

Further Stanistic Spy Revelations

Author: [Rachel Irwin](#)

Belgrade's ex-intelligence head is said to have maintained close links with several foreign agencies. Allegations that the former chief of Serbia's secret service had a long, covert relationship with the United States Central Intelligence Agency, CIA, during the Yugoslav wars are only part of the story, say Serbian officials.

Jovica Stanistic also worked closely with the Russian Foreign Intelligence, FIS, in the early 1990s, said Zoran Mijatovic, the former deputy chief of the Serbian State Security Service, SDB.

"The two of us were together every day during the most difficult times for this country," Mijatovic told IWPR.

"As the man who led SDB, Jovica Stanistic had great relations with the Russian Foreign Intelligence Service."

Mijatovic was responding to a March 1 article in the Los Angeles Times on Stanistic's alleged ties with the CIA, which spoke of clandestine meetings between the accused and CIA agent William Lofgren from 1992 onwards.

"For eight years, Stanistic was the CIA's main man in Belgrade," wrote journalist Greg Miller in the article.

"During secret meetings in boats and safe houses along the Sava River, he shared details on the inner workings of the [regime of the late Serbian president Slobodan Milosevic]."

Stanistic, who was arrested by Serbian officials in 2003, now faces charges of war crimes and crimes against humanity, including murder, at the Hague tribunal. Although his trial has been suspended due to his ill health – and judges are currently waiting to receive expert medical reports before deciding how to proceed – he faces a potentially long prison sentence if he is eventually convicted.

While it is considered normal for intelligence agency chiefs worldwide to maintain contacts with their counterparts in other countries, Mijatovic said that when Stanistic was appointed SDB chief in 1991, there was no such practice in Serbia.

The alleged cooperation with Russia began, maintained Mijatovic, when Yevgeny Primakov became director of the FIS in 1991, and continued even after he became Russia's foreign minister.

In 1994, the pair brokered a meeting between Milosevic – by then, completely isolated as the president of a near-pariah state – and Russian leader Boris Yeltsin.

The meeting was an incredibly important gesture for Milosevic, said Mijatovic, who saw it as a

breakthrough, and hoped that other world leaders might soon start talking to him again.

According to Mijatovic, Stanasic began making contacts with countries other than Russia at the beginning of 1992, and in the following years, established strong ties not only with the US and Russia, but with the French and Chinese secret services as well.

“This was not cooperation carried out by individuals, but by heads of intelligence services and expert groups accompanying them, who were fully involved in those affairs,” added Mijatovic.

Stanasic’s alleged links with the CIA even prompted the US agency to submit a classified document to the court in 2004 “that lists Stanasic's contributions and attests to his helpful role” during the war, said the LA Times article.

The CIA document was meant to show “that this allegedly evil person did a whole lot of good”, Lofgren, who is now retired, told the LA Times.

Stanasic assisted CIA operatives in their search for grave sites and also helped the agency set up a network of secret bases in Bosnia, Lofgren reportedly said.

At the same time, according to the Hague indictment, Stanasic was allegedly “setting up death squads for Milosevic that carried out a genocidal campaign” in Croatia and Bosnia, noted the article.

While Mijatovic said he wouldn’t be surprised if Russia had also sent a letter of support for Stanasic to the Hague tribunal, others were more doubtful.

Bozidar Spasic, a former official in the Yugoslav State Security Service, said he suspected that Stanasic's alleged contacts with the CIA were much closer and more personal than his job required.

He suggested that a friendship between the Serbian official and his American contact could have been the reason why the US agency decided to send a letter of support to the Hague tribunal.

To support this theory, Spasic said that the practice of holding private liaisons in parks and boats, as detailed in the LA Times article, was unheard of. According to him, meetings between heads or members of two secret services were only supposed to take place in official buildings.

Spasic insinuated that Stanasic was actually working for the CIA, rather than just cooperating with it.

While the LA Times article states that Stanasic “never took payment from the CIA, worked with the agency on operations or took steps that he would have considered a blatant betrayal of his boss”, Spasic maintained that the accused’s supposed links with the US agency had not been typical.

“When agents are approached by a service that is as big and powerful as the CIA, they get weak and

usually lose their nerve," he said.

"But it's a disaster that the head of the SDB succumbed to the pressure [by working for them rather than just cooperating with them]."

He noted that it was common for security services to protect those agents working for them.

"This is a basic rule of every intelligence service - to protect your agent when he or she gets into trouble," he told IWPR.

"Obviously, Stanisc is in trouble now because it seems he won't be able to avoid the trial at the Hague tribunal."

IWPR approached the CIA about all of the allegations related to Stanisc and his relations with the agency, but it declined to comment.

The accused's lawyer Geert-Jan Alexander Knoops, said that neither he nor his client were able to comment on the accusations.

Mijatovic, meanwhile, disagreed that Stanisc had been a CIA agent, insisting that he had merely cooperated with the agency.

He said that the SDB and CIA continued to work together after the Dayton Peace Agreement was signed in November 1995, putting an end to the Bosnian war.

"Our job was to supply the American intelligence with the information related to the safety of their forces deployed in Bosnia," he said.

"[We were supposed] to warn them if there was any threat to their security, either in Bosnia, or during their transit through Serbia."

Mijatovic added that Stanisc's alleged collaboration with the CIA did do a lot of good - just as Lofgren argued in the LA Times article.

"Considering all the internal problems in Serbia [during the Balkans wars] Stanisc, in a way, prevented many...problems from getting out of control and helped many critical situations to be resolved peacefully," said Mijatovic.

Representatives of the Hague tribunal declined to comment on the Stanisc revelations.

Rachel Irwin is an IWPR reporter in The Hague. Zoran Glavonjic is an IWPR contributor in Belgrade.

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