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“Every Serb has a map and a gun” were the words uttered by convicted war criminal Momčilo Krajišnjik in his speech given to members of the political party, Serb Democratic Party (SDS), on February 28, 1992.¹ These words fully describe the aims and goals of Serb leadership and the ways in which they mean to fulfill them. Based on a variety of sources which are comprised of archival documents, media reports, trial documents from the International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia in the Hague, as well as documents from the Court of Bosnia and Herzegovina. These numerous documents and primary sources, combined with a myriad of current and novel literature, were used by authors Muamer Džananović, Hikmet Karčić, and Jasmin Medić, to reconstruct the policies and events that led up to the creation of the Bosnian Serb breakaway statelet in the 1990s.

The significance and merit of this study is only highlighted by the fact that it is a joint publication by the Institute for Research of Crimes Against Humanity and International Law and the Institute of History at the University of Sarajevo. While the topic of genocide and war atrocities were painstakingly covered by a plethora of authors, the beginning of the plans and seeds out of which these events grew were left unresearched and marginalized.

This book has a linear, chronological approach to the question of the idea of how and why Serb nationalists opted for the establishment of a new nation-state at the end of the 20th century. To give a deeper understanding, the authors go further back into the past and examine the situation in the Balkans in the 17th and 18th century, during the Ottoman Empire when nationalist movements appeared in the region. This overview gives a useful insight into the challenges and problems of the Balkans, especially Bosnia, and how this century-old idea resurfaced after the fall of Communism. Within this chapter the focus is shifted towards Serbia’s foreign relationships and their goals and aims. They explore the influence Serbia exacerbated on the region from the creation of the Serb nationalist plan called “Načertaniye” mid-19th century, later following the unification and creation of Yugoslavia, all the way to the establishment of Socialist Yugoslavia. In all of these stages the authors examine the actions of Serbia, and their leaders, as well as the spread of the Serb Orthodox Church and their influence in the process of establishing a future “Greater Serbia.”

After the brief historical summary, the authors narrow their focus on the military and political situation in Yugoslavia in general, and Bosnia in particular from 1990 up until 1992. This time period is rather crucial since the cracks in Yugoslavia were visible now more than ever, and

the signs of troubles and war to come were beginning to be clearer for some. The focus of this chapter were the elections of 1990, the first multi-party elections, the political aftermath, the Yugoslav People’s Army, and the start of attacks aimed towards opponents of the Serb leadership. As pointed out by the authors, this period was the crucial tipping point, and the chain of events that happened were the de facto starting point of the Republika Srpska (RS) and the interlude to the war.

Throughout the book, the authors talk about the Serb leadership, especially Radovan Karadžić, Biljana Plavšić, Momčilo Krajišnik, and others. From the third chapter on until the last, they dwell deeper and analyze the chronology of events from the first multi-party elections up until the start of the war. The focus in the third chapter is the rise of the SDS after the elections and their work on establishing a vertical and horizontal hierarchy which would include all Serbs loyal to them. Seeing that the political events were heading more in the way of military escalations, the leaders of SDS started to form their plans and establish parallel institutions to those of the central government. Furthermore, their representatives, which held offices and political appointments secured in the election, in an act of defiance to the call of Bosnian independence, withdrew from their offices and gave their resignations. While all of this was happening, the leaders of SDS started to get more involved with their counterparts in Serbia and parts of Croatia which had split from it and established the Republika Srpska Krajina.

Alongside these events, the Serb leadership started to form their plans for further activities, a secret document explaining the so-called Variant “A” and Variant “B.” In these plans, the Serb leadership formulated plans in case of the inevitable independence of Bosnia and Herzegovina. Variant “A” was aimed towards the areas predominantly inhabited by Serbs, while Variant “B” regarded places where the Serbs were a minority. These plans were the first in which instructions that would lead to genocide were brought forward. The authors also explore one key element that helped to achieve these plans, the creation of “crisis centers” which were instrumental in carrying out the instructions in the plans formulated by Serb leadership.

The fifth chapter is one of the most important parts of the book since it contains the private phone transcripts between Serb leaders. The Serbs, not aware that they were being taped and monitored, spoke candidly with one another about their plans and about the lengths they were ready to go and the means which they intended to utilize to achieve their goals. On par with these recordings, the authors also consider the public interviews and official reports given by the Serb leaders. The authors at every step compared the public statements to the private conversations and the discrepancies between the two. By doing so the authors gave a more in-depth approach which was rarely utilized by authors before.

The last chapter covers the breakout of the war and the atrocities that were committed by people loyal to the SDS and under instructions of their leaders. Soon enough Variant “A” of the plan was being implemented by either mass deportations or genocide of non-Serbs, predominantly Bosniak Muslims and Bosnian Croats. While still not at the height of the bloodshed, further meticulous plans were being drawn up and the experience of the initial military confrontations were being revised and the approach adapted. The authors thoroughly bring forward these plans and create a chronological evolution of these atrocities and actions, which inevitably led to the genocide in Srebrenica 1995.

All in all, this book represents an important addition to the studies of genocide and how genocide can be enabled through government institutions which were specially designed with the goal of creating an environment and country with a specific goal of being ethnically and religiously homogeneous by any means necessary. Overall, Nastanak Republike Srpske: Od regionalizacije do strateških ciljeva (1991–1992) is a valuable book that provides meaningful insights into the creation of the RS and the parallel processes that eventually resulted in genocide and war crimes that were committed during the Bosnian War. In addition, the importance of the book lies in the fact that this book is one of the rare books which deal with the topic aforementioned, as well as the fact that book was written by Bosnian authors, while most other books were written by Serbian authors. That being said, the book provides a valuable counterbalance to these other books and helps to give a more complete picture of the creation of the RS.