

Observation no: 199 – Bosnian Independence

Country-year: Bosnia 1991

1. Did the current regime come to power in a military coup?

No.

The current regime in Bosnia and Herzegovina was elected to power following the first multi-party elections in Bosnia in 1990. The new regime was strongly nationalist and advocated greater autonomy for Bosnia within Yugoslavia, and saw the broader Yugoslavian regime as too Serbian.

2. Has the country ever experienced a military coup?

No.

Prior to its declaration of independence in 1992, Bosnia was one of several republics of Yugoslavia. Therefore, I have not found any evidence of attempted or successful coups prior to 1991. Coup attempts, if any, would have occurred at the federal level, not at the subnational (that is, Bosnia's) level.

3. Is the country's top leader a former military officer?

No.

The country's top leader was Alija Izetbegovic, a civilian Muslim dissident and activist. During the country's first multiparty elections in 1990, he helped establish the Party of Democratic Action (PDA), which won the largest share of the vote. Following elections, he became the country's President.

There is no evidence that Izetbegovic ever served in the military.

4. Are ethnic, sectarian, or racial criteria used to exclude segments of the population from the officer corps?

Yes.

The Army of the Republic of Bosnia-Herzegovina (ARBH) was devoid of Serbian officers from the very beginning.¹ In fact, almost all of its Serbian officers abandoned the ARBH after the declaration of independence from Yugoslavia.² Further, evidence

¹ Ingrao, C. 2005. "How Bosnia Armed." *Choice*. 42(8) (April): p1453.

² Ibid.

suggests that over time, the ARBH became a “predominantly Muslim force,” as even Croats left its ranks.³

5. Are there strict ideological requirements for entry into the senior officer corps?

Yes.

The ARBH was predominantly a Muslim force. In fact, some contend that the Bosnian military was an “agent of Muslim nationalism.”⁴ Anecdotal evidence from the war suggests that Muslim nationalist sentiment was strong within both the civilian and military leadership. For example, the commander of the Bosnian army, Sefer Halilovic, was supposedly planning to defend only Bosnia’s Muslims (and not its Croats) from the impending Serbian attack.⁵

6. Is party membership required for entry into the senior officer corps?

No.

Bosnian independence came amid the breakup of a communist government in Yugoslavia. The Bosnian army, ARBH (Army of the Republic of Bosnia-Herzegovina), was created when the regular army was combined with armies belonging to other nationalist political parties, the Croatian Defense Council and the Patriotic League (the army outfit of the PDA).⁶

Therefore, the army was not under control of any one political party, but rather, controlled by the ruling civilian leadership.

7. Does military training involve extensive political education or ideological indoctrination?

No.

I could not find any evidence that military training involved extensive political or ideological indoctrination. First, the ARBH was a “nominally multiethnic force” which, in the beginning, did include non-Muslim Croats.⁷ Second, “the initial fighting forces of

³ Sadkovich, James J. 2005. “How Bosnia Armed (Review).” *The Journal of Military History*. 69(3) (July): 894-895.

⁴ Sadkovich 2005, p 895.

⁵ Sadkovich 2005, p 894; and Burg, Steven L and Paul Shoup. 1999. *The War in Bosnia-Herzegovina: Ethnic Conflict and International Intervention*. Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe, p 131.

⁶ Sadkovich 2005, p 894.

⁷ Ingraio 2005

Bosnia [were] made up of small bands of criminals and violent opportunists recruited or self-recruited from street gangs and organized mobs.”⁸

While the leadership was undoubtedly nationalist, evidence suggests that the Bosnian armed forces themselves were not all committed (or trained to commit to) any particular ideology.⁹

8. Has the military been used to repress internal dissent in the last five years?

Yes.

Prior to the outbreak of the Bosnian war for independence, the political situation was extremely tense all over Bosnia, with the country becoming increasingly polarized along ethnic lines and various ethnic groups (like the Serbs) arming themselves, often with arms coming from outside Bosnia.¹⁰ Many of these groups posed a danger to ethnic minorities in their local communities. During the period, both the regular Yugoslav military (JNA), which would later become the enemy, and the nascent Bosnian forces were involved with various civilian authorities to try and maintain law and order, and prevent these groups from engaging in violence.¹¹

9. Has the military been used to govern the country in the last five years?

No.

I cannot find any evidence that the military became involved in governing the whole or part of the country. The governance of Bosnia remained in civilian hands prior to the outbreak of war. Prior to 1990, governance was in the hands of the communist leadership. After 1990, it shifted into the hands of the elected, civilian leadership.

10. Is there a paramilitary organization separate from the regular military, used to provide regime or leader security?

Yes.

According to several sources, the ARBH was made up of police units from the Ministry of Interior, the Territorial Defense Forces (which was the military units formerly belonging to Yugoslavia), and paramilitary forces from the two nationalist political parties, the Croats and the Muslim Bosniaks.¹² The larger of the two paramilitary forces

⁸ Mueller, John. 2000. “The Banality of “Ethnic War”.” *International Security*. 25(1) (Summer): 42-70, p 50.

⁹ Mueller (2000) makes this argument for all three sides in the war – Serb, Croat and Bosnian.

¹⁰ Burg and Shoup 1999, p 74.

¹¹ Ibid, p 129-130

¹² Sadkovich 2005.

belonged to the Muslim Bosniaks called the Patriotic League, which was tied to the Bosnian President Izetbegovic.¹³ According to some estimates, the Patriotic League numbered 120,000.¹⁴

11. Is there an internal intelligence apparatus dedicated to watching the regular military?

No.

I did not find any evidence that there existed an internal intelligence apparatus dedicated to watching the regular military. This may be mostly because the ARBH itself was hurriedly put together, and essentially evolved through the breakout of hostilities with the JNA.

12. Has a purge of the officer corps occurred in the last five years?

No.

Accounts of the war suggest that Serbian officers deserted the Bosnian army right at the outset, and gradually, the Bosnian Croats also distanced themselves from the main leadership and withdrew into their own military units.¹⁵ However, I did not find evidence of a top-down purge.

13. Is there an institutionalized forum through which civilian leaders and military officers regularly exchange information?

No.

I did not find any evidence of an institutionalized forum through which civilian leaders and military officers regularly exchanged information.

The ARBH was a conglomeration of various paramilitary groups, regular military units, police, criminal gangs, and armed forces loyal to particular political parties – the Croatian Defense Council to the Croats and the Patriotic League to the Bosnian Muslims. The commander of the Patriotic League, Sefer Halilovic, was also considered the top commander for the Bosnian Army.¹⁶ Hoare (2004) suggests that Halilovic was responsive more to the Bosnian President personally as the head of the Bosnian Muslim political party, and not as the civilian head of government.¹⁷

UN reports on the war also suggest that the command and structure of the various warring factions, including the Bosnians, served to blur the chain of command and helped

¹³ Burg and Shoup 1999

¹⁴ Ibid

¹⁵ Sadkovich 2005, p 894

¹⁶ Burg and Shoup 1999, p 131.

¹⁷ Hoare, Marko Attila. 2004. *How Bosnia Armed*. London: Saqi Books.

conceal responsibility. All of the warring factions also made extensive use of paramilitary forces that fell outside the regular chain of command and reported to particular political leaders, and those relationships were often not known publicly.¹⁸

¹⁸ UN Report, p 8-9