. His insidiousness will be thoroughly described below. Klugmann had been sympathetic to the causes of communism for quite some time, having been recruited along with several others by Communists at Cambridge University, as revealed by Richard Lamb in Churchill as War Leader. This is not to offer speculation, however, that he and others were agents planted for the sole purpose of undoing General Mihailović. Rather, they were planted for expansion of Communist ideals and the aid of Communist leaders.
wherever and whoever they might be. Lamb goes into great detail by establishing the
timeline for the fall of Mihailović due to the falsification of both American and British
information going to and from the Balkans and the United Kingdom via the SOE Cairo
office, which was referred to as MO4.1

This false information had been exploited by the Communist sympathizers in
Cairo, which was one of many regional bases of operation for the SOE. Messages that
came from the Balkans and other eastward points to the prime minister and vice versa
often made their way through Cairo or another SOE office; Cairo was the office where
the messages of concern with Yugoslavia were transferred. Agents in this particular
office were in the position to alter, fabricate, or obscure information, or a combination of
any of the three, at their checkpoint. Since the recipients and the senders were not privy
to this sort of covert activity, they did not know and were not suspect that they were in
receipt of false intelligence and other information. In fact, light would not be shed on this
topic until some time after the war would be over through such works as Martin’s *Web of
Disinformation*, which was also discussed in Chapter 1. Even so, these falsifications
would bear fruit that would turn to poison for one person of interest while simultaneously
providing an antidote for his political opponent.2

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1 Richard Lamb, *Churchill as War Leader: Right or Wrong?* (New York: Carroll & Graf Publishers, 1991); see Chapter 19, “Tito and Mihailovic Blunder.” As mentioned in Chapter 1, Lamb has been critical of Winston Churchill on a variety of topics and has drawn his conclusions by analyzing a variety of primary source documents as well as commentary from other historians concerning the prime minister.

2 See David Martin’s *Web of Disinformation: Churchill’s Yugoslav Blunder* (San Diego: Harcourt, Brace Jovanovich Publishers, 1984) for thorough descriptions of the activities of Communist agents within the SOE.
A Communist-free Yugoslavia

One particular inquiry that appears to be skirted around fairly often is whether Churchill could have kept communism from taking over the Yugoslavia. Nevertheless, to answer this we must first address several other issues that pertain to a better understanding of the peoples of Yugoslavia and their place in the greater spectrum of the Allied war effort. Ultimately, the Soviet Union spread its influence in varying degrees in the postwar Balkans to Yugoslavia, Romania, Albania, and Bulgaria. Greece alone was to be spared from this fate, but at the cost of a bloody civil war that involved more precious Allied manpower and resources. Critical also were the negotiations between Churchill and Soviet Premier Joseph Stalin at the Moscow Conference (Codename TOLSTOY) on October 9, 1944, which came to be known as the “percentages agreement” and which defined much of what transpired during the later stages of the war and after.

The battle for control of Yugoslavia proved to be an important front for the Allies when the Allied efforts in Europe are examined. Even so, at least for the first two years of the war, only the United Kingdom withstood the Nazi war machine; other states were defeated in short order until the Germans invaded the Soviet Union. Resistance manifested itself in several European nations, which included the nationalists of General Mihailović and the Partisans of Marshal Tito. Churchill and the Allies were quite aware of this and so they were apt to support Mihailović during the initial stages of the resistance. This happened as Yugoslavia’s King Peter II had, in absentia in England, appointed then-Colonel Mihailović to be his minister of war after the German invasion of
April 1941. Shortly thereafter, he then became commander of the Yugoslav Army of the Homeland.

Lamb tells us that Churchill had planned on making the Balkans another front in the war: “He did not want to send an expeditionary force there; instead he hoped to use the Yugoslav resistance to prepare the ground for the Eighth Army to make an amphibious landing in Istria [to occur some time before the landing at Normandy] and then drive on through the Ljubljana Gap into Austria and then on to Vienna.”\(^3\) Churchill had pushed for an invasion of Istria to take place at most any time, but he only gave up lobbying for an invasion at Istria by January 1945,\(^4\) likely as the Soviets had already helped to expel the remaining Axis forces from Yugoslavia in November 1944 and because of his agreement with Stalin, which occurred in Moscow in early October. From Lamb’s short assessment, it is clear that the struggle in Yugoslavia was relevant to the greater Allied plan; this is why the proper support for the correct leader in Yugoslavia had to be determined. If the Allies were to drive the Axis forces from all of the lands that they occupied, the Allies were going to make the most of the various factions on the ground in different regions of occupied Europe. In Yugoslavia, where Allied expeditionary forces could not be easily placed, implemented, or even mobilized, this burden fell on the shoulders of the Partisans and the Nationalists. Even so, these two

\(^3\) Lamb, *Leader*, 250.

\(^4\) Ibid., 250. The Malta Conference was attended by President Roosevelt, Prime Minister Churchill, and the Chiefs of Staff and took place between January 30, 1945 and February 2, 1945. It was codenamed JUGGERNAUT. See *Foreign Relations of the United States: Conferences at Malta and Yalta, 1945* (Washington, D.C.: United States Government Printing Office, 1945), 457+. 
groups, try to help them as Churchill might, could not agree to work with each other to form a cohesive resistance against the Germans.

**An Alternative: Allied Predominance in Eastern Europe**

There is a factor that must be considered when analyzing the reasons for Britain’s protracted involvement in the later stages of the war. It is likely that a change of support was not carried out because Churchill felt that Great Britain’s diplomatic and military strength was beginning to wane and that he could not muster enough support from the other Allies to face Stalin and the Soviet tide, who would almost assuredly have backed Marshal Tito, had there been any issue of dominion over the lands of Yugoslavia. Furthermore, Britain’s military clout had been reduced after years of struggle. We know that there was a deal struck between Churchill and Stalin that was confirmed with a handshake during the Moscow Conference on the night of October 9, 1944. President Franklin Roosevelt learned the basics of the conference’s proceedings from Averill Harriman, the U.S. ambassador to the Soviet Union.5

Churchill’s conversation with Stalin on influence in Southeast Europe was quick and to the point, for it was merely a formality as the two parties had for some time been considering the spheres of influence. Warren F. Kimball notes that Churchill had “demonstrated his consistent pursuit of a spheres-influence settlement in late spring 1944, when he eagerly sanctioned Soviet predominance in Rumania in exchange for British

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control in Greece, a proposal opposed by the [U.S.] State department but approved by Roosevelt.” The prime minister recalled the meeting after the war:

[…] I said, “Let us settle about our affairs in the Balkans. […] While [the proposals were] being translated, I wrote out on a half-sheet of paper:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Rumania</td>
<td>90%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Greece</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Russia</td>
<td>90%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The others</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Greece</td>
<td>90%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Great Britain</td>
<td>(in accord with U.S.A.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Russia</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yugoslavia</td>
<td>50-50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hungary</td>
<td>50-50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bulgaria</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Russia</td>
<td>75%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The others</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

I pushed this across to Stalin, who had by then heard the translation. There was a slight pause. Then he took his blue pen and made a large tick upon it, and passed it back to us. It was settled in no more time than it takes to set it down. […]

After this there was a long silence. The pencilled paper lay in the centre of the table. At length I said, “Might it not be thought rather cynical if it seemed we had disposed of these issues, so fateful to millions of people, in such an offhand manner? Let us burnt he paper.” “No, you keep it,” said Stalin.

And so the agreement on the spheres of influence over Yugoslavia and other nations was complete; this meeting transpired about ten months after British support for General Mihailović had ceased at the order of Churchill. Churchill and Stalin agreed that a sharing of influence in Yugoslavia was just and the split ought to be equal, with half for

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7 Quoted in ibid., 227-28.
Soviet “predominance” and half for Western Allied “predominance,” as L.S. Stavrianos also refers to it. Moreover, by this time, the Soviets had crossed the Yugoslav frontier on October 1, so there was little that could be done there by the Western Allies. Indeed, Churchill wrote to Roosevelt after the meeting that “Arrangements made about the Balkans are, I am sure, the best that are possible.” He had succeeded, however, in saving Greece from the Soviets, which he considered strategically important to British interests in the region.

It is perhaps reasonable to think that Stalin was in the same situation as Churchill in regard to influence over Yugoslavia: postwar dominion had to be considered. It was the Soviet premier who wished to undermine non-communist interests in Yugoslavia, but he was probably not ignorant to the fact that the popularity of General Mihailović, especially when combined with the nationalist interests of the Serbian people themselves, would make it difficult for pro-communist forces to control all of Yugoslavia after the war had ended. Because of this, preventing the monarchy-supporting Chetniks from reunifying the land of the southern Slavs would be a virtual guarantee that the Communist sphere would at least include a part of this region, and, since the war was not over and the ultimate fate of many European countries had not yet been determined by October 1944, the agreement was at least a progressive step that would help further Soviet interests in the peninsula.

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Churchill had his own clear intentions for the postwar period. If the British prime minister knew of the land-grabbing notions of the communists in Yugoslavia as well as he knew that the Soviet Union hoped to expand its influence as far as it could, we are to assume that Churchill’s aim to have an Allied invasion at Istria launched from Italy, as he wrote on August 29, 1944 “that the arrival of a powerful army in Trieste and Istria in four or five weeks would have an effect far outside purely military purposes.”\(^\text{11}\) To the chagrin of Churchill, an invasion would not come to fruition, however, likely due to increasing shortages of British troops and an American apprehension to support further ventures in Europe while the war in the Pacific Theater had yet to be decided.

Churchill sought the Allied influence over other countries besides Yugoslavia in order to lessen the effects of communism, which in his eyes was some sort of slavery and a form of pestilence that the peoples of the world were better off without, as he would note in his “Sinews of Peace” (perhaps better known as “The Iron Curtain”) speech at Westminster College in Fulton, Missouri on March 5, 1946.\(^\text{12}\)

This pact between the British prime minister and the Soviet premier was eventually known to Tito, as evidenced in a telegram from Churchill to Brigadier Maclean, dated December 3, 1944.\(^\text{13}\) Churchill asked Maclean to relay to Tito, “As you know, we have made an arrangement with the Marshal [Joseph Stalin] and the Soviet

\(^{11}\) Quoted in Lamb, *Leader*, 267.

\(^{12}\) For a transcript of the speech, see http://www.historyguide.org/europe/churchill.html.

Government to pursue a joint policy towards Yugoslavia, so that our influence there should be held on an equal basis.”"¹⁴ The Soviet premier only had to bide his time until the Americans and the British had both withdrawn support for General Mihailović and the Chetniks, the enemies of the Yugoslav communists, although by the time that the British withdrew their mission to the Chetniks it was revealed that Stalin entertained supporting the Chetniks as well, much to the chagrin of Tito. Maclean recalled after the war that “the Soviet attitude towards Mihailović was quite interesting too. They upset Tito very much because they showed some interest in the Četniks in the early days and [British Foreign Secretary Anthony] Eden also told me that [Soviet Foreign Minister Vyacheslav] Molotov had expressed interest in sending a Soviet mission to Mihailović.”¹⁵ It is plausible that Stalin had the foresight to think that the sphere of Soviet influence would be greater than that which he had initially secretly agreed upon with Churchill.

**The Results of Communist Infiltration**

Churchill struggled with a quandary. As the possibility of a civil war, or at the very least a permanent disagreement between the leaders of the two main resistance factions, increased in Yugoslavia during 1942 and 1943, Churchill had to make a decision on who should be provided support. He saw the Chetniks as ineffective and the Partisans as possibly allowing the king to return to power. The British Foreign Office

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¹⁵ Quoted in ibid., 258.
had already suggested that support remain for General Mihailović, but after the Tehran Conference, the first wartime meeting of the leaders of the Big Three (the United States, the United Kingdom, and the Soviet Union), which transpired over several days in late November and early December 1943, the prime minister opted against heeding this advice, responding that “Mihailovic is a millstone tied around the neck of the little King [Peter II] and he has no chance [to return to Yugoslavia] till he gets rid of him.”\textsuperscript{16} In addition, Churchill desired to choose support in a manner that would allow the monarchy to return to power, or, in a worst-case-scenario, to allow the people of Yugoslavia to determine their destiny after the war ended, should the destiny not include a monarch. Bearing this in mind, Churchill set about gathering information to make his choice as to support the Partisans or the Chetniks.

The timing of the Tehran Conference, codenamed EUREKA, is pivotal in the fall of Mihailović. While at SOE Cairo, Klugmann had been changing the messages flowing to and from the Balkans for quite some time.\textsuperscript{17} All of this culminated in a field report submitted by British Brigadier General Charles D. Armstrong, who was a member of the British regular army, rather than of the SOE, and had been in working in Yugoslavia. His report became known as the Armstrong-Bailey Recommendation.\textsuperscript{18} An account of his time in-country had been requested by the British Foreign Office and on November 7,\textsuperscript{16} Quoted in ibid., 261.


\textsuperscript{18} For the complete Armstrong-Bailey Recommendation, see Martin, \textit{Web}, 315-25; for his commentary, see Chapter 20, “The Armstrong-Bailey Recommendations.”
1943 he answered with a five-thousand word report. The Recommendation noted that the Chetniks would be an effective fighting force against the Germans. In part, it read:

Mihailović himself in his letter to [the] Commander-in-Chief stated:

A. He is ready for complete military collaboration [with the Allies].
B. He is now devoting his whole military time to military operation.
C. The Central National Committee was founded because of the absence of King and Government. It is therefore by implication acting only as their representative here.\(^{19}\)

Lamb relates: “Had Churchill read it he would have realized that the Cetniks [sic] were dominant in Serbia, as active as the Partisans were, and worth backing on military grounds – quite apart from political considerations”;\(^ {20}\) the political considerations relate to Allied concern about the general representing a questionable Serbian monarchy. Furthermore, the report seemed to reiterate what many in the British War Office except Churchill believed all along, which is that the Chetniks were indeed formidable opposition to the German invaders. That the Chetniks were “dominant in Serbia” suggests that the problems in Yugoslavia were sectional in nature, as the non-Serbs, who largely made up the ranks of the Partisans, were not represented or treated well enough by the Chetniks.

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\(^{20}\) Lamb, *Leader*, 258.
Lamb is correct in his assessment about the Chetniks, but his interpretation of the Armstrong-Bailey Recommendations, while it holds some water, is less so. Although Lamb believes that had Churchill been able to take possession of the Armstrong-Bailey Recommendation, he would have been in a position to make a better judgment regarding the fate of Yugoslavia, it is not the language of the piece that would warrant that author’s claims. This particular primary source does not employ the sort of rhetoric that is observed in other pieces, such as the Maclean Report. The Maclean Report of November 6, 1943, written by SOE liaison officer Brigadier Fitzroy Maclean and to be discussed directly, offered one-sided advice that the prime minister seemed to have been looking for because it presented an ultimatum to the Allies concerning the faction that would be most effective against the Germans and the support of which would be in the best interest of Yugoslavia. Rather, the Armstrong-Bailey Recommendation is a careful, first-hand assessment of the inner thoughts and workings of General Mihailović, offered in the hope that the Allied leaders would be able to decide correctly on Yugoslav policy.

A slightly more careful clarification of the Armstrong-Bailey Recommendations is necessary. The Recommendation was just that: a suggestion about Allied foreign policy as it applied to the parties in question in Yugoslavia, even though this source deals primarily with Mihailović. In it, there appears language and style that is wholly a report and, in the eyes of its readers, an unbiased assessment of the ways in which Mihailović conducted both himself and the war. Knowing that because of misinformation flowing out of SOE Cairo, the BBC had been errantly attributing, the various bombings of bridges and the taking of several Axis-held locales to the Partisans, Mihailović was
understandably upset with the recognition, or lack thereof, that he was receiving from the British government and press. Even so, he took the circumstances in stride. Concerning the general’s knowledge of the inconsistencies in media reporting, the Recommendation reads: “Mihailovic rarely raises any matters in our conferences, never gives Armstrong his confidence and always leaves the initiative with us.”

We can gather two relevant points from this statement.

First, General Mihailović was not in full trust of all of the BLOs and American OSS agents assigned to him. This was the culmination of all of the information Mihailović knew about British policy toward him. He was aware of the improperly reported events by the BBC; tidbits such as this had a lasting, less-than-favorable effect on the general. Second, and perhaps more importantly, the confirmation that he did not bring “any matters” out in the open during conferences and that he left “the initiative” with the Allied officers in his company strongly suggests that he still trusted the Allies, at least to the extent that he could, for aid and guidance when it was necessary, although at this point, November of 1943, aid to the Chetniks had dwindled significantly.

Admittedly, the Recommendation quickly adds that “On the other hand, we have the problem of Mihailović’s character and the deficiencies of his organization. He is a career officer, narrow-minded and stubborn, very Pan-Serb, wily and a master of evasion.

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22 BLOs refers to British Liaison Officers, or the SOE agents who were in occupied areas such as Yugoslavia, while OSS stands for the Office of Strategic Services.
and procrastination” but “He has a strong sense of duty to his King and people.”23 Clearly, the Allies were fully aware of Mihailović’s character flaws and the section of the Recommendation could possibly have confirmed that the Chetniks were not open to including non-Serbs and did not have their interests in mind, which vexed Churchill. Nevertheless, the Western Allies recognized them and still desired to have the general and his Chetniks be a part of the Allied forces or else the title of Armstrong’s piece would have been called something other than a recommendation. This is just a sampling of how the Recommendation reports concerning Mihailović. In all, the Armstrong-Bailey Recommendation undeniably recognizes the faults of the general, but falls considerably short of ruling him out as worthy of continued support against the Axis in Yugoslavia. Instead, it offered several viable suggestions as to what to do to rectify the issues in Yugoslavia, which would have certainly made a difference in the effectiveness of the Chetniks. This is so because it is possible that had they received more material support from the Allies, and Britain in particular as the British had established relations and contacts with individuals in Yugoslavia since before the war in anticipation of its commencement, the Chetniks would have been a formidable fighting force.24

The Maclean Report

Though not offered as such, the Maclean Report is in direct opposition to the Armstrong-Bailey Recommendation. This piece was presented to Churchill in early November 1943. The two accounts were not penned as rebuttals to each other; however, they are at the opposite ends of the spectrum of Allied policy on Yugoslavia. Brigadier Fitzroy Maclean was a British Liaison Officer in charge of the British mission to the Partisans. He was aided considerably in his writing by F. William Deakin, who had been the first chief BLO sent to the Partisans and who then succeeded Maclean.

Though not at all in favor of Communism, Maclean became rather well acquainted with Tito and subsequently authored a biography about the Partisan leader in addition to a volume about his experiences in Yugoslavia during the war, as mentioned in Chapter 1. In its pages, the Maclean Report contained wording that is quite contrary to the notions suggested by one particular OSS officer, as we shall see shortly. An example of the BLO’s claims is as such: “…the Cetnik [sic] Dinaric Division… [contains] 3,000 men, representing approximately one-quarter of the total Cetnik forces…”25 Conversely, Maclean wrote, perhaps exaggeratingly, that “The latest information gives the number of [Partisan] divisions as 26 and the total number of troops as 220,000,” who were spread throughout Yugoslavia, including “30,000 in Serbia and Macedonia.”26 If the numbers are reliable, the 30,000 Partisans would have been pitted against the both the Chetniks and Axis forces in Serbia proper.

25 Martin, Web, 310.
26 Ibid., 307.
The Maclean Report contains language that is one-sided and not favorable to the Chetnik general. The conclusion of the report reads: “In these circumstances my recommendations are as follows: (1) That support of Mihailović should be discontinued. (2) That our aid to the Partisans should be substantially increased.” This is another example of what helped Churchill to decide to withdraw support for the Chetniks and the Serbian general.

More evidence abounds as Brigadier Maclean also knew of information that should have been useful to Churchill, and it can be said with certainty that Maclean divulged to Churchill what he was privy to. For instance, while having one of many such probable discussions with Tito, Maclean revealed that he “[…] asked him whether it was his ultimate aim to establish a Communist State in Jugoslavia [sic]. [Tito] said that it was, but that it might have to be a gradual process […] in a sense the revolution was already in progress.” From this exchange, we can garner that Maclean did indeed know that the Partisan leader already had plans in the works for the postwar situation in Yugoslavia, yet he was insistent in his opinion that the British withdraw support for the Chetniks. The postwar ramifications, though, would be secondary to the military objective of defeating the Axis forces in Europe.

There are two other occasions that Brigadier Maclean revealed after the war that require scrutiny. The first occasion is an exchange between the brigadier and the prime

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27 Ibid., 310.

28 Quoted in Stavrianos, Balkans, 776.
of the brigadier, his lucid description of the conversation progressed as follows:

As soon as I heard that I was not going to Mihailović but that I was going to somebody called Tito and that Tito was thought to be a Communist, the first question I put to the Prime Minister was, ‘Have you thought about the implications of backing a Communist-inspired movement bound to be responsible to the Russians?’ He replied, ‘Yes, we have,’ and that was when he said, ‘What we are concerned with is who kills the most Germans and how we can help them, and political considerations are secondary.’

In this statement by the British prime minister, it can be seen that the possibility existed that the Soviet grip of Communism could reach as far as Yugoslavia after the war and that short-term military objectives were more important than long-term political objectives. We cannot discern that the brigadier knew of all the political issues surrounding this decision, but it is verifiable that Churchill was willing to risk the postwar effect in order to reassemble the state of Yugoslavia after the war had been won. Further, this position would have prevented the Yugoslav government-in-exile from returning during or after the war as well.

The other discussion between Churchill and Brigadier Maclean is similar in nature. Occurring in November 1943, its description from the brigadier and the exchange reads as follows:

[...] in fact I made it absolutely clear that the future regime of Yugoslavia would certainly be a Communist one. That was when Churchill said to me, ‘Are you going to live there?’ And I said, ‘No.’ And he said, ‘Neither am I, so had we not better leave the Yugoslavs themselves to work out what sort of system they are going to have?’

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29 Quoted in Auty and Clogg, *British Policy*, 252; quotation marks are as in original text.
That seemed to me a perfectly clear directive, and that was the basis I went on throughout. 30

From the conversation described here, the British prime minister comes across as uncaring about the fate of the Yugoslavs. Indeed, he might have been. But we can also see that a first-hand confirmation has been directed to the prime minister concerning the possible fate of postwar Yugoslavia. This is a confirmation about the inquiry that Brigadier Maclean had made in the prior citation. Even armed with this solidified knowledge, the British prime minister was still insistent on withdrawing support for the nationalist Chetniks and fully backing only the communist Partisans.

Fitzroy Maclean made these recommendations to the prime minister, knowing full well that the consequences of a communist government would likely be unfavorable to the population of Yugoslavia after the war had ended. Additionally, since Brigadier Maclean admits to revealing this information to Churchill, the prime minister ought to have continued to support the Chetniks as well as the Partisans until such time as he found reason either to cease material support for the Partisans, find a way for the exiled king to return to Yugoslavia, or accomplish a combination thereof. The combination would have been most favorable to the Western Allies as both the Chetniks and the Partisans were, for the most part, operating against the Axis forces in different sections of Yugoslavia, save for where their paths occasionally crossed and they fought against each other instead.

30 Maclean in Auty and Clogg, discussion, 252; quotation marks are as in original text. Also in Lamb, Leader, 259.
A Difference of Opinion

Aside from the above, there are several ways in which the Maclean Report and the Armstrong-Bailey Recommendations differ. First, the Maclean Report appears to be an account that only advances the interests of the Tito movement. Throughout its pages, language such as has been seen herein appears to suggest strongly that support for Tito should be upheld, all the while demanding the dismissal of Mihailović. Quite to the converse, the Armstrong-Bailey Recommendation readily offers the eye-witness accounts of individuals who have been embedded with the Chetniks. Furthermore, it recommended that Mihailović’s forces, as well as those of Tito, be kept in the employ of the Allies; on the other hand, the Recommendation does not call for the dismissal of Tito. Because of the clear proposals of the Armstrong-Bailey Recommendation, it is plain that its authors did not seek to persuade the Allied leaders to end support for the Nationalists, but rather to try and gain a fair share of Allied support for the Chetnik loyalists. The Allied officers who were with the Chetniks knew that Mihailović had, in what they considered to be good fashion, carried out the tasks that he was assigned, but the Serbian general knew that on many occasions, the credit had been given to the Partisans, which then resulted in more Allied support for Tito.

Second, there is a discrepancy between the facts as reported by the BLOs with the two Yugoslav factions. In turn, this should have had a critical bearing on the decision that Churchill ended up making on Allied Balkan policy; nonetheless, it did not. The concern with this difference is that many members of the British Cabinet were apprehensive about the items being reported by BLOs embedded with Tito. Even so, they happened to take
the word of the BLOs who were with Mihailović’s men at face value; Churchill’s War Cabinet members cannot be blamed for this.

This issue was noted by Major Richard Weil, an OSS liaison officer who had been with Tito and his men, in “early 1944.” The major wrote, “We do not know whether the Partisan reports about actions are accurate, exaggerated, or utterly untrue. This is because for the most part we have taken the Partisan[s at their] word for what went on since we seldom had our own observer with them.”31 This is a potential admission that the information passed on to both the president and the prime minister was less reliable when it came from Partisan camps.

Though the officer who wrote the above passage was from the United States, officers from both the United States and Great Britain, in all likelihood, knew each other and were working together when in contact. Nevertheless, a lack of personal involvement from the BLOs in Chetnik missions was not the case for the officers who were working with Mihailović. The Recommendation was penned by individuals who had personally led the general’s troops on missions and into combat, and who thus had a better understanding of what the circumstances were on the ground in Yugoslavia, as opposed to those individuals who were with Tito.

There are several instances of this as indicated in the Mansfield Report, submitted March 1, 1944, by United States Captain Walter R. Mansfield, that lend credibility to the claim on behalf of the effectiveness of the Chetniks. This document was written after the

officer had been on the ground with Mihailović’s forces for a period five months and had caught the attention of General William J. Donovan, who was the superior officer in charge of the OSS, as well as the attention of President Roosevelt. In one instance, the officer retells the events of September 11, 1943, when “British Col. Wm. Bailey, with a band of 1000 Chetniks supplied by Gen. Mihailovic, fought a bloody battle against a German garrison force at Prijepolje, in which over 200 Germans were killed. Col Bailey then proceeded to Berane (with Chetnik forces) where he accepted the surrender of 8000 Italians at the ‘Venezia’ Division H.Q.”

This is an example of the value of the Chetniks, which would warrant further support, because Klugmann and his Communist cronies took advantage of the situation and spun the incident to give credit once again to the Partisans. In a court statement offered at the trial of Mihailović at Belgrade in 1946, there are even more details of this event offered by former British liaison officers, among them Brigadier Armstrong and Colonel Bailey. It was noted that “Heavy casualties were inflicted upon the Germans and a considerable quantity of booty including motor transport, captured. Without the successful conclusion of this action, the British officers could not have carried out their orders,” which were to advance to the Italians after this Axis power had arrived at an armistice with the Allies.  

32 Quoted in ibid., 131.

Interestingly, another first-hand account of the same situation is available. In a postwar interview that Martin conducted with Lieutenant Colonel Rudi Perhinek, a wartime officer of General Mihailović whom Martin described in his validation for the former Chetnik as “an impressive and highly intelligent Slovene career officer,” Mihailović’s subordinate remembered in detail the events that transpired after the assault at Prijepolje. Martin summarized Perhinek’s recollection as:

After resting for a day, Colonel Bailey and his Mihailovic forces, now motorized with captured German equipment, started moving toward Berane on September 14. Bailey and Perhinek were driving together in the captured car of the German commander, with Bailey at the wheel, when they heard [the] BBC announce that “the Partisans have captured Prijepolje from the Germans.” Perhinek turned to Bailey in consternation and asked how [the] BBC could say this. In painful embarrassment, Bailey replied, “I can only tell you that I have reported events exactly as they happened.”

This is a prime example of the falsifications relayed on to the BBC and British leaders by SOE Cairo. It is also a rare example of the people in the field, and in particular the individuals who had only days before taken part in the said events and knowing that what was put over the airwaves by the BBC was wholly untrue, hearing them and questioning how such fabrications could even come to pass. It is within reason to assume that the truth did not reach the prime minister on most nearly every occasion and events such as this ultimately contributed to the change in Allied policy concerning Mihailović, for there were assuredly more pressing matters on the mind of the prime minister in the conduction of the war against the Axis forces.

34 Martin, Web, 152.

35 Quoted in ibid., 152.
Martin writes that “SOE’s handling of this incident constituted a third major affront to Mihailović.”36 The author has carefully dissected the many hundreds of pages in reports and correspondence between SOE Cairo and personnel in the Balkans and London. He feels that “Six incidents in the relationship between SOE Cairo and Mihailović were characterized by such apparent malevolence or inaccuracy that they simply could not have been the product of accident or error.”37 Though he only refers to six such instances, it is evident that there are a fairly significant number that were sent from the offices of SOE in Cairo that influenced Churchill’s decision and, in turn, subsequently led to the undoing of Mihailović.

Richard Lamb further clarifies the issue revealed by Martin. Brigadier Armstrong had submitted his report on November 7, 1943. If Klugmann had not kept the report for a week before sending it, should have been ample time to have reached Churchill. It is difficult to know his exact location, for during the next several weeks, the prime minister may have been in Great Britain, though he may have also been on the move toward Tehran, seeing that the Allied summit had been scheduled to begin there later that same month and ran through early December. At any rate, Klugmann did not permit Armstrong’s account to reach its destination until December 12. This date is of the utmost importance because Churchill made his official decision to withdraw support from General Mihailović on December 9, 1943.38 Moreover, the author tells us that the report

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36 Ibid., 152.
37 Ibid., 149.
38 Lamb, Leader, 258.
was held up “in the Egyptian office of S O E in Cairo, and it was not received in London until” the later date. We cannot say with any certainty that Klugmann knew whether or not Churchill would be in London on that date, but Lamb does reveal that the prime minister made his “irrevocable decision to sack Mihailović” while in Cairo on his return from Tehran.\(^{39}\)

**Advice from the Prime Minister’s Cabinet**

Winston Churchill would have done well to heed the suggestions of several members of his War Cabinet. There are instances when Churchill chose not to take the advice of his most experienced Cabinet members into consideration before he made decisions on British policy, particularly as it applied to General Mihailović. In a report from the British Chiefs of Staff dated March 4, 1943, it was written that “On balance taking the long view, the better military alternative was to continue to back Mihailović because he would provide some organization and control whereas under the Partisans chaos would probably ensue when the Axis forces were defeated.”\(^{40}\) This message was sent in regard to the eventual defeat of the Italians, the occasion of which was finally announced to the SOE officers who were with General Mihailović on September 8, 1943.\(^{41}\)

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\(^{39}\) Ibid., 258; punctuation is as in original.


\(^{41}\) Quoted in Martin, *Web*, 152.
Conflicting reports also came from the prime minister’s advisors. Stavrianos offers one account of such discrepancy, writing that “As early as June 6, 1943, Prime Minister Churchill received [a report] from his joint chiefs of staff,” the contents of which stated that ‘It is clear from information available to the War Office that the Chetniks are hopelessly compromised in their relations with the Axis in Herzegovina and Montenegro. During the recent fighting in the latter area, it has been the Partisans rather than the Chetniks who have been holding down the Axis forces.’ No doubt, this created a conundrum for Churchill, but inclined him to lean toward the Partisans when the question of support was considered.

Conversely, Foreign Secretary Anthony Eden tried time and again to persuade Churchill to exercise caution before finalizing his decision on whom to back in Yugoslavia. As Churchill was in Marrakesh, Morocco on his return to London from Cairo in mid-December 1943, Eden wrote to Churchill:

…it would be a mistake to promise Tito to break with Mihailovic. If we have a public and spectacular break with Mihailovic our case against him for treachery must be unanswerable…I am still without evidence of this. Breach with Mihailovic whenever it happens will certainly attract a good deal of attention both here and in America and I should have liked to have moved in step with Russians and Americans if we could.

On this point, Churchill was not persuaded. He was still bent on the return of the monarchy at any cost and felt that the way to expedite this decision would be to have Tito in control of operations against the Germans in Yugoslavia. In his reply to Eden,

42 Quoted in Stavrianos, *Balkans*, 780.

43 Quoted in Lamb, *Leader*, 261.
Churchill wrote that “Once Mihailovic has been dismissed Maclean and Randolph [Churchill’s son] will have a chance to work on Tito for the return of the King, perhaps in a military capacity.” It can be speculated that Churchill tried to get King Peter to return initially only in a military capacity, as at that point he was an Allied pilot, and from that point the king could have likely gained popular support, thus reestablishing the monarchy and allowing it to flourish. Furthermore, Churchill followed this message up with another communiqué to the foreign secretary on January 6, 1944, which read “My unchanging object is to get Tito to let the King come out and share his luck with them. I believe dismissal of Mihailovic is essential policy.”44 Evidently, the monarchy of Yugoslavia was so important to Churchill that he was willing to overlook comments from trusted advisors who would suggest otherwise.

There are many such occurrences where notable War Cabinet members decided collectively to reason with the prime minister, but to no avail. In one such instance, Eden learned that Churchill had already drawn the conclusion to no longer support General Mihailović as the prime minister had sent a letter to Tito on January 8, 1944 informing him “that the British Government shall give no further support to Mihailovic and [the British government] will give all help to” Tito.45 Eden became upset and conveyed his concern to the War Cabinet. Eden wrote a memo to his fellow Cabinet members that accompanied a copy of the prime minister’s letter to the Partisan leader: “It would be

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44 Quoted in ibid., 261.

unwise to back Tito and abandon Mihailovic.” Tito then wrote on February 9 that the Yugoslav “Government in [exile in Cairo] must be suppressed, and with them Draza Mihailovic.” The two leaders held the same policy, as the prime minister had made this decision while in Cairo on his return from the Tehran Conference without the consent and comments of his advisors in London; Churchill’s unaided pronouncement had severe consequences on British Yugoslav policy as well as postwar events in the country.

The issue of Churchill’s hard-headedness was compounded significantly by his notion of constitutional monarchies, rather than those authoritarian in nature, remaining in control of their respective states. Seeing that he had been raised in an era when the British Empire was one of the dominant forces in politics and exuded military might that was usually unparalleled, the prime minister constantly held monarchs and sovereigns in mind whenever the good of a country, particularly one occupied by Axis forces, was in question. In his decision making, he probably remembered the heyday of the British Empire and all of the romanticism that came with such perceptions. As such, he constantly brought up the question of King Peter II returning to Yugoslavia to Tito, as he had said that he would to cabinet members such as Eden.

There are examples of Churchill trying to stress the importance of having King Peter II back in Yugoslavia with his own people. In the same message to the Partisan

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46 Quoted in Lamb, Leader, 262.
47 Churchill, Closing of the Ring, 474.
commander that declared Britain’s newfound and unwavering support for the Partisans, the prime minister wrote that “It would not be chivalrous or honourable for [Great Britain] to cast [the king] aside.” Tito cited the reluctance of the king to dismiss Mihailović as the reason not to place faith in him, as Churchill wrote to Tito in a January 15, 1944 letter that:

I can understand the position of reserve which you adopt towards King Peter. I have for several months past been in favour of advising him to dismiss Mihailovic […]. You will understand I feel a personal responsibility towards him. I should be obliged if you would let me know whether his dismissal of Mihailovic would pave the way for friendly relations with you and your movement and, later on, for his joining you in the field, it being understood that the future questions of the Monarchy is reserved until Yugoslavia has been entirely liberated.”

This letter goes on to try and convince Tito to trust the king because the prime minister says that he has been trying to get the king to get rid of the general; it is implied that when this finally happens, the marshal should let the king back into his country to aid in ridding the land of Nazis.

Churchill penned this letter to Tito in the dashed hopes of a monarchical renewal. Tito’s reserve for Peter mentioned above has been confirmed by Maclean in a letter to Churchill dated January 22, 1944, where it was written that “[Tito] pointed out that the King was discredited by the people by long association with Mihailovic and the Government.” Tito, it seems, was dancing around the issue of Peter’s return. Tito knew that, if this were to happen, he would not be the leader in Yugoslavia and that

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49 Quoted in Lamb, Leader, 262.

50 Quoted in ibid., 263.
though the civil war with the nationalist Chetniks would be stopping, at least for the time being, that a new one would likely ensue if the king were to return to his country.

In addition, it must be noted that Tito had established a provisional government over his areas of influence. This was contrary of Tito’s promise to Churchill that “he had no desire to introduce the Communist system into Yugoslavia.”\textsuperscript{51} Ralph Stevenson, who worked at the SOE office in Cairo, noted that “…the Partisans declared themselves to be in open revolution against the King and Government.”\textsuperscript{52} This appears to be part of the Partisan commander’s plan to keep the monarchy from returning to Belgrade. Lamb also comments that “[Tito] formed an \textit{ad hoc} Provisional Government which formally deprived the Royal Government of all its right, and forbade the King to return.”\textsuperscript{53} The Partisan leader formed the Provisional Government when the Red Army had taken Belgrade from its Axis occupiers; the Red Army invasion had commenced in October 1944. In all likelihood, the Red Army would have backed Tito in this segment of the conflict, for when the Soviet forces entered Yugoslav territory, Tito was in its ranks as he was returning from Moscow. Moreover, due to the lack of support for the Chetniks, the Partisans were in control of large segments of Yugoslavia at this juncture in the war.

It is possible that Churchill could not have seen this development coming. He was counting on Tito to permit the king to be back on the ground in Yugoslavia, which would have thereby in essence been an open door for the monarchy to be reinstated for the


\textsuperscript{52} Quoted in Lamb, Leader, 262.

\textsuperscript{53} Ibid., 262; emphasis in original.
postwar reconstruction of Yugoslavia. This is the turning point for Allied Yugoslav policy, for by Tito knowing that Peter had dissolved any relations with Mihailović, any monarchical interference that would have been possible was eliminated and the way was clear for Tito to start consolidating power while he continued to fight against the Chetniks and any other group standing in opposition. Tito, apparently keeping in line with the ideals of communism, sought to gather men of all nationalities and extractions, be they Muslims, Bosnians, or whoever, to the Partisan cause.

**British Confusion over Mihailović’s Contributions: A Betrayer among the Allies?**

There are cases when the British felt that the Chetniks were ineffective as a fighting force in Yugoslavia. This had a bearing on how Churchill felt about which Yugoslav faction ought to be supported. However, as Martin contends, these instances were in part a fabrication of Communist infiltration into British SOE offices, especially in Cairo as this was the regional office through which information concerning the Balkans flowed, as mentioned above. Communist infiltration proved to be problematic with the SOE and in the end would of course contribute to the undoing of General Mihailović and his monarchy-backing followers.

Contrary to what many of the authors discussed in Chapter 1 hold, General Mihailović did make formidable contributions to the Allied war effort. Aside from the aforementioned examples of combat assaults and the sabotage of Axis supply lines, Mihailović is best remembered for coordinating with the Americans in the return of airmen who had been downed from the skies over Yugoslavia. Unfortunately, due to
poor record keeping, the exact number appears to be inconsistent and varies from anywhere in the 500s to, occasionally, in excess of 600. Martin, for instance, tells us that just “In the summer and fall of 1944 […] 432 American airmen” had been rescued in addition to “4 British airmen, 2 Canadians, 2 Belgians, 30 Russians, and 76 Italians [who would have changed sides midway through the war].” The author goes on to add that “…both the Germans and the Cetniks [sic] raced up to get them, and their possession was determined only after Germans and Cetniks had fought it out.”

Rather aptly, this is where Gregory A. Freeman got the title for *The Forgotten 500*, which thoroughly documents the rescue missions. Like the combat engagements and disruption of bridges and roads, these operations to save airmen who had been shot down by German guns and planes were dangerous and extremely well executed but did not win over the ultimate or exclusive favor of Churchill and the other Allied statesmen.

Even so, Mihailović’s initially limited resistance to the Axis forces from the mountainous regions of central and southern Yugoslavia should have provided enough evidence for the Allies to continue to support his anti-Axis effort, but the general’s actions would ultimately be seemingly for naught. Mihailović’s efforts were also hamstrung by the fact that his ill-equipped forces were fighting with two enemies at once, the Nazi occupiers and the enemy that ought to be an ally instead of a foe: “[…] The British sent messages to Mihailovic urging him to carry out the maximum amounts of sabotage against the enemy’s bridges and railways […] He did useful work, but was

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severely hampered by Tito’s Partisans [who were] attacking his troops.” Unfortunately for the Chetnik leader, these circumstances were realized by Churchill through such sources as the Armstrong-Bailey Recommendation only after he had made the decision to cease assisting Mihailović’s operations.

Moreover, many sources on Allied policy in Yugoslavia have put forth the notion that General Mihailović was certainly and openly collaborating with the Germans against the Partisans. This issue will be discussed in much greater detail in Chapter 4; an overview of what had a hand in forming British policy will be given directly. Churchill probably considered this when drawing conclusions in Yugoslav policy. In one instance, Walter R. Roberts, in his assessment of the conflict in Yugoslavia, writes that “…the Partisans were complaining to the Comintern that Mihailović and the Četniks were collaborating with the German forces.” In another text, Warren F. Kimball says that “The forces of General Draža Mihailović were loyal to the king, but they had been compromised by collaboration with the Germans.” Even Stavrianos touches on the topic, writing that in one incident where there was allegedly a collaborative offensive, “the Chetniks broke and fled, leaving behind many documents revealing their relations with the enemy. Brigadier Maclean examined these documents and then sent a report to Churchill that contributed to the cessation of British support for Mihailovich.”

55 Lamb, Leader, 252.
56 Roberts, 1941-1945, 43.
57 Kimball, Complete, 80.
58 Stavrianos, Balkans, 780-81.
estimations played a significant role in Churchill’s thoughts on the matter and the conclusions that he subsequently drew.

However, F. H. Hinsley’s exhaustive text on British intelligence during the war helps to set these estimations aside. He wrote, “The [British] Foreign Office […] insisted that there was no proof that Mihailović had ordered collaboration with Germany or was even conniving in the activities of his subordinates.” 59 This seems to be in opposition to what British personnel in the field say. F.W.D. Deakin, the first SOE liaison officer with the Partisans in 1943, relates that when in-country, he was again informed that “The British government had only been recently aware that certain of Mihailović’s commanders […] had been collaborating with the enemy.” 60 This corresponds with the exchange Deakin carried out with the British prime minister before he was dropped in to be with the Partisans, as noted above.

The Foreign Office appears to be correct in its estimations. Richard Lamb, in Churchill as War Leader, explains the problem that continued to plague Churchill. He comments again on the actions of Klugmann and his associates, writing that “Unfortunately S O E in Cairo had been infiltrated by active communist agents. They misled Churchill and his advisers into believing that the Royalist guerrilla leader, Mihailovic, was collaborating with the Germans and fighting against the Partisan Communists under Tito.” 61 These actions were in direct support of Tito as he had been

60 Deakin, Mountain, 69.
61 Lamb, Leader, 346.
taken under the wing of Joseph Stalin and had even traveled to the U.S.S.R. to see the
Soviet leader in Moscow in late September 1944. Lamb continues, “The reverse was
ture. Tito’s Communists were not fighting the Germans, and his sole aim was to make
Yugoslavia a Communist state after the war. Against the advice of [British Foreign
Minister Anthony] Eden and the Foreign Office, Churchill insisted on all-out support for
Tito and none for Mihailovic. This was a disastrous error.”

In actuality, a two-fold objective on the part of the Americans and British could
have been undertaken. As the two resistance forces were concentrated in different parts
of the dismembered Yugoslavia from the time of the German invasion in 1941 until the
question of which side to support had to be answered, the Allies could have continued
support for both sides in the struggle against the Axis. To have done so could have been
beneficial to the Allies since the Axis forces would still have been defeated, but this
might not have been feasible since Tito was so insistent that support for the Chetniks be
withdrawn completely.

**Were the Chetniks only composed of Serbs?**

There is also a common misperception that General Mihailović was only interested
in having persons of purely Serbian nationality in his ranks, which Churchill appears to
have taken into consideration. This seems to have been a major concern for Churchill;

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63 Ibid., 346.
for a reunited Yugoslavia to emerge after the war ended, participation would be asked of all ethnic groups within the restored boundaries of the Balkan state. According to David Martin in *The Web of Disinformation*, “While the great majority of his followers, especially in the early stages of the movement, were Serbs, by 1943 [Mihailović’s] forces already incorporated a significant number of Slovene and Moslem [sic] detachments, and Mihailovic looked forward to the day when Croatian anti-Nazis would join his movement in strength.” This notion is backed with evidence from Maclean’s lengthy Report. It notes that “As further inevitable disintegration overtakes the Moslem [sic] SS units, recruits and supplies will continue to flow into the Green Cadre.” The Green Cadre is what Martin refers to as the Moslem homeguard, a movement that was also in opposition to the Axis forces in the broken Yugoslavia.

Furthermore, the Green Cadre was aided in its quest for more members by Mihailović himself. Martin informs us that “General Mihailovic assisted [Muslim] leaders in procuring the services of certain Yugoslav Regular Army officers of Moslem extraction,” for those leaders hoped to form their soldiers in a pattern similar in nature to the Nationalist Chetnik forces. Moreover, the author tells us that “in the Sondjak” a

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64 Martin, *Web*, xxxii.

65 Ibid., 407.

66 The spelling is correct from this source; in other sources and maps, this location is referred to as the “Sanjak” in common English transliteration or the “Sandžak” in Stevan K. Pavlowitch, *Hitler’s New Disorder: The Second World War in Yugoslavia* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998), 48 et al.
force of about 4000 local Moslems was cooperating with the Serb Nationals.\textsuperscript{67} The two anti-Nazi groups had the same purpose in mind.

This also reveals that the ethnic hostilities were transpiring at a variety of camps operated by the Nazi-backed Ustaša.\textsuperscript{68} As noted in the Introduction, the Ustaša were a fascist regime in control of the puppet state of Croatia during the war. Mihailović noted at his trial that he did not permit ill-will against the Croatians or any other various peoples that comprised Yugoslavia prior to the war. Rather, he would go to some extent to include them since they were subjects of the king in exile, whom the general himself had been charged with leading military operations against the Axis occupants.\textsuperscript{69}

The Chetnik general also had a genuine concern for the well being of the people of Yugoslavia, no matter whether they were Serbs or others. Stavrianos tells us that “The Germans retaliated with savage reprisals—the burning of villages and shooting of ten, fifty, even a hundred inhabitants for every German casualty. Mihailovich was appalled by the bloodshed, especially since the Serbians were usually the victims.”\textsuperscript{70} The numbers are corroborated with the accounts of downed airmen such as Lieutenant Richard Felman.\textsuperscript{71}

\textsuperscript{67} Martin, \textit{Web}, 407.

\textsuperscript{68} Other sources, Ustasha, Ustashe, or Ustashi. See Introduction, footnote number 5.


\textsuperscript{70} Stavrianos, \textit{Balkans}, 774.

\textsuperscript{71} See footnote number 55.
Awaiting Reprisal

General Mihailović’s alleged “refusal to attack the important railway lines running through Serbia finally caused a breach between him and the Allies. He received no further supplies from the Allies after the summer of 1943, and in May 1944, the British withdrew their mission from his headquarters.” It can be said of this, however, that the Serbian general knew of the reprisals that would await the Serbian villagers, and so to save their lives, he could not always partake directly in what was asked of him, but instead he did what he could, seeking to strike a balance between damaging the Germans and in turn minimizing the damage to the peasants, who looked to him for leadership.

Many sources have noted that the cost in reprisal for casualties inflicted upon the Germans was extremely high. All agree that the cost of one slain German soldier at the hands of the Chetniks amounted to 100 Serb peasants killed. For example, Richard Lamb notes that General Milan Nedic, a Yugoslav officer in Belgrade who was under the direction of the Germans during the war, “had decided that further active resistance could only cause useless loss of life as the Germans had announced that a hundred Serbs would be killed in reprisal for each German soldier killed,” as per “[German General Paul] Bader’s reprisals order of 28 February 1943.” However, for wounded German soldiers, the penalty was not so high: only 50 Serb peasants would be killed instead. It is assumed that the same consequences applied to supporters of Tito’s men when the Partisans

72 Stavrianos, Balkans, 781.
73 Lamb, Leader, 250; see also Felman, Mihailovich, 34.
74 Pavlowitch, Disorder, 182.
caused German casualties. Accounts such as that of Richard Felman also bear witness to
the burning of Serb villages after many inhabitants would be shot. As such, if there were
any surviving villagers, they would be homeless in addition to having to tend to the dead.

It is almost certain that General Mihailović knew of the suffering of his
countrymen due to Chetnik assaults. It can be speculated that he was biding his time
until an Allied invasion of the peninsula, for he knew that the valorous Chetniks would
not be the deciding force in the defeat and removal of the Germans. Because of the
heavy casualties that could possibly be inflicted upon his own population, it appeared to
make sense for the Serbian general to limit his attacks to where they would inflict the
greatest amount of damage, all the while trying to prevent the blame for the sabotage
from being traced back to his ranks.\textsuperscript{75}

Conclusion

This chapter has rendered an overview of the how British policy on Yugoslavia
was shaped. As will be seen, there are many issues at hand that gave the British a
different impression of the circumstance in Yugoslavia than was ascertained by the
Americans. When examined successively, it is easy to understand why there was a high
level of disagreement between the American and the British administrations in regard to
their wartime policy for Yugoslavia.

\textsuperscript{75} See Felman, \textit{Mihailovich}, for his account of his missing in action in Yugoslavia, which includes an
account of burning villages.
Chapter 3

Roosevelt’s Knowledge and American Military Involvement

Background

This chapter will show that there was ample evidence available to President Franklin Roosevelt for him to have discussed the Yugoslav situation, in addition to the situation in Southeastern Europe, with his British counterpart, Prime Minister Winston Churchill. Though delicate, the change in support in Yugoslavia from supporting both the Partisans and the Chetniks to only the Partisans could have been avoided if Roosevelt had been sterner with Churchill. It cannot be fully ascertained why it is that the president gave in to British wishes; however, Yugoslavia was not the only nation in which the Allies were supporting guerillas against the Wehrmacht and the other Axis forces. These circumstances most likely had a significant bearing on Roosevelt’s inaction. There is a significant chance that had Roosevelt persisted, especially when there was such a plethora of proof extended to the president, the composition of postwar Yugoslavia might have been somewhat different.

Roosevelt is highly regarded for his staunch support of Britain against the Nazis before America’s entry into the war and for his stout opposition to Axis aggression during the conflict. This is justifiably so, for there is no doubt that both the face of the world and history after his presidency would have been greatly different had the United
States not intervened on behalf of the Allies. However, Roosevelt has been questioned as wartime leader because of the perceived concessions to the communists in Eastern Europe as the war was in its final stages. Unfortunately, his untimely passing before the conflict had been fully won prevents us from learning any more of what he truly thought about Yugoslavia and the whole of Europe in general, as presidents are fond of commenting on their terms after their tenures in office have been completed. Several questions of relevance to American policy for the wartime situation in Europe, and Yugoslavia, in particular, will be addressed in this chapter, including but not limited to why Roosevelt appears quick to have yielded to Churchill when the latter insisted that the Allies withdraw aid for the Chetniks and throw their full support behind the Partisans.

At this point it is safe to assume that Roosevelt conducted the affairs of his office in order to keep the Anglo-American alliance intact should he need to work with Churchill against potential Communist aggression from Joseph Stalin and the Soviet Union in the postwar period as well as to lay the groundwork for the coming United Nations project. Examples can be seen in such instances as Churchill’s appeal to Roosevelt, which will be discussed directly.

**America’s Yugoslav Policy**

For the president, there was much input concerning collective Allied policy in Yugoslavia presented by the prime minister that had a bearing on American policy. The organization of Europe in the postwar period was of utmost significance to both Roosevelt and Churchill. This is so because by the time that the debate emerged about
which faction to support in Yugoslavia against the Germans, early to mid-1943, it was probable that the Allies would be the victors in the war, due in large part to the Soviet resurgence on the Eastern Front in which the Red Army juggernaut had turned the tide against the *Wehrmacht*.\footnote{The Germans had invaded the Soviet Union on June 22, 1941 and two years later the Soviets had then been able to push the Germans back towards Central Europe. See Bryan I. Fugate, *Operation Barbarossa: Strategy and Tactics on the Eastern Front, 1941* (Novato, CA: Presidio Press, 1984) or Alan Clark, *Barbarossa: The Russian-German Conflict, 1941-1945* (New York: W. Morrow, 1965), for example, for more thorough descriptions of the war efforts of the Germans and Russians.} Because of this, Roosevelt had to be careful so as not to upset the long-standing agreement concerning the Balkans that the United States enjoyed with Great Britain. Essentially, this arrangement dictated largely British operational control in the area. Servicemen from the other Allied forces were under the jurisdiction of the British while in-country; Americans were limited to clandestine operations with the Chetnik and Partisan resistance fighters. The British, for the most part, also enjoyed control over the transport of goods and men in and out of the region. As we shall soon see, there are several exchanges between Churchill and Roosevelt in April 1944 when the former learned that the latter had planned on sending a mission to General Mihailović for the sole purpose of gathering intelligence and coordinating the evacuation of downed airmen rescued from possible German capture by the Chetniks. The prime minister had initially nixed the mission, but after much insistence by the Office of Strategic Services (OSS), it was decided that the American expedition was of too much value in regard to intelligence-gathering to not let it be carried out.\footnote{Anthony Cave Brown, ed., *The Secret War Report of the OSS* ((New York: Berkley Medallion, 1976), 280.} This mission to Mihailović was
authorized by Roosevelt after the decision to cease British support for the Chetnik leader had been made by Churchill in early December 1943, as noted in Chapter 2.

The correspondence between the two leaders shows the reasons for Churchill’s concern about the manner in which combined Allied policy was progressing in Yugoslavia. The circumstances can even be agreed upon by other participants in the war. Lindsay Franklin, an American OSS officer embedded with Tito’s Partisans during the war, offers a first-hand account of the Anglo-American conditions. He writes, “Roosevelt approved [a mission to Mihailović] on March 22, 1944. Learning of this, […] Churchill strongly [opposed] the mission.” In a communiqué dated April 6, 1944, Churchill notified Roosevelt of the political ramifications of sending an American intelligence group to General Mihailović. The prime minister wrote, “If at this time an American Mission arrives at General Mihailović’s headquarters, it will show throughout the Balkans a complete contrariety of action between Britain and the United States.” Churchill wrote this because he did have a legitimate concern about the chasm that could have emerged between the two Allies, but his concern was greater in scope than that. “The Russians will certainly throw all their weight on Tito’s side, which we are backing to the full. Thus we shall get altogether out of step. I hope and trust that this may be avoided,” he quickly added.

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On April 8, Roosevelt acquiesced. The president wrote to the prime minister, “I have directed that the contemplated mission be not repeat not sent.”

Nevertheless, the consternation of Churchill and his seeming influence over Roosevelt was not enough to deter the efforts of an important person in the American intelligence community, who will be discussed below.

The Office of Strategic Services (OSS)

The OSS had in its employ many individuals who were knowledgeable American scholars on an array of topics and peoples from around the globe, although it appears that they were not as skilled at clandestine operations as the British. Gathered as part of the clandestine community during the Second World War, the agents of this organization were certainly able to make sound decisions and judgments based on data acquired from the field; this is no less true in the case of Yugoslavia. The agents sent to both Tito and Mihailović were exposed to an ample amount of data before compiling reports on their findings. Reports from agents of both the OSS and the SOE were almost certainly processed by their respective services with much scrutiny and passed up through the chain of command of each nation.

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Roosevelt was most likely aware of the conditions and circumstances under which the American military intelligence community was operating in Yugoslavia. Formed by Roosevelt in June 1942, the OSS was in charge of American intelligence operations during World War II and Colonel William J. Donovan was its chief. This intelligence agency’s authority was not concerned only with operations in Yugoslavia but rather wherever the United States military had been deployed or had an interest in being deployed. The OSS had commenced plans to enter Yugoslavia between March and April 1943. For all of the intelligence-gathering and rescue accomplishments of the OSS, however, a number of important failings occurred during its service in Yugoslavia.

Roosevelt and Churchill do not appear to have been in accordance with one another concerning the OSS mission to Mihailović. In one instance “[...] Churchill had, on September 1, 1944, strongly intervened with Roosevelt. ‘If we each back different sides,’ Churchill wrote to Roosevelt, ‘we lay the scene for a fine civil war.’ American relations with Mihailović bothered the prime minister. ‘[OSS chief] General [William J.] Donovan is running a strong Mihailović lobby, just [...] when many of the Cetniks [sic] are being rallied under Tito’s National Army of Liberation.’” As the report of the operation reveals, this mission was charged with gathering more intelligence on the

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9 Ibid., 98-100.


German positions in addition to evacuating several hundred Allied airmen who had been shot down from the skies over Yugoslavia.\textsuperscript{12} In Roosevelt’s reply to Churchill, it would appear that the president was trying to appease the prime minister, for he played the incident off as inadvertent in nature. He wrote, “The mission of OSS is my mistake. I did not check with my previous action of last April 8\textsuperscript{th}. I am directing Donovan to withdraw his mission.”\textsuperscript{13} Now in-country with the Chetniks, Donovan’s mission to Mihailović was scrubbed within days; it would be November 1, 1944\textsuperscript{14} before the mission would be fully evacuated from Yugoslavia, due in part to inclement weather conditions and logistical problems regarding evacuation.\textsuperscript{15} By then, the Germans had also been routed by the Western Allied-supported Partisans and liberating Soviet forces.

Anthony Cave Brown’s edited work Secret War Report of the O.S.S. tells the tale of the involvement of the forerunner to the modern Central Intelligence Agency in World War II. The report in question was written by Kermit Roosevelt, Jr., who was then an OSS agent. Editor Brown uses this opportunity to discuss the impression of the operation as given by Colonel Albert Seitz, an OSS officer embedded with the first American mission to General Mihailović in the spring of 1943, which had been recalled well before


\textsuperscript{13} Quoted in Loewenheim, Langley, and Jonas, Secret Wartime Correspondence, 571.

\textsuperscript{14} Biber, “Failure,” 199.

\textsuperscript{15} Smith, Shadow, 282-83.
the mission that had been sent to the general in the fall of 1944. Brown wrote concerning the American impression of the circumstances in Yugoslavia that:

The show was British, [Seitz] said, and the whole show would remain British […] Moreover, dependant upon British wireless for their communications, [OSS agents] were not able to communicate their real impressions about Mihailović until they had been rendered obsolete by Churchill’s and Roosevelt’s decision to back Tito and abandon Mihailović to his fate.16

These comments concerning the assessment of Colonel Seitz further suggest that the British prime minister was doing all that he could to prevent support of any kind from reaching General Mihailović. A similar example will be discussed shortly. The lack of support for the Serbian general only played into Churchill’s plan to establish a favorable enough relationship with Tito in order that the marshal would permit King Peter II to return to Yugoslavia.

It is possible that Churchill had grown tired of waiting for the newfound American interest in Yugoslavia and the rest of South East Europe to subside, and so he was distraught that Roosevelt had opted to permit the OSS to venture forth into Yugoslavia once more. We see that there is a span of five months’ time, the first week of April 1944 until September 1 of the same year, from when Churchill initially cautioned about the American mission being assessed the wrong way by both the Partisans and the Chetniks and the time that Churchill warned Roosevelt of further civil unrest. Much had occurred stateside in this duration, for there were other OSS officers at work who were trying to change the tide of support in Yugoslavia from the circumstances that Churchill thought would be ideal in the country.

Even after President Roosevelt had approved the scrubbed McDowell mission to Mihailović for a second time, the prime minister still tried to hamstring the mission. Lt. Colonel McDowell and his men “had made six abortive attempts [to go to Yugoslavia] and had been able to land only on the seventh try. Churchill had instructed the SOE, which controlled air operations to Yugoslavia, to delay McDowell’s flight.”\(^{17}\) In all likelihood, the prime minister did not want the Americans to gather the intelligence they needed to fortify their reports about General Mihailović. The reports conveyed that the general’s men were indeed carrying out missions against the Germans and could be more effective against them if he were better supplied, as recorded in documents such as the McDowell Report.\(^{18}\) This account was written by Lieutenant Colonel Robert McDowell concerning his time with the Serbian general, which, as mentioned, lasted from August until November 1944, and would soon show the facts as he saw them pertaining to Mihailović and the Chetniks. Churchill would rather that all support go to Tito, who had allegedly promised to permit King Peter II to return to Yugoslavia to assume the throne once more.\(^{19}\) Churchill had also noted in a letter to Roosevelt that “The only chance of saving the King is the unity between his Prime Minister, [who was] the Ban of Croatia, and Tito.”\(^{20}\)

\(^{17}\) Martin, *Web*, 189.

\(^{18}\) For a complete transcript of the McDowell Report, see Martin, *Web*, 378-411.

\(^{19}\) Lindsay, *Beacons*, 268.

\(^{20}\) Kimball, *Complete*, 306. The Ban, or Governor, of Croatia at that time was Dr. Ivan Šubašić.
OSS reports were also relevant in reporting General Mihailović’s troop levels, which were likely of great concern to the Allies. Between late August and early September 1944, McDowell “sent six reports regarding administrative problems, military and political events, Chetnik plans for military cooperation and mobilization, armed clashes between Chetniks and Partisans, and military operations.” It is probable that these reports made it to the upper echelon of American commanders, including the president as he knew of the mission and Churchill’s discontent with it. Dušan Biber, who used many official OSS and SOE reports as well as communiqués from all levels of command, summarized the Chetnik military aspirations as such: “Mihailović notified McDowell that by September 1, 1944, he would complete mobilization throughout Yugoslavia. He told him that he had under arms 100,000 men and that a half a million men had been already mobilized, though they were still unarmed.” Although these numbers are questionable and cannot be verified, if true, this assessment shows that the Chetniks were in dire need of armaments and, more than likely, supplies such as radio equipment. Biber goes on to describe in detail the plan that General Mihailović had for striking against the Germans in the rest of Serbia and even past its frontiers.

This is in contrast to the Partisan troop levels as they have been reported by OSS agents in Yugoslavia. In Lt. Colonel McDowell’s report, he gave an assessment that Tito had a “Partisan force of no more than 200,000.” This means that the forces of General

21 Biber, “Failure,” 203.
22 Ibid., 202.
23 Ibid., 203.
Mihailović, had they been properly armed and their numbers certified, would have outnumbered Tito’s men by at least three-to-one. But as with all wartime guerilla movements, the troop levels for either faction would have been quite difficult to verify. In addition, seeing the effectiveness of the Partisans against the Germans, there is reason to dispute the reported troop levels.

While it is entirely possible that General Mihailović could have been embellishing his troop strength, it is quite doubtful that he did so when reporting to Lt. Colonel McDowell. This is so for two reasons. First, we can perceive the general’s estimations and battle plan to be a plea for aid from the Americans. At this point in the war, November of 1944, we know that the British had already pulled their agents out of the Chetnik ranks and General Mihailović was fairly confident that they were not to return since the Red Army was already in Yugoslavia. Previously, Churchill had written to Roosevelt on April 6, 1944 that “We are now in the process of withdrawing all our missions from Mihailovic and are pressing King Peter to clear himself of this millstone.” Thus, the general’s only hope for assistance in the war effort against the Wehrmacht was to beseech the American agents to ask the upper echelon of their organization to aid the Chetniks while the agents were in Yugoslavia. Second, General Mihailović probably knew that he should be honest in his dealings with Lt. Colonel McDowell in order to produce the results that he sought from the Americans.

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24 Martin, Web, 409.

25 Kimball, Complete, 80.
After Lt. Colonel McDowell returned from his mission to General Mihailović on November 1, 1944, he prepared the lengthy Report of the circumstance from his viewpoint. Its pages contain what we assume to be a full and fair description of the circumstances on the ground in Yugoslavia as he and other OSS agents had witnessed. In sum, the lieutenant colonel’s report concluded that the efforts of the Chetniks were relevant to the cause of fighting the German forces in Yugoslavia. Additionally, the Report suggested that these forces were consistently hamstrung by the Partisans, engaging in battle against the Partisans in self-defense and not offense. The report also strongly suggested that the United States take up the cause of the Chetniks in earnest in the form of materiel support so that they could move against the remaining Germans, which was of course an action favorable to the Allied war effort, in addition to being able to move against the Partisans, if need be, because of the struggle for power that would occur upon expulsion of the Germans.

Biber adds another facet to the importance of the report. He notes that McDowell wrote, “To entrust the Yugoslav Government to Tito is to ensure civil war. The local leaders and masses among both Partisans and Nationalists will quickly agree and unite if the Allies will cease all support of the small communist group on one side and the small reactionary on the other.”²⁶ McDowell had been able to envision the struggle for power that would ensue if the Partisan leader were to gain power. This only served to back McDowell’s position that the Chetniks ought to receive ample support in order to carry

²⁶ Quoted in Biber, “Failure,” 211.
on their operation against their enemies and to gallantly defend themselves, should the need to do so again arise, against domestic antagonists.

The McDowell Report, issued November 23, 1944, was a significant work. Both the American and British intelligence leadership wanted to peruse the document in order to make better assessments of the Chetnik situation. So great was interest in the report that it was even “needed for debate in the House of Commons.” Because of this, General Donovan decided to make the following proclamation pertaining to the fate of the report:

The McDowell report will be forwarded to me directly here. All other copies will be held by [Foreign Service officer and OSS operative Robert] Joyce as OSS property and disclosed to no one until so directed by me. As a matter of security and for McDowell’s own protection from attack, he will deliver all copies to Joyce, retaining none for himself. I intend that this material will be made available to us only after I have submitted it to the State Department and have obtained clearance from […] Secretary of State [Cordell Hull].

We can discern from General Donovan’s order that McDowell’s report was quite groundbreaking in nature. It is proof that high-ranking officials such as President Roosevelt and Cordell Hull and most likely their British counterparts were privy beforehand to the contents of McDowell’s Report. The president and the prime minister were thus made aware of the indisputable circumstances on the ground in Yugoslavia but for whatever reason neglected to take actions that could have produced vastly different results than what were accomplished. The outcome would have been more in line with what greater Allied policy for Europe actually was; the policy concerned the expulsion of

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27 Quoted in ibid., 212.

28 Quoted in ibid., 212.
Axis forces as well as a wall against the coming threat of Communism. In the case of Yugoslavia, the Allies called for the defeat and ouster of Axis forces and a restoration of the monarchy; both targets were certainly within grasp, but the Allies were forced to settle for only the former goal of victory due to earlier high-level discussions that had taken place between Churchill and Soviet Premier Joseph Stalin. McDowell’s information, it appears, had arrived too late to have an effect on the outcome of the war in Yugoslavia.

Several men on the McDowell mission also voiced their opinions in favor of American backing for the Nationalist Chetniks as opposed to the Communist Partisans. One piece of OSS correspondence sent to General Donovan upon return of the McDowell mission in November 1944 read that “Serb Nationalists [Chetniks] were active in attacking the enemy” but that “Partisan forces avoided attacking Germans to concentrate and attack Mihailovich Serbs.” We must also remember that Soviet troops were in Yugoslavia by this time as well. In addition, this piece of correspondence said that the “Serbian Nationalist movement has support of the vast majority of people in Serbia proper, [Serb-populated] Herzegovina and southern Bosnia. These conclusions, based on proper observation, are entirely opposed to British intelligence reports on conditions in Serbia.”29 It has also been noted that “praise of Mihajlović and doubt about the efficacy of the Communists in Yugoslavia filled OSS reports and, surprisingly, General [Major

29 Quoted in ibid., 208-09.
General Sir Kenneth W.D. Strong, OSS’s old nemesis in [British military intelligence outfit] G-2, took the same line.”30

There is, however, a rather pertinent suggestion by Jozo Tomasevich, an economist who authored *War and Revolution in Yugoslavia, 1941-45: Occupation and Collaboration*, that appears to be in error. He is cited in Dušan Biber’s article: “Tomasevich remarked, ‘One can imagine the reaction to these recommendations among the British authorities and among American authorities who supported British policy in Yugoslavia.’ He then made the following point, ‘In other words, the recommendations could hardly have been taken seriously.’”31 The issue is that McDowell’s recommendations were certainly within reason of being taken seriously. They had outlined the truest version of events when the effectiveness of Mihailović and the Chetniks was scrutinized. The exposure of the grave error in Yugoslav policy was evidenced, so much so that Biber notes that “We now know that these recommendations remained under seven seals even inside the American military apparatus.”32 Once again, had at least some of the many recommendations been implemented or at the very least considered, Yugoslavia’s fate could possibly have been altered in regard to its postwar political composition.33


32 Biber, “Failure,” 213.

33 Another misstatement on American Balkan policy has been noted in *The Shadow Warriors: O.S.S. and the Origins of the C.I.A.*, by Bradley F. Smith. In this text, Smith wrote, “The head of the mission, Robert McDowell, was a conservative anti-Titoist who apparently encouraged Mihajlović [sic] to believe that Britain and America would ultimately assist him in his struggle with the communists” (282).
This is in stark contrast to what the fact of the matter actually was. Lt. Colonel McDowell had been under strict orders from General Donovan, for the latter had received a letter from President Roosevelt emphasizing the scope of the mission. Brown wrote, “At the same time the OSS officers going to Mihailović’s headquarters ‘should be instructed, and they should make this clear to Mihailović, that they are not to become involved in political questions or permit political functions to be attributed to them.’” Brown’s assessment is in direct line with what President Roosevelt wrote to Prime Minister Churchill when the latter initially requested that no more men be sent to General Mihailović: “My thought in authorizing an O.S.S. mission to Mihailovic Area was to obtain intelligence and the mission was to have no political functions whatever.”

When considering Roosevelt’s fateful decision, the input from the OSS agents must also be considered. These were able men who had been seeing first-hand action against the Germans in Yugoslavia and had been embedded with the Chetniks. Different from the mission of the men who were sent to the Partisans, those who were in the presence of the Chetniks had actually been involved in the missions against the Germans on most every occasion, such as in the case described herein by David Martin. Quite to the contrary, the Allied agents sent to the Partisans had nearly always not been allowed to go into the field with the Partisans. Rather, they had to rely on information and reports of the missions that had been provided to them by the Partisans themselves, as noted in Chapter 1. In short, this was certainly not reliable information as it is highly likely that

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34 Brown, War Report, 453.
35 Kimball, Complete, 80.
36 Martin, Web, 153.
The information had been skewed by the Partisans in order to cast themselves in a more favorable light than the Chetniks so that support for the nationalists would be withdrawn.  

There is also the issue of the legitimacy of the information sent to the OSS offices from the men on the ground. When information had been passed on from the agents involved with the Chetniks, such as from Lt. Colonel McDowell and Captain Ellsworth R. Kramer, a subordinate of the lieutenant colonel on the downed airmen/intelligence gathering mission, there is no evidence that the acquired information was aggrandized as had been the case with the data coming from the agents sent on the mission to the Partisans by British agents at SOE Cairo. President Roosevelt ought to have acted upon and taken advantage of vital new information available after the return of Lt. Colonel McDowell’s mission from General Mihailović’s headquarters.

The OSS agents apparently knew of the danger awaiting General Mihailović upon their withdrawal from Chetnik-controlled territory. This has been described by Walter R. Roberts in *Tito, Mihailović and the Allies, 1941-1945*. When Lt. Colonel McDowell was finally evacuated on November 1, nearly two months after the order to cancel the mission had been handed down from President Roosevelt, he “offered to bring Mihailović out at the same time, but the general refused.” Roberts notes that McDowell “confirms this, saying that he was instructed by OSS Bari to offer Mihailović the opportunity to leave with him. The general, however, turned him down emphatically,
rejecting the life of an exile or refugee and insisting that he would remain and die in his
own country.”39 It seems only appropriate that the Allies would offer General Mihailović
this chance to escape since they had impeded the Chetnik struggle against the Germans.
Nevertheless, this obstruction was not the fault of the Allied men who were sent on
missions to his headquarters.40

Information from non-OSS Personnel

Aside from the sources that have revealed the inner workings of the OSS missions
to the Chetniks, another example of the effectiveness of the Chetnik forces is available
that is similar in nature to that recorded by David L. Martin and presented in Chapter 2.
In that instance, the credit for a successful assault on the Germans was given to an
opposing force. The following example, however, was picked up by an American
serviceman.

While waiting to be rescued after being shot down over Yugoslavia, a United States
Army Air Corps officer, Lieutenant Richard L. Felman, relates that he took part in raids
and such along with the Chetniks, who had rescued him after he bailed out of his burning
aircraft. When back in New York harbor soon after being airlifted to safety around
August 10, 1944, he was reading a copy of The New York Times that had been provided
by the Red Cross. Inside the newspaper, Felman recounts that an article read, “‘Marshal
Tito announced his Partisan forces had successfully destroyed the large ammunition

39 Roberts, Allies, 279.
40 Ibid., 279.
dump and railroad terminal at Gorny Milanovatz after fighting off superior numbers of German and collaborator [sic] Chetnik troops.” 41

Lieutenant Felman writes that he was on that particular raid with General Mihailović’s men, adding that “there wasn’t a Red Star within 50 miles” of the munitions site. He attributes this lack of correct credit to the fact that the Partisans had control of the media in the dismembered Yugoslavia. Thusly, in addition to Communists having infiltrated the SOE network, the Partisans had command of news sources in the country as well.

There is also another issue that can be gathered from this event. If this participant found that he had assisted the Chetniks in actions against the German occupiers, and the credit was taken by the Partisans, it is fairly safe to assume that this sort of chicanery was in constant use by the Partisans. Such misconceptions would play into their hands and make the Partisans appear to be the more credible and dependable force standing against the Axis. This is what Prime Minister Churchill conveyed to Brigadier Maclean, as has been reported in Chapter 2. There is also the instance where the BBC reported the mission of the Chetniks as having been accomplished by the Partisans and the actual Chetnik participants hearing the credit given to the other faction, as noted in Chapter 2.

In addition, reports coming from the Partisans were made to appear as if they were only defending themselves from the Chetniks in addition to the Germans. The news report clearly refers to them as being in cahoots with the Germans. This was mentioned briefly in Chapter 2 and will be perused in Chapter 4. Much like unfortunately being

dubbed a racist or some other similar term in modern society, being labeled as a collaborator would be hard to shake for the Chetniks, especially if it were not true. Accusations such as these would prove incredibly difficult for General Mihailović and the Chetniks to overcome.

Unlike the unfortunate events that unfolded where the Serbian general’s subordinate, Lieutenant Colonel Rudi Perhinek, learned that the mission that he had just taken part in was credited to the competing faction, as noted in Chapter 2, Major Felman did not stop to question how the giving of credit for damage inflicted upon the enemy could not have been so arbitrarily bestowed upon another. Rather, he simply moved on to his next objective—business back home in the United States—because he was no longer an immediate stake-holder in Yugoslavia. One can only wonder how often the credit for someone’s deeds was given to another during the course of the war.

**King Peter II of Yugoslavia and President Roosevelt**

A series of exchanges between King Peter II and President Roosevelt exist and are worthy of further investigation. The exiled monarch gave a thorough description of the circumstances in his country to the president; the king also implored upon the good nature of the president to aid him in his royal plight. According to Anthony Cave Brown, these letters display what led up to “The high political drama in which the fate of Yugoslavia was decided began in May 1944, when, under strong Churchillian pressure, [King Peter] dismissed Mihailović as war minister.”42 One letter and one reply, in

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particular, must be scrutinized, for in them can be seen the manner in which King Peter II implores upon the good will of Roosevelt to do what he can to aid him and the people of Yugoslavia against the nagging insistence of Prime Minister Churchill.

There are several relevant segments in the letter from the king to Roosevelt. In addressing the issue at hand, the sovereign felt that he was being pressured by Churchill to dispense with support to General Mihailović and this was the main issue of contention. He writes, “On March 15th [1944], [British Foreign Secretary] Mr. [Anthony] Eden advised me to change the Royal Government and to abandon the Minister of War General Mihailovich. Two days later the British Ambassador told me that I did not need a Government. […] On March 18th, Mr. Churchill asked that on the day following my marriage I should no longer have a Government, but only a committee,” and that this body “would begin negotiations with Tito.”43 The British were using all manner of political clout to get the young King Peter II, then only 21 years old, to turn over control of Yugoslavia to Tito, thus losing his sovereignty. By the date that all these conversations were transpiring, spring 1944, Churchill had decided not to support the Chetniks any longer, as previously mentioned; what is more, the British had opted to withdraw their officers from the Chetniks by February 17,44 and so Churchill must have felt prompted to pressure the king into declaring the same policy.


44 Quoted in Lamb, Leader, 264.
However, King Peter II did not readily take this position. The king expressed that relieving the general of command was an action that he was not willing to undertake.

The king’s detailed reluctance was written as such to Roosevelt:

> The crux of the question is the Minister of War General Mihailovich, whom the Government cannot abandon, without betraying the people [...] I, personally, would become the traitor of my people and My Army in Yugoslavia [...] I told Mr. Churchill that it was too great a responsibility for me to assume and that I would like him to transmit his view in writing. Mr. Churchill replied that this was not an official conversation, but a friendly suggestion, on which Tito insisted. The reality is murder, under disguise of my personal suicide.45

It is peculiar that Churchill did not wish to convey his position to the king in writing. But Peter II did opt to tell Roosevelt about his discussions with the prime minister, thus vying to get the president into his corner for the next round of badgering from that prime minister, which he seems to have surmised.

This prompted Churchill to sternness. The king relates that “On April 13th, Mr. Churchill insisted again, this time with an ultimatum-like request and with the menace that he would accuse General Mihailovich of collaboration with the Germans and that he would treat all of us accordingly, myself as well as the Royal Government.”46 What is observed here is the recognition that Churchill would have General Mihailović abandoned in favor of the Partisan leader Tito, but the prime minister neglected to say why this should come to pass. Although Anthony Eden would later regret the sacking of General Mihailović, he made the proposition to King Peter II at the request of Churchill. Because of this, Churchill had been weighing the circumstances in relation to what could

45 *FRUS, 1944, IV: Europe, 1360.*

46 Ibid.
happen in Yugoslavia, but having done so with the faulty intelligence that has been described in detail in previous chapters had a detrimental effect on the decision of Roosevelt.

In this same letter, the king went on to try and persuade Roosevelt to consider his position before the fate of Yugoslavia be determined. He wrote that his countrymen “never [asked] the price to be paid with their blood, carrying on their shoulders the Cross of our Lord. They should be helped and not left alone to fight in the service of our civilization.” Furthermore, the king described his stance on the fate of Yugoslavia, conveying that “one of the greatest scandals in history” would be administered if General Mihailović were to be dropped by the Western Allies. He added that if Tito were allowed to control the region, then communism would certainly be an issue of contention “for all of Central Europe” and that the problem would simply spread. The king also felt that, since it was the Yugoslav people who were fighting against the Axis forces, the destiny of the nation should not “be decided outside of us and without the participation of one of the three great Allies the United States of America.” In this piece of correspondence, it is quite clear that, like Churchill, King Peter II knew of the coming danger of communism to the Balkans, especially Yugoslavia, and implores upon the good nature of President Roosevelt to do what was within his presidential power to do to help save the whole of the region from this fate. In closing, he states that “I, My Government and My Army in my country, as well as my entire people stand ready, as always, to make the greatest
sacrifices for the common victory over the enemy and to rise as one man at the chosen and agreed moment.”

King Peter II displays the qualities of leadership in his plea. Even so, President Roosevelt still appears to communicate in his reply with the king as if he were a child. In a draft letter reproduced in *The Foreign Relations of the United States*, Roosevelt replies, “Let me frankly say that I think your advisers and your officials have not always shown the wisdom necessary to achieve” unification of the Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes and “Let us not forget that the Mihailovich question has become more political than military.” The president appears to use this as the basis for informing the king that he will not stand with him against the spurning of Churchill. Roosevelt even knows of the fruits of dismissing General Mihailović, stating that “While our relations with the Partisan leaders are of a military character, we are fully aware of the political implications of the Partisan movement, and of the desire of its leaders for representation or recognition, also in the field of foreign affairs.” Despite this knowledge, Roosevelt did not convey a sense of any danger in supporting the Partisans to King Peter II. The president closed, “If some of my observations may seem disappointing, it is because my warm friendship for you prompts me to give you in this personal and direct way my thoughts on the several questions you ask” and that he did not want the king to “think that I underrate your own admirable efforts on behalf of your country and people. These are times that strain to the limit the energies and wisdom of the most experienced statesmen.”

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47 Ibid., 1360-61.

48 Ibid., 1367-68.
Although this volume of the official collection of U. S. foreign correspondence notes that it is not certain when the final draft of this particular letter was sent to the king, the understanding of the president pertaining to the king’s request for assistance in his debate with the British prime minister over the situation with Mihailović is undeniable. In it, we come to the conclusion that the president had already by May 12, 1944, made up his mind that to support General Mihailović in Yugoslavia would not be in the best interest of the United States or Yugoslavia itself.

Furthermore, it is evident in the letter that President Roosevelt feels that the Partisans are much stronger than the Chetniks. Admittedly, this must have weighed heavily in the ultimate decision for the Western Allies to eventually end their support for Mihailović and in turn solely back Tito to a greater extent. King Peter II had made a strong case in asking for the Allies not to take this step, citing as he did the quality of General Mihailović’s leadership in Yugoslavia and the heavy mist that would be cast over Central and South East Europe if the smothering clouds of communism were to be unleashed in the region. Even so, as the president and the other Allied luminaries had perpetually been receiving reports that they had not initially known to be untrue, the die was cast: the result was in opposition to the Serbian general. This is evidenced by a letter approved by Roosevelt and sent to Tito through the OSS. In part, it read that the work of the Partisans will help “the Allied command in working out the plans for rendering more effective assistance in strengthening resistance in Yugoslavia to the Germans, for contriving improved service of supply, and for fitting the operations of
Yugoslavia into the general scheme for the conduct of the war.”\textsuperscript{49} The date of the draft is May 13, 1944, the day after the draft was prepared by Roosevelt in his response to King Peter II’s request for assistance and advice with the Churchill conversations.

Roosevelt appears to have come to the conclusion of not continuing to support Mihailović under pressure from Churchill. The prime minister had by this juncture, May of 1944, been influenced by the communist infiltrators at SOE Cairo into believing that Mihailović’s men were not as effective in fighting Germans as Tito’s followers were, despite the evidence that had been provided to him from reliable, first-hand accounts of people on the ground in Yugoslavia such as Lieutenant Colonel McDowell. The inquiries of King Peter II to President Roosevelt were not enough to change the president’s mind on this matter.

**Franklin Roosevelt and Secretary of State Cordell Hull**

President Roosevelt had members in the White House Cabinet that he could call upon for help in making appropriate decisions, especially in regard to the quagmire of Yugoslav policy. One source of such information to President Roosevelt was Secretary of State Cordell Hull. Hull received a letter from the U.S. Ambassador to the United Kingdom, J.G. Winant. Dated May 12 and received by Secretary Hull on May 13, the letter read in part that “The Foreign Office said that Brigadier Maclean\textsuperscript{50} reports that Tito will have no dealings whatsoever with […] King [Peter II] as long as Mihailovic remains

\textsuperscript{49} Ibid., 1369.

\textsuperscript{50} British Brigadier Fitzroy Maclean, an SOE officer who had been embedded with Marshal Tito and the Partisans. Brigadier Maclean was described at length in Chapter 2.
Minister of War, but that it is remotely possible that Tito might deal with the King on a purely personal basis and not as King, if Mihailovic were dropped.”

Hull stated early on in the war that since Yugoslavia had been attacked by the Axis forces, it had been U.S. policy to aid the Yugoslavs. In his memoirs, he wrote that in a statement given to the general public on April 6, 1941, the day of the German-led Axis invasion, he “emphasized the sympathy of the American people for Yugoslavia and our intention to send military and other supplies to Yugoslavia as soon as possible.”

This policy had been brought to a halt by the summer of 1944 at the request and constant pressure of Churchill. Since the war had started, it is highly likely that Hull and Roosevelt were in communication with each other at regular intervals; thus, the contact and frequent discussions would have further solidified the stance on Yugoslavia taken by the president, if and when the issue of Yugoslavia arose. This suggests that Roosevelt was being supplied with enough evidence and first-hand accounts from reliable sources in Yugoslavia, such as the OSS agents, as to why the United States ought to reestablish support for General Mihailović. It must be noted, nevertheless, that Roosevelt had many things to consider in the conduct of the war and so the issues in Yugoslavia were likely regarded as low-level concerns.

We cannot know with any level of confidence that President Roosevelt was sensitive to the exact contents of the exchange between Ambassador Winant and Secretary Hull because we see that this letter was sent on the same day that Roosevelt

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51 *FRUS*, 1365-66.

penned his draft to young King Peter II. There were other pressing matters for Roosevelt as well, such as American strategy for the rest of Europe and Japan in addition to postwar considerations. Though we are unsure as to when the president’s draft was finally sent, as has been mentioned above, there is sufficient evidence that information coming back from the field, such as in Yugoslavia, was considered to be legitimate in nature. Nonetheless, the misinformation that also made its way from the field to the offices of the British and American commands ultimately led to the undoing of Mihailović.

There is also another point of significance that must be made about Ambassador Winant’s memo. It mentions that Tito would possibly be willing to meet with King Peter II only if the meeting were to be on a personal level, and not as subject to sovereign, as the king would have it. This reveals that all of the wrong information that arrived at the desks of the president and his men served the ultimate purposes of having General Mihailović done away with as well as positioning Tito for postwar leadership in Yugoslavia.

A Summary of Roosevelt’s Judgment

Because of the evidence presented herein, it can be said that the president made several wrong decisions in regard to Balkan policy, especially that which concerned Yugoslavia and halting the spread of communism. The first was the aforementioned correspondence with King Peter II. An adult and responsible leader in his own right, the king should not have been addressed as anything less than the head of a state. But because this was what transpired, the king took this as a total drop in support and
Mihailović and the loyalist Chetniks would suffer accordingly. The king was, quite unfortunately, not to be disappointed in making this assumption.

Further, the withdrawal of support for General Mihailović and the full support for Tito would have consequences that, unbeknownst to the Allies, would last for many decades and even have a critical effect until the present day. These consequences also promise to remain past our time as the fallout from the rule of Marshal Tito has results that show themselves quite often. This has been evidenced as recently as the various conflicts during the disintegration of Yugoslavia in the 1990s and even early in 2008 with the ethnic Albanians’ bid for secession from Serbia in Kosovo. It must be noted, however, that these events could have happened directly after the Second World War ended as well.

Next, the neglect of President Roosevelt to investigate further the claims of the Allied agents in Yugoslavia, and with General Mihailović, in particular, would have dire consequences for the Chetniks and for the Allied command. As has been shown, important OSS men in place in Yugoslavia were certainly reputable and their reports and suggestions should have been taken at a higher value than Roosevelt placed on them, for he most probably knew of their content. Conversely, OSS agents, who were placed with Tito, probably felt that he was the worthy of continued support as well. But Roosevelt’s refusal to act on intelligence provided by the American agents is directly related to the next point of contention, which deals with Churchill.

Last, as gathered from the correspondence between Roosevelt and Churchill, the president probably did not discuss the intelligence as thoroughly as he could have with
the prime minister. Simply replying, as has been noted herein, that an honest mistake had been made when permitting another American mission to go to Mihailović does not warrant a thorough and appropriate response to the prime minister. The reasons that Roosevelt left it at this may have been sufficient. Though the president could surely not forecast the outcome of events as they unfolded after the war was over, such as the spread of communism or the chasm that opened betwixt the Soviet Union and some of the Balkan States, we can conclude that the president enjoyed a certain level of authority in regard to making executive decisions and that, for whatever unknown reason, he ultimately failed to exercise this authority where it would have been put to great use, which was in Yugoslavia. Why he did not act upon the information rests with him in the grave and has been lost to the annals of history.

Conclusion

As has been displayed herein, Franklin Roosevelt had access to and, more than likely, direct and undeniable knowledge of a good deal of information that he could have used to make a case to Winston Churchill concerning who to support in Yugoslavia—Marshal Josip Broz “Tito” and the Communist-led Partisans or Serbian General Dragoljub (Draža) Mihailović and the loyal, monarchy-backing Chetniks. Though a total reversal in policy would have been a drastic measure and would probably have caused a serious fissure between Joseph Stalin and his major Western Allies, at the very least, Mihailović and the Chetniks should have been given a fighting chance against the Axis forces as well as, to a lesser, defensive extent, Tito and the Partisans. In addition,
creating this important change in policy would have virtually ensured the return of King Peter II to Yugoslavia in order to continue his rule of the Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes that had been interrupted just a handful of years before. After all, this is what Churchill was so heavily in favor of to begin with, which is why he had decided that Tito should be supported on the peninsula. The Partisan leader had promised on many occasions that the various peoples of Yugoslavia would have the right to self-determination: they would have the right to choose whether they wanted the monarchy to return or if they wanted to rid themselves of the constitutional monarchy. Also shown, the prime minister sincerely thought, perhaps quite unfortunately, that the chief partisan would follow through with his promises.
Chapter 4

Fallout from the War

Overview

It seems, then, that President Franklin Roosevelt had an abundance of information from which to draw and make a solid case for why the Western Allies should continue to back General Draža Mihailović. This could have been accomplished even in addition to remaining in support of Tito. As such, several inquiries must be made in recognition of this knowledge.

First, exactly why the Chetniks were not supported any longer should be discussed. An intricate web has been woven in the explanation of Allied Yugoslav policy, so to understand the results of the general’s dismissal, the events leading to it must be fully understood as well. Next, Winston Churchill’s motives must be examined. Simply because the United States and Great Britain were and remain Allies does not mean that they moved in lockstep with each other on all policies. As will be seen, quite the opposite was true in regard to a variety of Allied concerns, Yugoslavia not the least among them. This leads to the next area of inquiry, which is the correspondence between the two great Western Allied leaders. This examination will reveal that the two leaders disagreed on topics just as they got along with each other.
The following two areas are directly related to each other. The efficacy of the Chetniks against the German war machine will be discussed briefly. Coupled with this inquiry is the further concern about the collaboration of Chetniks with the Axis forces in Yugoslavia, which has been discussed earlier in this work. This has been one of the more important topics for the British; this issue can be distinguished as being one of the more relevant factors that had contributed to the undoing of Allied support for the Chetniks.

First, however, the Allied Grand Strategy must be understood. The American and British policies for Yugoslavia were but part of a larger policy for the whole of the European theater, both for during the war and in the postwar period. What was good for the continent often overshadowed the wants and needs of the actors in Yugoslavia, as will be shown. In great part, the manner in which the Grand Strategy played out had to do with the October 9, 1944 (Operation TOLSTOY) meeting between Churchill and Joseph Stalin and their discussion about how they would distribute their influence, if that is the proper word, over Eastern and Southeastern Europe.

**The Allied Grand Strategy for Europe**

The Grand Alliance of the United States and Great Britain, as related to often by Winston Churchill, had a Grand Strategy in conducting the Second World War. When it was abundantly clear that the Allies were becoming victorious in the war in Europe, Churchill felt that the time to implement the Allied Grand Strategy had arrived; the components of the Grand Strategy will be discussed shortly. Regrettably for the Western
Allies, though, their respective goals did not always agree with each other. And to the unaware chagrin of the actors in the fractured Yugoslavia, as well as many other European states, their individual interests were not always the priority of the Western Allies in the Grand Strategy.

Let us first examine the differences between British and American understanding of this occasionally contradictory Grand Strategy, according to Mark A. Stoler in his essay “Strategy, Grand and Otherwise: A Commentary.”¹ British policy can easily be summarized as concerned foremost with defeating Nazi Germany, which is essentially the same goal as that of the Americans. There is a slight difference, however, in that President Roosevelt wished to beat the Germans, who were seen as the more perilous adversary and whose defeat appeared to be more strategic, before setting the sights of the United States toward defeating Imperial Japan. This could be observed as a bit of an odd policy, since the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor is the action that forced the United States to finally become involved in the Second World War. Most assuredly, American citizens wanted vengeance against Japan, as often evidenced in the brutality of the conflict in the Pacific Theater.²

The British and the Americans had another common goal in the Grand Strategy. Both desired to keep the Soviet Union in the war against the Germans, according to


The purposes for this are manifold. First, the Soviets were needed in order to defeat the Germans. The Germans had already invaded the Soviet Union in 1941 and pushed as far as Moscow by October. However, this invasion occurred early in the war and the German army had been pushed back past the frontier of Poland before the planned execution of Operation OVERLORD. Even so, the Red Army would have to keep a sufficient number of divisions engaged in battle while the Western Allies implemented the continental invasion in order for it to be successful and so that Europe could be liberated more quickly. Next, Roosevelt wished for continued Soviet involvement in order to take Marshal Stalin up in his commitment to enter the war in the Pacific theater against Imperial Japan.\(^3\) Having the Red Army ready to move against the Japanese was thought to be beneficial by many Allied policymakers by the time that the Yalta Conference convened in early February 1945. Moreover, the atom bomb was not yet ready and would not be tested until July 2, 1945.

Another concern of the Western Allies was that since the Soviets had pushed so far west, a separate peace deal might be struck between the Germans and the Soviets. The Soviets likely had the same concern about the Western Allies making peace with the Germans. This event would be catastrophic for the Western Allies as the Germans could then concentrate a significant number of divisions against the Allies on the Western

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\(^3\) Even though the war raged in the Pacific with the Japanese pitted against the British and the Americans, the Soviet Union had not entered the war, and so it could use all of its resources and troop capacity against the Axis forces in Europe. The Soviet Union did declare war on August 8, 1945, after the first atomic bomb had been dropped on Hiroshima. Japan surrendered unconditionally on September 2, 1945. Whether it was necessary for the Soviet Union to enter the war in order to expedite Japan’s surrender remains open to conjecture.
Front, jeopardizing any chances of a successful invasion.\(^4\) As such, it was necessary not to upset the Soviets and have them bow out of the war. This is one example where Yugoslavia comes into play. The British and Americans did not want to make the Soviets angry over Yugoslavia and force the Soviets to change their policy once it was realized that they would have their influence over much of Eastern and Central Europe.

This leads us to the point of contention between the two Western Allies, as described again by Stoler. In order to hand a speedy defeat to the Nazis, the invasion of the continent would be required in early 1944, as agreed upon at the Tehran Conference. This is where the policy of keeping the Soviet Union in the war becomes even more apparent. On one hand, Churchill indeed wanted to invade the continent, but he was afraid of another disaster such as had occurred at Dunkirk\(^5\) and the stalemate that ensued in Europe during World War I. Because of this and because of the other clear successes the Allies had in such landings as North Africa and Italy, the prime minister called for a smaller invasion, or possibly several. Churchill suggested the south of France, where the Vichy regime had been set up, as well as Istria to push toward the Ljubljana Gap and into Vienna, or even continuing north from Rome to Vienna, all of which were occupied by

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\(^5\) The Battle of Dunkirk, France pitted the Allies (Belgium, France, Great Britain and Poland) and the Germans against each other between May 26 and June 4, 1940. It culminated in the massive evacuation of over 300,000 Allied troops across the English Channel, codenamed Operation DYNAMO. For further details of the battle and its consequences, see Richard Collier, *The Sands of Dunkirk* (New York: Dutton, 1961) and Robert Carse, *Dunkirk, 1940: A History* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1970), for example.
Germans.  

Presumably, either of the latter two actions would be undertaken in order to check a Soviet advance and prevent them from gaining too much land in Europe. On the other hand, Roosevelt, consistent with his policy of defeating the Germans first and as soon as possible, upheld the agreement drawn up in Tehran and called for the cross-Channel invasion, with all the Allied troops concentrated at this point.

The Grand Strategy looked past the war and into the future of Europe as well. Charles F. Brower notes that Yugoslavia and the rest of “Eastern Europe would be a Soviet sphere of influence [after the Axis forces were defeated]—this FDR understood and accepted.”

The president knew that the continent would have to be rebuilt after the war had been won and knew that the Soviets would be less inclined to take part in this with aid from the United States, if that were even a possibility after the war. The same historian also adds that “The effective coordination of these military and political strategies would help to create postwar opportunities for FDR to use American economic aid to induce Soviet moderation in Eastern Europe.”

This did not come to pass, but Roosevelt would never know the difference.

As it stood, the Allies had an agreement that any conquered lands would fall under the influence of the victors. Warren F. Kimball writes, “The Big Three had already demonstrated their acceptance of a variation on ‘to the victor goes the spoils.’

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8 Ibid., 3.
Occupation rights went with military victory.”

9 Kimball’s comment complies with what Milovan Djilas wrote in *Conversations with Stalin*: “Everyone imposes his system as far as his army can reach. It cannot be otherwise.”

10 This is an important aspect of British policy in the Grand Strategy. According to David Reynolds, Churchill’s strategy included cutting off the Soviet Red Army in its thrust toward Central and Southeast Europe. Reynolds notes that this seemed to be possible according to the British prime minister. Evidently, Churchill became a bit overconfident of his rapport with Stalin and with the capabilities of the British forces. Reynolds writes that the British prime minister “told the skeptical Chiefs of Staff” in early September 1944 that the British Army in Europe would soon contain “powerful forces in Austria and from Trieste northwards at the close of the German war, and should not yield central and southern Europe entirely to Soviet ascendancy and domination.”

11 We see that the British prime minister still desired to keep as many people and lands out of the hands of the Communists as possible. In this statement, he made his intentions clear to other Allied leaders.

The problem with this strategy, good as it might sound, was that it was contradictory to the “percentages agreement” discussed in Chapter 2. Churchill conceded that postwar Europe would be composed of a certain Soviet sphere of influence that would amount to direction over virtually all of the Slavic realm in Europe and more. One

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must ask how it is that the Grand Strategy was supposed to halt the Soviet advance and limit postwar influence if the British prime minister already admitted that the Soviets would take over the affairs of their fellow Slavs as well as the Magyars and Romanians. Greece would be saved from the grip of communism, which was pleasing to the both the British and the Soviets; this arrangement can then be viewed as a trade-off.

The Grand Strategy also contradicted the intentions of the downgrading of General Mihailović. As the strategy called for the westward and southward advances of the Soviet Red Army and the spread of Communism to be simultaneously checked, it seems that the promise of Tito to the British prime minister would ensure that the people of a re-emerging Yugoslavia would have a say in their own fate became, in effect, useless. This would not come to pass, as we see that Tito took over the nation by force instead, after having appealed to so many Yugoslavs of different ethnic extractions, each of which would end up with its own federated republic under the direction of communism.

Furthermore, there is yet another contradiction in the Grand Strategy that can be gathered from the lack of support for the Chetnik leader. The collective Western Allied policy that Churchill insisted on implementing negated the exiled King Peter II from going back to his ancestral homeland to continue the royal family’s dynasty. However, the drop in Western Allied support for Mihailović was enacted to ensure that King Peter II would have the opportunity to return to Yugoslavia as the nation’s ruler, but instead, the opposite transpired. Military considerations came before the political considerations, at least according to the British prime minister as related in Chapter 2, such as the expulsion of Axis forces from occupied countries and their subsequent liberation.
Nevertheless, there had to be a fundamental level of thought and concern that was made in regard to the postwar political system that would be established (or perhaps even re-established) in Yugoslavia.

In all, the Allied Grand Strategy almost seemed too grand to be pulled off. Some aspects of it were implemented; in fact, what was enacted proved to be what was needed to defeat the Germans: the Soviets remained in the war, leading to the successful invasion of the European mainland and subsequent global victories for the Allies. Despite this positive outcome, the Yugoslavs, among others, would not become the beneficiaries of the Grand Strategy.

**Reasons for Mihailović’s Departure from the Allied Sphere**

There is a culmination of several reasons that General Mihailović was dismissed by the Allies, often unrelated to one another but in the end each essentially contributing to why support was withdrawn. In regard to a unified Yugoslav effort to battle the Nazi occupiers, which was Winston Churchill’s vision for the war against the Axis forces in the country, Tito appeared to him to be the better man for the job than General Mihailović. The Chetnik leader certainly wanted the Germans and their cronies expelled from the dismembered Yugoslavia as much as the Allied leaders did, but the prime minister thought that General Mihailović was in favor of keeping his forces free of non-Serbs. As has been noted in Chapter 2, this was not totally the case. The Serbian general’s primary interest was the welfare of the Serbian people, which, unfortunately, would not make him all that appealing to non-Serbs. This then made Mihailović a strong
supporter of the monarchy, which Churchill saw as detrimental to the Allied war effort. Even though the prime minister supported the restoration of the monarchy, he felt that Mihailović’s leadership would not draw non-Serbs to the Chetnik cause, whereas he felt that the Partisans held this sort of appeal for the various Yugoslav peoples.

Moreover, as has been noted in the previous chapter, the general’s concern for the well-being of the Serbs made him, on occasion, hesitant to act due to the high cost of Serbian lives: One hundred Serb peasants killed for every dead German soldier and fifty Serb peasants killed for every wounded German soldier. Incidentally, we can ascertain that the Croatian Ustasha would not care so much for the killing of innocent Serbian peasants, for it had done its part to exterminate Serbs in a number of massacres.

General Mihailović’s position on wanting to oust the Germans ought to have solidified Allied support, but the contrary happened for several reasons. In the first place, Churchill had been grossly misinformed because of the false information that was purveyed by the communist sympathizers who had infiltrated the ranks of the SOE office in Cairo; this misinformation had been provided to him by the time that he made his decision to no longer support Mihailović upon returning from Tehran in December 1943. As a result, he was unable to be swayed from this stance either by his own War Cabinet or President Roosevelt. It was entirely too late for the prime minister to retract his full support for Tito and again support the Chetniks. Unfortunately for and quite

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12 See the previous chapters for the list of sources.

unbeknownst to the Serbian general, the pro-Tito reports that emanated from Cairo would help lead to his unseating as vanguard in the Yugoslav resistance effort.

Next, Tito’s empty promises of a monarchical restoration were enough to lead the British prime minister to withdraw support finally and fully for the Chetniks and General Mihailović. It is true that Churchill was highly suspect of Tito and his plans for postwar Yugoslavia and that the prime minister knew that the Partisan leader certainly had been a disciple of some form of communism for a formidable length of time, as we have seen in evidence rendered in the postwar era by British Brigadier Fitzroy MacLean. Time and again, Churchill had to pacify Tito when the Partisan leader became infuriated with the Western Allies for not withdrawing their support for the Serbian general. Nevertheless, Tito’s plan to double-cross Prime Minister Churchill would not come to fruition until Churchill had trod down a path of support from which he could not return, even though this was known by Brigadier Maclean.

Moreover, an occasional number of exchanges occurred between Churchill and Roosevelt over the support of guerilla groups in Yugoslavia. With this, the small chasm that had sometimes been conspicuous between the president and the prime minister on a variety of issues threatened to become wider than necessary. This was particularly true when Roosevelt suggested that General William J. Donovan take charge of a combined Allied effort within the remnants of Yugoslavia. From this exchange, it is clear that Churchill did not want the Americans getting in the way of the progress that he had seemed to make when he presented his case for the support of Tito and the Communist-led Partisans.
Fourthly, Winston Churchill had to save face, so to speak, with regard to Franklin Roosevelt, since the British prime minister had made such a big production out of dropping other Allied support for General Mihailović. Even though Churchill would realize that a mistake in Yugoslav policy and diplomacy had been made, he could not simply say that he changed his mind. To do so would have been unbecoming of a man in his office and could possibly have affected the morale of the other Allied leaders. This is especially true after he had bickered with Roosevelt over the matter and finally persuaded him to withdraw most OSS personnel and all forms of support from the American mission to the Chetniks, even though a few stragglers were to remain behind to gather intelligence and continue to aid in the rescue and evacuation of U.S. airmen. During mid-to late-1944, Roosevelt permitted these men to stay for but a short time after the collective Allied decision to back Tito was made (the Americans had gone back in to Yugoslavia after this conclusion had been drawn by Churchill when returning from the Tehran Conference), but it must be recalled that these were the same American agents who had to be forced to evacuate and therefore abandon the nationalist Chetniks, leaving them to fend for themselves and eventually succumb to the communist Partisans.

Also, the McDowell Report revealed many formerly unverifiable facts on the ground in Yugoslavia, but appearance of this truth was untimely. Lieutenant Colonel McDowell and his intelligence-gathering officers were finally evacuated from a make-shift Serbian airstrip on November 1, 1944, and the lengthy report was on President Roosevelt’s desk by the end of the month. Unfortunately, this was much too late for the Western Allies to take any action because, as has been mentioned, Soviet forces had
already reached Belgrade before McDowell had left the country. Thus, Tito’s government, though he claimed it to be provisional in nature, could no longer be displaced by Allied or Chetnik forces. It has also been noted that a plebiscite was held on November 27, 1945, but due to strong-arm tactics and all manner of corruption, Marshal Tito naturally won the election as evidenced that “Tito’s movement obtained ninety-six percent of the votes cast.”  

Perhaps this helped to justify the Provisional Government that Tito had established two years prior. Moreover, the “agreement” between Churchill and Stalin had already been reached and Churchill, as an English gentleman, would not rescind.

Sixthly, any plans to exert military force in favor of a restored Yugoslavian monarchy would not have been plausible, or even recommended, for that matter. The continental Axis forces had been beaten back; since this was the point of resistance in Europe, the United States, now under the leadership of Harry Truman, had decided that more troops were needed to defeat the last enemy, Imperial Japan. Truman did write to Churchill shortly after V-E Day, however, that “I do not believe that Tito or Russia wants to provoke a major clash while Americans are in Europe.” Thus, America’s attention would be drawn away from Europe and the Soviet Union would hold sway over large portions of Eastern and Central Europe.

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16 Quoted in ibid., 272.
The Motives of Prime Minister Churchill

And so it appears that in many aspects, Winston Churchill is sometimes not all that he is remembered as being. A few commentators make a strong enough case that historians have been forced to rethink their stances on the great Allied leader. In fact, more than just a few writers who are mentioned in this text have expressed their severe discontent with Churchill and have decided to place the blame for many occurrences and mistakes in regard to the dismissal of General Mihailović and the Chetniks solely on him. What sadly remains unclear is why, once Winston Churchill realized that he had made a critical mistake by considering the circumstances in earnest and then following up with his decision, the illegitimate information and advice of communist sympathizers who infiltrated the ranks at the SOE office in Cairo, in addition to some dissenting opinions from several other Allied personages, he did not reverse his decision and reaffirm his support for General Mihailović.

There was still an overly ample amount of time for Churchill to change his position on the Serbian general between the time that the decision was made after Tehran and the time that the Red Army approached the Yugoslav frontier. The tide would still have been turned against the German, Bulgarian, and Italian occupants (the latter had ultimately changed sides after Mussolini had been deposed in late July 1943), and the Axis powers could have been expelled from Yugoslavia about the same time that they would be from Greece had the Allies been able to dedicate more resources to the Chetniks and the Partisans, although the number of troops would have been quite small. Unlike Greece, however, the ultimate fate of Yugoslavia was not solved by means of a
segmented civil war. This is probably what Winston Churchill had hoped to avoid while at the same time whittling down British and American support for the loyal, nationalist Chetniks.

Furthermore, it is quite possible that Stalin knew of the scheme to isolate Mihailović from the Western Allies, thereby withdrawing their support for him. He had given the directive for the Communist Party of Yugoslavia to mobilize and resist the Axis occupation in order to draw some German divisions away from the invasion of the Soviet Union. This occurred on July 3, 1941, after the June 22 German invasion of the Soviet Union, Operation BARBAROSSA. It is here that the significance of the agreement between Churchill and Stalin comes into play, as does the agreement that the Red Army would relinquish control of the lands taken from the Germans in Yugoslavia. Moreover, the Soviets would not remain in Yugoslavia in order to serve occupation duty, as was the case with the various Eastern European peoples whom the Soviets claimed they needed to provide a buffer against future Teutonic aggression; by the time that the Red Army had reached Belgrade, the Partisans controlled most of the nation due to continued Allied support.

To begin with, we see that Stalin had his own ideas for the future of Europe, and perhaps even the world, when he entered the war because of the German invasion, though he initially was trying to save himself. They likely developed fully after the Red Army had turned the tide of the war on the Eastern Front with the German defeat at Stalingrad.

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Seeing that a tenet of communism is world domination for the alleged betterment of the worker, Churchill and the other Allied leaders, Roosevelt in particular, had certain misgivings about aiding both the Soviets and, later, Tito, who would go on to become the strongman of Yugoslavia. The Allies needed to offer assistance but did this with apprehension; in addition, it took a good deal of persuasion on the part of Churchill to get the rest of his colleagues to follow suit, especially Roosevelt. Tito’s demands that the Allies stop supplying General Mihailović with any sort of aid whatever were loudly echoed so that when support for the Chetnik leader was withdrawn, Tito would have an easier time in gaining control of the regions where the Chetniks still held considerable sway. In order for Stalin’s plan for Yugoslavia to be implemented correctly, a swift end to the enemies of the Communist Party of Yugoslavia needed to be enacted directly as well as efficiently.

There is also good reason that the Soviet Army did not stay to serve occupation duty after the war was finished. Tito was a pawn of Moscow before Yugoslavia entered the war and had come up through the ranks to become party chairman in Yugoslavia. He was on the payroll of the Communist Party as an organizer both in the prewar era and promoted communism during the conflict; Stalin took for granted that the Communist leader in Yugoslavia would follow his directions after the war ended. The Red Army had assuredly been on the move into the northern Balkans and had indeed assisted in the liberation of Yugoslavia, if even only to a minor extent, and other Balkan states; the

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19 See Auty, *Tito*, Chapters 15 “International Statesman” (288-308) and 16 “Head of State” (309-336) for further details of Tito’s postwar presidency and formal split with the Soviet-controlled Cominform.
Soviet forces had reached and liberated Belgrade by October 21, 1944.\textsuperscript{20} And so when the war ended, they remained in the surrounding war-shattered nations that had been included in the German sphere of influence, such as Bulgaria, Czechoslovakia, Hungary, and Romania, in order to establish the Soviet satellite nations that would fall behind the Iron Curtain. In turn, these countries would be treated differently from those that contained political elements sympathetic to communism, such as Albania, Greece, and Yugoslavia.

**Correspondence between President Roosevelt and Prime Minister Churchill**

Winston Churchill’s sentiment for both Tito and General Mihailović is easily traceable when perusing the correspondence he wrote and received from his close friend and fellow Allied leader, Franklin Roosevelt. From these primary documents, we can see the clear path that the change in support proceeded upon. Roosevelt was the first to raise the issue of the differences in the intent and capabilities of Tito’s Partisans and Mihailović’s Loyalists. In correspondence dated October 22, 1943, the president wrote the following: “The chaotic condition in the Balkans causes me concern. I am sure you are also worried. In both Yugoslavia and Greece the guerilla forces appear to be engaged largely in fighting each other and not the Germans.” Roosevelt added directly that “If these forces could be united and directed toward a common end they would be very effective.”\textsuperscript{21} He strongly suggested to Churchill in this same piece of correspondence

\textsuperscript{20} Lamb, *Leader*, 270.

\textsuperscript{21} Quoted in Francis L. Loewenheim, Harold D. Langley, and Manfred Jonas, eds., *Churchill and Roosevelt: Their Secret Wartime Correspondence* (New York: Saturday Review Press/E.P. Dutton &
that the American Brigadier General William J. Donovan from the OSS be allowed to try and consolidate the differing factions in Yugoslavia, but to no avail. Roosevelt had a good deal of faith in General Donovan, and the prime minister was quite aware of this. Since this OSS general had been keeping the American commander-in-chief abreast of the developments in Yugoslavia through the communications of men in the field such as Lieutenant Colonel McDowell during his first mission, Roosevelt possibly felt that the Chetniks were an effective fighting force in dire need of continued support.

There are several ways that the American general could have kept the Chetniks on an effective track, had he not been restricted by Churchill’s nixing of Roosevelt’s suggestion not to do so. During spring and summer of 1944, when the second mission to the Chetniks had been undertaken against the wishes of Churchill, Donovan could have kept armaments and supplies coming into the Yugoslav mountain hideaways, thus enabling the Chetniks to continue to sabotage the Axis forces in the region, keeping the Germans and their adherents tied down instead of going to the Eastern Front to support the greater German effort against the Red Army.

General Donovan would have been more than capable for the task that President Roosevelt had suggested he undertake. Donovan was a trusted friend of the president who had been aiding the Chetniks covertly against Axis aggression since the spring of 1943. The fact of the matter is that Churchill was rather well-acquainted with General Donovan, as the general had conducted research in the Balkans and elsewhere as a personal agent of Roosevelt since before the Americans entered the war in late 1941. His Co., 1975), 384-85.
actions with and the help of the loyalists were well known with the prime minister, who had met him on his review of British installations in 1940 and 1941.\textsuperscript{22} The problem therein lies with the fact that by October 1943, Churchill, based largely on the unbeknownst falsely altered evaluations in reports from SOE Cairo, had already largely made up his mind in regard to only supporting Tito. As mentioned, this decision was solidified during the Tehran Conference, which spanned the closing days of November and the opening of December 1943. General Donovan was quite familiar with the circumstances on the ground in Yugoslavia in regard to the strength and effectiveness of General Mihailović’s resistance forces, and he thence attempted to further the cause of the Chetniks.

The prime minister would realize that a mistake in regard to his policy in Yugoslavia had been made. It became steadily more apparent to Churchill during the months following the discussion in Tehran, where the ultimate decision had been crafted, that the Chetniks’ efforts were attempting to be dutifully carried out in an effective fashion. Even so, the communist-led forces in Yugoslavia, whether they be considered countrymen in a greater Yugoslavia or not, were often implementing attacks against the Chetniks, even while the Chetniks were engaged in combat against the \textit{Wehrmacht}.

The McDowell Report, though submitted eleven months after the Tehran Conference, gave support to the American stance on Yugoslavia. Churchill would have benefited from the descriptions and recommendations that it contained. It is most probable that he had access to it or at the very least knew of its existence because General

\begin{footnote}{\textsuperscript{22} Anthony Cave Brown, \textit{The Last Hero: Wild Bill Donovan} (New York: Vintage Books, 1982), 148-49.}\end{footnote}
Donovan had made the report known to President Roosevelt; Martin relates that copies were sent to both Churchill and Roosevelt in the weeks after the lieutenant colonel’s flight from Yugoslavia on November 1, 1944. Resultantly, the Allied leaders could possibly have discussed McDowell’s findings. The colonel wrote in his conclusion that “…the Allies jointly inform both Nationalist and Partisan leaders that civil war and all acts of organized violence must cease immediately” and “…that a provisional government [different from that established by Tito] be set up” in order to run the affairs of Yugoslavia.23 To have done so would have negated the deal struck between Churchill and Stalin in Moscow just a few weeks earlier. The official position of the Big Three Allies would be realized by all at the Yalta Conference in the Crimea, codenamed ARGONAUT, which was held from February 4 through February 11, 1945. This conference confirmed the spheres of influence over Europe by the Allies.

It is also clear that a rift, however small in nature, had surfaced between the British and the Americans in regard to which faction ought to be supported in Yugoslavia by the time that McDowell’s mission had finished. Many American OSS agents were still in favor of Mihailović and the Chetniks. The above selections from McDowell’s Report show that the general and his loyal Nationalists were capable of doing a formidable job should they be given the opportunity and not held back by the lack of Allied support or attacks from the Partisans. Because of this line of thinking, it was quite difficult for Churchill to sell the idea to Roosevelt. After a good deal of persuasion from the British statesman, his American counterpart eventually capitulated, but the decision to make

23 Quoted in Martin, *Web*, 411.
amends with the Soviets would not be understood correctly by Roosevelt’s inexperienced and uninformed successor. It was likely too late for Truman to have accomplished anything in Yugoslavia as by the time that he became president, April 1945, the Soviets had already assisted in liberating the capital of Belgrade some six months prior. There was little that the British could do at this point, for that matter.

**British Understanding of German Sentiment on the Effectiveness of the Chetniks**

There has also been some discussion over how effective General Mihailović was in directing the Chetniks against the Wehrmacht and what sort of threat the Serbian leader and his followers posed to the Axis in the dismembered Yugoslavia. This point was raised at a scholarly conference at the University of London in September 1973 involving many British officers who had been in the SOE.

The subject of one particular post-lecture discussion concerned the various radio transmissions intercepted by the Germans. The transmissions were interpreted in a light that was favorable to General Mihailović and helped foster Adolf Hitler’s notion that the Chetniks were the strongest faction operating against the Axis powers in Yugoslavia during the early months of the resistance. This notion commanded more initial Allied support for the Chetniks rather than the Partisans. The Germans were so concerned about the Chetnik resistance that they “built a whole order of battle for Mihailović,” which suggested that the Germans thought “that Mihailović was a far worse danger than Tito,”
said F.W.D. Deakin, an aforementioned SOE liaison officer who participated in the conference.  

Further, Deakin is quoted as saying, “Hitler never conceived we were going to support Tito. He was thinking in terms of the First World War, too, and therefore he thought that Mihailović was far more dangerous than the Communist Partisans in Serbia.” The intercepted radio transmissions and the anti-Serbian feelings of Hitler culminated in an initial concern for the Germans in regard to their policy toward the Chetniks.

With these conceptions in mind, it is understandable to see why Hitler had devoted so much time and men to the destruction of the Chetniks. Pawlowitch reveals that the Germans implemented Operation *Morgenluft* “in July [1943], with orders from [German secret police chief Heinrich] Himmler to use all means to locate, capture or liquidate [Mihailović] and his headquarters.” Furthermore, “[…] a reward was offered, published […] on 21 July 1943 and placarded throughout Serbia, of 100,000 reichsmarks in gold for whoever delivered Mihailović […] dead or alive. Crudely-produced peasant posters then appeared awarding 1 dinar in paper for Hitler’s head.” If the Allies were to make a landing in Yugoslavia, they would need support from people in the interior of the country, as would be the case for Operation OVERLORD. The Chetniks, if they were

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25 Quoted in ibid., 257.

26 Pawlowitch, *Disorder*, 182. *Morgenluft* is German for “morning air.”

27 Ibid., 182. The German monetary denomination, reichsmarks, is listed as lower-case in the original text.
indeed the favored faction of the Western Allies, would have to have secure ground in the broken Yugoslavia in order to help support an Allied invasion. Thus, the Führer likely realized the necessity to destroy the loyal Nationalists. Perhaps he thought that he would have to crush the Partisans only after he had taken care of the Chetniks.

The Issue of Collaboration

As mentioned in Chapter 2, the issue of Chetnik collaboration with the Germans arose. Chapter 1 notes that there is a difference in opinions for writers who address the topic of which faction, the Chetniks or the Partisans, were of more use to the Allies, and collaboration is no different. Even historians who do not seem to have an axe to grind, such as Stavrianos, suggest that General Mihailović and the Chetniks were dismissed from Western Allied service because of their constant collaboration with the German occupiers. 28 Contradicting the claim of a good number of historians and researchers is evidence from the Chetnik general himself.

In one statement at his trial for treason in July 1946, Mihailović made references to the two incidents he admitted to having taken part in where he was in direct contact with the Germans. In the first instance, the general lamented that the Germans requested his surrender, but he stated that he would not oblige them. “I told them I would fight [against them],” he said.29

28 Stavrianos, Balkans, 780.

29 Quoted in Felman, Mihailovich, 92.
On the second occasion, he was in the company of Lieutenant Colonel George Musulin, who was with an American mission to the general that had been “with the Chetniks in the winter and spring of 1943-44.” During this episode, the Serbian general comments that he had met with them “[…] to negotiate a surrender of German arms and not for collaboration, and I had never ordered any legalization of my troops.” The “legalization” could be interpreted as allowing his men to collaborate with the Germans. With a surrendering of German armaments, it is clear that the Allies, of whom the Chetniks considered themselves to be a part, were gaining momentum in Yugoslavia. Thus, there would be no need for the Chetniks to take part in any operations with the Germans.

Also in the same statement, General Mihailović did admit that “Some of my commanders, against my orders, collaborated, others fought each other, others tried to put a rival in my place.” We see here that, as noted earlier in this work, a lack of cohesiveness plagued the Chetniks. Openly admitting that some who were supposed to be under his command would not suffer themselves to heed his orders proved to be problematic. Although General Mihailović was not himself a collaborator, instances where those under his command did perform collaborative actions had a hand in shaping the information that Churchill considered when opting to cut support for the Chetniks.

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31 Felman, Mihailovich, 93.

32 Quoted in ibid., 92.
It can be suggested that at his trial, General Mihailović knew that he would likely be facing the Grim Reaper soon enough, and so he said whatever he thought might relieve him from such a heavy penalty. Given the many accounts of his character, the idea of a last-ditch effort to save himself from the grave can easily be dispensed with. The Serbian general’s love for his countrymen had prevented him from leaving the country when the aforementioned offer to be evacuated came from the OSS. We can assume that his refusal to leave when offered by the Americans would lead him to believe that he would one day be caught and that the consequences that he would face from the Communist government would be detrimental.

There is further evidence of this from the Serbian general himself, provided in OSS reports. Lieutenant Musulin “surreptitiously obtained” a memorandum that General Mihailović had sent out to his ranks. In part, it read, “German forces have not interfered with us in this last operation even though we do not have any contact or agreement with them.” Since the purpose of this particular mission to the general was to gather intelligence, usually by whatever means possible, it can be assumed that General Mihailović was forthright in this statement for he did not know that the Americans would eventually have the document in their possession when he penned it. Moreover, the operation does not appear to be against the Germans, for there would have been reprisals against the Serbian peasants, but we cannot say with any level of assuredness who the operation was intended to be against, if anyone, or what it was for.

33 Lindsay, Beacons, 272.
34 Quoted in ibid., 272.
Apart from acquiring this important piece of information from General Mihailović, Lt. Musulin reported on his experiences with the general and the Chetniks. The lieutenant “said that during his months with Mihailovic [sic] he had seen no evidence of collaboration.”35 As such, it is plausible that any military cooperation between the Germans and the Chetniks, should there have been any, was unbeknownst to General Mihailović or conducted without his direct knowledge or approval.

Lieutenant Colonel Robert McDowell also shed light on the topic of collaboration. This is apparent in an excerpt from a report that McDowell sent while in-country. The report from October 1944 revealed that:

[…] members of this mission personally observed significant instances of Partisan avoidance of German troops and installations in Serbia during August and September to require the conclusion which the undersigned (Colonel McDowell) unhesitatingly accepts—that during this period at least the Partisan army made no serious effort to fight Germans or hinder retreat, but concentrated on attacking Nationalist troops who in some instances were attacking Germans. […] all the evidence including much collected earlier by British and American liaison officers cries out against the hypocrisy and dishonesty of the Partisan effort to destroy the Nationalist movement by labeling it quisling or collaborationist. By this attack they only have succeeded in depriving the Allies at this moment of the services of well seasoned troops eager to attack the Germans if only relieved of the pressure of Partisan attacks.36

This brief passage from an American eyewitness in Yugoslavia reveals that, quite contrary to what Churchill wanted to believe, the Chetniks were indeed focused on their anti-Axis missions and were more than impeded by Communist Partisan actions.

35 Quoted in ibid., 274.

36 Lamb, Leader, 265; parentheses in original. For a complete transcript of the McDowell Report, see Martin, Web, 378-411.
Other information from the OSS agents concerning the collaboration has been noted. Major Felman, in his short text on General Mihailović, has revealed that the issue of Chetnik collaboration was addressed in a postwar inquiry in the United States. The effort had been made to provide evidence on behalf of the Serbian general during the course of his trial in Belgrade. Having worked on the American servicemen’s effort to ensure a fair trial for General Mihailović, Major Felman, with thorough knowledge of the content of the collected depositions, wrote that:

[...] testimony was furnished by six former officers of the Office of Strategic Services who were working as liaison officers with Mihailovich at different times throughout the entire war. [...] All former American OSS officers and crewmen were most emphatic in their testimony that at no time did they observe even the slightest evidence of Draza Mihailovich’s collaboration with the enemy. [...] at least one of the OSS who testified was virtually at Mihailovich’s side.37

The evidence and depositions were sent to Belgrade for the trial of General Mihailović. They were of little use as, according to Major Felman, the Yugoslav government did not permit the testimonies to be used on the Serbian general’s behalf during the course of the trial.

Interesting evidence comes from the Germans as well. Heinrich Himmler, Reichsführer of the Schutzstaffel (SS), gave specific orders in regard to the Serbian general and his followers on July 17, 1942, more than a year after the Axis forces had invaded Yugoslavia. He said of Mihailović:

The basis of every success in Serbia and in the entire southeast of Europe lies in the annihilation of Mihailovich. Concentrate all your forces on locating Mihailovich and his headquarters so that he can be destroyed. Any means may be used to achieve this end. I expect the smoothest cooperation between all agencies concerned, from the Security Police and Security Service to all other branches of the SS and police. The head of the SS and police Meissner has already received instructions from me in this regard. Please let me know which clues we already have of Mihailovich’s whereabouts. Please inform me weekly about the progress of this action.  

Himmler appears to have had a certain level of contempt for the general. Himmler’s comments display his understanding of the importance of the Chetniks in resistance to the Germans. This is merely one instance of how the German commanders felt early on about the Chetniks and their leader.

However, there is contradictory evidence available in some secondary sources, although it does not hint at collaboration but rather the priorities of the Chetniks. For example, “Mihailovich […] believed that the defeat of the Axis depended upon the Allied Powers rather than upon his Chetniks. Accordingly, he considered his primary duty to be the destruction of the Communists, whom he regarded a greater menace to Yugoslavia than the Germans, who in any case were doomed,” writes Stavrianos. Strangely, the Balkan historian seems to imply that the Chetniks were only capable and willing to fight against their countrymen in the prevention of communism. The scholar soon adds, “But he was not strong enough to fight the Communists alone, and the Allied Powers were unwilling to give him assistance.”

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At this point in time, early 1944, the Allies had been lending support in various manners, but the Western Allies had drawn a conclusion to fully back the Partisans based on the opinion of Churchill, as was mentioned in Chapter 2. Stavrianos continued gravely, “The only alternative was to collaborate with the Ustashi and Axis forces, which were also anti-Partisan. Thus the course of events forced Mihailovich, who was both anti-German and anti-Croatian, to collaborate with the Germans, the Italians, and the Ustashi.”

Stavrianos’s assessment is contradictory to what had been gathered in a clandestine manner from the actual documents that had been in possession of Mihailović and from agents and men who knew the general, as related above. Moreover, the Ustashi were anti-Serb and had taken part in atrocities aimed against the Serbs in many instances, as documented by Jozo Tomasovich. Examples such as this perpetuate the confusion that studies in the Balkans, and Yugoslavia, especially, entail.

Conclusion

There are many issues, then, that when added together, spelled the end of support for General Draža Mihailović and the endeavors of the Chetniks. It is easily observed that there was much upheaval in the ranks of the Allies, but Winston Churchill finally came through with his endeavors to no longer have the Western Allies support the Chetniks. A recent historian noted that after the conference in Tehran, the British prime

40 Ibid.

minister would not have any other major decisions on collective Allied policy be decided in his favor.\footnote{Ibid., 53.} Thus, the undoing of General Mihailović was one of the last acts that he would be able to claim as a victory, though it would end in a crushing defeat for the Chetniks.
Postlude

It is usually easy to make judgments about the actions of various notables in history. This is often true because historians have access to information that even the people who are being studied were not aware of. From a favorable conclusion, however, Prime Minister Winston Churchill and President Franklin Roosevelt should be excluded concerning General Draža Mihailović. Even though their desire to avoid a potential rift in their Grand Alliance against the Axis is understandable, just a further inquiry by Roosevelt could have produced drastically different results in the way that Western Allied policy in Yugoslavia was handled.

The reasoning here is rather simple. Roosevelt appears to have had ample information at his disposal to implore upon Churchill for the plight of the Chetniks. The president’s request would have enabled democracy to be furthered in favor of various South Slavic peoples who would only be oppressed in the coming decades as they had been under German occupation, as the British prime minister correctly surmised. To have done so might not have changed the outcome of the postwar circumstances that befell the Western Allies on one side and the Soviets on the other, but the map could have been arranged differently. More free people could have been in control of their own destinies, quite possibly under constitutional monarchies, and not subjects of the clenched fist of ever-authoritarian communism.
Churchill might have gladly extended the war in favor of reinstating the monarchy in Yugoslavia, but more importantly, he wanted to keep the influence and oversight communism from spreading past the frontiers of the Soviet Union. But to do so would have no doubt made Marshal Joseph Stalin and the Red Army come to the aid of Tito and the Communist-led Partisans. Without the strength of the U.S. military, the United Kingdom’s servicemen, in a weakened state and spread too thin from long years of conflict, could be little match for the aggressive Red Army. Though the Soviets would leave the reassembled Yugoslavia by the time that the Second World War had concluded, the Red Army was already on the ground in the country and other Eastern European nations, as the Soviets had helped in its liberation. But the British and American regular armies were not. Only clandestine agents from the Untied States remained by the time that Belgrade had been liberated.

There is also the Japanese factor to consider. Whereas the British had initially been doing the brunt of the fighting in the European Theater until 1943 during such actions as the British Expeditionary Force in France and the Battle of Britain, upon the U.S.’s entry into the war, the American armed forces took up the load in the Pacific Theater. The first-ever military defeat of Japan was still several months beyond victory in Europe, and so American forces had to be redistributed to inflict the final blow upon the sole remaining Axis power.¹

¹ Victory in Europe Day, or V-E Day, came with the unconditional surrender of Germany on May 8, 1945. Victory over Japan Day, or V-J Day, is recognized as September 2, 1945, when the Japanese signed the surrender documents aboard the USS Missouri although Japan adhered to the Potsdam Conference requests on August 15, 1945 (then still August 14 in the United States). Up to that point in history, Imperial Japan had not been beaten in a war.
Perhaps insult was added to injury due to this necessity, much to the dismay of Churchill. As mentioned, the British prime minister’s inquiry regarding the possibility of American troops’ backing of British forces in the Balkan region brought this reply from President Harry Truman shortly after V-E day: “[I am] most anxious to avoid interference with the despatch [sic] of U S troops to the Pacific.” This figures into the Grand Strategy as understood by the American administration. As a result, Tito fully succeeded in usurping power in Yugoslavia due to the highly-suspect election of November 11, 1945 as he had time and again promised Prime Minister Churchill he would arrange. Yugoslavia had been dismembered by the invading Axis forces in early April 1941 and the Allies wanted to reunify it. Even so, the path upon which they would tread would have detrimental effects for the delicately reunified nation.

The price of reuniting the partitioned Balkan state meant that the Karadorđević dynasty would be prevented from re-entering Yugoslavia, never again to return. Tactful in implementation, Tito’s political maneuvering concerning the cessation of support for Mihailović consisted of coaxing Churchill into believing that the prime minister’s acquiescence on the Chetniks would expedite the return of King Peter II to Yugoslavia. Tito promised that the Yugoslavs would have an opportunity to participate in a plebiscite for self-determination after the war. This is revealed when he said to Churchill at their

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2 Quoted in Richard Lamb, *Churchill as War Leader: Right or Wrong?* (New York: Carroll & Graf Publishers, 1991), 272; punctuation as in original.


meeting in Italy on August 12, 1944, “We do not intend to impose any such system. I have often stated this publicly,” and during the end of the meeting, “Churchill asked Tito if he would allow individual freedom after the war. ‘That is our basic principle — democracy and freedom for the individual.’ That was Tito’s answer.” Furthermore, Auty adds, “Tito […] was concerned about statements being made about the introduction of communism after the war. He emphasized that Yugoslavia would have a democratic system — but he did not specify of what kind, and he refused Churchill’s request that he make a public statement about communism.” These statements would not come to pass, and thus the fate of postwar Yugoslavia was for a time sealed in communism.

Before the war was even finished in Europe, Churchill had had his fill of the Partisan leader and was already regretting his decision to drop support for the Chetniks. Richard Lamb aptly noted, “By the time that the Macdowell [sic] Report reached Churchill his final disillusionment was complete.” This had to be some time in late 1944 as Lieutenant Colonel McDowell returned from his mission to the Chetniks on November 1, which was too late for Churchill as the Soviets had reached Belgrade with Tito in October of the same year.

As noted previously, on at least one occasion, the Allies did move to try and secure Mihailović’s escape after it became evident that Tito and the Communist Partisans would be in control of Yugoslavia after the Allies won the war. Even so, the general

6 Lamb, Leader, 265.
7 Auty, Tito, 244.
refused to leave his Chetniks behind, about whom he cared so deeply, in what he regarded as the clutches of Communism when evasion was suggested to him. The Serbian general answered sternly:

Under no conceivable circumstances will I leave my country and my people [...] For I am not Josip Broz Tito, who has nothing in common with this land and these people, so that I should run away at the first sign of danger and seek refuge on some isolated island. On several occasions I have been in desperate straights, surrounded on all sides and without any apparent means of escape. With God’s help we have always succeeded in escaping.8

Due to the potent combination of Churchill’s inability to let go of the maudlin notions that he carried with him that harkened back to the heyday of the British Empire and Roosevelt’s lack of motivation to act upon the information that he had been given by his subordinates, a flame for the cause of freedom was extinguished long before it ought to have been. It seems as though communism and destiny were stacked against General Mihailović.

Alas, neither victory nor the return of the king would come to pass for the Serbian general and the loyal-to-the-monarchy Nationalist Chetniks. After many months of hiding in the rolling, forested hills between Bosnia and his beloved Serbia after the Second World War had been won by his former Allies, General Mihailović was captured by the Partisans on March 13, 1946 and imprisoned. And as noted in Chapter 4, he would be brought to trial with the charge of treason.

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Speaking on his own behalf in court, the Chetnik leader offered closing remarks with apparent honesty.\(^9\) In part, General Mihailović said:

> I wanted nothing for myself. […] I am a soldier who sought to organize resistance to the Axis […] I was caught in a whirlpool of events and the movements of the new Slav unity which I have favoured for a long time. […] I had against me a competitive organization, the Communist Party, which seeks its aims without compromise. […]

> I believed that I was on the right road and called for any foreign journalist or Red Army Mission to visit me and see everything. But fate was merciless to me when it threw me into this maelstrom.

> I strove for much, I undertook much, but the gales of the world have carried away both me and my work.\(^10\)

Perhaps this statement was given as the Serbian general realized that the end for him was imminent.

Some journalists present at the court proceedings rendered their accounts of the effectiveness of General Mihailović’s closing remarks. One source tells us that the general “spoke without oratory, without rancor towards political opponents or private enemies, lucidly and in detail.” This reporter noted that the Chetnik leader’s presentation was “compelling because of its simplicity” and that “he showed himself respectful to the Court and oblivious to the crowd, who for once forgot their hisses and listened in complete silence.”\(^11\)

General Mihailović made impressions upon other attendees of his tribulation as well. An English reporter in Belgrade wrote that the Chetnik leader’s “speech, which

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\(^10\) Quoted in ibid., 93-94.

lasted until nearly midnight, was delivered with simple dignity. When he finished, the courtroom was silent."12 From the reporters’ accounts, it is readily observed that General Mihailović was in a hostile environment, no safer from the taunting of the courtroom crowd than he was from the menace of the German guns. Even so, the impression that he left upon those within earshot in his final days directed them to become respectful, though perhaps grudgingly, for they were humbled enough to become quiet.

After what many have seen as a trial that “was anything but a model of justice, as the stenographic record amply proves”13 and even after “American liaison officers as well as downed American airmen who had been saved by Mihailović’s forces asked to testify on his behalf, but were not permitted to do so,” the general was sentenced to death by firing squad.14 The punishment was carried out in Belgrade during the small hours of July 17, 1946, his lifeless body then placed in an unknown grave. General Mihailović was but fifty-three years old.15

Quite tragically, after the war had been won, Englishmen such as Churchill and Anthony Eden, Churchill’s Foreign Secretary, lamented that the choice of Tito was a grave error and that it was quite regrettable. Though no longer prime minister, Churchill in December 1945, as General Mihailović was hiding from the new Communist

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government in the Yugoslav hinterland, lamented that “During the war I thought that I could trust Tito...but now I am aware that I committed one of the biggest mistakes of the war,” while Eden further grieved, saying “My biggest regret of the war was abandoning Mihailovic.”

To the chagrin of Churchill and other Western Allied leaders, the Soviets would be allowed to extend their tentacles over much of Eastern Europe. Gazing upon a map of the continent as it stood at the end of the Second World War reveals that communism would then further encompass the whole of the Slavic realm, from Poland in the north to Czechoslovakia in the west to the Slavic Balkans in the southeast and in Hungary as well as Romania, which become problematic as various peoples, such as the Poles, viewed the Russians with contempt due to age-old animosity. The “Iron Curtain” had been drawn across the region, as had been noted previously by Churchill on a visit to the United States.

To some degree, Yugoslavia would be excluded from the curtain. Not only had Marshal Tito betrayed Churchill and the Western Allies, but he did likewise to Soviet Marshal Stalin, and underwent a “break with the Cominform in 1948,” though

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16 Quoted in ibid., 273.

Stavrianos notes that the break that June was due to expulsion. After the dust had settled, the marshal saw fit to conduct the business of Yugoslavia with a brand of communism that was not in total agreement with the Soviet style. This was at odds with the Western Allied view of communism in the immediate postwar period, which held that it was monolithic in nature. It was not.

The discord that led to the assassination of King Aleksandar during the interwar period was but a shade of things to come for the reborn Yugoslavia. Decades hence, the strife that had never quite gone away, but was merely sleeping, gradually awakened in different sections of the country, resulting unsurprisingly in yet further wars during the deterioration of the Yugoslav state throughout the 1990s. The time would be now for Yugoslavia to splinter again, divided by timeless ethnic grudges and along religious lines.

This time, however, no one seemed to care, for only one superpower remained: the United States. And why would the former Great Powers have cared, had they been around in the last decade of the dead century? The Iron Curtain, a veil of oppression, had rusted away, opening the path to liberty, and there was no superpower left to oppose the United States—it had emerged as the hegemon in the post-Cold War world, which was unipolar in nature—and come to the aid of the Southern Slavs in the post-Tito disintegration. Ultimately, then, retrospect tells us that dropping support for the Chetniks has had both beneficial and disastrous consequences for Yugoslavia, the effects of which still remain today. However, had Tito not been permitted to take control of Yugoslavia and operate the country with strong-man tactics, the strife amongst the various ethnic

groups in the country directly after the collapse of Yugoslavia could have transpired at an earlier date, as some Serbs who identified themselves as “Chetniks” in the 1990s were some of the most ferocious fighters.

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Today, General Dragoljub “Draža” Mihailović is scantly remembered as a lion in the struggle against the forces of fascism and communism. Where he is not forgotten, he fills the memories of die-hard supporters of Serbia both in the United States and Europe. He is unjustly recalled by most others as an ineffective leader of resistance fighters who did not accomplish the tasks asked of them by their Allied supporters during the Second World War. As has been evidenced in this thesis, many would say that this is not the case. Every now and then, positive light about Mihailović has been made known, even going so far as to having been told and retold in great detail within scholarly works. Even recently, on May 9, 2005, Mihailović’s daughter, Gordana, finally received her father’s long-kept-secret Legion of Merit Medal into her trembling hands at a special ceremony with rescued airmen.19 This medal was awarded posthumously by President Truman at the behest of then-General Dwight D. Eisenhower in 1948.20 Rather

19 Gregory A. Freeman, The Forgotten 500: The Untold Story of the Men who Risked All for the Greatest Rescue Mission of World War II (New York: New American Library (NAL) Caliber/Penguin Group Inc., 2007), 278-79. The Legion of Merit Medal is the highest honor that a non-citizen can receive from the United States of America. It is also one of a handful of decorations that can be worn by American military personnel and foreigners.

20 Ibid., 268-69.
regrettably, though, the true story has seemingly fallen on deaf ears and scholars of the Balkans readily and all-too-often denounce the Chetnik movement as quisling and unproductive.

Why does support for General Mihailović, however minor in nature, endure as it does? The actions of the Chetniks and their leader have left an impression on the minds of people who knew the Serbian general personally as well as those who recognize their nationalist role in the defeat of the Axis forces in Yugoslavia. For downed Allied airmen, being saved likely meant that they would desire to do what they could for General Mihailović, as shown by the depositions that were produced on his behalf for use in his trial. There are also displays of similar gratitude from relatives of the rescued airmen.

A cult-like devotion persists for the fallen general, as evidenced by the plethora of websites and gatherings both in Europe and North America that pay tribute to “Uncle Draža,” as he is affectionately known. And so it should be, for after many decades of being misrepresented, for the most part, in his role in the Allied cause during World War II, the general might once again be revered in the eyes of historians. The spirit of nationalism and the Serbian general is kept close and celebrated when it ought to be. One such instance occurs during the annual celebration of the life of General Mihailović in Serbia proper, held over several days around the anniversary of his execution. It is a fitting manner in which to remember the well-regarded, tragic Chetnik leader, for the Serbs have a long tradition of holding festivities on days of negative commemoration.
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