

**Observation no: 200 – War for Kosovo**

**Country-year: Yugoslavia 1998**

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

No.

The current regime in Yugoslavia, under the leadership of President Slobodan Milosevic, was voted to power during elections in July 1997.<sup>1</sup>

**2. Has the country ever experienced a military coup?**

Yes.

Yugoslavia experienced a coup on 27 March 1941.<sup>2</sup> The coup ended the rule of monarchy in Yugoslavia under Prince Paul, and following an interim government in World War II, Yugoslavia emerged as a communist federation under the leadership of Josip Broz Tito in the postwar era.<sup>3</sup>

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

No.

There is no evidence that President Slobodan Milosevic ever served in the military.

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

Yes.

Prior to 1990, the previous Yugoslav regime was a multi-ethnic federal republic. Under Tito's rule, the official policy was one of non-discrimination, and Tito made a significant effort to make sure that the army reflected this multi-ethnic character – so that it could be the backbone of the Yugoslav state.<sup>4</sup> In reality, however, the military and the officer corps were heavily Serbian, and got increasingly so with time. In fact, the majority of the officer corps of the army was Serbian.<sup>5</sup> Some reports estimate that 60% of the officer corps was Serbian.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> *Under Orders: War Crimes in Kosovo*. 2001. New York: Human Rights Watch. Print, p 26.

<sup>2</sup> Onslow, Sue. 2005. "Britain and the Belgrade Coup of 27 March 1941 Revisited." *Electronic Journal of International History*. (8): 359-270.

<sup>3</sup> "Prince Paul of Yugoslavia gets royal resting place at last." *Agence France-Presse* 6 Oct. 2012.

<sup>4</sup> Derdzinski, Jeoseph Leo. 1998. "Vojnik i Narod: The Soldier and the People. Civil-Military Relations in the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia and Civil-Military Relations in Slovenia." M.A Thesis, Austin, TX: The University of Texas at Austin.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> Echikson, William. "Ethnic Strains Test Yugoslav Army." *The Christian Science Monitor*. July 10, 1991.

This situation was exacerbated heavily with the rise of Milosevic, and under the new Yugoslavia that existed following the secession of various Republics like Croatia and Bosnia, the army became even more heavily Serbian. Hadzic (2002) reports that as conflict moved around the Yugoslavian republics during the 1990s, more and more generals of other ethnicities were criticized for the poor performance of the Yugoslav military.<sup>7</sup> He further points out that “there was a corresponding rise in the number of Serbian and Montenegrin generals for were [considered] suitable for higher positions, and colonels deserving of the general’s star.”<sup>8</sup>

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

Yes.

Prior to 1990, Yugoslavia was ruled by a communist regime, and the military was under the control of the Yugoslav communist party. In fact, Djilas (1993) argues that the “army was the most anti-democratic and reactionary of all Yugoslav communist institutions.”<sup>9</sup>

The new Yugoslav regime after 1991, under the leadership was strongly Serbian nationalist. Hadzic (2002) reports that after the war in Bosnia, the military leadership “submitted publicly and totally” to Serbia’s political leadership.<sup>10</sup> In fact, during the 1990s, many of the top leadership of the Yugoslav military published Serbian nationalist books and articles praising Milosevic’s goals and the creation of ethnically Serbian armies.

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

No.

Prior to 1990, the top leadership of the Yugoslav military were members of the Communist Party, and many of them were part of the leadership structure built by Tito himself.<sup>11</sup> In fact, Derdzinski (1998) reports that within the military, “over 98% of all commanding officers were members of the League of Communists of Yugoslavia.”<sup>12</sup>

However, that was not the case for the new Yugoslav regime after 1991. There is no evidence to indicate that membership (to Milosevic’s party or any other) to a particular political party was an important criteria.

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<sup>7</sup> Hadzic, Miroslav. 2002. *The Yugoslav People’s Army*. Hampshire: Ashgate, p 14.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> Djilas, Aleksa. 1993. “A Profile of Slobodan Milosevic.” *Foreign Affairs*. 72(3) (Summer): 81-96.

<sup>10</sup> Hadzic, Miroslav. 2002. *The Yugoslav People’s Army*. Hampshire: Ashgate, p 15.

<sup>11</sup> Binder, David. “Ethnic Conflict in Yugoslavia Tearing Apart Its Army, Too.” *New York Times*. October 1, 1991.

<sup>12</sup> Derdzinski, Jeoseph Leo. 1998. “Vojnik i Narod: The Soldier and the People. Civil-Military Relations in the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia and Civil-Military Relations in Slovenia.” M.A Thesis, Austin, TX: The University of Texas at Austin.

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

Yes.

Derdzinski (1998) argues that prior to the end of communist rule, Yugoslav military and the Communist party were intimately connected. In fact, from the very beginning, communist political indoctrination was a key feature of military training.<sup>13</sup> Until the very end, the military remained the most staunchly communist element in Yugoslavia.

Following the end of Communist rule, Oberschall (2000) suggests that the Yugoslav military became increasingly Serbian nationalist, which meant an increasingly hostile view towards non-Serbian minorities, even among senior army leaders.<sup>14</sup> Interviews and testimonies recorded by the Human Rights Watch show that army officers held regular classes during training and other times in which they would indoctrinate soldiers against Albanians in Kosovo. These classes included showing “pictures of mutilated bodies and talk[ing] about this village or that village where the Serbs were killed or driven out by Albanian terrorists.”<sup>15</sup> One soldier claimed that the soldiers were “blinded” by these news reports, which were coordinated between the military and TV, radio and other media sources.<sup>16</sup> Other documented evidence collected by the Human Rights Watch included pamphlets recovered from paramilitary groups, which included the text of oaths that recruits were required to take – to fight all enemies of Serbia in the name of the church.<sup>17</sup>

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

Yes.

Slobodan Milosevic rose to power in late 1980s in Serbia through strong, ethno-nationalist rhetoric, and has a long and documented history of using the military to repress non-Serb minorities.<sup>18</sup> Particularly in Kosovo prior to the war, the rise of the separatist Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA) resulted in widespread increases in human rights violations within Kosovo by Serbian police, secret police and paramilitary personnel.<sup>19</sup> This included arbitrary arrest, detention, physical abuse and extra-judicial

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<sup>13</sup> Derdzinski, 1998, p 8-9.

<sup>14</sup> Oberschall 2000, p 991.

<sup>15</sup> *Under Orders*, p 71.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>17</sup> *Under Orders*, p 88.

<sup>18</sup> Djilas, Aleksa. 1993. “A Profile of Slobodan Milosevic.” *Foreign Affairs*. 72(3) (Summer): 81-96; Magas, Branka. 1993. *The Destruction of Yugoslavia: Tracking Yugoslavia’s Break-Up 1980-92*. London: Verso, p 161.

<sup>19</sup> Independent International Commission on Kosovo. 2000. *The Kosovo Report*. New York: Oxford, p 53.

killings of suspected members of the KLA and their families, political activists and regular Albanian civilians.<sup>20</sup>

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

Yes.

In 1990, the Serbian Parliament voted to revoke the autonomous status of Kosovo. Prior to that, Kosovo enjoyed legal autonomy within the Republic of Yugoslavia. Following the election of Milosevic to President of Serbia riding a wave of Serbian nationalism, the Serbian assembly voted to take away the administrative powers of the existing government in Kosovo. Following this, “Kosovo became police state run by Belgrade.”<sup>21</sup> The police state was administered using a heavy Serb military presence that engaged in widespread repression. By 1992, Serbian Special Police Forces were enforcing rule in Kosovo.<sup>22</sup>

This does not imply that the Yugoslav Army itself was governing Kosovo. The army was largely in charge of maintaining security. The role of surveillance and policing Kosovo fell to the Serbian Ministry of Internal Affairs (MUP). The MUP was in charge of police as well as the secret police.<sup>23</sup>

But under Yugoslav law, the MUP also technically comes under the ambit of the Yugoslav Army. And both of them ultimately reported to Milosevic. NATO’s forces in Yugoslavia considered the Serbian Ministry of Internal Affairs, paramilitary groups and Yugoslav Army as all part of the armed forces of Yugoslavia.<sup>24</sup>

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

Yes.

According to data on military and paramilitary organizations by Pilster and Bohmelt (2012), Yugoslavia had a variety of paramilitary organizations. In fact, the number of soldiers in paramilitary groups far outnumbered regular armed forces – in the late 1980s, there were several hundred thousand paramilitary troops, while the regular armed forces was less than one hundred thousand.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

<sup>21</sup> *Under Orders*. P 27.

<sup>22</sup> *Under Orders*, p 29.

<sup>23</sup> *Under Orders*, p 65.

<sup>24</sup> *Under Order*, p 61, fn 1.

<sup>25</sup> Pilster, Ulrich, and Tobias Böhmelt. 2012. “Do Democracies Engage Less in Coup-Proofing? On the Relationship Between Regime Type and Civil-Military Relations.” *Foreign Policy Analysis* 8(4) (January): 355–372.

The Human Rights Watch Reports that various paramilitary forces operated in Kosovo that was not part of the regular army, but worked in coordination with the regular army. This included paramilitary forces that were attached to the Serbian Ministry of Internal Affairs, and the secret police.<sup>26</sup>

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

No.

Prior to 1990, the regular military, the Yugoslav People's Army (JNA) was the most staunchly communist and conservative actor within Yugoslavia.<sup>27</sup> Internal surveillance in Yugoslavia was focused primarily towards potential spies for the USSR (and to a lesser extent, the West), and towards nationalist groups.<sup>28</sup>

This trend seems to have continued in the new Yugoslavia. The state secret police, which was in charge of surveillance (and much more), was focused on anti-Serbian dissidents, particularly members of the Kosovo Liberation Army. The secret police was a part of the Serbian Ministry of Internal Affairs, which was, part of Yugoslavia's armed forces.<sup>29</sup>

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

Yes.

There is evidence that Milosevic's control over the Yugoslav army was not as strong as it was over the Serbian Ministry of Internal Affairs (MUP). Human Rights Watch reports that "from the time he became president of Serbia in 1989, Slobodan Milosevic gradually strengthened and expanded the MUP over the Yugoslav Army (VJ) and the Yugoslav federal police, both of which he viewed as less loyal forces."<sup>30</sup>

There is also evidence to suggest that gradually, he brought the military stronger control as well. Djilas (1993) suggests that after coming to power, Milosevic consolidated his power over the armed forces by "retiring about one hundred generals and admirals, though never, of course, openly."<sup>31</sup>

Finally, there is evidence that personnel changes at the top of the military leadership were made in 1998. Specifically, in Nov 1998, Milosevic fired the Chief of the General Staff of the Yugoslav Army and replaced him with a known loyalist, General Ojdanic. Ojdanic

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<sup>26</sup> *Under Orders*, p 62 – 63.

<sup>27</sup> Derdzinski, Joseph Leo. 1998. "Vojnik i Narod: The Soldier and the People. Civil-Military Relations in the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia and Civil-Military Relations in Slovenia." M.A Thesis, Austin, TX: The University of Texas at Austin.

<sup>28</sup> Fleming, Louis B. "Yugoslavia Steps Up Citizen Surveillance." *Los Angeles Times*. February 25, 1980: B5.

<sup>29</sup> *Under Orders*, p 61, fn 1.

<sup>30</sup> *Under Orders*, p 64.

<sup>31</sup> Djilas 1993, p 92.

would remain Chief of the General Staff for the rest of the course of the Kosovo War. He also placed a known loyalist as the new commander in charge of the Kosovo region, and in late October 1998, replaced the commander of the Yugoslav Air Force and the chief of Serbia's security service. The Human Rights Watch reports speculation that these personnel changes were made because the new personnel were personally loyal to Milosevic and known hardliners on Kosovo.<sup>32</sup> The previous Chief of the General Staff, General Perisic was believed to have warned Milosevic against confrontations with NATO, and for arguing against the deployment of military against civilian protestors.<sup>33</sup>

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

Yes.

According to the constitution of Yugoslavia, the Yugoslav Army (VJ) is under the control of the President of Yugoslavia. The controlling body of the Yugoslav Army was the Supreme Defense Council, of which the Yugoslav President is the chairman.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> *Under Orders*, p 56.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>34</sup> *Under Orders*, p 66.