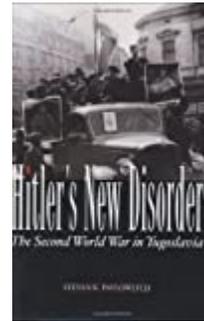




**Stevan K. Pavlowitch.** *Hitler's New Disorder: The Second World War in Yugoslavia.* New York: Columbia University Press, 2008. xix + 333 pp. Illustrations. \$34.50 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-231-70050-4.



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## A Long Overdue Synthetic Account of Yugoslavia in World War II

English-language histories of Yugoslavia during World War II are exceedingly rare. Enter Stevan Pavlowitch's formidably researched, lucidly written *Hitler's New Disorder*, which helps to fill a remarkable gap in the literature on World War II and twentieth-century Europe. The fact that Pavlowitch is the first historian to publish such a book in English may explain the profound ignorance about Yugoslavia's past demonstrated by Western leaders and media when that state so violently broke apart in the 1990s. To fill in the lacuna, Pavlowitch has set out to "give a synthetic account, in less than 100,000 words, of the interconnected events that took place between 1941 and 1945 from the Alps to Macedonia, from the Adriatic coast to the Danubian plain, over what had been, somehow remained, and gradually became again, Yugoslavia" (p. x). By any reasonable standard, he has succeeded. In addition to having mastered the linguistic challenges that probably deterred many scholars from undertaking such an ambitious work, Pavlowitch has brought a professional lifetime's erudition in the culture and history of the South Slav lands to this project. Of special inter-

est are his oral history sources, which include dozens of interviews conducted throughout the 1970s and 1980s.

Pavlowitch organizes the history of Yugoslavia in World War II chronologically into five chapters. The first two, covering the years 1939-41, deal with the demise and partition of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia. Chapter 3 examines "Insurgents Left to Their Own Devices" in 1942. The final two chapters discuss the disappointed expectations of an Allied invasion and the Italian withdrawal in 1943, and the liberation and restoration of the country by the Communist Party (KPJ) in 1944-45, respectively. Pavlowitch reinforces major themes and points with concise postscripts at the end of these chapters. His emphasis falls unmistakably on political and diplomatic developments rather than military operations. Readers interested in the latter will want to consult the book's extensive, multilingual bibliography.

Several key themes and often-exacting detail emerge from this chronological structure and political/diplomatic focus. The first and most important of

these concerns the complex nature of World War II in Yugoslavia. Following the Axis invasion and partition in 1941, Yugoslavia became the scene of numerous inter-related ethnic and ideological conflicts fought by insurgents, occupiers, and various local bands and militias—in effect, a civil war fought within the wider context of global war. This view, now widely accepted, contrasts with the communists’ black-and-white interpretation of the postwar period, which held that the war in Yugoslavia was merely an extension of a global anti-fascist struggle.

A second major theme is the struggle between Chetniks and partisans. Pavlowitch shows that the defeat of the royalist and Serb nationalist forces, known collectively as the Chetniks, resulted from chronic disunity as well as their lacking appeal to non-Serbs. By contrast, their great rivals, Josip Broz Tito’s communists and the partisan movement they led, realized that “they had to appear as a broader patriotic movement in order to acquire and retain the support of non-communist followers,” all the while focused on establishing communist rule in postwar Yugoslavia (p. 147). The Chetniks and their nominal leader, Draža Mihailović, had been the first to take up the insurgency against the Axis occupiers. But they never developed either an effective central command structure or an ideological appeal that could transcend the boundaries of nationality, and thereby attract non-Serbs to their cause in significant numbers, even though they enjoyed official legitimacy for much of the war. Besides receiving British aid, Mihailović served as war minister of the royalist government and chief of Supreme Command Staff in the homeland. But the Allies, the exiled government, and even young King Peter II eventually concluded (not without reason) that the partisans were the only ones effectively resisting the Axis and transferred their support to Tito during 1944.

A third major theme Pavlowitch addresses is collaboration and resistance. He exposes the high degree of passive and sometimes even active cooperation of Chetnik forces—and others as well—with the Axis occupiers and their regional satrapies, such as the Nedić administration in the “Serbian Residual State.” The facts and perception of resistance and collaboration proved decisive not only to the military and diplomatic course of the war but also to the history of postwar Yugoslavia.

Fourth, Pavlowitch considers the role of the Allies. He argues that the supposed plans for a British and American invasion in the western Balkans assumed, and long maintained, central importance in the imaginations of almost all factions involved in the conflict there: “The

optimistic plans were all based on the assumption of Western Allied support, and on its magical power to put everything right” (p. 251). Unfortunately, this most intriguing of questions remains totally open: assuming Pavlowitch’s interpretation is correct, why was there such universal faith among all parties in Allied invasion or intervention? Was it disinformation? Faulty intelligence? Wishful thinking? Or a combination of all three? On this point alone, the author might have reconsidered his decision to examine Allied policies only “through the prism of what the local actors believed Churchill, Roosevelt or Stalin did or did not want to happen there” (p. vii). Pavlowitch’s sensitive treatment of the exiled government in London, its status within the Allied camp, and its connections to events and personalities “in the homeland” is one of the book’s major strengths.

Finally, Pavlowitch explains that the idea of a united Yugoslavia was preserved or resurrected during the war, even after its seeming collapse in 1941 and despite the failure of “‘integral’ Yugoslavism” in the interwar years: “The idea of a united Yugoslavia was kept by the representative of the pre-war regime—the King, his government and Mihailović, by Tito and the KPJ leadership,” as well as by an increasing number of ordinary people (p. 210). By contrast, sectional nationalism was associated with the Axis powers that had destroyed the Yugoslav state and were soon seen to be losing the war.

Although this is not an unusually long book, it is densely packed. The text’s year-by-year and region-by-region configuration makes it an ideal reference source and helps the reader keep track of the many people and organizations encountered. A useful appendices section includes a month-by-month chronology and an extensive directory of names, which readers will consult frequently.

The book’s strengths notwithstanding, a few questions about the material’s presentation and packaging remain. Belying the title, the author’s sources and scholarly focus strongly emphasize the Italian role in the story rather than the German one, which was unquestionably more decisive to the course of the war in Yugoslavia. Pavlowitch explains that this book grew in part from work on Italian involvement across the Adriatic. In a postscript on page 316, he informs the reader that he conducted research in Southampton, London, Paris, Milan, Bologna, Florence, Rome, and Belgrade. This Italian-oriented research background is perfectly legitimate, of course, but it does raise the question of whether foregrounding Hitler and Nazi Germany so prominently in

the book's title—probably a marketing decision on the part of the publisher—does not give a distorted representation of its content. The author's only occasional, and not wholly convincing, references to this “new disorder” in some of the chapter postscripts and the conclusion reinforce the feeling that the concept is not his true organizing theme but rather was imposed in the post-writing, pre-publication phase.

A second criticism concerns the choice of illustrations, which could have been both more varied and more representative. The book contains a mere six photographs collected in a center section, five of which are from the author's own private collection, several of only grainy quality. Unfortunately, no photos are included of any leading local actors in the drama, not even—somewhat unbelievably—of Tito himself. Similarly, it would have been helpful and appropriate to include campaign maps of the Axis invasion in 1941 and the Soviet-led liberation of 1944-45 in the otherwise fine map sec-

tion. Pavlowitch has written a political rather than a military history, but the two spheres are hardly separable; indeed, the book's text makes clear how interconnected they were.

*Hitler's New Disorder* promises to become essential reading for anyone with a special interest in Yugoslavia. It will help fulfill background or reference needs, especially for graduate-level courses on World War II or Balkan history. However, its density, its occasionally daunting level of detail, and its stringent demands both on the reader's attentiveness and prior knowledge will make it tough going for most undergraduates. Perhaps a future edition could include at least a concise historiographical section outlining how the events of 1939-45 have been interpreted, both in- and outside Yugoslavia, during the postwar and post-Cold War periods. As it stands, however, Pavlowitch has made an outstanding contribution to the historiography of World War II and southeastern Europe in the twentieth century.

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