

Observation no: 198 – Bosnian Independence

Country-year: Croatia 1991

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

No.

The current regime in Croatia was elected to power following the first multiparty elections in Croatia in 1990. That said, news reports and various scholarly sources contend that the elections were manipulated and that the winning party, the ultra-nationalist Croatian Democratic Union (HDZ), heavily outspent its opponents to secure votes.¹

2. Has the country ever experienced a military coup?

No.

Prior to its declaration of independence in 1991, Croatia 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, Croatia's) level.

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

Yes.

The country's top leader was Dr. Franjo Tudjman (founder and head of the HDZ political party), who was elected President of Croatia in May 1990. Tudjman was involved with the Yugoslav military as early as age 19 when he fought against Nazis occupiers in World War II.²

After the war, he rose through the ranks of the Communist Yugoslav military and became a major-general before he reached the age of 40, making him the youngest major-general in the Yugoslav army.³ However, he left in Yugoslav army in 1961 after becoming disillusioned with the level of Serb domination in the military and the Party.⁴ He would

¹ "Franji Tudjman: Father of Croatia." *BBC News*. 11 Dec 1999; Mueller, John. 2000. "The Banality of "Ethnic War"." *International Security*. 25(1) Summer: 42-70

² "Franji Tudjman: Father of Croatia." *BBC News*. 11 Dec 1999

³ Ibid

⁴ Ibid

go on to become a known critic of the Yugoslav state and Communist party for its treatment of Croats.⁵

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

Yes.

The Croatian army has two major components – the Croatian Army (HV) which was made up of former Yugoslav army units (specifically, the Territorial Defense Forces of Croatia), and National Guards Corps (ZNG). According to UN reports on the fighting in former Yugoslav countries, “75% of the troop strength [of the ZNG] is thought to be ethnic Croatia...[and] the bulk of the leadership positions were filled by former [Yugoslav Army] JNA officers who were Croatian.”⁶ The Croatian army’s proxy in Bosnia was the Croatian Defense Council (HVO), which was trained and equipped by the HV, and made up of Bosnian Croats.⁷

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

No.

I could not find any evidence of strict ideological requirements for entry into the senior officer corps. There is only evidence that the officer corps was ethnically Croat, but not of any particular ideology.

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

No.

The Croatian army was not under control of any political party, but rather, controlled by the ruling civilian leadership. This was unlike the erstwhile Yugoslav National Army, which was controlled by the Communist Party. However, the Yugoslav Communist Party ceased to exist in 1990, before the new civilian government in Croatia came to power.⁸

⁵ Sadkovich, James J. 2006. “Who Was Franco Tudjman?” *East European Politics and Societies*. 20: 729-739, p 735

⁶ United Nations, General Assembly. 1994. “Annex III: The Military Structure, Strategy and Tactics of the Warring Factions.” *In Final Report of the United Nations Commission of Experts Pursuant To Security Council Resolution 780 (1992) (S/1994/674/Annex III)*; p 23

⁷ UNGA 1994, p 30

⁸ Zimmerman, Warren. 1995. “The Last Ambassador: A Memoir of the Collapse of Yugoslavia.” *Foreign Affairs* 74(2): 2-20, p 6

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

Yes.

There is evidence that the Croatian military saw itself as the protector of the new Croatian state. Bellamy and Edmunds (2005) argue that in the early years of Croatia existence (including 1991, the year of interest), “the role of the Croatian armed forces can best be described as nation building...the military was at the vanguard of developing the Croatian state in response to an immediate threat to state survival.”⁹

Along with the fact that the Croatian army was also closely linked with the Croatian ultra-nationalist party, I would argue that Croatian nationalist ideology was a key component of the identity of the members of the military.

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

Yes.

The Croatian military was involved in repression of Serb minorities in various parts of the country after Croatia declared independence from Yugoslavia. Serb minorities in the country agitated against the move and were involved in armed rebellion against the new state.¹⁰ The Croatian army was involved in combat against these forces, and often against the JNA, which was unofficially supporting the Serb rebels.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 Croatia 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.

⁹ Bellamy, Alex J and Timothy Edmunds. 2005. “Civil Military Relations in Croatia: Politicization and the Politics of Reform.” *European Security*. 14(1): 71-93, p 72

¹⁰ “World Wide.” *Asian Wall Street Journal*. July 8 1991: P 1.

¹¹ UNGA 1994, p 7-8

The National Guard Corps (ZNG)'s primary role "was to provide internal security and to fight the counter-insurgency was against Serbian paramilitary groups."¹² Additionally, the Croatian armed forces also included Police reserve forces from the Ministry of the Interior "to serve as an internal security force," including "Blue Berets" special forces units to conduct counter-terrorist operations.¹³

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. There is evidence that an intelligence apparatus existed that spied on potential political enemies and reported directly to Tudjman.¹⁴ But there is no evidence to suggest that these targets included the regular military, which was quite nationalist.

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

Yes.

News reports suggest that with the rise in prominence of Croatian nationalism, and particularly after the election of the ultranationalist Croatian HDZ, there has been a purge of Serbs from "jobs in the police [and] security forces."¹⁵

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.

That said, in 1991 in Croatia, "processes of state building and military building went hand in hand and civilian and military authority was often indistinguishable. Even once a structure resembling a regular military was created, significant paramilitary organizations remained outside state control and the police force continued to undertake military roles."¹⁶ In fact, UN reports on the violence suggest that the chain of command and

¹² UNGA 1994, p 23

¹³ Ibid

¹⁴ Bellamy and Edmunds 2005, p 73

¹⁵ "Franji Tudjman: Father of Croatia." *BBC News*. 11 Dec 1999

¹⁶ Bellamy and Edmunds 2005, p 72

decision-making authority was extremely blurred on the ground. This may have been deliberate, in order to insulate civilian leaders and afford them plausible deniability.¹⁷

So while scholars admit that the military and civilian leadership were indistinguishable (implying a regular exchange of information), there is also evidence to the contrary. Namely, the military was extremely fragmented, with various field commanders exercising considerable autonomy, potentially by design.

I would thus conclude that an *institutionalized* forum for regular exchange of information between military and civilian did not exist in 1991.

¹⁷ UNGA 1994, p 9